PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

SECOND SESSION OF THE FIFTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FIFTY-FIRST YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

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24 February 2003

THE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT OF THE
UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 13 JUNE 2001]

FIFTY-SECOND YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 400**

SEVENTH VOLUME OF SESSION 2002–2003

House of Commons

Monday 24 February 2003

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

HOME DEPARTMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Police Pensions

1. **Mr. Tim Boswell** (Daventry): If he will make a statement on the cost of police pensions. [98756]

The Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community Safety (Mr. John Denham): Forces in England and Wales estimate that their police pension bill for 2002–03 will be around £1.2 billion. That has been matched by the £1.26 billion allocated for pensions in the total funding formula. However, the Government are aware that pension costs cause police authorities concern, and we are reviewing the way in which pensions are financed and whether the scheme could be modernised for future entrants.

Mr. Boswell: I thank the Minister for that response. I acknowledge that Northamptonshire's settlement this year is less ungenerous than some recent settlements. Does he accept, therefore, that it is disturbing that the police authority has had to put up its precept by more than 25 per cent. for the second successive year? The chief constable has said that a major contributory factor has been the cost of police pensions. Will the Minister assure the House of some future relief from this treadmill for hard-pressed council tax payers?

Mr. Denham: We recognise that pension costs are a concern, but they represent the lifetime service of police officers in previous years, and we must honour that commitment. We should not reward forces—Northamptonshire is not one of them—that have been slack in their handling of early medical retirements in years past.

The hon. Gentleman referred to precepts. Northamptonshire has chosen to employ additional police officers and community support officers over and above the increase in officer numbers funded centrally. It is for the police authority to decide what should be done to meet the needs of its local community. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will support his authority in doing that.

Mr. David Kidney (Stafford): The Government's pensions Green Paper makes many constructive statements about funded pension schemes. Why should there not be a fully funded police pension fund over time?

Mr. Denham: If we were overnight to replace the existing pay-as-you-go pension scheme with a funded scheme, the Government would have to find about £25 billion to establish that. I suspect that Members would feel that there were more immediate policing priorities to which such money should be devoted.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): Further to the question put by the hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell), is it not correct that between 50 and 60 per cent. of any annual allocation to police authorities goes straight into pensions and salary increases that have been centrally agreed? Is not it time to review the whole position? There is a huge burden on council tax payers, and it is disingenuous of the Government to talk about percentage increases when most of the money goes overnight.

Mr. Denham: I remind the hon. Gentleman that the Government have put more money into the system through the funding formula for police pensions than the total cost that we estimate was paid out on police pensions or will be paid out this year. There are two problems. The first is how individual forces could be better protected from short-term fluctuations in pensions if, for example, a large number of officers were all to retire in the same financial year. The second is to ensure that forces continue to bear down on unwarranted early ill-health retirement, which adds significantly to pensions bills and to the costs on local people.

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley): Obviously, my right hon. Friend will be aware that council tax payers in Lancashire and in many of the northern police forces are subsidising police forces in the south because of the ceilings and floors on increases. Money is trapped, that is the problem. Will he hold discussions with other Departments to ensure that we get the funding that we should be allocated, instead of having to subsidise the south.

Mr. Denham: In introducing the new funding formula, we have tried to be fair to all forces. That is why there is a ceiling on increases of 4.9 per cent. and a floor that ensures that no one gets less than 3 per cent., which is above inflation. We should not forget the background to this issue, which is that the police service received a 10 per cent. increase in funding in 2001–02 and a 7 per cent. increase for 2002–03, and had an overall rise of 6.2 per cent. in the coming year, and a 16 per cent. increase in the current spending review settlement. Whatever the detail of the formula, no one can claim that the Government are not putting significant extra resources into the police service. That is why we have record numbers of police officers, and those numbers will continue to rise.

Asylum System

2. **Mr. Charles Hendry** (Wealden): What discussions he has had with his counterparts in other EU countries regarding the asylum system. [98757]

The Minister for Citizenship and Immigration (Beverley Hughes): The UK continues to play a leading role in developing the asylum measures proposed by the treaty of Amsterdam. That represents an important step towards achieving a common European asylum system with our partners.

We are also working bilaterally with the French, and in conjunction with other countries including Belgium and Holland, to continue to strengthen our borders and tackle abuse.

Mr. Hendry: Can the Minister confirm that although the Sangatte asylum centre was closed and bulldozed in December, the French Red Cross is now building another camp in Sangatte for 1,000 asylum seekers? Does that not make a mockery of the agreement reached by the Secretary of State with his French counterparts? Does it not also highlight the need for asylum seekers to be detained in secure accommodation until their applications have been processed?

Beverley Hughes: I know that a number of newspapers have spread that story about an alternative camp. I have been contacted by a journalist who has been at Sangatte, as well as by our own officials, and I can tell the hon. Gentleman that the story is absolutely untrue.

What the hon. Gentleman says about detention is rather outdated. It refers to an earlier variant of asylum policy than the one we have heard more about lately, in relation to quotas. There is certainly a place for detention—we apply it when appropriate, particularly to effect removals and to keep people where they are while we fast-track the processes—that has been very successful at Oakington—but the wholesale detention of every person would require a building programme that would not only be horrendously expensive, but would take five years to deliver. In the meantime, we have more effective measures to enable us to get to grips with the system.

Angela Eagle (Wallasey): Will my hon. Friend draw attention to other inaccurate reports in the newspapers about the number of people coming into the country? We are constantly told that the United Kingdom takes more than its fair share of asylum seekers, but the figures show that we are about sixth or seventh in the European Union league per head of population.

Beverley Hughes: My hon. Friend is right: the UK is in the middle of the EU range, per head of population. However, the picture has fluctuated over recent years in terms of the number of people we take relative to the number taken by other EU countries. That is why it is important for us to work towards a common European asylum system and to strengthen our borders with France, Belgium and Holland. It is also why we recently introduced robust legislative measures to deter people whose applications are unfounded.

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): My office in Bolton has now dealt with about 75 single male asylum seekers from northern Iraq. They are, of course, Kurds. Most have become destitute; they are now sleeping rough in Queen's park in Bolton or overcrowding existing national asylum support scheme accommodation. That cannot be allowed to continue. What pressure are we putting on the Turkish Government to stop the trafficking of such people through Turkey, on Turkish lorries, to Dover? They are paying between £7,000 and £8,000 for the transit.

Beverley Hughes: We are working closely with France, which is interested in working with us on the Turkish issue—not only in relation to the trafficking of people through Turkey, but, in particular, the negotiation of an agreement on readmission to Iraq via that route. My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the growing problem in some of our communities caused by people from northern Iraq who have been refused asylum, who are therefore not entitled to support, and whom we need to return as soon as we can. We shall do that as soon as the route is available.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): We are pleased that the Minister is discussing asylum with her European colleagues, and we welcome her undertaking to consult local people who are concerned about residence accommodation centres. We look forward to those meetings, which have not been possible so far.

Will the Minister assure us that when the meetings do take place they will not be sanitised meetings in London involving tea and biscuits with civil servants, but will be genuine consultations initiated by the Minister? I invite her to walk up and down Lee high street and meet local residents. She will then quickly learn how strong and universal is the hostility to her proposal for a local accommodation centre in Daedalus.

Beverley Hughes: There will be proper consultation. On the point about the two accommodation centres that are in the planning inquiry process, I visited those areas, had a meeting arranged by the local councils there and talked directly to local people. If we go ahead with the proposal, both I and officials in the Home Office will take it on ourselves to repeat that process in exactly the same way.

I raise a more general point with the hon. Gentleman and other hon. Members. All hon. Members and the general public at large rightly expect us to get to grips with the asylum system, to reduce the intake, to return people when their claim is refused, and to do that more efficiently. That is what the Government are trying to do. Some of those measures depend fundamentally on having the facilities available—induction centres, accommodation centres and detention centres. We cannot locate those on clouds in the sky. They have to be somewhere in this country. Therefore, we have to have a mature approach that recognises that, if we are to be able to address the problem successfully, in some parts of the country we have to build those facilities.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): The Minister will know the figures for the last three quarters show that the largest national group seeking asylum in this country is the Iraqis. Given the Prime Minister has now said that the case for war against Saddam Hussein is a moral one, do the Home Office and the Government accept that we also have a moral responsibility to grant asylum to those fleeing from Saddam Hussein? If that is the case, does the Minister accept that the best way of dealing with public concern is for Britain to lead the case for a genuine European integrated asylum system in which responsibility is shared but not shirked?

Beverley Hughes: The hon. Gentleman raised a number of points. On Iraq, most of the people claiming from Iraq are from the autonomous northern zone. There is no reason why those people should not be returned. As I said earlier, if we can negotiate a route through with Turkey, that is what we propose to do.

I have discussed the hon. Gentleman's proposals for a common system with him. He knows that I do not think the detail of some of his ideas would work in practice, but on two points I do agree with him. First, if one added up the contribution of all the asylum systems of the European Union countries, that would not make any significant contribution to the vast majority of refugees world wide. We certainly need to do more about that. Secondly, there is a need for international co-operation to be accelerated, to go further and to address some of the big questions about what we can do to protect people closer to source countries.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): If, as my hon. Friend rightly says, we are not taking more than our fair share of asylum seekers, why is it taking the immigration and nationality directorate so long to process applications for appeals and for indefinite leave to remain and also to issue status letters? The Home Secretary has said that he wishes to see a step change in the IND and has devoted additional resources, both financial and human, to that process, but I am sorry to have to tell my hon. Friend that, certainly as far as my constituents are concerned, far from speeding up the steps they are becoming slower and slower and leaving many of my constituents in serious situations.

Beverley Hughes: While I accept that there is a very long way to go until we make the IND into the effective and efficient public service that it should be, I cannot agree with my hon. Friend that things are getting slower and slower and worse and worse. Although there is a long way to go, things are improving substantially. Well over our target of 65 per cent. of new applications—in fact, over 75 per cent.—are being decided within the two-month target deadline. The process of appeals, which is the responsibility not of the IND but of the appellate authority, is reducing too, and we are coming close to the six-month target overall. There is still a problem with backlog cases, although that backlog has been reduced from an all-time high of 120,000 to fewer than 40,000, so we are working through the backlog. She is right to say that some of those cases are of long standing, but we are getting through them.

Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset): In the course of discussions with their EU counterparts, did the Minister and the Home Secretary offer any views on the achievability of the Prime Minister's target of halving the number of asylum seekers by September? In particular, did they guarantee to their EU counterparts, and will they now guarantee to the House, that they will not seek to achieve this target by statistical manipulation, through the issuing of work permits to people who would otherwise claim asylum?

Beverley Hughes: That represents our firm commitment to our approach to the need to reduce the intake in this country—it is not something that we have discussed with European partners. It represents what we want to achieve here, and it reflects the overriding priority of reducing the intake in order to achieve our other aspirations of increasing removals, reducing support costs and getting order into the system. That is our fundamental objective.

Mr. Letwin: I am not entirely clear whether the answer to my question was yes or no, but perhaps we can get a clearer answer to this question. In talking to their

EU counterparts, did the Home Secretary and the Minister discuss the Conservative proposal to scrap the current asylum system and replace it with a system of rational quotas for genuine refugees? Moreover, did they discuss the need to revise, or to withdraw from, the Dublin convention and the New York protocol in order to achieve that desirable result?

Beverley Hughes: For the record, I did answer the right hon. Gentleman's previous question, and the answer was no. On his further question, I am pleased to note that he now supports the work that the Government have already done, and the discussions that we have already had, with the UNHCR and others on resettlement and safe havens. We have not discussed the right hon. Gentleman's fourth variant of Tory asylum policy on quotas—the fourth version that we have heard in as many weeks. A quota system is a fiction, in the sense of his suggestion that it will solve the current problem. First, it would do nothing to address the bigger problem of the total number of asylum seekers across Europe, which he talks of simply carving up in some way. Secondly, it would not of itself prevent or deter illegal immigration. There remains a need for all the measures that this Government are implementing to strengthen border controls, to deter illegal immigration, to negotiate readmission arrangements and to manage migration. So far, we have heard nothing from the Tories on those issues.

3. **Mr. Michael Jack** (Fylde): What estimate he has made of how many people will be seeking asylum in the UK in September 2003. [98759]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): In the light of the proposals in the White Paper, which was published this time last year, and the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002, which received Royal Assent in November, we are very confident indeed [illegible] we can achieve a dramatic reduction in the number of claims, compared with the number made before Royal Assent in November.

Mr. Jack: I am disappointed in the Home Secretary's reply. My question asked what his estimate was of the number of people who will be seeking asylum in September of this year. He said that he hoped for a dramatic fall, but in the light of demonstrations against his reception centre policy, and of the courts' taking against his approach to finance and asylum seekers, can he spell out in much clearer terms why anybody should have any confidence in the Prime Minister's target of a 50 per cent. reduction? Also, what does the Home Secretary mean by "dramatic"?

Mr. Blunkett: The answer to the last question—there were many questions in one—is that, as I said in my initial answer, we have a firm commitment to reducing the number of asylum claims to 50 per cent. of their level immediately before the 2002 Act received Royal Assent. Secondly, we believe that the measures that we have taken—including the closure of Sangatte, the new border controls moved to France, the new technological equipment at Calais, the securing of Frethun and Coquelles, and the way in which we now deal with those who, having come into this country, claim late—will assist us in dramatically reducing the numbers claiming asylum.

Mr. Jim Marshall (Leicester, South): Does my right hon. Friend accept that not all his hon. Friends accept his statement last week in which he condemned the High Court judgment on section 55? Instead of appealing against that judgment, will he instruct immigration officials to interpret section 55 in terms of a reasonable period after entry into the United Kingdom, rather than on immediate entry?

Mr. Blunkett: Anybody who immediately claims asylum at a port or airport will be entitled, under the rules we laid down in the legislation, to receive the support—housing, equipment and financial—that they require. I do not accept that I should withdraw the appeal, but I accept entirely that it is right for judges to be able to use judicial review to facilitate challenges to Government when it is thought that they have acted in an administratively inadequate fashion. I do not accept, however, that judges have the right to override the will of this House, our democracy, or the role of Members of Parliament in deciding the rules.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Does the Home Secretary realise that a high proportion of asylum seekers enter the UK from EU countries that are, as my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) said, signatories to the Dublin convention? Why should we accept, prima facie, such individuals? Why does not the Home Secretary take to the European Court the EU nations that flagrantly abuse the convention? Is it because he has no confidence in that body to safeguard British interests?

Mr. Blunkett: The European Court has nothing to do with the first, or second and recently approved, Dublin convention. In obtaining agreement with other countries, I must bear in mind the fact that it was his Government who abandoned the so-called gentlemen's agreement by saying that it would fall when Dublin I was introduced. If I am to obtain agreement across Europe, as I was being pressed to do a moment ago by the shadow Chancellor—*[Interruption.]* I am sorry, I nearly did a reshuffle for the Leader of the Opposition. No doubt that will happen shortly. The shadow Home Secretary suggested that we should be collaborating with our European partners, not taking them to court.

Identity Cards

4. **Andy Burnham** (Leigh): What representations his Department has received on the consultation on compulsory identity cards. [98760]

The Minister for Citizenship and Immigration (Beverley Hughes): The consultation paper on entitlement cards and identity fraud was published on 31 July 2002 and the deadline for submitting responses was 31 January 2003. However, we are keen to see the debate continue.

We have received more than 2,000 letters and e-mails from individuals and organisations on the consultation paper. Many of those arrived very close to the deadline for responses and are very detailed, and we will study them thoroughly over the coming weeks.

Andy Burnham: I thank the Minister for that reply, but I would urge her to go further than the preferred option and consider introducing a compulsory identity card scheme, with a requirement to register and an expectation that cards should be carried. That would be necessary to unlock the full benefits of identity cards in fighting crime and, in these uncertain times, might help to give people a greater sense of security. Who knows, it might even be helpful to the Tory party, which seems to be going through another identity crisis.

Beverley Hughes: My hon. Friend knows that the consultation paper ruled out introducing a card that it would be compulsory to carry at all times. I can reassure him that I do not believe that a compulsory scheme is necessary in order to reap the benefits. There is no point in having a card unless it is universal and, therefore, it will be compulsory to register and obtain a card if Parliament decides to introduce a scheme. I agree with my hon. Friend about the benefits of a scheme, because if we are really serious about tackling some of the problems that have been raised today, such as illegal immigration, illegal working and identity fraud, we need a very secure method of establishing identity.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Does the Minister think that there is any reliable way to stop a supposedly voluntary card being required for an increasing number of purposes? How do Ministers intend, if they pursue this idea, to prevent the system failing to deliver the correct identity card to an individual? Do they have the Child Support Agency or the Criminal Records Bureau in mind as models?

Beverley Hughes: We are still considering the responses to the consultation. The right hon. Gentleman raised the issue of how we can make sure that certain organisations do not start requiring a card. That would be a matter for the terms of the legislation. He is also right to imply that it is a long-term commitment; it would be a big enterprise—a big project. In determining our response—I mean the response of every Member, not just that of the Government—we need to think about how to address the issues and make the project a success, rather than using them as an argument for not entertaining its possibility. We need to think about where we need to be as a country, not now but in 10 years time, because it will take that long to set up the issuing equipment and to get every member of the population registered. We should not necessarily be thinking about whether we need the system now but about the future: where do we want to be in 10 years time?

Mr. Bill Olner (Nuneaton): Many responsible licensees and retailers with off-licences on their premises would welcome the speedy introduction of such an identity card. It would also assist communities that are plagued by young hoodlums on drink-related offences. I urge her to address the matter more seriously.

Beverley Hughes: One potential use of such a card for young people would be as a proof of age. It is interesting that in many of the discussions that I held during the consultation process and in some of the qualitative research that we have carried out with different groups, including young people, many young people themselves have told us, "This would be really good and would enable us to prove how old we are". They would thus not get into difficult situations with retailers and others.

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire): Any system of identity cards, whether voluntary or compulsory, would work only if the information source on which they were based was accurate and up to date. The Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community Safety recently conceded to me that, although there is a target of only three days from a court hearing for inputting data to the police national computer, in fact no police force achieves that in less than 11 days, more than four fifths of them take more than 20 days and some of them take more than a year. Given that for months the right hon. Gentleman denied that the statistics even existed, can the hon. Lady tell the House whether and when she will publish, in full, the Carter report into the Criminal Records Bureau so that we can then all judge—

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is not about identity cards.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): Is it not the position that there has been a marked lack of enthusiasm for any form of identity card on the part of other Departments—namely, the Department for Work and Pensions and the Treasury? Why does not my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary understand that there is little evidence that any such card would deal with the abuses that have been mentioned or with terrorism? The idea is wrong and it should be dropped.

Beverley Hughes: We have had an extensive consultation exercise in order to get the views of ordinary people and of organisations which, rightly, want to express a view about the way forward. Among the 2,000 responses from individuals and organisations to which I referred, there is—on a cursory glance—support in favour in the ratio of about 2:1. As I said, we shall look at all the responses in great detail and the decision on whether to bring forward proposals will be a Government decision— not simply a Home Office one—and will be endorsed by the Cabinet.

Mr. Nick Gibb (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton): What security measures will be in place in any Government ID card scheme to prevent unauthorised access to the vast array of personal and confidential information that will be stored on such cards?

Beverley Hughes: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman has actually read the consultation paper. If he has done so, he will realise that he has just mistakenly implied that the card itself will contain a whole range of data. The card itself would simply contain identifying data, possibly including a biometric. Those data would be a gateway offering access to other databases, thus enabling the card to be used to access other information. The card itself would not hold a great deal of information about any individual.

Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act

5. **Mr. Andrew Dismore** (Hendon): When he expects to bring into force section 4 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002; and if he will make a statement. [98761]

The Minister for Citizenship and Immigration (Beverley Hughes): We hope to commence section 4 within a matter of weeks. Revised appeal procedures have to be put in place first. The Lord Chancellor's Department is currently consulting on a revised set of Special Immigration Appeals Commission procedure rules, which will be subject to Parliamentary approval.

Mr. Dismore: May I remind my hon. Friend that section 4 empowers the Home Secretary to deprive a person of citizenship if he has done something seriously prejudicial to the vital interests of the United Kingdom? Abu Hamza continues to spread his message of hate against Jews, Hindus, the United States and Britain. He has seditiously abused the sanctity of Finsbury Park mosque to incite violence and race hatred. He has actively recruited among British Muslims for terrorism abroad and has fundraised for terrorist groups. He is wanted overseas for serious terrorism offences. Is there any reason why section 4 should not be used to deprive Abu Hamza of his citizenship of our country, which he so obviously despises? That should be followed swiftly by the deportation that the British people think is long overdue and richly deserved.

Beverley Hughes: A month ago, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary said that this matter was under close investigation. The activities of the person referred to, and of other people, are being closely monitored. The Government will initiate deprivation action if we consider that the facts of an individual case meet the tests that are set out in section 4. My hon. Friend will understand that the previous legislation—the British Nationality Act 1981—was weak. It is right that we should wait for the implementation of the new legislation to ensure that we have effective measures to deal with this issue properly.

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): Is it not now clear that we have to go much further than the implementation of section 4 of the new Act? Is it not time to restore to the Home Secretary the ability to deport people who may threaten this country? Case law under article 3 of the European convention on human rights makes it impossible to do that, so is it not time that the Government saw sense, opted out of the ECHR, went back in with reservations, and gave the Home Secretary the power to protect this country from people who threaten it?

Beverley Hughes: The Conservative party is perpetuating a myth about the mechanics of the ECHR. The hon. Gentleman's suggestion would require the country to withdraw from the ECHR. We would then have to legislate in a way that was incompatible with article 3 and ask the Council of Europe if it would allow us to re-enter with a reservation. That would be a tortuous and difficult process. We have not ruled it out but it is fraught with uncertainty. No other country has done it. There is no certainty that the Council of Europe would allow us to re-enter with a reservation. Reservations have to be very specific and that has not been tested. We are not going down that route at the moment. However, the Prime Minister has made it clear that, if our measures to tackle such problems are not as effective as we want them to be, we will consider whether we need to revise our obligations under various treaties.

Active Community Unit

6. **Ross Cranston** (Dudley, North): If he will make a statement on the work of his Department's active community unit. [98762]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): We appointed a new director of the active community unit—Helen Edwards—at the beginning of last year. With Ministers, she has now undertaken a full review of our relationship with the voluntary and community sector and has identified four key principles—capacity and development at local level; community involvement; partnerships between Government and the voluntary and community sector; and a modern legal framework for the sector. Those matters are now being put in place.

Ross Cranston: I commend my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary for his commitment to building and enhancing the capacity of communities—especially deprived or ethnic minority communities. However, notions such as "active community" can seem a bit high-falutin' unless they mean something on the ground. What will this particular programme mean to people in, for example, my constituency?

Mr. Blunkett: First, the programme will mean an extra £93 million over the next three years, investing directly in those organisations that are engaged in volunteering. In my hon. Friend's constituency, that currently involves a Sikh project, gaining support in the community for work with young people to the tune of just under £50,000, and £133,000 from a major youth project in the west midlands is going into his constituency. That is the answer to the sedentary comment made by a Liberal Democrat who shouted, "And that is just in his constituency."

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): With regard to the compact and codes of practice relating to bringing together the voluntary and community sectors, has the Home Secretary implemented the recommendation of the Treasury report last year that a senior official should be appointed in each Department to encourage their effective implementation?

Mr. Blunkett: Yes, as part of a cross-cutting review agreed between the Treasury and ourselves and as part of the spending review, it was agreed, as the hon. Gentleman rightly says, that such individuals would be designated. That has now been achieved, and we are intent on ensuring that that collaborative venture across Departments, including funding identified by Departments, should work effectively.

Asylum Seekers

7. **Miss Ann Widdecombe** (Maidstone and The Weald): What target he has set for the removal of failed asylum seekers. [98763]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): Within weeks of taking over as Home Secretary, I made it clear to the House that the original intention, the technical commitment that had been made in relation to the number of people who could be removed from the country was not feasible. I indicated then that it would be more sensible to have commitment related to a proportion of the intake and that we should switch our energies into preventing entry by strengthening our borders. That is precisely what I have done in the past 20 months.

Miss Widdecombe: Is the Home Secretary aware that that answer is both evasive and pathetic? Will he please tell us why the much-trumpeted target of 30,000 removals a year was, in his own words, not feasible? Was it simply because his Department failed? Was it because he did not resource the immigration service properly? Or was it because the figure was never realistic, but a sham and grab for a headline? The Select Committee on Home Affairs was distinctly told that there never has been, and there is no immediate prospect of there being, sufficient detention space to support such a target. Was it not nonsense from the start?

Mr. Blunkett: The answer to the first part of the question is no. The answer to the rest of the question is that I cannot match the right hon. Lady's breathtaking audacity. I cannot match the idea that someone who was in the Home Office who saw the number of staff cut and a failure to put in place the removal centre facilities, who had no programme for accommodation centres, who did not have induction centres, who failed to reach an accommodation with France in terms of moving border controls and who achieved less than half the number of removals that we are now achieving can actually stand up in the Chamber and suggest that we are failing compared with her pathetic efforts.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): I endorse everything that the Home Secretary said in relation to that previous answer, but may I caution him to avoid becoming impaled on any more unrealistic targets in relation to asylum and put it to him that, bearing in mind all the complexities that surround the subject, what is needed is clear and consistent progress, not a big bang, which will inevitably end in tears?

Mr. Blunkett: I know that I am in favour of tougher sentences, but I have never been in favour of impaling, so I am okay on the first part of the question. [*Interruption.*] But I have one or two people in my sights, in a manner of speaking. I take my hon. Friend's advice to heart and believe that his is a very wise counsel.

Mr. Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden): Does the Home Secretary accept that if the process of deportation is put off until people have put down roots in this country, had children and become part of the community, deportation becomes inhumane? Should we not therefore resile from an agreement that gives every inhabitant of the globe who can find ways to this shore the right to claim asylum, appeal against being refused that claim, take out a judicial review and subsequently claim under human rights legislation—securing benefits all that time—until they have been here so many years that it is inhumane to deport them? Should we not resile from that agreement, as my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) suggests, if we cannot renegotiate it?

Mr. Blunkett: On the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question, I have every sympathy. The longer that people are here, the more difficult it is to remove and uproot them. We should therefore seek to avoid that at all costs. On the second part of the question, a large number of the layers to which the right hon. Gentleman referred have been or will shortly be removed under the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002. I am seeking, week by week, to implement an Act that we had to struggle to get through both this House and the other place because Conservative Members opposed us at every end and turn.

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): Will my right hon. Friend consider what can be done to improve the co-ordination between the various parts of the Home Office? Does he accept that it is very unsatisfactory when a decision is made and apparently nothing happens on enforcement? In fact, what happens is that the National Asylum Support Service will tell a provider to cut off someone's support. The provider therefore has the problem of dealing with that individual rather than the Home Office, which took the decision that the asylum claim should be rejected.

Mr. Blunkett: Bearing in mind that there is a 28-day period in which support continues, I accept the thrust of my hon. Friend's question entirely. There must be a more efficient, more effective and seamless removals policy in which, when support is removed, advice, support and, when appropriate, removal takes place immediately. That is fair for the individuals and fair for the country.

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford): Question 8.

Mr. Humfrey Malins (Woking): I am not sure that the question was that good anyway. We might have done better without it. Does the Home Secretary believe—I would be grateful for a frank answer—that the Government will ever remove those 250,000 or more failed asylum seekers, who, since Labour came to power five years ago, should have been removed but have not been?

Mr. Blunkett: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman thought of a question, as we might have been waiting all afternoon otherwise. The truth, as he knows well, is that the figures that are plucked out of the air are hypothetical, and we know perfectly well, as per the earlier question, that there are real difficulties when people have remained in the country for a lengthy period. That is why preventing people from clandestinely entering our shores is the top priority. Ensuring that we turn them round and remove them when they are clandestine is the key. That is the answer to the question of how long is a piece of string—as long as the hon. Gentleman wishes to cut it.

Illegal Land Occupation

8. **Mr. Simon Burns** (West Chelmsford): If he will make a statement on the powers of the police to move on people who illegally occupy land and open spaces. [98764]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Bob Ainsworth): Section 61 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 gives the police, subject to certain conditions, the power to remove people who are trespassing with intent to take up residence, and who have been asked to leave by a landowner. We intend to legislate to strengthen further these powers. We will do so as soon as parliamentary time allows.

Mr. Burns: I thank the Minister for that answer and assure him that my constituents living in the Cranham road and Little Waltham part of Chelmsford will warmly welcome that. Will he accept that there are individuals who are prepared to defy court injunctions, abuse the appeal procedures, string out defiance of planning law, and build on and occupy greenfield sites against the law? The quicker that something is done to empower local residents to be able to reclaim their land and their communities from those people, the better.

Mr. Ainsworth: I completely agree that unauthorised camping, and the antisocial and criminal behaviour that is often linked with it, is a problem, and we intend to tackle it. The police need effective eviction powers to take prompt action against unauthorised sites, particularly those that create a nuisance such as the hon. Gentleman describes, and we intend to introduce such powers.

Mr. Bill O'Brien (Normanton): My hon. Friend is correct in suggesting that new legislation will strengthen the powers of the police, but there is another side to the equation. My constituents complain about the rubbish and mess left on sites after travellers have occupied them for a few days, but there are no powers of redress, so any cost falls on the local authority and becomes, in turn, a charge on council tax payers. Has my hon. Friend any suggestions or ideas as to how people can be held responsible for the expense of clearing sites once they have left?

Mr. Ainsworth: I am sure that my hon. Friend will agree that there are members of the travelling community who behave reasonably and appropriately, but nuisances such as those that he mentions are a great problem. We should expect the same standards from the travelling community that we expect from other people. As well as the power to evict, we need the ability to tackle antisocial behaviour by the travelling community, and we are considering that. It is possible to impose antisocial behaviour orders on travellers as well as other members of the community.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): We welcome the Minister's announcement that he proposes to toughen up the powers still further. He is aware that when we were in government, we sought, in the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, to toughen the law. Does he accept, however, that unscrupulous travellers and gypsies have found loopholes in the legislation introduced by Governments of both parties, and that if they are to be closed it is necessary for Ministers such as himself to agree to meet Members from both sides of the House, leaders of local authorities and leading local authority officers to ensure that the new law, which we hope to help draft, will be effective? Does he recognise that in constituencies such as that of my hon. Friend the Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) and my own some travellers are trying to get round the law by buying land and then breaching planning laws?

Mr. Ainsworth: The hon. Gentleman is right, and we must consider planning issues as well as police powers of eviction . He will know that the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is looking at planning law. He is as entitled as anybody else to have an input into that process. I have always been prepared to consider his proposals on this matter as on any other, and if he has suggestions that relate to Home Office responsibilities in these matters, I will be happy to listen to him. I am sure that he is capable of making his own répresentations on the planning side of this question.

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): May I take the Minister back to his initial reply? He said that the police can evict travellers at the request of a landowner. Part of the problem is that sometimes the landowner will not make such a request because he wants planning permission, and he spitefully hopes that local authorities will give up and grant it in exasperation. Will my hon. Friend consider, as part of the review, introducing a power for local authorities to ask the police to evict people, in appropriate circumstances and in the absence of a reasonable request by the landowner?

Mr. Ainsworth: I am sure my hon. Friend agrees that, in the first instance, we need adequate sites for the travelling public. I hope that that is not controversial. However, unauthorised camping is a problem and we need to ensure that the new powers bring not only swift relief, but effective relief. We are aware that people will find various ways around them. Trying to plug all the loopholes will not be easy, but the new proposed powers will seek to deal with that problem.

Polish Citizens (Deportation)

9. **Bob Russell** (Colchester): How many Polish citizens are due to be deported prior to the planned date for Poland's accession to membership of the European Union. [98765]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Hilary Benn): The number of Polish citizens we remove will be determined principally by the number who are refused entry or are found to be here in breach of our immigration laws.

Bob Russell: From that answer, I suggest that the number will be very small. With Poland about to join the European Union, may I point out that it is a waste of time and money to uproot people who could legally return to this country in a year or two's time? In particular, why pick on a 63-year-old Polish-born widow, Mrs. Maria Puchrowicz, who lives in my constituency? Have we really got to the stage of deporting 63-year-old widows?

Hilary Benn: I am not aware of the case that the hon. Gentleman raises, although I will gladly look into it. The answer to his substantive point is that we need to maintain the integrity of the asylum system. He is not correct to assume that the number removed has been very small. Since April 2002, 848 failed Polish asylum seekers have been removed on scheduled flights. On 14 January, 34 were removed using a charter flight. About the same number again of non-asylum removals have occurred as a result of enforcement action. In addition, 8,700 Polish nationals were refused entry to the country in 2001 and subsequently removed.

Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): The Minister will know that our Government's position is much more honourable than that of the German Government as far as Polish citizenship is concerned once Poland joins the European Union. Given the pressure on the immigration and nationality directorate, which is obvious from questions asked by hon. Members on both sides of the House, surely it would be sensible, in view of the fact that Poland will join on 1 May next year, to hold back on the removals until it is a full member. Is that not the most sensible and cost-effective means of dealing with the problem?

Hilary Benn: I disagree with my hon. Friend for the simple reason that maintaining the integrity of the asylum system is the right approach for the reasons that I outlined, notwithstanding the fact that Poland will join the European Union on 1 May 2004.

Antisocial Behaviour

10. **Mrs. Joan Humble** (Blackpool, North and Fleetwood): What steps he is taking to tackle antisocial behaviour. [98766]

The Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community Safety (Mr. John Denham): We will shortly be publishing a White Paper on antisocial behaviour which will be followed by an antisocial behaviour Bill. That will build on existing measures to ensure that we have legislation in place to tackle antisocial behaviour. We have also established an antisocial behaviour unit in the Home Office to take the lead in ensuring that new and existing legislation is used to good effect.

Mrs. Humble: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. He will be aware of the success achieved by Blackpool police in reducing the antisocial behaviour of young people by working closely with other agencies. When the individual support orders that are proposed in the Criminal Justice Bill are introduced, will he ensure that they lead to genuine collaborative work between the police and social services so that those young people do not reoffend?

Mr. Denham: I congratulate the police in Blackpool for their use of the interim antisocial behaviour orders. They have obtained seven since the new powers came into effect at the beginning of December. It is certainly true that we have not always had the support that we would have liked from social services departments up and down the country for antisocial behaviour orders. The new individual support order is designed to address the causes of a young person's offending behaviour and, for that reason, social services departments should become more active and more supportive of the measure.

Bob Spink (Castle Point): Why did the Government take away from police the power to remove unopened cans and bottles of alcohol from young people and children in public places? When will they reverse that decision?

Mr. Denham: It is important that the police have the power to remove such alcohol from young people. The Licensing Bill, which is before Parliament, will give them that right.

Unsolved Murders

12. **Mr. John Robertson** (Glasgow, Anniesland): If he will make a statement on police procedure for investigating unsolved murders in cases where the original conviction has been overturned. [98768]

The Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community Safety (Mr. John Denham): The police will review the evidence available and any comments or findings made by the court in cases where convictions are overturned. As with other unsolved crimes, it is for the police to decide in individual cases whether the evidence justifies reopening the investigation.

John Robertson: I thank my hon. Friend for his answer. He will be aware of the case of one of my constituents, Robert Brown, who spent more than 25 years in jail for a murder he did not commit. He was finally released in November. He will also be aware of the case of Stefan Kiszko, who was released from prison in 1992 on the basis of an unsafe conviction. He had served 16 years in prison. It has recently been announced that in that case the original murder is being reinvestigated due to new DNA evidence.

Will my hon. Friend tell me why it is that in cases such as the Birmingham Six and the Guildford Four, and the case involving one of my constituents, the police failed to find the real perpetrators and were all too ready to see convicted the people who were charged?

Mr. Denham: We must take every miscarriage of justice extremely seriously. I think that in every instance that my hon. Friend has mentioned, the cases were brought to court originally before the protections that now exist in the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984. Those protections have been important. If there is a case, however old, where a conviction is overturned and it becomes possible for the police to reinvestigate, and the evidence is there to enable a reinvestigation, I would hope that the police would take that course. That must be a matter for the police to decide in the light of the evidence that is available to them.

Business of the House

3.31 pm

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): Mr. Speaker, with permission, I should like to make a short business statement. The business for Wednesday 26 February 2003 will now be:

Debate on Iraq on a Government motion.

The business for Thursday 27 February will be consideration of a motion to approve the Third Report of the Committee on Standards and Privileges followed by consideration of motions relating to the Draft Social Security Benefits Up-rating Order 2003 and the draft guaranteed Minimum Pensions Increase Order 2003.

The debate on Welsh Affairs is provisionally planned for the week commencing 10 March and I hope to make an announcement on an alternative date for the debate on flood and coastal defence policy in due course.

I will of course make my usual business statement on Thursday.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): I am grateful for that statement. When will the text of the motion for Wednesday be available to the House?

Mr. Cook: The motion will be available during the course of the evening, when it will be tabled. It will, of course, be available to all hon. Members in the Order Paper for tomorrow. Given that we have just returned from a recess, there is no quicker way of getting it on the Order Paper. I understand the interest of the House in this matter. Perhaps I can help the House by saying that Wednesday's motion will confirm the commitment of the Government and the House to our strategy of handling the Iraq crisis through the United Nations. It will repeat our support for resolution 1441, which the House overwhelmingly endorsed on 25 November.

The motion will not be a trap. No Member need fear that support for it will be interpreted as support for any specific action. The House will have other opportunities in future to debate Iraq, and if necessary another specific opportunity to vote on military action.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): We warmly welcome this timely motion. We welcome also the assurance that the Leader of the House has just given us that the text of the motion will be available shortly. Further, we welcome the fact that this will be an opportunity not only for the House to debate in clear terms a substantive motion, but to vote in clear terms on that motion. We hope that there will be no fudge—no parliamentary subterfuge—so that we can see clearly that the House is representing considerable concern among the public at large at what is happening and what is being done in our name. We look to you, Mr. Speaker, to ensure that the division of opinion in the country can be fully reflected in the way in which the House votes on Wednesday night.

Mr. Cook: I have already given an assurance that the motion will not be a trap. Nor will it be a fudge. It is not an attempt to secure by subterfuge any approval for military action.

I think that it is right that the House should debate Iraq. It plainly is a matter of considerable political interest outside the House, and our constituents would be perplexed if this week went by without our setting aside a date to explore the matter. That is why I think that it was right for the Government to come forward and volunteer this time.

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Manchester, Central): My right hon. Friend always tries to be candid with the House. The House will welcome his assurance that the motion will not be a trap and that there will be a further opportunity to debate and, if necessary, to vote. Will he make it clear that it is his intention that there will be the opportunity for a substantive vote after any resolution goes to the United Nations and before this country goes to war? Can he advise the House now whether the motion to be debated on Wednesday will be amendable?

Mr. Cook: Any motion that goes on the Order Paper will be open to amendment. Whether an amendment is chosen is, I am grateful and thankful to say, not a matter for me. However, the motion will certainly be amendable. On the question of bringing a second resolution to the House, the House will recall that that is precisely what we did with the first resolution, 1441, and there would be obvious sense in our bringing to the House any further resolution and seeking the endorsement of the House for that resolution, in the same way as the House endorsed 1441.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): It is right and proper that the traditional Welsh day debate should give way on this occasion to the important debate on Iraq. We hope that the motion to be tabled tonight will enable those of us who oppose war in the current circumstances to make our views clearly known. On the re-tabled Welsh day debate, events may require the House to debate Iraq another time and may not allow for an Adjournment debate on Welsh matters. As an alternative, will the Leader of the House consider allowing Welsh Members who wish to raise constituency matters to raise them on the Floor of the House or in a meeting of the Welsh Grand Committee before very long?

Mr. Cook: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for being understanding of the need to postpone the debate on Welsh affairs in the present circumstances. If I can carry him with me on that point, I am sure I will carry the rest of the House with me on it. Yes, we will consider whether any further action is required to make sure that the interests of Welsh electors are protected, and we will make sure that the debate on Welsh affairs proceeds.

I note what the hon. Gentleman said about wishing to oppose any military action. Let us be clear. At the present time, we are pursuing a strategy through the United Nations. We wish to see the matter resolved through that United Nations process. For it to be resolved will require the co-operation of Saddam Hussein, and require him to accept his obligation to disarm under the resolution that has already been passed by the United Nations and endorsed by the House.

Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): Naturally, I accept the good faith of my right hon. Friend, but he will recall

[Donald Anderson]

that concern was expressed after the vote on 25 November—a vote that effectively only endorsed resolution 1441—that the Government were seeking to put too much weight on that general expression of opinion. Since he has properly said that this is only an interim stage and that there will be an opportunity for a substantive vote later, is there any reason at all to have a vote after the important debate on Wednesday?

Mr. Cook: Whenever I have proposed a debate on Iraq on a motion for the Adjournment, I have tended to be criticised in the House for not providing a substantive motion. I will take it rather ill if I am now criticised for bringing a substantive motion before the House. It is absolutely right that the House should debate the matter. People outside would find it rather strange if we debated it for a full day, with no product at the end. Therefore to assert the support of the House for the present strategy through the United Nations seems to me entirely appropriate in the present circumstances. Should it be necessary for that strategy to develop as a result of the failure of Saddam Hussein to co-operate, there will be another opportunity for the House to debate the matter and to express a view on it.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Mid-Bedfordshire): Can the Leader of the House make it clear whether, if the Government decide that our troops should be committed to war, the House will be able to vote on that specific subject prior to their going to war?

Mr. Cook: When the Foreign Secretary spoke in the House on the matter, he said that he hoped it would be possible for us to have such a motion before there was any military action. That would certainly be our intention and our preference. Of course, as Ministers have repeatedly said, in any specific circumstances we have to weigh how we conduct the proceedings of the House against the safety of our troops who may be committed to action. That must be a proper consideration, and I do not think that any hon. Member would argue against it, but that should not be taken as some kind of underhand plan in order to proceed with action without the authority of the House. That would not be our wish and it is not my expectation of what will happen.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Forgive my curiosity, but when the Leader of the House mentioned that there could be a trap—that was spontaneous—what trap did he have in mind?

Mr. Cook: I am happy to assure my hon. Friend that I said that there was no trap.

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): Given that the debate on Wednesday might be our last opportunity to discuss this matter before hostilities begin, and given the fact that many constituency MPs have had huge mailbags about this important subject and will want to question the Government as well as explain their own position, would it be possible to get rid of the 7 o'clock rule for the debate and to allow it to run on?

Mr. Cook: There will be a full day's debate, and it will commence earlier than it would have done before the change in the hours. I hope that it will therefore attract even more support from the Gallery above us. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that there will be as much time to debate this matter as there would have been under the previous hours. I also fully understand that Members will wish to question the Government—to use the hon. Gentleman's own phrase—as well as expressing their own views, and it is for that reason that the Prime Minister will be making a statement to the House tomorrow, in addition to the debate on Wednesday.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): But will a future substantive motion be on the issue of whether—not when, or if—British troops will be deployed? My right hon. Friend referred to the remarks of the Foreign Secretary, but if I remember correctly, the Foreign Secretary warned the House against such a substantive motion on the ground that it could put British troops in danger by taking away the element of surprise. I reiterate: is it now the Government's policy that decisions on whether to deploy British troops are taken by our Government, our House of Commons and our people? Two Cabinet Ministers have revoked the words of the Prime Minister on that issue.

Mr. Cook: I re-read the Foreign Secretary's speech only this morning, so it is quite fresh in my mind precisely what he said to the House. He has always been quite open with the House—and, if I recall rightly, with the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs—that it was the Government's wish that there should be a substantive vote in the House. I have often said, both in the House and outside it, that it is inconceivable that British troops could be committed into action without support from within the House of Commons. That would plainly not be politically acceptable, and it would not be something that this Government would contemplate.

On the question of timing, I have already said that the Foreign Secretary has said that his hope is that such a motion would take place before action, and that would certainly be our intention. As I said earlier to the House, however, we have to bear in mind the safety of our troops and not take any action in specific circumstances that would compromise that safety. I would hope that no hon. Member would disagree with that.

David Burnside (South Antrim): I welcome the statement by the Leader of the House, and I look forward to the Prime Minister's statement tomorrow and to the debate on Wednesday on an important subject on which we need as much public, parliamentary, governmental and national unity as possible if we are going to war. The Leader of the House will no doubt be aware that the Prime Minister's chief of staff has been in Ulster over the last week, informing people that the deadline for putting together a Belfast deal between the Provisional IRA, the British Government and other parties is the beginning of next week. Will the Leader of the House give the House a commitment that there will be a statement by the Prime Minister and a full day's debate if the deadline in Northern Ireland is indeed planned for the beginning of next week?

Mr. Cook: I am well aware of the interest in all quarters of the House—not simply from those who represent Northern Ireland—in the peace process and in the efforts to restore it to sufficient health to re-establish the Northern Ireland Assembly. I can assure hon. Members that, if there are developments, we will ensure that the House is kept fully informed and has a full opportunity to ask Ministers questions and to pursue the matter.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): The subject of Wednesday's debate is clearly a matter of critical importance both for the House and for the nation. Will the Leader of the House give us an assurance that the debate will be led by the Prime Minister, and that the Prime Minister will spend the full period of time in the Chamber, so that he can hear the views of hon. Members?

Mr. Cook: I am quite confident that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister would welcome the opportunity to spend six hours in the Chamber or, indeed, on any other single activity, but it is in the nature of government at the best of times—and especially now—that the luxury of time is not available to him. I think that most mature Members would recognise that he may have more important things to do over six hours than simply to sit in this place.

Energy White Paper

3.44 pm

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Ms Patricia Hewitt): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement about the energy White Paper which I and my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State for Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs and the Secretary of State for Transport are publishing today. Copies are available in the Vote Office. At the same time, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is publishing the Government's response to the 22nd report of the royal commission on environmental pollution, "Energy—the Changing Climate". I should also like to draw the attention of the House to the written statement on British Energy that I made this morning.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I regret as much as I am sure that you do that drafts of the White Paper have been leaked to the press in the past few days. Such action is a discourtesy to the House and I deplore it wholeheartedly.

The White Paper sets out a new energy policy that is designed to deal with the three major challenges that confront our energy system. First, we face the challenge of climate change. CO_2 levels, which have already risen by more than a third since the industrial revolution, are now rising faster than ever before. The scientific evidence makes it clear that the consequences of rising global temperatures could be devastating—not only in Britain, where floods and storms could cause billions of pounds worth of damage, but even more so in developing countries where millions of people could be exposed to disease, hunger and flooding.

Secondly, we face the challenge of our declining indigenous energy supplies. We already import nearly half the coal we use; by 2006 we will be a net importer of gas and, by 2010, of oil; and by 2020, we could be dependent on imported fuel for three quarters of our total primary energy needs. As we move from being an exporter to an importer of energy, we need new approaches to reduce the risk of price fluctuations and political instability or conflicts in other parts of the world.

Thirdly, we face the challenge of keeping our energy infrastructure up to date with changing technologies and needs. Much of our infrastructure will need to be updated over the next two decades, particularly to adapt to far higher levels of renewable electricity and to accommodate rising gas imports.

Our four new goals for energy policy are: first, to cut greenhouse gas emissions; secondly, to secure reliable energy supplies; thirdly, to maintain competitive energy markets in the UK and beyond; and fourthly, to ensure that every home is adequately and affordably heated.

The United Kingdom is already on course to achieve our Kyoto commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 12.5 per cent. below 1990 levels by 2008–12. Today, we are making a further commitment to cut UK CO_2 emissions by 60 per cent. by about 2050, with real progress by 2020. That is the recommendation that was made by the royal commission on environmental pollution, and we have accepted it. Of course, our actions in the United Kingdom will affect

[Ms Patricia Hewitt]

climate change globally only if they are part of a concerted international effort, so a key objective of British foreign policy in future will be to secure ambitious international commitments to cutting CO_2 emissions world wide. At the heart of our new framework for energy policy will be a carbon trading system. A new Europe-wide system planned for 2005 will create a powerful incentive to producers and consumers to use less energy and to switch to lower or zero-carbon forms of electricity.

The cheapest way to tackle all our energy goals is simply to use less energy, but we will need to achieve far more on energy efficiency in the next 20 years than we have achieved in the past 20 years. Building on the climate change programme, we have therefore decided to consult on an expansion of the energy efficiency commitment to run from 2005 until at least 2008, at possibly twice its current level of activity, and to work with energy suppliers and Ofgem to create an effective market in energy services; to bring forward to 2005 the revision of building regulations, with higher standards for efficiency both in new buildings and in refurbishments; to work with our European partners to agree higher standards for consumer and industrial appliances; and to set an example within Government by improving energy efficiency in our own buildings and procurement.

Last year, we introduced a renewables obligation to help to deliver our target of generating 10 per cent. of electricity from renewables by 2010. By then, the renewables obligation and the exemption from the climate change levy will be worth some £1 billion a year to the renewables industry. We believe that renewable sources of energy will increasingly demonstrate that they can achieve our goals at an acceptable cost. Our further aspiration is therefore to double renewables' share of electricity from our 2010 target by 2020. The White Paper sets out policies to achieve that by investing £60 million in new money for renewable energy projects, bringing Government investment in renewable energy up to £348 million over four years; simplifying and streamlining the planning system; taking steps with Ofgem and others to improve access by renewable generators to the electricity network; and setting out a new strategic framework for offshore wind.

Nuclear power is an important source of carbon-free electricity, but its current economics make it an unattractive option, and important nuclear waste problems need to be resolved. The White Paper does not include proposals for new nuclear power stations. However, it does not rule out the possibility that, at some point in the future, new nuclear build might be needed to fulfil our carbon targets. Any further decision to proceed with building new nuclear power stations would be made only after full public consultation and publication of a further White Paper.

Transport accounts for approximately a third of final energy use and will also play its part. We shall continue to improve vehicles' fuel efficiency and cut carbon emissions through the successful European voluntary agreements with car makers. Vehicle taxation also now encourages and rewards consumers for choosing clean, low-carbon vehicles. We shall start to make substantial use of low-carbon biofuels. That builds on the strategy that we set out in "Powering Future Vehicles", and we welcome the engagement of industry and other partners through the new low-carbon vehicle partnership.

The White Paper sets out a package of measures to support new energy technologies, including a new industry network on fuel cells and further work on the transition to a hydrogen economy. I also welcome the Research Councils' proposal for a new energy research centre.

Becoming an energy importer does not necessarily make it harder to provide energy reliability. Most other leading industrial nations have achieved economic growth as energy importers. We can do the same. Securing reliable energy supplies will be an increasingly important part of our European and foreign policy.

Last year, we secured a commitment to European energy liberalisation for industrial customers by 2004, and overall by 2007. That will improve our access to different sources of supply and allow United Kingdom companies to compete in wider markets. As well as keeping prices affordable, competitive markets create the right environment for infrastructure investment that will increase our capacity to import gas through the existing interconnector. Renewables and smaller-scale distributed generation will also help to promote greater diversity and energy security.

Coal generation provides approximately a third of our electricity, increases flexibility and contributes to diversity of supplies. The future for coal electricity generation lies in cleaner coal technologies or carbon capture and storage. We already have a programme of support for cleaner technologies, and the White Paper includes proposals on capture and storage. We propose to introduce separately an investment aid scheme to help existing pits to develop new coal reserves, when they are economically viable, and to safeguard jobs. We have already negotiated the required flexibility at European level to enable us to achieve that.

Tackling fuel poverty remains a key priority. In 1996, 5.5 million households were in fuel poverty. Today, the figure is around 3 million. Of those, 2 million are vulnerable households, comprising older people, families with children or people who are disabled or have a long-term illness. In 2001, our fuel poverty strategy set out policies to end fuel poverty in vulnerable households by 2010. Our aim is that, as far as is practical, nobody in Britain will live in fuel poverty by 2016–18.

However, eradicating fuel poverty requires action in people's homes through better insulation and heating systems. We are tackling that through programmes such as warm front and the energy efficiency commitment. We shall publish our first annual report on the fuel poverty strategy shortly. It will give hon. Members more detail on our progress.

The White Paper establishes an energy policy for the long term. For the first time, such policy puts the environment at its heart. It will give energy producers and industry the long-term market framework that they need to invest and plan with confidence. It will ensure that consumers can continue to rely on safe, affordable energy for all their needs. It will help us to play a leading role in meeting the challenge of global climate change. I commend it to the House.

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk): I am grateful to the Secretary of State for providing a timely copy of her statement and the White Paper this morning. I share her concern about leaks. As she wholeheartedly deplores these leaks, will she confirm that they came not from the Department of Trade and Industry, but from No. 10 Downing street, which made a late draft of the White Paper available to a certain *Financial Times* lobby journalist last Friday? The same day, her Department seemed unaware that the White Paper was to be published today. The timing was presumably chosen to suit the Prime Minister's presentational timetable.

Seldom has a document that was so widely trailed and so eagerly anticipated been so disappointing. The White Paper is long on aspiration and short on conclusions. It ducks all the hard decisions, and leaves Britain without a coherent energy strategy just when clarity and decisiveness are most needed. It is not as though the Government have not had time to think about the issues. It is a year since the performance and innovation unit's report was published, and two and a half years since the royal commission published its report, but all we get from Ministers is a series of targets watered down into aspirations, and bland statements that would scarcely rate a pass mark in a GCSE economics exam and which bear all the hallmarks of the cut-and-paste techniques now favoured by 10 Downing street.

The White Paper has had the gestation period of an elephant, and at the end of a lengthy labour the Secretary of State has delivered a mouse. It is a typical new Labour exercise, full of overblown prime ministerial rhetoric and claims, and its content is wholly inadequate to meet the challenges that Britain faces.

Governments have two responsibilities in relation to energy policy: first, to ensure security of supply, and secondly, to meet our environmental commitments. The White Paper fails abysmally on both counts at a time when Britain is moving from self-sufficiency in energy supply to being a net importer, and when the Government's failure to achieve reductions in carbon dioxide emissions is serious.

Incidentally, the Secretary of State's claim in her statement that the

"United Kingdom is already on course to achieve our Kyoto commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions"

is contradicted in her own White Paper. On page 25, footnote 6 states that carbon dioxide emissions in Britain increased in 2000 and 2001. Will the Secretary of State confirm that the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has just announced that carbon dioxide emissions have risen for the third year running? That is a fresh example of the Government's increasingly favoured technique: if they are missing the immediate targets by a big enough margin, their answer is to set much more demanding targets to be met at a much later date.

The Prime Minister, in his foreword, calls the White Paper

"a milestone in energy policy",

but the truth is that it is a millstone around the necks of the industry and the customers, who include every man, woman and child and every business in Britain. The price of ministerial dithering and incompetence will be paid by people and businesses for years to come.

We welcome the references in the White Paper to the importance of improving energy efficiency. Nevertheless, experience shows that relying on greater energy efficiency to achieve half the carbon dioxide savings required is wishful thinking. Although the White Paper admits past failures, for example on condensing boilers, it does not provide any policies to deliver micro combined heat and power in the future, which could be an important contributor to greater energy efficiency and generating capacity.

The Conservative party fully supports Britain playing its part in meeting internationally agreed targets to tackle climate change. That process originated under the Conservative Government. Will the Secretary of State tell us whether she believes that other countries will now commit to a 60 per cent. target cut in carbon dioxide emissions by 2050? Will she confirm that it would be economically damaging for Britain to impose such a target unilaterally? What discussions have taken place recently with the world's largest emitter, the United States, about its commitment to reducing carbon dioxide emissions? Why are the Government persisting with the climate change levy as one of their primary instruments for achieving a reduction? Does not the Secretary of State recognise that the climate change levy is unfair, arbitrary and ineffective in its impact? Does she understand that a comprehensive emissions trading system would provide a fairer and more efficient way of cutting carbon dioxide emissions? Why does the White Paper not admit the failure of the climate change levy, and announce its immediate replacement?

Will the Secretary of State confirm that the Government's existing emissions trading system is incompatible with the European Union scheme, and that the EU scheme itself is not comprehensive?

I welcome the overdue signs of realism in Ministers' minds in relation to renewable energy. Will the Secretary of State admit that when the White Paper describes the target of 10 per cent. of Britain's energy being supplied from renewable sources by 2010 as "very challenging", what it really means is that the chances of meeting it are remote? Will she confirm that that target can be met only at huge cost to both consumers and taxpayers, giving the lie to the Government's claim that they are concerned about affordable energy and fuel poverty?

Does the Secretary of State recognise that onshore and offshore wind, the two sources identified in the White Paper as the largest contributors of renewable energy in 2010, are not reliable sources, in the sense that there is no guarantee that the wind will blow when electricity demand peaks?

Yet another example of the White Paper's failure is the lack of any new policy on combined heat and power. The Government are failing to meet their existing CHP targets, no new CHP arrangement is being constructed, and all the White Paper offers is

"review existing guidance . . . continue to emphasise the benefits of CHP . . . work with Ofgem to keep these developments under review"

—anything, in other words, except tangible action to promote CHP.

Will the Secretary of State explain why the Government have ducked any decision on nuclear power? Does that mean they believe that existing

[Mr. Tim Yeo]

nuclear power stations, which provide more than a fifth of current energy supplies, do not need to be replaced? What more do the Government need to know about nuclear technology or public attitudes before making up their mind?

Given that the lead time for planning, approving and building nuclear power stations is very long indeed, does the Secretary of State agree that by requiring both the fullest public consultation and the publication of yet another White Paper before any decision can be made, the Government are effectively trying to kill off Britain's nuclear industry? Does she agree that in doing so she has made Britain even more dependent on imported gas? Are the Government content to make Britain's electricity depend on gas supplies from countries such as Russia and Algeria? Does the Secretary of State believe that in the event of a future energy crisis, Britain—at the western end of a gas pipeline that passes alongside Russia's biggest gas customer, Germany—could rely on that source of supply? Does she agree that, at the very least, the situation would require the construction of huge new gas storage facilities? Where will those be, and who will pay for them?

We waited a long time for this White Paper, but judging by its content I think it would have been better for us to wait a bit longer so that the gaps in the policy could be filled in and the uncertainties that it perpetuates could be resolved. The long lead times in the energy industry, and the fact that Britain faces the most acute energy challenges for a generation, mean that the Government's actions and, more particularly, inactions now will have effects in years to come which consumers will still be suffering, and paying for, long after the Secretary of State has begun to draw her pension.

This White Paper represents a missed opportunity that could have disastrous results. Dodging the difficult decisions today may mean that the lights will go off tomorrow, and will certainly mean that the bills will be higher the day after that.

Ms Hewitt: That was a bit rich, coming from the spokesman for a party that was responsible, in government, for the discredited pool system that gave us artificially high electricity prices for years, which encouraged massive over-investment in electricity generating capacity—over-investment that is still unwinding itself. That Government's only energy policy was to have no policy whatsoever.

The hon. Gentleman began by referring to carbon dioxide reductions and our Kyoto targets. I can confirm that we are indeed on course to meet not just those targets but, we believe, the more challenging domestic target that we set of a 20 per cent. reduction by 2010. It is true that for the last two years there has been a small increase in carbon dioxide emissions, but we expect to see a fall again this year when we have the new figures. We also expect a continuing downward trend that will not only meet the Kyoto commitments, but go beyond that.

As for the commitments of other countries, today, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced that he and the Swedish Prime Minister have written to the Greek Prime Minister as President of the European Union to urge all our European partners to sign up to the target of 60 per cent. reductions by 2050.

The hon. Gentleman complained about the climate change levy, but that levy and the climate change agreements made under it, which deliver an 80 per cent. discount on the levy, are proving to be an extremely effective incentive for much greater energy efficiency and cleaner electricity within our industry, just as we thought that they would be. Britain pioneered voluntary emissions trading and it is already using that trading scheme to enable a number of companies to meet the commitments that they have entered into under the climate change agreements. As we say in the White Paper, as we move towards the new carbon trading system in 2005, we will look at how people move from the existing emissions trading scheme to the new trading scheme, and how the climate change levy fits in with that.

The hon. Gentleman complained about progress on renewables. Yes, it is a challenging target for 2010, and I mean precisely that. We put in place the renewables obligation only last year, so it is not surprising that it has not had much effect recently. We know very well, and we say in the White Paper, that we need to do far more year on year to ensure that we get the renewables electricity that we need, but the renewables obligation will build up to an enormous level of support for the renewables industry. It will be backed by the capital grants programme that I have just announced over the next four years and it will be reinforced from 2005 by the emissions trading scheme.

Let us recognise that, in Britain, we have one third of the entire wind resources of the European Union. Just as we used the coal reserves of our country to build our industrial wealth, so we can use our wind and wave resources to build the energy systems that we need for the future.

As for combined heat and power, we are already halfway towards the 2010 target and we have set out in the White Paper sensible, practical steps that will enable us to go the rest of the way.

The hon. Gentleman complained about the announcement that I have made today on nuclear energy. Let me make it plain that, although nuclear energy is a carbon-free source of energy, as I said, its economics are not attractive at the moment. The problem of radioactive waste rightly causes great concern to the public. The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is working on that issue at the moment.

It would have been foolish to announce, as the hon. Gentleman apparently wanted us to do, that we would embark on a new generation of nuclear power stations because that would have guaranteed that we would not make the necessary investment and effort in both energy efficiency and in renewables. That is why we are not going to build a new generation of nuclear power stations now. We are going to put all the priority on energy efficiency and on renewables, but we have not ruled out the possibility of needing some further nuclear capacity to meet our carbon targets.

On the issue of energy security, I disagree with every assertion that the hon. Gentleman made. We have access, potentially and already, to the extensive gas fields of Norway, with which we are working on a new treaty. Not only Britain but western Europe as a whole have been buying gas from Russia for the past 30 years without interruption. Already the industry is investing in liquefied natural gas facilities and in storage that, in a new world of much greater dependence on imported gas, will enable us to ensure that we continue to meet our energy security targets as well as our environmental targets.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): I am not sure whether to thank the Secretary of State or the Prime Minister for the advance leaked copy that I received but perhaps she will pass on my appreciation to whoever it was. Having had a chance to read the report, I believe that it contains a great deal that is very welcome, in particular its emphasis on putting the environment at the centre of energy policy. However, there are some specific issues and questions that I want to deal with.

First, I welcome the emphasis on energy efficiency and conservation, but how can we take seriously the Government's commitment to energy conservation and fuel poverty, given that the Chancellor of the Exchequer is going to cut the warm front budget—the main practical instrument through which funding for energy conservation is delivered—by 15 per cent. from April? Why have the Government not come forward with proposals to replace those in the excellent private Member's Bill that was tabled by the hon. Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Dr. Turner) but sabotaged in the previous parliamentary Session?

Secondly, I welcome the emphasis on renewables, but can the Secretary of State confirm that—as I believe is correct—of the £1 billion of funding that she is discussing, not one penny is additional money? All of it constitutes funding already committed to support for renewable power, and the only funding outside that budget that will be made available is an additional £60 million. That contrasts with the hundreds of millions of pounds that her Department is throwing at the failed energy company British Energy.

Thirdly, on CHP, I welcome the Prime Minister's lending his authority to the White Paper this morning, but I wonder whether the Secretary of State remembers that four years ago, the Prime Minister launched the Whitehall CHP project—a project that now runs for only four hours a day. In the light of the Conservative spokesman's comments, what concrete action is the Secretary of State taking to deal with the immediate problems associated with CHP, given that output has fallen by 17 per cent. in the past year, and that three quarters of all capacity is currently under-utilised?

I congratulate the Secretary of State on standing up to the pressure that she was undoubtedly under to commit herself to new nuclear power in the White Paper. That is to be commended, but given that, in addition to the well-known security and environmental difficulties, the economics of new nuclear power are hopelessly unattractive, why do the Government feel that waiting another few years before producing the definitive view on this issue will add any new information whatever? Does she not accept that further procrastination both blights investment by the nuclear power industry, and makes it much more difficult for new investment to take place in renewables and other sources?

Finally, I also welcome the very sane and balanced way in which the White Paper deals with energy imports, particularly gas. However, does the Secretary of State acknowledge that the main threat to this country comes not from dastardly foreigners such as the Norwegians, but from the serious problem that is building up in the industry of large-scale underinvestment in infrastructure such as storage, terminals for liquefied natural gas, and pipelines? When are the Government going to address this very serious and imminent problem?

Ms Hewitt: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his overall welcome for the White Paper, and for his especial welcome for its emphasis on the environment. As for energy efficiency, I must warn him—leaks or no leaks—not to believe everything that he reads in the press. The warm homes programme has already been a considerable success. No decision has yet been made on the next stage of its funding, but I stress again—as I did in my statement—the importance of the energy efficiency commitment, and our intention to extend and increase it. Indeed, we shall also consult on its possible extension to the business sector, to ensure that the benefits already brought to the domestic sector are extended to business.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned investment in renewables, and he began by saying that there is no new money at all. I can confirm that there is indeed new funding of £60 million, which comes from the non-fossil fuel obligation, and a further allocation of £38 million that was part of last year's spending review settlement. That was allocated generally for energy, but I have now allocated it specifically to capital grants for the renewables programme. I stress to the hon. Gentleman that support for renewables does not, of course, come only from the taxpayer. It will come, in even more sizeable form, from the renewables obligation and from the carbon trading system.

The hon. Gentleman also mentioned CHP. We all know that it is difficult at the moment to make the economics of CHP work, with gas prices high and electricity prices low. That price situation will not exist for ever and, indeed, we spell out in the White Paper how we see electricity and other energy prices rising in the future, especially under the impact of the carbon emissions trading scheme. We are also taking action with the regulator, Ofgem, to ensure that the regulatory framework is properly suited to the needs of CHP and more generally distributed small-scale renewable sources. We are also proposing to put a statutory duty on the regulator to assess all regulatory proposals on their environmental impact. That will help to ensure that we get the regulatory climate right and obtain the investment that is needed in new distribution and storage infrastructure.

I know that the Liberal Democrats would like to rule out nuclear power forever, and preferably close it all down today—although that may not be the hon. Gentleman's personal view. The Tories would like us to commit to an entire new fleet of nuclear power stations today. Both are wrong. We have taken the responsible course that will meet this country's energy security needs and deliver our environmental targets.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. I ask hon. Members to be concise in their remarks to the Secretary of State, so that more may be fortunate enough to catch my eye.

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Ochil): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement and the White Paper. In particular, I welcome the incorporation of the timetable of the royal commission on environmental protection, which is more realistic than those we have had in the past. The royal commission placed some emphasis on a nuclear contribution, but—like my right hon. Friend—I think that it is unrealistic to discuss that at the moment, given the financial problems faced by the industry.

My right hon. Friend mentioned the importance of the co-ordination of the research contribution. Can she assure us that the Department will be more aware of the special pleadings that can come from research scientists? In the past, the old Central Electricity Generating Board researchers bedevilled the progress of investment in generation schemes by wanting a few dollars more, and more bells and whistles. We ended up being years behind with most of our major programmes. That meant that prices rose, although no one will be under any illusion that prices will not rise in future as a consequence of the programme of measures that my right hon. Friend has laid out.

Will my right hon. Friend bear in mind that there are still 2.5 million people, by her figures, in fuel poverty, most of whom live in hard-to-heat homes and are not necessarily helped by social security changes? It will be essential that she and her team fight and defend the budgets, which some see as inadequate now but which are under threat as a consequence of the costs of the foot and mouth epidemic and their effect on the budgets of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

Ms Hewitt: My hon. Friend is right to offer those warnings about the temptation to try to develop a uniquely British solution to technological problems. That was a trap into which the British nuclear industry fell in the past. I am sure that he will welcome the announcement today by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council that it will invest more than £11 million in new research into renewable power generation, drawing upon some of the outstanding science that has been done in that area in the UK.

My hon. Friend is also right to draw attention to the need to ensure that vulnerable households, and people living in inadequately heated houses, are able to meet their energy needs. The White Paper has the balance right between ensuring that we do not price those people out of being able to heat their homes, and ensuring that we obtain private sector investment, and retain public sector investment, in energy efficiency.

Mr. John Horam (Orpington): May I thank the Secretary of State for publishing alongside her White Paper the Government's response to the Environmental Audit Committee's report on sustainable energy? I welcome the remarks made in the White Paper about renewables and the emphasis on the environment. However, now that the right hon. Lady has got her White Paper out of the way, will she inject some urgency and decisiveness into this snail-like policy-making process? It is especially disappointing that a White Paper published now includes a plan for an implementation document in 12 months' time. Are we not in danger of paralysis by analysis?

Ms Hewitt: I think that it was worth spending some months looking at, in particular, the recommendations of last year's report from the strategy unit, and conducting the largest-ever public consultation on energy policy and doing very extensive and detailed economic modelling to ensure that we have a soundly based policy. Of course, I agree with the hon. Gentleman that we now need to ensure that we implement it. By bringing together all the Departments with an interest in and a responsibility for energy policy under the direction of a new ministerial Committee, which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and I will chair together, we shall have the right framework not only to make policy but, above all, to implement it.

Dr. Jack Cunningham (Copeland): I welcome my right hon. Friend's White Paper and hope that its important aspirations for renewable energy can be achieved. I also applaud the clear commitment to retain the option of using nuclear power in the future.

Is it not clear that carbon trading, unlike the climate change levy, will enhance the economic position and thus the potential contribution from nuclear power in future? I am in no doubt that we shall need that contribution. While my right hon. Friend places much emphasis on energy efficiency and energy conservation, does she recognise that experience tells us that all those millions of disaggregated decisions, taken 24 hours a day, seven days a week, will never be changed simply by exhortation? Does she recognise that she will have to legislate to regulate and that, in doing so, she will also have to ensure that fuel poverty issues are carefully taken into account?

Ms Hewitt: I think that I am right in saying that my right hon. Friend was the first ever Minister for energy conservation. He is right: exhortation simply does not work. It certainly does not work in my family when it comes to persuading teenagers to turn the lights off and not to leave the television on standby. We need to build energy efficiency into our homes, offices, factories and appliances. We shall do that through the building regulations, through stricter product regulations in Europe and through voluntary agreements with industry. We shall also do it through this much stronger energy efficiency commitment and through the development of an energy services market. My right hon. Friend is right to say that the new carbon trading system that will apply in 2005 will apply to all sources of electricity.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): Can the Secretary of State tell the House what proportion of electricity production is met by renewables at present? If, as I think, the figure is about 3 per cent., will it not be very difficult to increase it by 1 per cent. year on year? As she has already said that she hopes that the whole programme will gather momentum, is that not even more reason for a detailed strategy setting out the contribution that each part of renewables—whether wind and wave or solar—can make. To get the support of the British people to achieve the policy, we need to capture their imagination.

Ms Hewitt: As we say in the White Paper, renewables account for less than 3 per cent. of Britain's electricity. That is certainly less than a number of other European countries have achieved. It is not for the Government to say that so much must come from onshore wind, so much from offshore wind, so much from waves and so on. That is for investors to decide. We stand ready, with the increased capital grants programme that I announced today, to ensure that there is backing from the taxpayer for renewable energy projects. By working with the regulator, we are also ensuring that we get the distribution infrastructure right so that those renewable generators can get their electricity to market. In the White Paper, we are setting exactly the investment and market framework that the energy companies and their investors are seeking and I am confident that they will respond.

Mr. David Borrow (South Ribble): I want to discuss the poor position of the UK in regard to solar energy. What discussions has my right hon. Friend had with her right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister on improvements to planning regulations and grants towards social housing? We have to promote the use of solar energy in social housing and public buildings.

Ms Hewitt: My hon. Friend raises an important point. I have talked to my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister about how we can use the early review of building regulations to ensure that, in setting much higher energy efficiency standards for new build and such things as the refurbishment of roofs, we can massively increase investment in solar energy and similarly energy efficient systems. That will require changes to the planning system and, as is said in the White Paper, we will make changes to the planning system for energy. I am glad that, in the new communities programme that my right hon. Friend announced recently, he made it clear that we will set high standards of energy efficiency in new homes.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): It is disappointing that the White Paper contains just six sentences on future research needs. There are no announcements that the Chancellor of the Exchequer intends to put any new money into research. Does the Secretary of State agree that, if we are to get optimum performance from existing nuclear plant, we will need more research into nuclear fission and we will certainly need more research into nuclear fusion? At Culham and elsewhere we should ensure that we at least match the investment in research of the rest of the European Union. If we are to take advantage of the hydrogen revolution, we will need a great deal more research across the board. I hope that the Government will address that issue.

Ms Hewitt: In the White Paper, we set out clearly our support for the energy research group's research priorities. I refer the hon. Gentleman to paragraph 7.32, in which we set out that the research priorities include energy efficiency, nuclear power, hydrogen production and storage, carbon dioxide sequestration, solar photovoltaic energy, and wave and tidal power. The funding for those priorities is available from the enormous increase in the research council's budget that we announced last year as a direct result of the spending review. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will welcome not only that commitment but the fact that the EPSRC is already calling for bids for its new programme of renewable energy research.

Mr. Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West and Penistone): I welcome the White Paper, with its emphasis on renewables and its focus on reducing greenhouse gases. I listened with interest to what my right hon. Friend said about investment in clean coal technology. Will she review the investment into that technology with a view to considering how clean coal technology—such as that of the integrated gasification combine cycle unit—could boost British manufacturing and help in the transfer of technology to tackle pollution worldwide?

Ms Hewitt: As my hon. Friend will be aware, we are already working on that. We are talking to the industry about how we can help to develop that particular clean coal technology. I know that he will welcome the fact that we are investing some £25 million over three years in the cleaner coal technology programme.

Mr. Michael Weir (Angus): In her statement, the Secretary of State made a commitment to cut UK carbon dioxide emissions by 60 per cent. by about 2050, with real progress by 2020. How does she define "real progress"? Would it not be better to have a specific target for 2020?

Ms Hewitt: As I said in my statement, we have set out very clearly that, by 2020, we hope to double the contribution that we have set from renewable energy sources, compared with the target of 10 per cent. by 2010. That is one of the ways in which we will measure the progress that we need to reach the overall 2050 target. As I said earlier, we are on course to meet our 2010 Kyoto targets and, we believe, our more challenging domestic targets. However, in about 2005, we will enter the discussions for Kyoto 2, which will expire in about 2012. At that point, we will be able to see what further commitments we need to make internationally for the period ahead. That, too, will be part of the benchmark that we use to assess whether we are staying on track for the commitment that we are making today of 60 per cent. by 2050.

Mr. Gareth Thomas (Harrow, West): I, too, warmly welcome the White Paper, particularly its accelerated focus on renewables, but does my right hon. Friend accept that many people in the energy industry think that 25 per cent., or even 30 per cent., of our energy needs is perfectly achievable from renewable sources by 2020? Does she also recognise that, given the way that Ofgem has introduced the new electricity trading arrangements, it is possible that there might be concern about whether it has understood the White Paper and, indeed, is capable of delivering in a helpful way the objectives for Ofgem that are contained in it?

Ms Hewitt: My hon. Friend is right to say that some people, particularly in the green movement, believe that

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a 25 to 30 per cent. share of electricity from renewable sources is perfectly achievable. We considered whether that should be our policy aim, but, on present information, the costs of achieving that would be very substantial indeed, and if we go above 20 per cent., the costs to the consumer increase much faster. I believe that it is important to get on the right course with the practical policies that I have outlined, including the renewables obligation.

My hon. Friend refers to Ofgem. Let me stress again that we will put Ofgem under a duty to conduct and publish an environmental impact assessment of all its regulatory proposals. We will also revise and strengthen the environmental guidance that we give to Ofgem under the Utilities Act 2000, in the light of the White Paper, but Ofgem is already consulting on the proposals for the British electricity trading system—the Electricity (Trading and Transmission) Bill—and that will give it a further chance to ensure that the regulatory framework meets the emphasis on renewables that we have set out in the White Paper.

Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South): I welcome the Secretary of State's environmental aspirations, even though I share other hon. Members' scepticism about whether they are achievable. She has made it clear today that there is a future for coal-fired generation, provided that it uses clean coal technology. Given that coal-fired generation, without clean coal technology, is uneconomic and power stations are closing down, how does she propose that clean coal technology should be financed? I refer not to her research programme, but to how the investment in clean coal technology will be paid for at present market levels.

Ms Hewitt: The hon. Gentleman raises an extremely important and interesting issue. The important feature of the White Paper, as I have tried to stress, is that we are giving long-term signals to the market. We have set out very clearly our own assessment, on current information, of what we think will happen to electricity prices. That assessment and the policies that we have announced today set the climate and the framework in which investors will make their decisions on investing in coal and, indeed, other generating plants, but we also know—I reflected on this in my statement—that coal-fired electricity generation has a very important contribution to make because it is so flexible. Of course, that is an important factor, and investors and energy companies will take it into account when they make those decisions.

Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): I welcome the White Paper proposals for improved energy efficiency, the growth in renewables and, of course, clean coal technology and sequestration, but taken together, even if we achieve that more environmentally sensitive energy policy, does the Secretary of State accept her own Department's figures showing that, by 2020 at the outside, 80 per cent. of our energy needs could be met from gas, 90 per cent. of which will be imported? Is that really a secure, reliable and sustainable energy policy? If that is the case, will she keep that matter under review?

Ms Hewitt: I have already outlined to the House why I believe that we can achieve our energy security goals, as well as our other energy goals, with much greater dependence on imported energy, particularly gas, than we have at the moment, but of course we will keep that under review. As the White Paper says, we will strengthen the arrangements for jointly monitoring, particularly with Ofgem, security of supply considerations, and we will ensure that Ofgem regularly reports on the security of supply and on the implications of its decisions for future security.

Hugh Robertson (Faversham and Mid-Kent): A number of farmers in my constituency are excited by the potential—I put it no more strongly than that—of biofuels. What discussions has the Secretary of State had with the Chancellor about the duty cut necessary to kick-start the industry, and what part does she think biofuels could play in meeting our future energy needs?

Ms Hewitt: Like the hon. Gentleman, I think that bio-energy has a contribution to make to our future energy needs, particularly in light of the need for our agricultural communities to diversify and the need to reform the common agricultural policy, and this is a thoroughly timely opportunity. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor, who has led the way in ensuring that we have an environmentally sensitive tax system, said in the pre-Budget report that he wants to consult further on fiscal incentives and I am sure that that will take into account the need further to encourage the development of biofuels.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is the Secretary of State aware that it is not a good idea to rely on so much imported energy in future? The situation is bad enough now. At the last count, the trade deficit was about £34 billion, which is the highest figure that we have experienced. In that context, would it not be a good idea to concentrate on renewables? I accept that they will make little inroad into the problem, but we must concentrate on industries that supply energy. If it is possible for a few hundred miners in south Wales to take over Tower colliery as a co-operative and to keep it going against the odds for seven or eight years, yet the giant UK Coal can close down Selby, would not it make more sense for the Government to take over Selby, as they took over Railtrack, to offset the trade deficit and to ensure that those massive supplies of coal, from a field that we did not start using until 1988, keep coming?

Ms Hewitt: I hate to disappoint my hon. Friend, but I do not propose to renationalise Selby. My hon. Friend the Minister for Energy and Construction and I have been working on an investment aid scheme that will bring hope to hundreds of our miners. It will also help to ensure that the extensive coal reserves that this country still enjoys are properly used for the future.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): The Secretary of State must be aware that even if we achieved 20 per cent. generation from renewables by 2020, if at the same time the nuclear plant, which is carbon free and provides 20 per cent. of our requirements, closed down, our ability to meet our carbon emissions targets would be severely compromised. In that respect the right hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) is right to say that the carbon emissions trading scheme is integral to the economics of future nuclear generation and to our meeting our carbon emissions targets. Will the Secretary of State say that in January 2005, when a carbon emissions trading scheme that includes electricity generation is to be introduced, the climate change levy will be disapplied from the electricity generating industry?

Ms Hewitt: As the hon. Gentleman knows, decisions on taxation, and therefore on the climate change levy, are a matter for the Chancellor. However, as the White Paper says, the climate change levy will of course be reviewed in light of the introduction of the carbon emissions trading system.

Mr. Kevin Hughes (Doncaster, North): Although I welcome the announcement of an investment aid scheme for the coal industry, it has to be said that the White Paper goes out of its way to ram home the message that the indigenous coal industry has only a short-term future, despite the fact that this island is built on coal. We know that coal is a reliable fuel and, with modern IGCC technology, not only can we generate electricity with virtually zero toxic emissions, we can capture nitrates, carbon and hydrogen. Instead of seizing an opportunity to plan for our energy needs, however, the Government have left it to be decided by market forces. It beggars belief that they are planning to be a net importer of energy.

Ms Hewitt: As my hon. Friend knows, over the past three years we have put £160 million of coal aid into the British coal mining industry. Indeed, my hon. Friend the Minister for Energy and Construction has done everything possible to help to ensure that the Hatfield colliery in my hon. Friend's constituency has a viable future. My hon. Friend knows the industry well. I am sure he understands and accepts that in a mature coal industry, geology is against us. That, I am afraid, was clear from the near-tragic flooding and closure of Longannet just a year or so ago. We are doing what we can, but we should not delude ourselves that British coal will have the same role in our energy system that it had over the past 100 years.

Mr. Nick Gibb (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton): What is the Secretary of State's estimate of the additional costs of electricity generation as a result of meeting her new 20 per cent. renewables target?

Ms Hewitt: We spell out in the White Paper the best estimates that we can offer of the increase in electricity and gas prices for domestic consumers and industry over the next 15 to 20 years. Let me stress that because electricity prices are at such a low point, prices for most consumers will still be below what they have been paying for the past 20 years or so even if they rise to the highest anticipated level of the estimates. I believe that we have the balance right between setting incentives for energy efficiency and cleaner electricity, and ensuring that our businesses stay competitive and our vulnerable consumers are protected.

Mr. Tom Levitt (High Peak): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement, in particular her reference to the contribution that energy conservation and the reduction of energy use can make. May I make a modest suggestion about the warm front scheme? It is my constituents' experience that warm front grants for central heating boilers are only available to replace on a like-for-like basis. I am sure she will agree that it would make more sense for the best available technology to be used in the warm front scheme because new boilers for domestic use are cleaner, cheaper and greener in every respect, both to install and to run, than the old-fashioned systems. Will she support a review of the warm front grant in that respect?

Ms Hewitt: My hon. Friend raises an important point. The review of building regulations will consider the need to move towards condensing boilers so that they become the standard for replacements and new installations. I was not aware of that problem with the warm front grant and shall draw it to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

Mr. Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon): Is it the case that we are not being offered the radical alternatives that were promised? We seem to be maintaining the existing policy of following whatever the market dictates on traditional fuels while superimposing an unproven wish list on renewable energy with no analysis of the structural changes that will be required to put it in place.

Ms Hewitt: The hon. Gentleman is quite wrong. We have set out a clear strategy for ensuring that we have the right market framework, with the right set of incentives, backed up, where necessary, by regulation and public sector investment to meet the overall targets for CO_2 reductions by 2020 and 2050 in a way that preserves security of supply and competitive markets.

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson (Coventry, North-West): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the measures on renewables and energy efficiency which lie at the heart of her policy should be welcomed by hon. Members on both sides of the House? She should not be criticised for the ambitiousness of her targets providing that if they are not reached—she states in the White Paper that they are highly uncertain by their very nature—she has an alternative plan, be it coal or, indeed, nuclear energy. In the latter respect, will my right hon. Friend ensure that, as a minimum, we retain a skills base that will enable us to use this technology should it prove necessary?

Ms Hewitt: My hon. Friend raises an important point. We say in the White Paper that we need to ensure that we have nuclear engineers and scientists available for the future, not only for possible new nuclear build but to manage the ongoing waste issue. I am glad to say that the trade unions that represent the work force in this area have said today that they welcome the White Paper and believe that it offers the right way forward on skills.

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney): I welcome the emphasis that the White Paper places on wind energy, and especially offshore wind energy. My right hon. Friend knows that I represent the most easterly part of the country. I believe that it is the windiest part of the

[Mr. Bob Blizzard]

country as well. Is my right hon. Friend aware that we are keen to see something that used to be seen as a negative turned into an asset for the country?

We are also keen to grasp the economic opportunities of developing a wind energy industry. I am talking about manufacturing the machinery that will generate the wind power. Will my right hon. Friend support that and ensure that the Regional Development Agency and other bodies that her Department funds fully recognise that this is a commercial opportunity and that they will need to act quickly if we are to gain jobs from it?

Ms Hewitt: I am grateful to my appropriately named hon. Friend for his support. I entirely agree with him about the huge potential of the wind energy industry. That is why we are backing Renewables UK in ensuring that we build a United Kingdom supply chain, to make sure, for instance, that the sort of skills, expertise and jobs that we developed for the offshore oil industry are now developed in the wind industry, to generate more jobs and more prosperity not only for my hon. Friend's constituents but for many others.

Mrs. Joan Humble (Blackpool, North and Fleetwood): I am pleased to follow on from my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard). My right hon. Friend will know that there are plans for not just one wind farm but three new farms off the shores of my constituency. Will she bear in mind the time scale that is involved in giving the planning consents that are necessary for such development? Although there has been a lot of consultation with the fishing industry in Fleetwood, there are concerns about how long people will have to wait until decisions are made. Clearly they need to plan for the future, depending on what the decision will be.

Ms Hewitt: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Current planning time scales are much too long. That is why I have said in the White Paper that we will apply to energy infrastructure projects, including wind farms, the same planning reforms that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is introducing generally. I hope that without in any way compromising the need to engage local people in these decisions, we can ensure that we make such decisions much more quickly and thus reduce the uncertainty and costs to industry.

Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Should we be giving more attention to the virtually untapped indigenous source of power, which is tidal power? We know that one scheme can provide 5 per cent. of our electricity needs. Many small schemes, such as tidal islands, could be built at low cost and provide renewable electricity which is not seasonal, not intermittent, but continuous. It could provide a base load of electricity with the tides sweeping round our coasts at different times. Is it not right that we should invest in that form of electricity, which is non-polluting, benign, British and inexhaustible?

Ms Hewitt: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The potential for tidal power is extremely great. He will be aware that we have already contributed about £1.6 million to a scheme in the Severn, which my hon. Friend the Minister for Energy and Construction assures me operates on the inverted windmill principle. It is not the only tidal wave power scheme that we are supporting. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn), I feel that there is great potential there to be fulfilled.

Jon Trickett (Hemsworth): Will my right hon. Friend state clearly that she sees a long-term future for coal that has been mined in this country rather than imported? If so, will she finally get a grip on a company whose corporate strategy seems to involve the closure of mines, thereby sterilising proven stocks and at the same time making my constituents and others redundant?

Ms Hewitt: I am clear about the fact that there is a long-term future for coal generation. As regards British coal, we are in a constructive dialogue with UK Coal. My hon. Friend the Minister for Energy and Construction is in talks with UK Coal to ensure that, with the help of the investment aid scheme on which we are working, there will indeed be a long-term future for a number of British coal mines.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. We must now move on to the main business.

Points of Order

4.50 pm

Mr. Peter Kilfoyle (Liverpool, Walton): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Since we last debated Iraq, we have been presented with a risible, plagiarised dossier on weapons of mass destruction. We have also seen huge demonstrations in London and Glasgow and elsewhere round the world. We have had the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Cardinal Archbishop and His Holiness the Pope repudiating the assertion of some kind of moral justification for war on Iraq. We are now told that there will be a debate on Wednesday, and we are given every indication that it will be a broad motion, to which we can all sign up. Many of us believe that this is make-your-mind-up time on a critical issue of our times. May I seek your advice as to the circumstances in which a Back-Bench amendment to the Government motion might be acceptable?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): If I recall correctly, the Leader of the House said earlier that the Government motion would be tabled today. Perhaps when the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues see that, they may decide whether they wish to table an amendment, which will enable the Speaker to make a decision whether to select it.

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Manchester, Central): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The Leader of the House said that the selection of an amendment is a matter for the Speaker, which the House recognises, of course. Some would say that the country was not divided, with only a small measure of support for the Government. Could you impress on the Speaker the view from the Back Benches that any amendment that is selected should accurately reflect the simple argument that the Government have not yet made their case for war? It is important that the House and the country should know that Parliament is debating these matters in a way that most accurately reflects national sentiments.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I understand the gravity of the situation, but we must first see the motion as tabled, and hon. Members can then decide the most appropriate amendment. As I said earlier, it will be for the Speaker to make his decision.

David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. During the recess, the Deputy Prime Minister wrote to me notifying me that a statement was being made in the House of Lords about funding to local authorities for the first year's supporting people programme. He wrote:

> "I regret it has not proven possible to make this announcement while the House of Commons was sitting."

He provides no explanation for that.

The programme affects the housing of a million elderly people and has a £50 million effect on local government funding. At the same time, £400 million is being taken off that funding through the abolition of social housing grant, about which local authorities have not been notified. This Friday, the local authorities must, by law, set their budgets. This is a shambolic and incompetent way to run local government finance. Have you had any indication of a statement from the Deputy Prime Minister this week, so that the matter can be sorted out as soon as possible?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I have had no indication from any Minister that they wish to make a statement to the House, but I am sure that a note will have been made of the right hon. Gentleman's comments.

Orders of the Day

Industrial Development (Financial Assistance) Bill

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): I inform the House that Mr. Speaker has selected for discussion the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition.

4.54 pm

The Minister for Employment Relations, Industry and the Regions (Alan Johnson): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The purpose of the Bill is to increase the cumulative limit on financial assistance that may be provided under section 8 of the Industrial Development Act 1982. A useful starting point would be to explain what the section 8 power is and what it can be used for. Section 7 of the 1982 Act allows financial assistance to be offered in the assisted areas of the UK if it is likely to provide, maintain or safeguard employment. Section 8 has much broader scope and provides the legislative basis for financial assistance, both inside and outside the assisted areas. It gives wide discretion to provide financial assistance to industry if, in the opinion of the Secretary of State, it is

> "likely to benefit the economy of the United Kingdom, or of any part or area of the United Kingdom".

That can be a geographical area as well as a sector of the economy. Assistance can also be provided if it is "in the national interest" and if it cannot be provided in any other way.

The precise purposes for which assistance may be offered are set out in section 7(2) of the 1982 Act. They include promoting the development, modernisation or efficiency of an industry; the creation, expansion or sustaining of productive capacity in an industry; promoting the reconstruction, reorganisation or conversion of an industry; encouraging the growth of an industry; and encouraging the arrangements for ensuring an orderly contraction of an industry. The legislation is drafted in such a way as to permit other Secretaries of State, as well as the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, to use the section 8 power. Following devolution, Ministers in the devolved Administrations are also able to use the powers of section 8 to fund their own activities. If they do so, their expenditure counts towards the cumulative limit.

Assistance using section 8 as the legislative basis has been subject to a statutory limit since the Industry Act 1972. In calculating the cumulative spend under section 8, it is necessary to take account of all expenditure since then. More than 60 measures of financial assistance to industry have been established using the section 8 power since 1972. Of those, 15 are currently open, which I will return to shortly. The 1972 Act contained a limit of £150 million on section 8 expenditure, but provided for that limit to be raised by a sum not exceeding £100 million on not more than four occasions, by order made with the consent of the Treasury. The Act stated that an order should be contained in a statutory instrument and that a draft order should be approved by a Commons resolution. The limit was reset by the Industry (Amendment) Act 1976 to £600 million, with provision for up to four increases, by order, of up to £250 million each.

The Industry Act 1982, which the Industrial Development Act 1982 consolidated, raised the ceiling to £1.9 billion. The system of affirmative orders was retained and section 8(5) of the Industrial Development Act 1982 allows the limit to be increased four times by up to £200 million on each occasion. This provides for a maximum ceiling of £2.7 billion. The Government have sought parliamentary approval to increase the limit on three occasions to date, most recently in January 2002. The current limit is £2.5 billion. As this is likely to be reached by the end of the current financial year, a fourth and final order under existing legislation is needed before the Bill completes its passage through Parliament. A draft order raising the limit to £2.7 billion was laid in the House on 30 January and will be debated in Committee next week.

At the end of March 2002, the cumulative expenditure for all section 8 schemes since 1972 was almost £2.35 billion. For the current financial year, the forecast is that a further £167 million will be spent, with a further £208 million for the financial year 2003–04. Based on current levels of spend, the maximum amount allowable under existing legislation—£2.7 billion—is expected to be reached early next year.

It may be helpful if I explain what contributes to the cumulative limit. The 1982 Act states that the aggregate of sums paid, plus liabilities under any guarantees given, less any sum received by way of repayment of a loan or of sums paid to meet a guarantee, count towards the cumulative limit.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): Before the Minister moves on to the schemes that fall within section 8 expenditure, I am interested in the build-up of total commitments. I may have missed something, but I looked in vain in annual reports on the Industrial Development Act 1982 for a cumulative total, building up year on year, of section 8 expenditure. Can the Minister give some indication of the pace at which those commitments have built up over the past five years in comparison with the preceding years?

Alan Johnson: I shall come to that in due course when I explain how we have had to come back to the well, so to speak, to replenish stocks. I am surprised that that information has not been in the annual reports—it should have been.

This small Bill of just two clauses is essential to enable the section 8 power to continue to be used by the Department of Trade and Industry, other Departments and the devolved Administrations to give financial assistance to industry. Without an increase in the limit, the legislative basis for the various schemes set up using section 8 would be exceeded when the absolute limit of £2.7 billion is reached, rendering unlawful Ministers' further use of that power. The Bill raises the financial ceiling in section 8(5) of the Industrial Development Act 1982. It retains the structure of tranches in the existing legislation but replaces the numerical ceilings with new, higher ones.

Clause 1 replaces section 8(5) of the 1982 Act by increasing the initial ceiling from £1.9 billion to £3.7 billion and the subsequent four tranches from up to £200 million to up to £600 million each. Clause 2 gives the short title of the Bill. The other provisions of section 8 remain unaltered.

Mr. Michael Fallon (Sevenoaks): The Minister seems rather coy about what he is actually doing. Will he confirm the arithmetic? Is his position that he inherited a total ceiling of £2.1 billion when the Government took office because the cap had been increased once, and that he now proposes to increase the total ceiling available to £6.1 billion—in other words, trebling it?

Alan Johnson: For the sake of clarity, the financial ceiling that has existed since 1982 is £1.9 billion. I believe that we had been to the well twice for £200 million by the time we came into government in 1997. We went back to the well again last year, so we have been three times and there is one more time left. We have reached a situation whereby we have spent £2.5 billion and there is another £200 million left. We are now suggesting, 20 years after the 1982 Act, that we replenish the stocks. While maintaining the four tranches, we want to increase the ceiling on those tranches—as, indeed, did the previous Government in 1982—to £6.1 billion.

There are no plans to change the threshold at which individual offers of assistance under section 8 are subject to the approval of the House of Commons. That threshold, fixed by section 8(8), remains at £10 million. The aim of subsection (8) is to give Parliament the opportunity to consider larger cases of assistance to industry. As there have only been a couple of occasions in recent years on which that has been required, there seems to be no reason to raise the threshold at this time.

The new limits in the Bill were chosen to provide more regular parliamentary consideration of the section 8 power. If we consider existing legislation, 14 years elapsed before the first order was needed, and there were subsequently only four years, two years and one year between orders. Based on the average spend forecast for the next four years of £185 million per annum, the new initial ceiling is expected to last for approximately six years before the first order is needed. Increases through affirmative order will be required every three years after that until the new ultimate limit of £6.1 billion is reached. On that basis, the proposed new limits are expected to provide legislative cover to enable assistance under section 8 to continue for almost 20 years.

Section 8 is an enabling power. The Bill provides the statutory authority to continue expenditure on measures that have already been announced and enables the introduction of new measures as appropriate. However, I am not announcing new measures today. The Bill has no regulatory impact on business and a copy of the regulatory impact assessment was placed in the Library today.

Section 8 is not the only legislative base on which to enable financial assistance to be offered to industry. Section 5 of the Science and Technology Act 1965 and other sections of the 1982 Act also provide for that. Section 7 of the 1982 Act provides for the regional selective assistance scheme, the main regional policy instrument. Some industrial sectors such as aerospace are covered by specific legislation.

Mr. Lansley: I appreciate that the Minister is not announcing any new schemes under section 8 today, but the explanatory notes to the Bill specifically refer to the urban post office network reinvention programme, which costs approximately £450 million. Am I correct that that money has not yet been spent and that, for three years, it creates a much higher rate of expenditure under section 8 than in the recent past?

Alan Johnson: The hon. Gentleman is right. The money, which Parliament authorised in November, has not yet been spent.

When assistance under section 8 is regarded as state aid, it must be compatible with European Community state aid rules. The European Commission will need to be notified of and approve any new scheme under section 8 that constitutes state aid before it can be introduced. However, if one of the block exemptions covers it, simpler notification procedures can be adopted and the aid can be granted immediately. The Commission has been informed of our intention to raise the limits.

The Small Business Service, which was established in April 2000 to meet the needs of small businesses, administers eight of the current assistance schemes. The Government acknowledge that there were weaknesses in the market's provision of finance to small and medium-sized businesses. The SBS was established partly to ensure that Government support programmes for small firms dealt with their needs at all stages of their development and helped to bridge the funding gap that many companies face. One of the main SBS programmes is the enterprise fund that was announced in the competitiveness White Paper in 1998. It aims to stimulate more finance for small businesses and tackle marked weaknesses in the provision of the finance.

Four elements of the enterprise fund use section 8 as their legislative basis. First, the small firms loan guarantee scheme, which was set up in 1981, is the oldest section 8 scheme. It offers guarantees on loans to small firms with viable business proposals that are unable to obtain conventional finance because they lack assets as security against the loan. By providing a guarantee against default, the scheme encourages lenders to lend when they would not otherwise do so.

Secondly, regional venture capital funds were established to tackle the equity gap experienced by SMEs that seek investment of up to £500,000.

Thirdly, the UK high technology fund was set up to encourage institutions to invest in early-stage, high-technology businesses and to increase the amount of finance available for investment in technology-based businesses.

Fourthly, the early growth funding initiative seeks to stimulate small amounts of risk capital for start-ups and growing businesses that are usually too risky for the banks or too small for venture capital. The first of those, the London seed capital fund, was formally launched in December 2002. The Small Business Service also administers the enterprise grant scheme, which is a discretionary scheme for SMEs in areas of special need. Enterprise grants are given to businesses to finance capital investment projects.

Another main SBS activity is the Phoenix fund to promote entrepreneurship among disadvantaged groups. Two elements of the Phoenix fund use section 8. The first is support for community development finance

[Alan Johnson]

institutions, which are organisations that lend to enterprises that the banks consider too risky. The second is the Government's investment, in parallel with private sector investors, in the bridges fund, which is a community development venture capital fund that makes equity investments in growing businesses in disadvantaged communities that tend to be overlooked by established venture capital funds. There is also the business incubation fund, which helps to improve the chances of survival and growth of start-ups and early-stage SMEs through increasing availability and access to business incubation.

Section 8 has also been used for schemes that address the needs of particular industrial sectors. The UK coal operating aid scheme, which was set up to help the coal industry through a period of transition, closed at the end of December. It was established to prevent the premature closure of viable mines owing to short-term market problems. The Government are in negotiation with the European Commission over our intention to use section 8 to support redundancy payments arising from the closure of UK Coal's Selby complex. Section 8 was also used last year to support supplementary redundancy payments to those who lost their jobs following the sudden and catastrophic flooding of Longannet colliery, which was the last deep coal mine in Scotland.

Section 8 is also used to enable the Government to make payments to redundant steelworkers through the iron and steel employees readaptation benefits scheme. Most recently, section 8 has been used for the urban post office reinvention programme, which the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) mentioned, to enable the Post Office to carry out its programme to restructure the urban post office network, and to ensure that sub-postmasters whose offices close are adequately compensated for the loss of value of their business, and that those who remain can benefit from investment grants. The House debated and approved that funding on 15 October 2002.

Part of the assistance offered through the Rover taskforce programme uses the section 8 power. The funding is to enable the regional development agency, Advantage West Midlands, working with business link operators, to help businesses in the region to modernise and diversify.

Section 8 is also used by the National Assembly for Wales to operate that country's regional innovation grants scheme and the Assembly's investment grant scheme. Those initiatives are funded by the Assembly, but the expenditure counts towards the cumulative section 8 limit.

Those are the 15 current schemes under section 8.

Mr. Michael Weir (Angus): I note what the Minister said about funding from the National Assembly for Wales. Is it additional funding that is made available to devolved Administrations for these schemes or does it come out of their existing block grant, even though it counts towards the cumulative total under the Act?

Alan Johnson: No, it comes out of the settlement for the Welsh Assembly. Unlike English schemes, the schemes in Wales do not require Treasury approval and they count towards the cumulative total.

Having gone through the 15 schemes, I am aware that only three years ago, during the debate in Standing Committee on the second order, we estimated that replacement legislation would not be needed until 2010. In true confession mode, I shall try to pre-empt any comments from Opposition Members about the increase in the number of financial assistance to industry schemes set up using the section 8 power, and the acceleration in section 8 expenditure over the last three years. This issue should be considered against the DTI's total spend on business support, which has remained at around £1 billion per annum in recent years.

A fundamental change is taking place in the DTI's business support activities. The Secretary of State unveiled a complete overhaul of the DTI's business support programmes in November, following a comprehensive review. The problem that we identified—initiative overload—was partly symptomatic of enthusiasm in the DTI for assisting business. The purpose of the review is to channel that energy in a more strategic direction. Businesses said that they were confused by the plethora of DTI schemes, and found them difficult to understand and access. The aim of the review is to sort out the muddle, cut out inefficiency and focus on our strategic priority, which is to drive up UK productivity.

Mr. Lansley: When the Secretary of State appeared before the Trade and Industry Committee on 29 October, she said that there were 183 schemes within the DTI's ambit, and that she proposed a major simplification of those schemes. As far as I am aware, the Select Committee has not been told the outcome, although the Secretary of State said that it would happen "certainly by Christmas". It did not happen by Christmas, and we have seen nothing since. Perhaps the Minister can enlighten us on when we will see something.

Alan Johnson: It did not happen by Christmas because it took longer than we had thought to do a thorough job. We are hoping to launch this stage of business support simplification in April, and I am sure that the Select Committee will be among the first to know about it.

To ensure that DTI business support is both strategically targeted and simple for business to access and use, all existing schemes are being closed. New business support offerings, some of which will incorporate the best elements of existing schemes, will be produced under a new mechanism approved by the business support review, and will focus on the drivers of improved productivity. We are not cutting the amount that we spend on business support, but we will greatly reduce the number of business support products that we offer. The new approach will ensure that funds are allocated to activities that offer the best value for money.

Mr. Fallon: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way yet again. I certainly support the streamlining that the Secretary of State announced, of which the Minister is now giving more details. I understand that an American business woman, Mrs. Fields Wicker-Miurin, will chair the new investment committee that will make all the decisions on the various support schemes. Will they include some of the schemes covered by section 8?

Alan Johnson: As the hon. Gentleman will understand, I am not yet in a position to announce the outcome of the review, but I am sure that many of the schemes governed by section 8—after "year zero", when the schemes have been closed and then incorporated in a much simpler structure—will be there, although perhaps under different titles and accessed in a different way. But this is not a debate about the DTI review of business support; it is a debate about section 8 of the Act.

Mr. Lansley: Will the Minister give way?

Alan Johnson: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman one last time.

Mr. Lansley: Is it not surprising that the Minister should present us, in late February, with legislation designed to increase substantially the amount to be spent on these schemes, while proposing to tell us in early April what the product will look like? Is he not asking the House to pay for the product when he will not tell us what we are buying until a few weeks down the line?

Alan Johnson: No, I am not. We are not talking about the DTI review; we are talking about 15 schemes funded under section 8. As the hon. Gentleman said, there are a good many more schemes—about 160. That is part of the problem for people who are confused by the process of gaining access to DTI support. Moreover, if the Bill is not passed now we shall not be in a position to finance some very important schemes—some introduced by the last Administration—later this year.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Will the Minister give way?

Alan Johnson: I will give way just once, because the hon. Gentleman is so utterly charming.

Mr. Bercow: I thank the Minister, who is better able than most to make sound reasonable that which on closer inspection may prove not to be so.

The Bill's very title has a certain 1960s or 1970s ring. In what circumstances does the Minister think that it would be appropriate—in this century, or this decade—for the Government to expend resources to create

"productive capacity in an industry"?

Alan Johnson: The Bill may look from its title as though it is wearing flares and tank tops. If we go back to the early 1970s, the legislation was used originally, to use the parlance of the time, to bolster lame-duck industries. That changed completely. I am not sure I am equipped to answer the hon. Gentleman's precise point, but I remember one scheme from, I believe, November 2001. Customers of Atlantic Telecom in Scotland were faced with losing their telecommunications systems overnight because the company went bust. The use of funding in co-operation with Scottish Enterprise enabled those business customers to continue to have a telephone system until they were able to find a new one. These days there are many varied reasons why the scheme is used. They might differ from the reasons in the 1970s but they are still valid.

As I said, we are not cutting the funding that we spend on business, to draw a line under the DTI review of business support. I provide this information as background. This short Bill is not about the quality of the business support offered by successive Governments. It is before the House today because, before the Government can incur any expenditure on such schemes, there has to be an appropriate statutory power. Section 8 of the Industrial Development Act 1982 provides that power. The Bill allows for the continued use of section 8 as the enabling power for financial assistance to be given to business inside and outside the assisted areas. On that basis, I commend the Bill to the House.

5.21 pm

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): I beg to move, To leave out from "That" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

"this House declines to give a Second Reading to the Industrial Development (Financial Assistance) Bill because it amends section 8(5) of the Industrial Development Act 1982 in a way that diminishes accountability to Parliament on the levels of future financial assistance to industry."

I declare my interests, which are in the Register of Members' Interests. I will come to the amendment in a moment, but first I thank the Minister for the full explanation that he has given. I make it clear that we support many of the principles behind the Bill. After all, it was a Conservative Government who introduced the original Act in 1982. We certainly strongly support some of the section 8 schemes.

Some of our concerns relate to parliamentary scrutiny and accountability as well as the lack of detail in the Bill. On scrutiny, as the Minister explained clearly, the Bill amends the cumulative limit in section 8(5) of the 1982 Act and sets a new higher figure of £3.7 billion as the initial ceiling. It then sets a new figure for the four tranches, which go up from £200 million to a pretty hefty £600 million each.

I understand from the Minister that the new limits were chosen by a 20-year roll-forward of the existing limit of £2.7 billion in real terms, using a 2.5 per cent. gross domestic product deflator. The Minister pointed out earlier that, based on current spending, and assuming that the rate remains constant, the new ceiling will last for six years before the first order is needed, with increases by order every four years after that.

To my surprise, I see that the Department of Trade and Industry's briefing note says that the DTI believes that the new regime will lead to more parliamentary scrutiny. It bases that conclusion on the premise that it was 14 years before the first order was needed in 1996, but the 1982 Act was a new initiative setting a new ceiling of £1.9 billion. The previous Government would have had to spend at a furious rate to reach the ceiling before 1996.

[Mr. Henry Bellingham]

Three orders came hard on the heels of the one in 1996. There was one in 2000 and one in 2002. We were going to have a fourth one tomorrow but I gather that it has been postponed until next week. Since the first ceiling was reached, Parliament has had the chance to scrutinise the Act and the relevant section 8 schemes every 20 months. That compares favourably with the 4.5 years or 54 months anticipated by the new Bill's regime.

We are talking about much bigger sums, as my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon) made clear. The urban post office network reinvention scheme alone will take up a very large amount of money. Furthermore, the Secretary of State has made it clear that she wants significant consolidation of the plethora of section 8 schemes, which is why we welcome and support her business support review. However, that is surely a very good reason for initial scrutiny to take place well before 2009.

As my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) pointed out, it would surely have made much sense for the Secretary of State to complete her business support review before Second Reading. Either next week or the following week, the statutory instrument extending the original phase 1 will be introduced. That will give the Government considerable leeway, so Second Reading could easily have been postponed, thereby enabling the business support review to be launched at the same time. That surely would have constituted more joined-up, grown-up and sensible government.

On scrutiny, we will look at some constructive suggestions in Committee, and we shall certainly consider including in the Bill a requirement for the Minister to come to the House every two years. That is not unreasonable, given that, on average, Ministers have come to the House every 20 months for the past seven years, and that debates on delegated legislation in Committee are short and hardly onerous. In 1996, when my former colleague Phillip Oppenheim was taking such legislation through, the debate lasted 14 minutes. The then Opposition did not provide much scrutiny, but in 2000, scrutiny increased to 18 minutes, in 2002 to 55 minutes, and perhaps next week we can crack the one-hour mark. It is to enhance the scrutiny available to this House that we intend to table constructive amendments in Committee.

The different schemes can be found on the DTI website. Alternatively, one can refer to the annual reports relating to the Industrial Development Act 1982, the last of which was published on 27 June 2002—my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire referred to it—and covers the year to the end of March 2002. It would have made good sense to advance this year's report to, say, 1 April—not a very difficult task—so that it could be combined with Second Reading. That way, at least we would have had more detail on what is happening with these different schemes. My hon. Friend and I have had a close look at last year's report. Much of it is already out of date, and new schemes are to be launched. We are being asked to vote for very significant extra resources for Her Majesty's Government without having up-to-date information before us.

I do not propose to go through all the schemes in detail. The Minister has already covered many of them—I am grateful to him for that—and in his inimitable, lucid way he explained exactly what they do. In the main, we are happy with how they are operated on the ground. They are efficiently managed and run, and I pay particular tribute to the tireless work of the Small Business Service in running the bulk of them. We support the enterprise grant scheme and, in particular, the small firms loan guarantee scheme, to which I shall return. However, we are cautious about the business incubation fund, which was announced to a terrific fanfare in 2001. Is it true that no loans have so far been agreed under its terms?

We are also concerned about a number of aspects of the Phoenix fund—the somewhat appropriately named initiative launched by the right hon. Member for Tyneside, North (Mr. Byers). We applaud attempts to encourage enterprise, small business and entrepreneurship in the most disadvantaged areas, and within disadvantaged groups. Such an initiative will undoubtedly appeal to my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow), and we must try to help these people. I am sceptical—as, I am sure, is he—about community loan funds or not-for-profit funds that focus on non-profit-making social enterprise. They may be laudable, but is it appropriate for the DTI to be involved? I want to see real evidence of success and achievement before we can support community development finance institutions.

Mr. Bercow: My hon. Friend correctly anticipates my mindset on the subject. Does he accept that, as a working premise for the Opposition, it is important to distinguish between funds that can legitimately be spent from time to time as a palliative or cushion in the event of the breakdown or destruction of a whole industry, and a generalised largesse on the part of a Government who mistakenly believe that they can run industry?

Mr. Bellingham: My hon. Friend is right, and I shall give an example that shows up some of the flaws of section 8. The mini-schemes may be laudable, but should such work be done by the DTI under that budget?

I am not very impressed by the UK high technology fund, which—according to the DTI's briefing paper—is

> "a 'fund of funds' providing finance for existing venture capital funds that specialise in financing early stage small and medium sized high-technology firms. The Funds have received investment from the UK High Technology Fund and also receive funding from many other . . . sources. As a result, businesses do not necessarily know that they have received funding from the Fund."

That is bizarre. Should the DTI be hunting round the country for high-tech success stories? Should the Department be in the business of trying to back technology sector winners, when we have one of the most sophisticated and vibrant venture capital sectors anywhere in the world? We submit that the DTI should not do that, and that the money would be better saved or reallocated to the small firms loan guarantee scheme.

The Minister mentioned Atlantic Telecom. Hon. Members may recall that Atlantic Telecom was a stock market darling whose share price went up to about £13, but which went spectacularly bust in October 2001. Most of its operations were sold as going concerns by the administrators. However, they could not find a buyer for a fixed radio network, which led to a risk that some business customers, who had switched carriers from—in the main—BT, would have been without a telephone service temporarily. Atlantic Telecom's customers were given extra time to switch back, at a cost of £550,000, shared, as the Minister pointed out, between the DTI and the Scottish Executive. That was not a good use of money. I suggest that the Scottish Executive put pressure on the DTI and, to make the Department look good in Scotland, it agreed to go along with it.

Mr. Weir *rose*—

Mr. Bellingham: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, because he probably knows much more about the situation than I do.

Mr. Weir: There was a serious danger that many businesses, especially in the north-east of Scotland, would have been without a telephone service for some time. In Aberdeen and Dundee especially, many businesses had gone over to that private operator and found that when it went down the tubes, BT would not reconnect them for many weeks, if not months. I do not often support the Government, but it was a good use of money to ensure that business disruption did not occur. Otherwise, Atlantic Telecom's collapse could have been disastrous.

Mr. Bellingham: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, who obviously knows much about the subject. That fly-by-night operator conned a lot of businesses by offering them much lower rates than BT, and the Minister's time would have been better spent talking to BT and urging it to reconnect the businesses affected. Surely in this day and age it does not take more than a few days to reconnect a fixed line system.

The loan guarantee scheme has achieved significant success since its launch in 1981. To a large extent, it was the brainchild of my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page). I am sorry that he is not in the Chamber this afternoon to hear my praise for him.

As the Minister pointed out, from June 1981 until March 2002, 79,900 loans were guaranteed. The average loan is £37,000 and the total value of the loans is well over £3 billion. Since the scheme has been finessed and improved, it has been a significant success.

I shall give the House some examples of companies that have benefited considerably from the scheme. During 1999, a biotech company had secured providers of new equity capital but was struggling to fund working capital. The projects undertaken by the business were not suitable for bank security, but the bank was able to offer £100,000 under the loan guarantee scheme. The injection of equity was dependent on that loan agreement, as were the jobs of 23 employees. Two years later the business was sold to a plc for £4 million and the loan was repaid.

Another success story comes from a steel fabricating company that was struggling to finance working capital during turnover growth from £0 to £4 million over a three-year period. The banks agreed to an initial £100,000 and recently provided a second tranche of £150,000 under the small firms loan guarantee scheme. As a result of that growth, 20 new jobs have been created and the business is making a net profit of nearly £500,000 a year.

There are many similar examples. I urge the Minister to reinforce that success. Will he remove some of the sector restrictions? For example, the scheme cannot apply to education, medical health services or motor vehicle repairs and servicing—something that many of our constituents would resent—and nor can it apply to retail or transport.

Will the Minister also look into the turnover limits for manufacturing businesses? Currently, the limit is £5 million and it has not been raised for some years. It should be raised because it is too restrictive.

We should try to make the scheme more flexible. As an example of its inflexibility, a business that needed funding to cope with increased orders was excluded from securing £250,000 because although it had been in existence for two years, its parent had gone into receivership. The management team bought the company from the receiver and continued to trade with the same staff, premises and customers as well as a continuing order book, yet the small firms loan guarantee scheme interpreted the change in ownership as a cessation of business. Surely that was a mistake. Let us try to make the scheme more versatile and reinforce success.

Will the Minister tell the House how much the scheme costs every year? I have studied the report in vain. It gives the number and amount of loans and the global totals, but it does not actually give the write-off figures. Obviously, most of the money is paid back to the banks because the businesses are successful, so the Government's guarantee is not called in. However, will the Minister give us the annual figures for the last four years and the global figure for the bad debts that the Government have had to guarantee and which have been a cost under section 8 of the report?

We have debated important concerns for our industrial and manufacturing base, but we need to set the Bill in the wider business and economic context. The Government are right to take credit for the recent falls in unemployment and inflation, but serious storm clouds are gathering. Manufacturing is already in severe recession; 600,000 jobs have been lost since 1997.

The Confederation of British Industry predicts that 40,000 more jobs will be lost in the sector by April this year. Its recent monthly survey was very gloomy indeed. It suggested that the cloud of misery engulfing manufacturers showed no sign of lifting and that output was expected to continue to stagnate, with order books remaining below their normal level. The CBI's conclusion is not surprising, given that industrial output has fallen every month for the past two years.

In terms of market capitalisation, Invensys was once Britain's seventh largest company. It changed its name from BTR Siebe, which probably cost a large amount of money. In spite of the gallant efforts of the new chief executive officer, Rick Haythornthwaite, the company has been in a downward spiral ever since. Four years ago, its shares were worth £4; a year ago, they were worth £1; and they closed on Friday at 15.5p, threatening many further job losses. That is just one example.

[Mr. Bellingham]

It is little wonder that the outlook is grim. In 2002, 16,500 businesses went to the wall, which is a 10 per cent. increase on the previous year. Our trade balance in goods is worse than at any time for over 300 years. Britain's net foreign assets of £5.5 billion in 1992 have turned to net liabilities of £114 billion in 2002. Those figures are staggering.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has a real problem with public finances as a result of undershooting his growth targets and the fall in tax revenues. The Chancellor was rebuked last week by fellow European Finance Ministers. He was told that his optimistic assumptions on growth could lead to a breach of Brussels rules on public finances, and that

> "The Council considers that the macro-economic forecasts now appear to be optimistic in the short term and that there are downside risks to growth."

That is not me speaking but the judgment of the Council of Ministers on the Chancellor's control of public finances.

We cannot ignore the fall in the stock market and the crisis in pensions, which certainly do not help. Smaller pensions lead to less tax, lower share prices, less tax from the City and less stamp duty revenue. Quietly tucked away in one of the many volumes of the previous Budget was the Chancellor's assumption on the stock market. He assumed that it would go up in line with money gross domestic product—that is, by 4 per cent. In fact, it has fallen by 25 per cent. We all have a vested interest in that, and no one will take great pleasure from that fall.

In conclusion, there are real problems in manufacturing, and many problems in other areas as well. At least the Secretary of State acknowledges those problems in manufacturing. At Labour's spring conference, she said:

> "We also all know our manufacturing is hurting and manufacturing workers are losing their jobs."

If she knows that, why are the Government about to hit businesses large and small with a large national insurance tax increase? Why is she piling more and more red tape on business?

A survey in today's report by the British Chambers of Commerce shows that the total extra burden—excluding the minimum wage—is £22 billion. David Frost of the BCC has said:

> "Red tape is strangling British productivity and it is threatening to combine with other blocks on business to create critical mass that will destroy jobs through a dramatic loss of competitiveness."

If the Government are serious about business—

The Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): I appreciate that the Bill is about the financing of businesses, but I do not want the debate to develop into a general debate on the economy as a whole.

Mr. Bellingham: I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker—but, with respect, I thought that it was important to set the Bill in its wider economic context.

The Opposition feel strongly that, if the Government are to listen to business—as they say that they will—they will have to consider the burdens on business. They will have to reconsider their work-life balance agenda. They will have to consider carefully the agency workers directive and the equal treatment at work directive. Above all, the Government should start to listen to business. It is time to stop the avalanche of burdens. It is time for the Government to take business seriously.

5.44 pm

Mr. Kelvin Hopkins (Luton, North): I wish to express my very strong support for my hon. Friend the Minister and his Bill, and I urge all hon. Members to vote for it later this evening.

I speak because I have some knowledge of these matters from my previous employment. In the 1970s, I worked in the TUC's economic department and was responsible for regional policy. During that time, I undertook some modest research to show the effect of regional policy over economic cycles, and with and without regional selective assistance, and I concluded that it had a very beneficial effect, particularly in reducing regional inequalities. Although we are talking about selective assistance to certain firms, perhaps helping them through difficult times, such policies have a very beneficial macroeconomic effect. However, they are no substitute for developing a growing economy and reducing unemployment.

It is rather surprising that that measure of intervention has survived through some decades of attachment to the neo-liberal dogma—I do not share it myself—that the free market is all and Government intervention is to be eschewed. I very strongly support such measures and am glad that they have survived; and they have done so for historical reasons. Even as far back as Sir Edward Heath's Government in the early 1970s, there were attempts to promote the rigorous free market agenda. Most hon. Members are probably too young to remember Selsdon man, but I remember Selsdon man very well in the form of Sir Nicholas Ridley, Sir John Eden and various others.

That Conservative Government panicked when there was great resistance to those policies and reverted to an interventionist approach, which was a very wise thing to do. Indeed, Sir Edward Heath was negotiating Britain's membership of the European Union and it was known that, if we wanted to get into the EU, we would need some regional policy measures as a counterbalance to the very unfair burden of the common agricultural policy, which would have had no benefit whatever to Britain. Even with a regional policy approach and with the later structural funds, we still had to negotiate a rebate, and I am glad that we still have it in place today.

In 1979, Mrs. Thatcher's Government had a very rigorous approach to the economy, which led to unemployment rising to 3 million in two years. No doubt, many people thought that a splendid idea—a bit of rigour and the cold draught of competition. I thought it disastrous, and eventually even Mrs. Thatcher thought it slightly worrying, because her Government introduced the 1982 legislation to which reference has already been made.

I remember that time extremely well, and Labour had an enormous public opinion lead shortly before the Falklands war, which rather changed the balance of public support. Nevertheless, there was a reaction to the initial period of rigorous free market policies, part of which involved the 1982 legislation. So we carried on with that approach for a long period.

We cannot solve the macroeconomic problems of low growth and investment and high unemployment simply by such selective measures, but they are still absolutely vital to underpin development in the regions, especially those that are more vulnerable—unlike the south-east—where older industries have declined and we have needed to help small companies to sustain employment. That has been very successful, and I very much welcome the fact that the Government have chosen to increase the amount of money that will be available. It is possible that we are running into some serious economic difficulties now, which are not necessarily of our making, and the world economy will be in difficulty, especially if there is a war. In such times, the Government will need to keep as much of a measure of intervention as they can to assist our industries to survive through difficult times to emerge on the other side, when we can all breathe again in a growing economy.

At the end of the last period of serious economic decline, between 1990 and 1992—the disastrous period of the exchange rate mechanism, the failure of which I predicted and wrote about before it started—unemployment had risen to enormous levels. Everyone who supported that policy said that depreciation and getting out of the ERM would cause massive inflation, would not bring down unemployment and would be economically disastrous. In fact, what happened was that there was a substantial depreciation straight after the ERM collapse, unemployment started to fall, and the inflationary surge did not happen until considerably later.

I hope that we will keep such measures as part of the Government's armoury for running the economy for the foreseeable future and that we will raise the amounts available to appropriate levels as time goes on. I would like more vigorous intervention in the economy to assist our manufacturing sector in particular. Without doubt, the manufacturing sector is currently suffering, to which Opposition Members have drawn attention. A major factor in that is the overvaluation of the pound, which cannot be solved by these measures. The pound has depreciated somewhat in recent weeks and months, and that is very welcome, but there is still a competitive disadvantage for Britain in the manufacturing sector. The balance of trade deficit is evidence of that. We must consider macroeconomic measures as well as supply side measures to solve our economic problems, and particularly to bring manufacturing back to the strength that we should expect.

We still have major economic problems to solve, our investment levels are still too low, and measures in which the Government get involved directly in the economy to promote investment are precisely what we want. I am very happy to support the Bill and I look forward to voting for it later this evening.

5.53 pm

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): The Minister introduced the Bill with his usual flair and clarity, but I am not persuaded. I share many of the concerns of the Conservative spokesman, both in respect of the necessity of this legislation and in relation to the issue of parliamentary accountability.

First, we are talking about very large sums of money, as the intervention by the hon. Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon) made clear. We are progressing at one step from a commitment to £2.7 billion, which is the current total, to £6.1 billion. An increased commitment of £3.4 billion is very substantial, even if, as the Government say, it is spread over a 20-year time horizon. Is it really necessary? In 2001–02, which is the last year on which we have any kind of report on section 8, there was spending of £113 million. At that level of expenditure, it would take 30 years to use up the proposed sum. In addition, many of the schemes that have absorbed substantial amounts in the past—for shipbuilding and coal—have been brought to an end. That raises the question of what this funding is for.

Clearly, there are occasional useful and necessary purposes, of which Atlantic Telecom, as the hon. Member for Angus (Mr. Weir) reminded us, was a very good example. As I recall, however, that intervention was very small—it involved only £500,000. Concerns exist about the enormous imbalance between very small, very useful activities and the enormous sums of money for which provision has been made. To my mind, the two do not gel, unless there is a clear statement about how accountability will be provided for the big jumps that will no doubt take place.

A great danger exists that if there is a giant slush fund of this kind—essentially, that is what we are talking about—means will be found of spending it. If we look at some of the recent initiatives to spend section 8 money, we find that that raises some awkward questions about what the Government are trying to do. The biggest, latest initiative is the urban reinvention programme in the Post Office. That has nothing to do with industry or innovation—we have debated the Post Office frequently on the Floor of the House. Of course, some of us welcome some elements of the reinvention programme—there is a necessary consolidation—but it essentially provides emergency funding for redundancy money for a lot of postmasters who have been forced to close down as a result of the automated credit transfer programme. It has nothing whatever to do with industrial restructuring. I suspect that schemes of that kind, which are far removed from the original purposes of the Bill, may be wheeled in to use up the funding that is provided.

I would feel more reassured if there were a little more evidence and more of an attempt to explain to us how productive the funding was. I am prepared to believe that all these schemes for small business are brilliant and enormously useful, but we have no evidence to show whether they are. The only document that I have found—I may be missing something—is the annual report, the latest of which ends in March 2002. Those reports largely provide a description of what is being spent and are not presented on any kind of comparable basis. There is no explanation of the costs and benefits of the different schemes or of the cost-effectiveness from the taxpayer's point of view. Those are legitimate questions that we need to put.

Let us take the most important of these schemes—the small firm loan guarantee scheme. The Conservative spokesman gave that a rousing endorsement, and he may be right. I am sure that many small businesses find it very useful. There are certain questions, however, that I would ask. How many of the companies that have been

[Dr. Vincent Cable]

helped under the scheme are still in business? How many have expanded their business? How does their performance compare with companies in the same sector and the same region that have not had the benefit of that assistance? Those are the kinds of questions to ask to judge whether the scheme has been a success. It may be a brilliant success, but no attempt whatever is being made to justify it, explain it or give its history.

Similarly, many of us would want to know how much of every £1 that is allocated to this and other small business schemes actually reaches the small business. Many of the costs are absorbed in overheads, and we need an evaluation of that simply to provide accountability.

Mr. Lansley: Of course, the fact that evaluations are not presented in the annual report does not mean that they do not occur. I have no recollection of recent evaluations but I know that they occurred in the later part of the 1980s. It is important to get the evaluation into the public domain, however, as a scheme in which everybody succeeds is probably not necessary because the loans were probably going to be successful in any case, and the additional benefit of the guarantee is probably limited. A scheme in which too many fail, however, is probably equally misjudged. Somewhere in the Department of Trade and Industry, there will probably be a target for the proportion of guarantees to such loans that fail. The point is that it is not in the public domain or in the annual report.

Dr. Cable: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is right. It ought to be in the public domain, and there are different mechanisms for ensuring that. The Trade and Industry Committee, on which he sits, may be one forum in which these programmes can be analysed properly, and the National Audit Office is another. However it is done, it should be done. I remember seeing some of the evaluations of the wool textile assistance schemes, going back to the 1970s, which were very sophisticated economic evaluations justifying the substantial amount of public money put into the industry. We have nothing comparable in this case; if it does exist, it is bottled up in the DTI, as the hon. Gentleman points out, and we are not privy to it, which is clearly wrong.

My next point is on the same theme. A lot of the funding has gone into what one might call adjustment assistance schemes for redundant steel workers and coal miners and for Rover. In principle, that is admirable. It is surely right to provide funding to help workers to adjust to other activities and to assist the process of change, rather than simply to provide open-ended subsidies. If agriculture had been helped in the same way as industry, many of the problems with the CAP would no longer be with us. However, I have questions about accountability and about where the money went, and I have no idea what the answers will be.

I notice, for example, that one of the big schemes provided for under section 8 was the £129 million programme of adjustment assistance for Rover. That was one of the big schemes launched by the former Secretary of State for Trade and Industry at a time of crisis for the company. As far as I can tell from the last annual report, in 2001–02 only £1 million of that £129 million was spent. What happened to the other £128 million? Was it not spent? Could not the company find a use for it? Perhaps I have missed it somewhere. Can we have an explanation of what happened to the Rover package?

Similarly, in the coal industry, about £76 million was spent up to the last financial year for which accounts are available, and then another £62 million was made available, so the industry has received about £138 million of special help. I do not want to criticise that. I am sure that after the battering that the industry has had, help with adjustment must be welcome. However, I question how much of that money has gone to the coal miners to help them to adjust and how much has simply provided an open-ended subsidy to UK Coal, which subsequently closed those mines. We need an economic evaluation of where that money has gone and what value the community has got from it.

Mr. Bellingham: I think that I can provide the hon. Gentleman with an answer. When the Government announced that £129 million, it was provided as regional selective assistance, under section 7. However, it took some work to discover that because it was not clear, and the hon. Gentleman is right to make the point about accountability.

Dr. Cable: That is my closing point. I am willing to be persuaded that most of this funding is useful, that it is welcomed in industry and that it raises productivity, but I have no proof of that. There appears to have been precious little effort to provide us with evidence to help us to support what the Government are doing.

When the Minister sums up, will he tell us how the Government intend to account for the money that is spent and to ensure that that is done on a rigorous and consistent basis? Do they intend to report to the NAO, the Trade and Industry Committee or to another forum where we can judge the usefulness of the funding? I support the proposal that Parliament should be asked to review these measures every couple of years. Providing open-ended funding for long periods in large sums for which there is no identified use seems to me very dangerous in principle, and this process should be subject to a good deal more parliamentary scrutiny.

6.3 pm

Mr. Michael Fallon (Sevenoaks): I am grateful for the chance to speak on the Bill, and I declare the business interests recorded in the register. I welcome the chance to follow the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable). I assume from what he said that he will support our amendment in the Lobby, because he shares some of our reservations about accountability.

This is a short Bill, but it is substantial and it has something of a history. The Minister referred to its origins in the Industry Act 1972. It is always good to hear a Labour Minister taking forward progressive Conservative legislation. There is no reason that he should know that the Act was one of the great tipping points of the Heath Government. It was one of the events that led to the resignation of a junior Industry Minister, and he may care to bear that in mind as the Bill unfolds.

The Bill cannot simply be dated to what the Minister called the period of tank tops and flares—it goes further back. It comes almost exactly 70 years after John Maynard Keynes wrote his famous four articles for *The Times* on "The Means to Prosperity". In the first, "An Argument for Action", he set out the current basis for industrial development policy. He made the case for state expenditure, including loans, to promote industrial and commercial activity, and he rested that case on the indirect employment benefits of subsidised employment on the higher yield in taxation that resulted and on the consequently reduced expenditure on the dole. That was a locus classicus of industrial development policy, and it was the first time that it was set out.

Those arguments were followed a year later by a further series of articles in *The Times* entitled "Places With No Future", which called attention to the plight of the Durham coalfields and the problems of south Lanarkshire, south Wales and Cumbria. Those in turn were the origin of Baldwin's special areas and the foundation of regional development policy, which is covered by a different section of the Industrial Development Act 1982.

Here we are, some 70 years after modern industrial development policy, as run by the Government, was launched. This is an appropriate time to take stock. We could first reflect, as the hon. Member for Luton, North (Mr. Hopkins) did, that there are regions that still require the assistance available under the Act. It is ironic, and I ask the Minister and Labour Members to reflect on the fact that 70 years after that Government action started, almost exactly the same areas still require special assistance—the north-east, parts of Scotland, south Wales and Cumbria. Indeed, with this Bill, it is the legacy of the same old industries of steel, shipbuilding and coal that we are assisting. We cannot argue that industrial development policy, whatever else it is, has been a dynamic force for modernising our economy.

Mr. Hopkins: The hon. Gentleman seems to be making a case that such assistance may be a necessary condition for solving those problems, but not a sufficient one. Would not the situation be much worse if there had been no assistance?

Mr. Fallon: It might have been. That is the argument that is always put forward when state expenditure is involved. I shall try to answer that question a little later. It is perfectly reasonable for the hon. Gentleman to pursue it. On regional employment, the doctrine according to Keynes has been followed by all Governments since the '30s, some with more success than others, and as I shall explain, some of these instruments have been more successful than others. I simply ask the hon. Gentleman to reflect on the point that 70 years on we are still looking after the same areas. We do not seem to have cracked the problem of regional industrial regeneration in the way that other countries have.

Keynes fatally over-estimated Governments' ability, as did the Governments themselves, to pick out the particular schemes that are likely to be effective and to promote the necessary change within a region or an industrial sector. Too many schemes had precisely the opposite effect; they fossilised innovation and they continued to subsidise unproductive, inefficient practices. They prevented the kind of change that a more market-oriented economy, without any intervention, might, with great pain—the hon. Gentleman was right to draw attention to the pain, such as rapid increases in unemployment—have delivered by a different route. I suggest that there were follies in regional aid, and in the most extreme cases it got captured by political lobbies in the regions. Some of those cases of regional selective assistance are well documented. However, the failures of national selective assistance, with which the Bill is concerned, are equally profound. Time and again, Ministers have backed the older industries rather than promoting the newer ones. There were no schemes in the '70s or '80s to promote the new technologies as there were to subsidise the old technologies.

Governments have inevitably seen aid in quantitative terms, as we have discussed. Ministers like to take credit for the total—the millions, the hundreds of millions, the billions—rather than the value that is added in the regions or in particular industrial sectors. In addition, successive Governments and Ministers have deployed aid according to the most perverse criteria. When we came into office back in 1979, aid was capital intensive. Huge grants went to industry. Well known national companies—the BPs and ICIs of this world—received grants to build their massive petro or oil complexes. They might have employed only a handful of extra men, but they qualified for grants under section 8.

We changed the balance a little in the mid-1980s by making the criteria specifically job intensive. That sounded more reasonable. Surely the object of industrial development policy should be to reduce unemployment, but that carried with it its own internal fallacy because head count became all. Someone only had to show that a project would create new jobs to get a grant or loan. Almost immediately, of course, the job test was corrupted. Jobs were defined not simply as jobs created but, as they still are today, as jobs created or safeguarded. Even today, no inward investment project is complete without at least four or five different local agencies trumpeting in their press releases how the money has safeguarded x number of jobs. I have never seen a rigorous analysis of whether jobs that are claimed to be safeguarded by a Government grant actually have been safeguarded; nor do I know how long they have been safeguarded or how the risk to those jobs was measured in the first place.

Conservative Governments were no better at that than Labour Governments. Indeed, sometimes they were worse. We had our aluminium smelters in curious parts of the country and our politically sited steelworks. We paid good money for unreliable Celtic votes just as the Minister may have done with Atlantic Telecom. But the object of industrial development policy should not be to increase either capital or jobs, although both of those are important. In the end, the test should be whether that money stimulates enterprise and wealth creation, and that should always be measured against the other instruments available at the Government's disposal, some of which were mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham), notably lower taxes and less regulation.

[Mr. Fallon]

It was also true that the head-count approach to job creation was flawed by a terrible bias towards bigger industry. Some £1 million given in grant to create 100 jobs in one place was always more appealing to Ministers and local Members of Parliament than 10 times £10,000 to create 10 jobs in 10 places. One might argue that it is odd to have a policy that constantly pitches the Department of Trade and Industry against the Treasury. It seems that the DTI gives companies money for creating as many jobs as possible while the Treasury encourages the same companies to be as productive as possible with as few jobs as possible.

All the schemes over the years have been biased towards the older technologies, declining businesses, labour-intensive processes and, with one or two exceptions, larger, medium-sized or established companies. The newer processes, the smaller companies and, above all, the processes that add value have been neglected. It is no accident that the best schemes are those that have helped the self-employed or very small businesses. My hon. Friend mentioned the small business loan guarantee scheme, which continues to flourish. It was introduced a little earlier than he suggested and filled a serious gap when the banks had a poor record on backing small new companies, both regionally and by sector. However, that small scheme also needs the critical analysis that is so lacking in the Department.

Mr. Lansley: The small firms loan guarantee has of necessity been successful at various times and to varying degrees. After the recessionary effects of the early 1990s, it was clear that the retrenchment of lending by banks without security made that scheme more necessary. However, if the Cruickshank report were implemented in a way that was successful in stimulating genuine competitiveness on the part of banks lending to small businesses, one of the corollaries would be the reduction of the desirability of large-scale funding through the small firms loan guarantee scheme.

Mr. Fallon: My hon. Friend may want to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to advocate the abolition of the small business loan guarantee. Perhaps he is more of a moderniser than I am. It is sometimes hard to keep up with the development of Conservative industrial policy. However, he is right to say that the small firms loan guarantee scheme has performed a useful service at different times. There have been successes and I would not advocate its immediate abolition, but perhaps my hon. Friend will make a case for further revolution so that it is redirected more efficiently into certain parts of the economy.

On the detail of the Bill, the Minister and others have well described what it does. The Industrial Development Act 1982 set a ceiling of £1,900 million which could be raised four times. We only raised it once in 1996 after 14 years in government. When the Minister came into office, he inherited a ceiling of £2,100 million. He and his hon. Friends were soon at the pot. They have increased the limit three times, the third of which we are discussing tonight. As he confessed, the limit is going to be breached shortly when it reaches £2,700 million. However, the proposed increase is enormous. The individual tranches will increase not by £200 million, but by £600 million, giving the Minister a total of £6,100 million. I know he will forgive us if we take with a pinch of salt his qualification that the final limit might not be reached for another 20 years, because, as he candidly confessed, he was wrong about the last limit. Money seems to trickle out a little faster when Labour Ministers get their hands on it.

We must consider where all the money is going. The increase is huge. Given its size, it might have been better for the Government to introduce a new piece of legislation. The original formulation of this Bill is old and no longer appropriate to the ragbag of schemes that it covers. There is nothing in it to increase the parliamentary scrutiny that such large sums warrant. It would be absurd to have only an hour and a half in a Committee Upstairs to authorise another £600 million of industrial assistance, ranging over 15 to 20 different schemes.

It is clear that the Minister and his colleagues are rethinking their policy. As he confessed, the Secretary of State announced that all 183 of her business support schemes are being lumped together under a review and will be administered by an American business woman, Mrs. Fields Wicker-Miurin. I do not doubt her qualifications for the task. She is described in the Department's press release as

"'having more degrees than a compass'".

Apparently she speaks fluent French and Italian. That is all fine. However, those of us who are concerned about the accountability of this expenditure and the need for greater scrutiny of it would like to see a little more detail of the investment committed that will support Mrs. Fields Wicker-Miurin when she comes to allocate more than £1 billion in total. I am still not quite clear—I think that the Minister tried to answer my question on this point—whether all the 15 schemes under the Bill will come under the 183 that have been brought together for Mrs. Fields Wicker-Miurin's personal supervision. Perhaps the Minister will clarify that when he replies.

When we turn to the detail of the schemes that are covered by the Bill, it is clear that there is a ragbag of schemes that well qualify for the streamlining that the Minister has spoken about. Too many of them are trying to do almost exactly the same thing. There is the help that is given to businesses to start up. There is the business incubation fund. We have the phoenix fund. The community development venture capital fund sits alongside the regional venture capital fund. There is a huge amount of overlap. If the Minister and his colleagues are serious about streamlining all this stuff, with all the separate application procedures and investment committee processes, he will certainly have my support. It seems to me that too many of these schemes are chasing too few worthwhile investment opportunities.

The proposal is a ragbag. There is no binding theme to any of the 15 schemes that are covered by the Bill, nor is there any consistent rationale for them. Some clearly derive from history, such as the steel and coal schemes. Some simply derive from faction—for example, the film scheme. Some have obviously been dumped on the Department of Trade and Industry by the Treasury. I notice that some of the schemes have been rather slow to show results. Some schemes were announced in 2000 or 2001, but they have yet to make substantial allocations. I share the doubts that have been expressed about the regional venture capital funds in particular. These schemes have been set up by the Government in conjunction with the banks. I suspect that the major banks were rather arm-twisted into providing the equity capital. I remain to be convinced that there is a gap in the market.

Ten or 15 years ago there was generally a shortage of venture capital in this country. Now, however, with more sophisticated small business banking and an explosion of private equity, I would need to be convinced that there is a gap that requires a host of Government bureaucrats and others round the regional development agencies to be involved in the venture capital business.

I take the point of my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) that had the Cruickshank report been followed through properly, some seedcorn schemes, including the regional venture capital scheme, might not have been necessary. We know now, of course, that Cruickshank was not followed through. The Government chose the price control route, slapping price controls on the banks and making it more difficult for new banks to enter the small business lending market. The ragbag of often overlapping schemes seems continually to be involved in trying to support the same type of business in different ways. I certainly welcome streamlining.

The Bill does a little more than the Minister made out. It trebles the amount of industrial selective assistance from £2,100 million to £6,100 million. That is a massive amount of money. It will certainly be used quite significantly before 2020. Secondly, this legislation is very out of date—it is almost archaic—and needs revision. Thirdly, as the Minister admitted towards the end of his speech, everything is up for grabs in the sense of the business support review, the idea of which may have been announced in principle. However, the conclusions have yet to be agreed with Ministers. It is a little presumptuous to come forward with the Bill for Second Reading and to ask for another £4,000 million of taxpayers' money before the Minister makes clear exactly how it will be spent and before he makes clear exactly how it will be accountable to Parliament.

6.25 pm

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster): I never cease to be amazed at the fundamental lack of understanding that government in general has of the essential economic engine of wealth creation. I must confess that in Department of Trade and Industry-speak, I suppose I am a keen proponent of initiative underload, if such a thing exists. It is a pleasure to speak after my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham) and the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable). There was a lot of sense in much that the hon. Gentleman said. It is also a pleasure to speak after my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon), who presented a tour de force of some of the historical underpinnings involving financial assistance.

It is probably the case that the Government have formerly had some hostility towards the engine of wealth creation to which I have referred. However, it is now recognised that the DTI talks the language, but I suspect that all too often in its actions its ignorance is betrayed.

My background before coming to this place was in business. I know that that is increasingly unusual, even on the Opposition Benches. The Bill recognises the importance, in the Government's mind, of regional development outside assisted areas, which are tightly drawn on a geographical basis. Therefore, for example, objective 1 funding areas would not be included in this context.

One or two examples include the British Film Commission, whose affairs have been subject to tightening up within the Finance Act 2002. As my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks rightly said, perhaps all too often there is something of a conflict between the DTI and the Treasury in the operation of much of this type of legislation. Although the film business is primarily based within my constituency, there is a fundamental question to ask: is it really the business of government to interfere in any way in these matters?

As has been mentioned already, the increase in the total budget is more than threefold, from a figure of £1.9 billion rising to £3.7 billion. Thereon, we have the option of four additional tranches of £600 million apiece, up to a total of £6,100 million. As my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Norfolk pointed out, there has to be a large question mark over such expenditure. Where is the accountability for that vast envisaged expenditure?

The tradition of financial assistance has been referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks. I shall look back even further in history to the chambers of commerce that existed. It all began with the London chamber of commerce in my constituency as long ago as 1882. It was led by my predecessor, Sir Robert Fowler, who lobbied for foreign policy to be geared primarily towards business and the global expansion of trade. That is an important lesson today. There is an understandable fear of parochialism rather than an appreciation of global trade in much of what is put forward regarding the financing and the assistance that is proposed in the Bill.

One only has to look at parochialism within the European Union, for example. It is often said that 57 per cent. of our trade is with the EU, which means by definition that 43 per cent. is outside that area. Very often that trade is with some of the fastest growing global nations. Some of those nations will be the key global trading partners of future decades. We should always remember that.

In my view, there are too many smaller pots of locally oriented government cash assistance, and much of this lacks focus.

Prior to entering this place, I was a local councillor in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. In that role, I was the director of a local business centre. There was little doubt, as the hon. Member for Twickenham pointed out, that much good work was done in that micro-context of Government funding, but it was not clear how many businesses funded in that way remained in business over a period of time. Notwithstanding the weekly, monthly and quarterly statistics that were published, one had to ask whether a number of those businesses would have thrived without such aid. I hope

[Mr. Mark Field]

that we will be able to examine the issue of accountability, and that the Minister will take on board the concerns that consideration by a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments on a variable basis will not provide the sort of accountability that we need to ensure that moneys are not wasted.

There is little doubt that the concept of regional aid in this country is based on the historical wealth and political power of London and the south-east, as the hon. Member for Luton, North (Mr. Hopkins) noted. That is partly due to the climatic advantages of the south-east, compared to the far north of Scotland. Since the industrial revolution, political and economic strength has tended to be based in London and the south-east. The political implications of the north-south divide have enabled the Government at times to play to the gallery. They were happy to play to the gallery while in opposition, but now that they are in government, with such a large majority, their marginal seats are no longer in the Lancashire mill towns, but in the southern England new towns, and it is less easy for them to play the deprived northern card.

I am concerned that all the proposals for new layers of government, whether through expanded regional development agencies or more formal regional autonomy, will not be the answer. We wait to see what will happen, and whether we are to have referendums. That may be successful in the north-east of England, but one of the grave concerns is that it will lead to ever more demand for power in the hands of RDAs and for further financial assistance arising from the Bill and through various other means. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price) suggests from a sedentary position that the City of London may qualify. It may qualify all too soon for regional development assistance, but that is another matter.

In recent speeches, the Deputy Prime Minister has espoused the cause of sustainable communities. That seems to me to be a superficial absurdity. After decades of Government interference, as my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks rightly said, why will more initiatives now lead to the nirvana of no regional divide in the future? The Deputy Prime Minister's view is that we must tackle the fundamental problem of high demand in the south and the collapse of housing demand in some of our most deprived communities. One is tempted to point out that if central Government relocated to the north, we might see some progress, [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear"] but until that occurs, it is merely words. I am glad to hear that my fan club from Wales and Scotland is present.

Under DTI policy as a whole, regulation is slowly but surely and perceptibly drowning business. Many of the regulations may seem superficially designed to protect consumers and employers, but the risk is that the regulations will be subject to the law of unintended consequences. There have been huge additional costs, which make business uneconomic and kill innovation, creativity and originality. If small businesses are to thrive, innovation must be encouraged, not discouraged. I fear that all too often, aid will have the opposite result to that which was intended.

Regulation of all types leads to a lowest common denominator mentality, which in a global marketplace is potentially fatal. Hon. Members will understand that during the recent constituency week, I would want to escape from my constituency. I escaped briefly to Germany, where I was on a lecture tour. It was very interesting to speak to individuals who were leading lights in political circles or local chambers of commerce in cities in the old East Germany, particularly Leipzig and Schwerin. Notwithstanding the enormous sums that have been pumped into those regions in the 12 years since German reunification, employment opportunities are getting worse, the economy is diminishing, and the young and innovative are voting with their feet by moving from the east to the west, or getting out of Germany all together.

Mr. Hopkins: The hon. Gentleman mentions East Germany. I hoped that he would mention West Germany, which in the post-war era had the strongest and most successful economy, and the most managed economy, in western Europe.

Mr. Field: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman raises that matter. Indeed, I also spent a day in Essen and a day in Bonn. Bonn was, of course, the home town of Konrad Adenauer, whose Finance Minister in the first few years of the history of West Germany was Ludwig Erhard. He realised that one of the reasons why Germany thrived and why the economic miracle of the 1950s occurred was that planning did not work. That was the key insight of Ludwig Erhard and the CDU in Germany during that period.

The economy may have been managed at a macro level, but not at a micro level. I expect that that comes to a number of the points that the hon. Gentleman made. Planning was not the way forward. That was the lesson of West Germany, which has largely been forgotten in dealing with large-scale expansion of that territory following reunification. I fear that it is one of the reasons why that country now has 4.6 million unemployed which, as I am sure the Minister will be happy to confirm, compares unfavourably, even in proportional terms, with the UK.

The Bill is a further, albeit small, example of a trend towards market distortion and political interference by means of political risk. Every business man in the UK, especially in the areas likely to be affected by the money, will have to second-guess before making investment decisions. Stamp duty rises and exemptions, a refusal to end stamp duty on shares as a whole, caps on stakeholder pensions, and windfall taxes on the oil industry and pension funds are all examples of large-scale and high-profile distortions, but the Bill will introduce a range of other distortions and political interference. Trade associations, chambers of commerce and regulators will need to have an eye not just to the market, but to the super-regulator in the form of the Minister and his right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. That will lead to uncertainty, above all, and to ever more form-filling and second-guessing, which will affect business growth and confidence today and have a negative effect on profits tomorrow.

6.38 pm

Mr. Michael Weir (Angus): In introducing the debate, the Minister gave a thorough and useful exposition of the various sections of the Bill and the parent measure. On the face of it, the Bill should be unreservedly welcomed—after all, any measure that gives financial assistance to industry and, hopefully, prevents job losses or increases employment would be wholly welcome. However, we in the Scottish National party and Plaid Cymru have some reservations about what the Bill will achieve, as we believe, contrary to the argument of the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field), that it will have the effect of widening the already apparent north-south divide.

As has been pointed out, the Bill will raise the ceiling on the limit of selective financial assistance from £1.9 billion to £3.7 billion, in effect doubling it, although as the Minister observed, the original ceiling has long since been overtaken, and will raise the maximum amount of each increase from £200 million to £600 million, in effect trebling it.

On the face of it that is welcome, but I remind hon. Members of the wording of section 8 (1) of the original act, which states:

> "For the purposes set out in subsection (2) of section 7 above the Secretary of State may, with the consent of the Treasury, provide financial assistance where, in his opinion—
>
> (*a*) the financial assistance is likely to benefit the economy of the United Kingdom, or any part or area of the United Kingdom".

That word "may" could become very important indeed as the economy enters choppy waters and a great many calls are made on the funds, as the Treasury could be unwilling—despite having what the hon. Member for Twickenham described as a slush fund—to pass money out to many of the industries that may be forced to seek it.

Section 7 of the 1982 Act—which we are not discussing today—deals with region-specific financial assistance. That has been referred to many times in this debate, as though the two kinds of assistance were interchangeable. They are not. Section 8 was originally intended to provide general selective assistance on a national or industry-specific basis. That is where we perceive a problem. The danger of the Bill is that, by granting increases in overall national assistance funds, it will consolidate a shift that is already evident from specific regional assistance of the type referred to by the hon. Member for Luton, North to a system of more national assistance.

My hon. Friend the Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price) has asked a series of questions about the payment of regional selective assistance between 1990 and 2001. Indeed, such questions were regularly asked by the present Chancellor when he was in opposition. The figures revealed that, in present-day cash terms, there has been a dramatic decline in the amount paid during that period. In Scotland, the figure has fallen from £150.9 million—in today's terms—in 1990–91 to £71.5 million in 2001–02. In effect, the amount has halved during the period. If we look at the figures for Wales, we see a similar picture, with a drop from £72.4 million to just £38.1 million—again, effectively half the amount. The total amount of regional selective assistance payments in 1997–98, when Labour came to power, was £295 million—two and a half times the amount estimated for 2002–03.

Adam Price (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): If we turn the clock back even further, to the last year of the last Labour Government—1978–79—we see that the figure for regional selective assistance was more than £3 billion in today's terms. That is more than 15 times the £200 million total. Notwithstanding the scepticism expressed by the hon. Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon), that was a period of significant convergence in the growth rates of the regions of the UK, compared with the divergence that we have seen over the last six years.

Mr. Weir: That is very true. The hon. Member for Sevenoaks, who is not here at the moment, could well be haunted—as could the Scottish Conservatives—by his quip about unreliable Celtic boats. He may remember that, after the work-in at Upper Clyde Shipbuilders, the assistance given to the company resulted in the survival of the shipbuilding industry on the Clyde. It would not be there to build aircraft carriers today, had it not been for the assistance that it received back in the 1970s.

Getting back to my point about the decline of regional selective assistance, and to show that I am not being entirely parochial, I should point out that the figures for England also show a marked decrease, from £214.5 million to £112.6 million. The clear message from all these figures is that there has been a steady move away from regional selective assistance during the time of the previous Conservative Government and of the present Government. As I said earlier, the total regional selective assistance payments in 1997–98, when Labour came to power, was £295 million—two and a half times the amount estimated for the current year.

The whole purpose of the concept of regional selective assistance was to create a level playing field. There has been a move away from that, however, and the effect of the Bill will increase that, since, if the intention is to give the same assistance to all areas, it will intensify and increase the already apparent divide between the north and south. The present Chancellor has in the past been a strong supporter of regional policy. We believe that aid should be redirected towards the areas that require assistance, rather than being provided in the form of blanket coverage. I was interested to note that the Minister said that the powers could be exercised by Scottish Ministers or Ministers in the National Assembly for Wales, but that the money would come out of the settlement for those areas. We have to wonder exactly what the benefit is of having the operation of those powers in Scotland and Wales, if there is no increase in the funds available. I would be interested to hear what the Minister has to say about that.

It is also interesting to note how section 8 has been used to provide assistance, because there seem to be cases in which, in the words of the section, it has been used to assist specific areas. Mention has been made—and the research paper from the Library gives details—of the example of the Rover taskforce set up when BMW announced the closure of the Longbridge plant. There was some discussion about the difficulty of finding out where the money for that came from, but page 18 of the research paper makes it clear that the Government

[Mr. Weir]

converted promised regional selective assistance of £129 million into more general relief under the auspices of section 8. So it can be used for specific areas, and, as the Minister has confirmed, those can be geographical areas in the UK as well as being industry-based areas.

This is of particular interest to many of us who represent areas with strong fishing links. The Minister will be aware that, in the north-east of Scotland, we have been hit by a crisis in the fishing and fish-processing industries, which are immensely important to the economy of Scotland, and in particular of the north-east of Scotland. These are not assisted areas. The Scottish Executive have come up with a package worth up to £50 million, but it is specifically targeted at the catching sector. In this House and in the Scottish Parliament, however, Ministers have said that any onshore aid would be provided through the regional development agencies. In Scotland, that is the Scottish Enterprise network. I appreciate that direct aid to the fishing industry is complicated by European considerations, but I would like the Minister to clarify whether it would be permissible to provide assistance similar to that given to the Rover taskforce for general work in the Longbridge area, or to the UK coal operating aid scheme, which provided Government support for the UK coal industry that was designed to allow mines with viable futures to overcome short-term market problems. Those conditions apply equally in the onshore fish-processing industry and other associated industries. If the political will existed, could some of the extra funds being proposed in the Bill be utilised for a specific aid package to assist onshore industries in getting through this difficult time? It would be interesting to see where the money for that would come from, in the case of Scotland.

I would like to take up some of the points made about the use of section 8. It has uses in many areas. The hon. Member for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham) mentioned Atlantic Telecom, and I intervened on him to explain some of the difficulties involved in it. I am surprised that the Conservatives made this point, because Atlantic Telecom's circumstances illustrate how relatively small amounts of money can be used to make a real difference. In my constituency—and in the Dundee and Aberdeen areas in particular—the collapse of Atlantic Telecom caused huge problems for many small businesses, because they were threatened with the loss of their telephone service.

It is a feature of the modern economy that many small businesses rely a great deal on business received over the telephone. They rely on contact by telephone, and by e-mail and other forms of electronic communication. One of the difficulties associated with the collapse of Atlantic Telecom was that many of those businesses had produced leaflets and had entries in Yellow Pages, and their only means of contact with their customers was by telephone. If assistance had not been given to allow the continuation, for a relatively short period, of their Atlantic Telecom telephone numbers, many of those businesses would have been uncontactable by their customers, because they would not have had the time or, perhaps, the money quickly to change all their promotional material, such as their entries in Yellow Pages.

That is a small example, but it is a good example of how even small amounts of assistance can make a great deal of difference. The Minister said that he was not going to announce any new schemes, but if he is thinking about it I should like to put in a bid for the fisheries. According to the Library research paper, in 1993 specific aid was given to areas that lost assisted area status when the aid map was redrawn. That is not a one-off problem, in that when the aid map was redrawn again in 2000, many other areas lost assisted area status, including Arbroath in my constituency, which was just recovering from a serious economic downturn. At the time, that withdrawal of assisted area status was graphically described as being a bit like driving a lawnmower over the green shoots of economic recovery. If the assistance had been in place when the fishing crisis hit our town, we might not be faced with our current difficulties, having to scramble around trying to find out where assistance might be available. When I had a meeting with the Scottish Enterprise Network, it was clear that although it can give minimal assistance no new money is available.

The Department, in conjunction with the devolved Administration, needs to consider how to deliver the money through the regional development agencies in England, and the Scottish Enterprise Network in Scotland, so as to ensure that it makes a real difference. We are talking about huge sums of money, but many areas are seeing little benefit from it at the moment. If the Government are, as we suspect, moving away from specific regional selective assistance to more general assistance, they must give serious thought to how that is to be delivered on the ground in Scotland, in Wales and in areas of north-east England.

6.51 pm

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): I am glad to have the opportunity to contribute to the debate and to follow the hon. Member for Angus (Mr. Weir). Although it has been a short debate on a short Bill, it has had some substance. I hope that I can add a little more in its latter stages, although I fear that other hon. Members have already had the better of the arguments.

I do not want to take the hon. Member for Angus to task too much, but as he recited the statistics on the decline over time in the amounts that have been spent by way of regional selective assistance, or regionally differentiated Government grants, I felt that it was a case of "never mind the quality, feel the width"—that what mattered was how much was spent, not whether it was spent effectively.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon) referred to a change in the shape of regional assistance that took place many years ago. It makes me feel rather old to say so, but I was there at the time, sitting in an office of the part of the Department of Trade and Industry that administered the regional development grant scheme. In late 1981 or early 1982, the cheque to BP was signed BP for Suilum Voe. We handed over £110 million—if my memory serves me right—to pay BP for doing something that we knew it had to do and that it knew it had no choice about doing. My hon. Friend was right to say that that is how the jobs test first arose; I worked on precisely those issues. I am afraid that the whole experience jaundiced me in relation to the continuing efforts by Departments—the

DTI in particular—to seek to influence outcomes by ever more sophisticated mechanisms for intervention. The more sophisticated those mechanisms become, the more complicated become the ways in which markets are distorted as a result.

Adam Price: I am following the hon. Gentleman's argument with interest. We are of course aware of the problems of dead weight in relation to the regional development grant, but does he accept that many companies are deterred from applying for regional selective assistance because of its discretionary nature and the amount of time that they have to take to go through the application process with no guarantee of getting any funds at the end of it?

Mr. Lansley: Yes, but I do not want to go too far down that track because, as I freely confess to the hon. Gentleman and to the House, it is some time since I have been involved in assessing such matters. The last time would have been in 1987 or thereabouts, when I was secretary to, if my memory serves me correctly, the science and technology advisory board, and we were trying to assess additionality. The hon. Gentleman is right that the dead-weight issue was key to that, in that we were trying to assess the additionality of the schemes that were presented to us, which is precisely the mechanism that is applied to regional selective assistance. At least in theory, if a project cannot demonstrate additionality if should not receive support. I was only too painfully aware of the inadequacy of our scrutiny mechanisms for trying to determine what was genuinely additional.

As soon as I left the Department of Trade and Industry for the industry side, I began to talk to business men who were willing to tell me about the ways in which they had, in effect, made assumptions about the availability of Government support. Some companies—no names, no pack drill—had a portfolio of schemes at the margin of their capital investment programme, which, although they did not regard them as having any particular economic justification, they reckoned they could put to the Department of Trade and Industry so that one or two would get through and add to their capital investment programme in such a way that the cost was reduced. In that case, technically speaking, additionality is met. Funding projects the economic viability of which has not satisfied the internal analysis of the companies concerned raises questions about the overall economic value of such projects. The money that funds them is not cost-free—it comes from the pockets of taxpayers and from the business contributions that my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham) talked about. The £47 billion of extra taxes that business pays is partly directed to the pockets of the DTI for it to put into projects that are sometimes of dubious economic viability.

It is therefore terribly important to have an underlying rationale for what one is doing as opposed to having some spurious theoretical justification and trusting in the scrutiny mechanisms of the industrial development advisory board, the investment committee, or whatever grand title it will have within the Department of Trade and Industry. People of great weight and merit will consider the issues, but they will not always get it right—too often, they will get it wrong. The question is, "What are we trying to achieve?" We should not be in the business of simply trying to identify areas that could be the subject of financial assistance, then adding to the capacity of industry by the application of subsidies—there must be a rationale. When my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks talked about underlying theoretical justifications for such assistance, he missed out what I understand to have been—if not in 1982, shortly after 1982—the intellectual justification for such assistance schemes: that we are trying to remedy market failures. As I understand it, that was the basis on which matters proceeded after 1982. One might say that, in individual cases, an assistance scheme can remedy any market imperfection in the sense of saying, "Here is a scheme with economic justification that is not going ahead because there is not sufficient capital available to support it." However, it is not the Government's role to be that specific at the micro level, but to identify systematic market failures and to seek to remedy them. The shape of the Department of Trade and Industry's programme should properly be directed towards the stimulation of competitive intensity and competition. Other Bills—we shall discuss one tomorrow on communications—are designed to stimulate that kind of competitive intensity. The risk of rolling forward section 8 is that competitive intensity will be undermined if the schemes that are supported under it do not clearly address some form of market failure. That brings me to the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks and I have discussed in relation to the small firms loan guarantee scheme. The SFLGS is justified only if a market failure remains in the provision of small-scale finance to unsecured businesses. That varies over time and it should not be assumed that such a failure will continue for ever. The Bill's underlying assumption is that such matters simply roll forward into the future and that we must take the same actions for ever.

Evaluation is therefore important. We should evaluate the measure continually to ascertain the justification for continuing a scheme such as the SFLGS. The small business lobby's support for its maintenance—we all support it in principle—is not a justification. With great respect to the small business lobby, of which I was a member, it will always say, "Here's a jolly good scheme for helping our members." Nobody will say, "Get rid of it." However, a scheme is justified by objective evidence, not lobbying. We should not respond to the lobby rather than the evidence.

The hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) and I had an exchange about the SFLGS. We may have done the Department a disservice when we emphasised the importance of the evaluation of the scheme being in the public domain. The hon. Gentleman wondered whether the evaluation had been undertaken. I do not know how recently the scheme was evaluated, but the results should be made public—and, indeed, I find that the figures for the defaults are in the public domain.

Figure 6.2 in the Department's annual report covers the information and tells us that approximately between £34 million and £40 million in respective years has been lost through the value of demands against the guarantee. If £250 million-worth of loan guarantees are being offered in a year, one in six—perhaps slightly more—loans default. I have no basis on which to judge whether the figure is correct. For the reasons that I outlined earlier, if all loans succeed, one is probably

[Mr. Lansley]

taking insufficient risk whereas if too many default, one is probably taking excessive risk. I have no means of judging where the balance should be struck; serious academic work is necessary to get that right.

I have tried to show the importance of objectively understanding the market failure that we are trying to resolve. When one compares receipts by way of interest for the SFLGS with defaults, it is apparent that the scheme costs money. It is not like bank lending. Clearly, there is a level of lending to specific small firms that banks and financial institutions would not undertake on the same basis. The receipts suggest premiums of 2 per cent. or 3 per cent. rather than the 0.5 per cent. or 1 per cent. premiums that currently have to be charged.

The scheme means a substantial benefit to business in the context of a proper market failure. It prompts the question whether businesses that are that risky should be willing to pay so great a premium to justify the level of borrowing. Perhaps that point is too detailed to consider now. It is certainly too late in our proceedings for hon. Members other than the Minister to respond to it, so I shall simply leave it hanging.

It is important to bear in mind the purpose of section 8. It should not be used to engage in the politically driven restructuring of companies or industries, but should be narrowly confined to operations that are necessary to fulfil some significant social need, such as the employee redundancy support for the coal industry. We have argued about the Post Office reinvention programme, which would be more properly titled the Post Office closures programme. We have debated its extent and nature elsewhere, but there is no doubt about the likely reduction in the number of post offices in urban areas and financial assistance may be required for that.

The debate shows how things have moved on. If we go back 15 years, when I prepared the budget for the Department of Trade and Industry, we would calculate the Post Office's negative external financing limit and its contribution to the Department's finances and associated nationalised industries. Nowadays we consider ways in which the Department can find mechanisms for recovering money and paying it through section 8 assistance to the Post Office. That is a worrying change, and a large part of the justification in the next couple of years for the additional financing availability.

Earlier today, the Secretary of State tabled a written statement, to which she referred in the Chamber, on the affairs of British Energy after the agreement with shareholders that was concluded a week ago. I am not clear whether the continuation of the loan to British Energy will be achieved legally by statutory cover under section 8. Clearly, it relates directly to the reorganisation of an undertaking in an industry and therefore appears to have the appropriate statutory cover. That has not been necessary until now, because the loan has been from the contingency fund and is to be repaid before the end of the financial year. It is therefore not necessary for section 8 to cover it. However, a longer-term loan is different. Perhaps the Bill is necessary to deal with the affairs of British Energy, provide loans to it or meet its liabilities. I would be interested to learn whether that constitutes one of the undisclosed reasons for the further limit.

Let us consider regional development agencies. The Minister spoke earlier about the availability of section 8 assistance to the Welsh Assembly through the block grant. That does not require the Treasury's consent. We have created a mechanism whereby, despite the cumulative total that is allowed for expenditure under section 8, the Treasury does not have fingertip control over precise amounts. In so far as it is confined to the Welsh Assembly, perhaps the amounts are not large and it does not have a great impact on the overall totals. However, I am not sure whether the Government have substantially changed their mind about the greater freedoms to regional development agencies or assemblies.

If we already have a single pot for RDAs, which effectively control the budgets for some purposes, including the Small Business Service, I presume that part of section 8 assistance can be spent through RDAs. To what extent are section 8 powers available to RDAs? To what extent can RDAs transfer money from budgets that were previously under a statutory provision different from section 8? There may be much greater variations in the amounts being spent on section 8 through action by RDAs without the Treasury's consent. I do not believe that they are required to have the Treasury's consent to move money between different budgets in their single pot.

Mr. Weir: The Scottish Executive have powers under the Scotland Act 1998 and the National Assembly for Wales have similar powers under the National Assembly for Wales (Transfer of Functions) Order 1999. Those powers were specifically given to the devolved Administrations. They do not apply to English regional development agencies. As I understand it, if the devolved Administrations use this power, there is no extra money to fund that. The position may be slightly different with the regional development agencies.

Mr. Lansley: I understand the point that the hon. Gentleman makes. I am sure that that is right. I am not clear whether the consent of the Treasury is required for regional development agencies to vire money within the single pot that is available to them, which is a bit like a block grant, if they want to use section 8 powers. If it is not, there is the administrative problem of how to monitor and report on the extent to which they are bumping up against the limit. Perhaps that is one of the reasons why the Government are proposing such big steps of between £200 million and £600 million. If they require the Treasury's consent to move money within a single pot, that undermines the sense of freedom that regional development agencies in England are supposed to have to be able to spend this money. The Minister may be able to enlighten me on that. Perhaps my concerns are not justified.

Back in 1982, the legislation envisaged a limit to restrict previous largesse by Government that had led to intervention in industry, and a system of scrutiny such that if the limit was hit there would be frequent scrutiny by Parliament of that extension of financial intervention in industry. It is astonishing that the Government are now turning that into something that involves big steps:

from £2.7 billion to £3.7 billion in one step, on the basis that several years may go by before Parliament needs to reconsider the use of this money, and thereafter up to four steps of £600 million, which if spending is at the current rate may require two or three years between such reconsideration.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks is right. On the face of it, the further we move from the 1982 legislation in time, in philosophy and in approach to industry, the more important it is for parliamentary scrutiny to be systematic and frequent. We must decide whether expenditure using these powers is justified. The Government are breaking with the intention of the 1982 legislation—although it may not have been expressed in these terms. It was envisaged that the time would come when the level of financial commitment would be reached, but it should not be breached, or only by small amounts and subject to frequent recall to Parliament. We are going away from that. My hon. Friend is right that we should reconsider the whole structure of the legislation and the basis on which we now approach this issue, because we have come a long way since 1982.

Before this debate, I was aware of a particular absurdity, but my concerns were not assuaged by the Minister's responses. The Secretary of State came before the Select Committee on Trade and Industry and told us about the desirability of rationalising grant schemes in the Department of Trade and Industry. She said that they would be managed under specific portfolios. She came before us again on 29 October last year, and spoke in glowing terms. She said:

> "The team that I have got working on this have been making fantastic progress and, again, I expect to make an announcement on that certainly before Christmas."

Well, the fantastic progress has not progressed fantastically. It was not before Christmas, and it will not be before the end of the financial year.

I am not naïve. I know that it is difficult to get rid of schemes. Various parts of the Department may be involved in a substantial fighting retreat on what should be kept and what should be scrapped, so it may take longer than was thought. Even if it takes longer, it is absurd to bring before Parliament legislation on a substantial number of these schemes. I presume that the majority of the 15 schemes will form part of the review, even if the post office programme does not. It is absurd to propose that year zero for the design of Government grant schemes should be April, but to say to Parliament now, "Fine, we'll spend another £3.7 billion on some of these schemes, but you don't know what they will look like, because we haven't told you yet. We'll tell you a couple of weeks after the legislation has passed through the House." That is deeply undesirable, and completely at odds with the scrutiny which the House demands and which is called for by our reasoned amendment. I shall support my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Norfolk.

7.16 pm

Mr. Bellingham: With the leave of the House, I should like to reply to the debate. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley), because he succinctly summed up the difficulties that we have with this legislation. A substantial review is taking place, so why on earth could not Second Reading be delayed until it was completed and the Secretary of State had made a statement?

We have had an interesting, albeit short, debate. I am glad that the hon. Member for Luton, North (Mr. Hopkins) recognises the plight of manufacturing and the difficulties over investment levels. I note that he wholeheartedly supports the rationale behind the original Act and this Bill. The hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) talked about accountability, and I hope that, in the light of that, he will support our reasoned amendment. He mentioned the purple report, and the need for statistics and comparable studies. He is right, because we need to know the administrative costs incurred for every pound that goes into these schemes. That point had not been raised before, and I hope that the Minister will comment on it.

On the Rover taskforce scheme, I think that I am right in saying that the £129 million was under regional selective assistance. So far, £12 million has been allocated under section 8, and perhaps the Minister can tell us how much of that has been spent.

The speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon) was a fascinating philosophical tour de force. He considered the genesis of this policy, going back to Keynes's famous four articles, and he fast-forwarded 70 years. He rightly said that it was time to take stock. He made a valid point when he said that Ministers should be looking for value added, not just the headline millions. He made an amusing quip. He talked about good money paid for unreliable Celtic votes. I wish that he had seen the expression on the face of the hon. Member for Angus (Mr. Weir). Questions need to be asked. Does the money stimulate wealth creation and enterprise? My hon. Friend was spot on when he said that the timing of Second Reading is completely awry. We need to know exactly what schemes will be kept.

I was interested in what my hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) said about the film industry. I had a quick look at one of the DTI briefs. The British Film Commission was launched in 1991, and one of its aims is to encourage film and production units from abroad to use UK-based facilities. It also helps to co-ordinate the work of other national and local film bodies. The commission now comes under the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. Were the grants paid out up to 31 March 2002, which totalled about £7 million, provided by the DTI or did they come out of the DCMS budget? Would the Minister elaborate on that?

My hon. Friend reinforced what had been said about some of the mini-micro-schemes, in regard to which there has been a total loss of focus. The reason we cannot go along with some of these schemes is indeed the lack of sufficient focus and accountability. I am glad that he also mentioned the red tape burden on business and the law of unintended consequences. He gave a fascinating example from East Germany, following his visit last week to some of his more far-flung constituents.

I will accept the rap over the knuckles administered by the hon. Member for Angus in connection with Atlantic Telecom because he obviously knows quite a lot about it, but I stick to my guns nevertheless. Most of those small business men will have had mobile phones, and I do not believe that, had the Minister contacted the chairman and chief executive of British Telecom, it would not have been possible to sort something out at a cost amounting to much less than over half a million pounds.

[Mr. Bellingham]

My hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire drew on extensive DTI civil service experience. He gave a riveting example involving BP and Sullom Voe, and made the interesting point that the more sophisticated intervention mechanisms became, the greater the distortions that resulted. That must return us to the inadequacy of the scrutiny mechanism set out in the Bill. Moreover, my hon. Friend's point about the loan guarantee scheme was spot on. Apart from the broad statistics relating to the small firms guarantee scheme, we see nothing about failure rates or the net cost. I hope that the Minister will respond on that, and also to the point about the money dispensed by the regional development agencies and the influence that they will have.

The Secretary of State recently promised to drive up UK productivity and competitiveness in order to deliver prosperity to all. We will hold her to account. The five key tests will relate to business investment, which is falling faster than it has for 36 years; to manufacturing jobs, 600,000 of which have gone since 1997; to the trade deficit, which is at its worst since 1967; to productivity, which is growing at half the rate at which it grew under the last Government; and to strikes, to which more than 1 million working days have been lost.

We shall continue to take every opportunity to hold the Secretary of State to account, but for the moment I ask hon. Members to support our amendment, because what we need above all else is proper scrutiny of the Bill and the workings of section 8 of the 1982 Act.

7. 22 pm

Alan Johnson: With the leave of the House, I shall reply to what has been a thoughtful debate on this short Bill, featuring excellent contributions from Opposition Members—although the best came from our side. What we lacked in quantity, we gained in quality.

I was deeply hurt by the comments of the hon. Member for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham), and by the lack of a political consensus. I had thought that we would sail through this with a fair amount of agreement between the various parties—only to find that our motives were being questioned, particularly in regard to the formula.

There is no getting away from one aspect. It took 14 years, from 1982 to 1996, to produce just one tranche, and the money has been spent more quickly since 1997. I do not argue with that. The problem is that we are talking about schemes that may have existed in the past, and about the use of taxpayers' money, which should of course be used properly, in the absence of any analysis of the payback for the Government.

We inherited one scheme: the small business loan guarantee scheme. The hon. Gentleman was scathing about some of the schemes that we have introduced, but very complimentary about the one that was left over from past Governments. We have introduced 14 schemes. It was right for hon. Members to question some of them and for me to defend them, but we must look at the Bill on the basis of what is happening now, not what was happening in the 1970s or 1980s.

In fact, it could well be argued that Governments in the 1970s and 1980s should have used such provisions. Especially in the 1980s, constituencies such as mine were crying out for just a bit of assistance so that one industry could diversify into others. In my case, the problem was the collapse of distant-water fishing, and very little help was forthcoming. That is all in the past, however.

The rationale of our formula was to roll forward the existing limit of £2.7 billion—which we have almost reached—in real terms, using 2.5 per cent. as a proxy for the long-term gross domestic product deflator, for 20 years. The figures produced at the time, in co-operation with the Treasury, did not satisfy us: they would have meant a £4.5 billion new ceiling, and our returning four times to ask for £400 million in each tranche. We felt that the first hurdle should be reduced, enabling us to return to Parliament more quickly. We therefore reduced it to £3.7 billion. To reach the £6.1 billion figure, the other tranches were £600 million more than £400 million.

Mr. Lansley: I understand that the Minister has produced an arithmetical approximation to the way in which things were done in 1982, but our point is that the original 14-year period after 1982 at least followed carefully considered legislation setting out a framework of support for industry. Following the meeting of that limit, is it not time for a reconsideration of the framework, and for the framework to be established for a period rather than being rolled forward?

Alan Johnson: In a sense we are doing that, but let me develop the argument.

The accusation, reflected in the amendment, is that we want somehow to avoid parliamentary scrutiny. Let me say in all honesty—I suppose that anyone should speak in all honesty from the Dispatch Box—that we have tried hard to do the opposite. We looked at the figures and said, "No, we want to return to Parliament earlier." We have proposed the same four tranches. There was an argument that we should return to Parliament two or three times rather than four, but we did not accept it. There is no change in the £10 million limit requiring parliamentary scrutiny, despite the argument—given that the limit was set in 1982, if not 1972—that it should change because of the increased cost of living. There is still an annual report, however inadequate it may be. We reached for the Kleenex when we were accused of trying to avoid returning to Parliament, for that was far from being our rationale.

The hon. Member for North-West Norfolk praised the Small Business Service. I was pleased about that, because I had understood that the Conservatives had pledged to abolish it. We may be witnessing the determination of policy here, and I can think of no better shadow Minister for the job.

The Small Business Service administers eight of the current schemes. Those eight schemes—this answers a question raised by, particularly, the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley)—are the ones that are in the pot for the review of DTI business support, as opposed to the industry-specific schemes relating to coal, steel and the post office network. So eight out of 15 are in the pot, along with another 175—the total number of DTI business support schemes being 183. Only those eight will be carried over from section 8 of the 1982 Act.

Two schemes were criticised by the hon. Member for North-West Norfolk. I pull in also his point about Scotland. There is an issue about Conservative

Members, perhaps because of the constituencies that they represent and because after 1997 they were true one nation Tories—they did not represent anyone in Scotland and Wales; they represented one nation and that was England—not realising how important the Phoenix fund is in deprived areas, particularly among ethnic minorities. The whole basis of this approach is to encourage people to be entrepreneurial and to help them to start up their own businesses. Every bit of feedback that we get from the Phoenix fund shows that it is one of the most beneficial.

It is right that no money has been paid out of the incubation fund thus far. I am told that that is because the very nature of the fund means that it takes a while for the applications to be processed. It is hoped that any problems will be ironed out. We are still expecting to spend a projected £65 million by the end of the scheme in 2004–05.

The other point that I make in relation to the contribution by the hon. Member for North-West Norfolk concerns the small firms loan guarantee scheme and what it costs per year. I will write to him, and probably to all hon. Members who will sit on the Committee, before the Committee stage, so that they receive a proper analysis of how the schemes are working. That analysis exists but it is all over the place. It is in documents that are published at different frequencies. I understand that it is not all in the annual report, which surprises me.

I am told that since the small firms loan guarantee scheme began in June 1981, the net cost up to the end of October 2002 has been £460.39 million. In all, over 82,000 loans have been guaranteed. The guarantees provided on loans so far total £3.1 billion, but I will write to the hon. Gentleman on the other points that he raised and on the point raised by the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) about whether there has been any comparison between companies that did not access the loan scheme and those that did. That is a valid question.

I am not going to be drawn into a debate on the economy, particularly as my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer made mincemeat of the Opposition just two weeks ago on that subject.

My hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North (Mr. Hopkins) is a strong supporter of these measures. He seems to have disappeared, but he was the only Labour Member to attend the whole debate and I am grateful for his support, which was welcome.

The hon. Member for Twickenham talked about post office network funding and questioned the use of section 8 for the urban post office network. I do not think that it should be questioned. I mentioned at the beginning the criteria set down originally in the 1972 Act and carried into the 1982 Act, which were about development, modernisation and efficiency. In terms of the post office network, that is necessary. The debate in the House last October threw up a number of issues that need to be addressed, difficult though they are. They probably should have been addressed many years ago.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the Rover taskforce. The hon. Member for North-West Norfolk was right that most of that money was a regional selective assistance grant that had already been applied for by BMW Rover when the problems occurred. Nevertheless, £12 million was set aside, as he rightly said. A total of £7.4 million has been paid up to now, but only £1 million of that relates to section 8 and the issue under scrutiny in this debate.

The hon. Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon) made a thoughtful contribution. I was fascinated by the light that it shone on what was happening in the 1970s. I was particularly interested to know that the legislation caused the resignation of a junior DTI Minister. That made me sit up and take close notice of how we should deal with this fresh Bill.

The hon. Gentleman said that we have never helped new and emerging industry. The eight support schemes administered by the Small Business Service—there is an argument about whether there is any duplication there—focus on new emerging businesses, particularly in sectors such as biotechnology, so it is unfair to say that we are sticking to the credo of the 1970s and looking only at failing industries.

Nevertheless, as the hon. Gentleman accepted, the scheme has united all parties. There needs to be assistance when traditional industries come up against problems, in particular iron and steel and coal; there are two specific schemes, one for Selby and one in Scotland. They need that assistance. The question is whether other industries should have had similar assistance. I have mentioned distant-water trawling in my constituency, where 5,000 people lost their jobs and did not receive any help because they were classified as casual workers. There was a case for some assistance under the scheme. It was not provided under the previous Government.

It is important to mention that there is full agreement on the Labour Benches about the rigorous analysis that the hon. Member for Sevenoaks spoke about. We abolished the shipbuilding intervention fund three years ago, with the support of the trade unions and the industry itself, because it was having no effect on our competitiveness or productivity. That was an important point.

The hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) made some important points, particularly about the City of London, which may be next in the queue for financial assistance. We will look at that claim with interest. He mentioned Conservative Members' experience of business and made the rather dated accusation that Labour Members did not really understand business. A back-handed compliment was paid to Labour by a business person whom I met recently. He said that the problem with the previous Government was that, because they had all had a directorship or two and all thought that they knew how to run businesses, they did not listen. He said, "The thing about you lot is that you know absolutely nothing about business and as a result you listen," which I thought was as good a compliment as we can expect in the circumstances.

The hon. Member for Angus (Mr. Weir) made a number of important points. He asked about RSA and in particular about the money that goes to Scotland and Wales. RSA is covered by section 7, not section 8. It is demand driven: companies have to apply for it. In

[Alan Johnson]

circumstances where we have the highest number of people in employment ever and the lowest period of unemployment since the Beatles released "Abbey Road", we will probably find that there is less cause for people to apply for RSA than previously. Also, the assisted areas map has changed and reduced. While we fought the good fight in Europe, we were unable to secure all the money we wanted.

Another important point was raised about RSA. The Secretary of State has power under the Regional Development Agencies Act 1998 to require the regional development agencies to administer funds under section 8. That power has never been used, but we have asked them to administer powers under section 7 because they now allocate all RDA applications up to £2 million, which is about 95 per cent. of RSA.

The hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire has detailed knowledge of how the DTI works, which may or may not be helpful in his current capacity. His was an important and interesting contribution. He spoke of the need to be remorseless in trying to achieve a root-and-branch examination of the 183 support schemes. That is what we intend to do, and although it may take us a little longer, we will end up with money that is better directed.

In the light of a helpful nudge from the Whips, I conclude by saying that the Government need the legislative means to operate their business support activities. We can debate what those activities should be, but there is little doubt that such support is needed. I commend the Bill to the House, and I look forward to making good progress in Committee.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 156, Noes 301.

Division No. 92] **[7:40 pm**

AYES

Amess, David
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Barrett, John
Beith, rh A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Brady, Graham
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chidgey, David
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dorrell, rh Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr. Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Leigh, Edward
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Mackay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury & Atcham)*
Maude, rh Francis
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Randall, John
Redwood, rh John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Wilshire, David
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Hugh Robertson and
Mr. Desmond Swayne

NOES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, John
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*

Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, rh Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, rh Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Ewing, Annabelle
Farrelly, Paul
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Galloway, George
Gardiner, Barry
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, rh Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, rh Peter
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, rh Michael
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Morley, Elliot
Mountford, Kali
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Perham, Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, rh John
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, rh Joyce
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Straw, rh Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watts, David
Weir, Michael
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wishart, Pete
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James *(Glasgow Baillieston)*
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Jim Murphy and
Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 62 (Amendment on second or third reading), and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 63 (Committal of bills)

INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT (FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE) BILL *[MONEY]*

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 53 (1)(a) (Money resolutions and ways and means resolutions in connection with bills),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Industrial Development (Financial Assistance) Bill, it is expedient to authorise any increase in sums paid out of money provided by Parliament attributable to provisions of the Act—

(a) increasing the sum of £1,900 million specified in section 8(5) of the Industrial Development Act 1982 to £3,700 million, and

(b) increasing the sum of £200 million so specified to £600 million.—*[Gillian Merron.]*

Question agreed to.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to European Community documents.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 119(9)(European Standing Committees),

IMPROVING SAFETY AT SEA

That this House takes note of European Union Documents No. 15301/02, Commission Communication on improving safety at sea, and No. 5111/03, draft Regulation on the accelerated phasing in of double hull or equivalent design requirements for single hull oil tankers; and supports the Government's continuing commitment to working within the European Union and the International Maritime Organisation to that end.

COMBATING CORRUPTION IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR

That this House takes note of European Union Document No. 12249/2/02, on Combating Corruption in the Private Sector; considers it to be an acceptable replacement for the Joint Action on Corruption in the Private Sector of 22 December 1998; and supports the Government's efforts to secure agreement to this Framework Decision.—*[Gillian Merron.]*

Question agreed to.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to delegated legislation.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6)(Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

NORTHERN IRELAND

That the draft Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 2003, which was laid before this House on 20th January, be approved.

LIBRARIES

That the draft Public Lending Right (Increase of Limit) Order 2003, which was laid before this House on 28th January, be approved.—*[Gillian Merron.]*

Question agreed to.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Ordered,

That the following Statutory Instruments be referred to Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation: the Education (Determination of Admission Arrangements) (Amendment) (England) Regulations (S.I., 2002, No. 2896), the Education (School Information) (England) Regulations (S.I., 2002, No. 2897), the Education (Variation of Admission Arrangements) (England) Regulations (S.I., 2002, No. 2898), the Education (Admissions Appeals Arrangements) (England) Regulations (S.I., 2002, No. 2899), the Education (Admission Forums) (England) Regulations (S.I., 2002, No. 2900), the Education (Objection to Admission Arrangements) (Amendment) (England) Regulations (S.I., 2002, No. 2901), the Education (Co-ordination of Admission Arrangements) (Primary Schools) (England) Regulations (S.I., 2002, No. 2903), the Education (Co-ordination of Admission Arrangements) (Secondary Schools) (England) Regulations (S.I., 2002, No. 2904) and the Education (Modification of Provisions) (No. 2) (England) Regulations (S.I., 2002, No. 2953).—*[Gillian Merron.]*

PETITION

Wiltshire Probation Service

7.58 pm

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): I have the honour of presenting a petition on behalf of 5,775 of my constituents from the towns of Chippenham, Malmesbury, Wootton Bassett, Corsham, and the villages in between, who are—not unreasonably—concerned about the proposal by Wiltshire probation service to site a probation office next door to the Ivy Lane primary school. My constituents are very concerned about the consequences of doing so.

The petition states:

The Petition of The Friends of Ivy Lane School, Chippenham

Declares that proposals by Wiltshire Probation Service to use an office building immediately adjacent to Ivy Lane Primary School are not in keeping with their statutory duty to protect the public.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons prevents Wiltshire Probation Service from using the Ivy Road site immediately adjacent to Ivy Lane Primary School.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Law and Order (Hertfordshire)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Gillian Merron.]*

7.59 pm

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): There are few, if any, subjects more important to my constituents and the residents of Hertfordshire, and many other parts of the country, than the maintenance of law and order. I am pleased to have this opportunity to express what I perceive to be my constituents' serious and growing concern on the issue, which is also felt in many other parts of Hertfordshire.

I wish to make it clear that in my remarks I make no criticism of the Hertfordshire police force or the Hertfordshire police authority. They do a good job in often difficult circumstances and I pay tribute to the way in which senior officers are prepared to respond to the concerns of the community. I recognise the strenuous efforts that they have made to tackle the difficult problem of recruitment and retention of police officers in Hertfordshire, and I pay tribute to the dedication of individual police officers of all ranks in the area. I make no criticism of the Hertfordshire force: indeed, I look for more support for it. I am sure that the force and my constituents would welcome such support.

According to the most recent figures supplied to me in a written answer on 12 February, the total crime figure for Hertfordshire is rising. Total crime has risen in the two years for which like-for-like comparisons can be made, after taking into account boundary changes and revised counting rules. There have been particularly worrying increases in offences of robbery and burglary, the second of which I still regard as a serious offence, whatever others may feel.

While crime has gone up in Hertfordshire, the thin blue line has been stretched thinner. Ministers seem to be unaware of the true picture of the number of police in Hertfordshire. In the recent debate on police funding, the Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community Safety, who will reply to this debate, told us that Hertfordshire Members should acknowledge that

> "in March 1997 there were 1,759 police officers in Hertfordshire, whereas in March last year there were 1,825—so the policies introduced by the Government have led to an increase in the number of police officers in Hertfordshire."—[*Official Report*, 5 February 2003; Vol. 399, c. 308.]

That statement unfortunately overlooks the fact that in April 2000 the area served by the Hertfordshire constabulary grew by a fifth when areas formerly policed by the Metropolitan force, including the whole of my Hertsmere constituency and other places, were added to Hertfordshire. Since then, the picture for police numbers in Hertfordshire in general, and for Hertsmere in particular, has not been as rosy as Ministers apparently believe, although I stress that that is no fault of the Hertfordshire force.

According to another parliamentary answer that I received on 5 February, the police strength of the Hertfordshire force stood at 1,954 on 31 January 2001. According to that same answer, the figure had gone down to 1,825 by March 2002. That was the figure given by the Minister in the debate to which I referred earlier, and was lower than that for a year earlier. Since then, there has been some recovery. According to figures supplied by the Hertfordshire police force, police strength stood at 1,946 at the end of last month. Although that is an improvement on the figure given by the Minister, it is still lower than the figure two years ago and must also be set against the substantially increased responsibilities of the Hertfordshire force.

As I pointed out, the position for Hertsmere appears to be starker still. The figures supplied by the Hertfordshire force show that in Hertsmere the thin blue line is being stretched very thin indeed. Two years ago, Hertsmere was policed by 36 officers from the Hertfordshire force and 97 officers on secondment from the Metropolitan force while the transfer was taking effect. Two years ago, Hertsmere was policed by a total of 133 officers. One year ago, the total number of officers serving Hertsmere was 116. Today, I am told that the total number of officers is 108—all from the Hertfordshire force—down from 133, which is a reduction of almost 20 per cent.

Mr. Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford): I share my hon. Friend's concern about the overall loss. Is he aware that in Bishop's Stortford in my constituency there is a parallel problem? Many officers have been drawn across to serve the new area and the result, on which he may want to comment, is that in Bishop's Stortford—a town of 31,000 people—the average shift on a Friday evening can be as few as seven officers.

Mr. Clappison: My hon. Friend makes a good point. I am sure that his constituents in Bishop's Stortford will be rightly concerned about that problem. The position that he describes is not the fault of the Hertfordshire force, which has done its best to spread officers throughout the whole area. However, the increased responsibilities for the force, of which the Minister seems unaware, have meant that officers have been taken from other parts of the county in order to police the new areas, such as Hertsmere, that have come under Hertfordshire.

Mr. Richard Page (South-West Hertfordshire): I congratulate my hon. Friend on obtaining the debate. In fact, there are plenty of police officers in Hertfordshire—we are knee-deep in them. The problem is that they go to work in London because they get thousands of pounds more, as well as support for travel and other things, so my constituency, like those of my hon. Friends in Hertfordshire, is short of policemen. Until the Government address that problem we shall not have enough officers. Is my hon. Friend aware that in a recent survey conducted in my constituency crime was the No. 1 concern?

Mr. Clappison: My hon. Friend is right. The situation is similar in my constituency. Many police officers live in Hertsmere, but many of them commute to London to serve in the Metropolitan force.

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire): Does my hon. Friend agree that in the north-eastern corner of the county the situation is the same? The force is spread very thin indeed. In small rural communities such as Buntingford and Royston, there is genuine concern that there is no longer the visible police presence that is needed to maintain law and order.

Mr. Clappison: My hon. Friend's constituents and mine may be suffering from the same problem—a rising

[Mr. Clappison]

tide of antisocial behaviour. They want to see more officers on the streets. They know that the Hertfordshire force is doing its best to provide those officers, but that it suffers from funding constraints and the relativity problem in respect of London. They have problems in recruiting and retaining enough officers. I shall deal with that important point later.

I am sure that my hon. Friends share my concern and that of other people in Hertfordshire, including my local authority, about the settlement under the Government's new funding arrangements. The problems that we have been describing are hardly likely to be solved by the new arrangements.

There have been questions about the communications between the Hertfordshire police authority and the Government. The Minister may be able to clear up some of the issues this evening. However, the police authority leaves me in no doubt as to the strength of its concern about the funding settlement. On 6 December, the chairman of the police authority and the chief constable wrote to me about the present settlement. They said:

> "We are sure . . . that you will share our extreme disappointment and concern at the funding levels announced yesterday . . . it is transparent that Hertfordshire will need to find at least £5 million from Council Tax just to maintain the current level of policing services."

On 20 December the same two gentlemen wrote to me again to confirm the analysis of

> "a very difficult funding situation",

and to point out that council tax payers faced big increases. Since then, we have discovered that Hertfordshire council tax payers face an increase of 21 per cent. in the council tax element for policing simply in order to deliver the same standard of service. They are being asked to pay more to uphold the forces of law and order in Hertfordshire. At the same time, they are suffering from the problems that I have described.

On 23 January, the leaders of all three parties in Hertsmere borough council wrote to the Home Secretary to express their concerns about the constraints on Hertfordshire police. They acknowledged the work of the Hertfordshire constabulary in seeking to provide an effective service with a limited number of men. I will quote their letter to the Minister to show the Hertsmere point of view on policing and police resources. It said that they wanted to

> "voice the strength of our feelings regarding the inadequate level of policing in our Borough. Our residents tell us that crime and disorder is a priority issue for them. Sadly, there is a widespread lack of confidence in the ability of the police to respond speedily to 999 calls or to provide a sufficient presence on the streets to deter crime and anti-social behaviour."

Those council group leaders, from the three political parties, are certainly in touch with local opinion in Hertsmere; and it sounds as if they are in touch with local opinion in the rest of Hertfordshire. They are right. Local residents are concerned about crime and a rising tide of antisocial behaviour.

As the Member of Parliament for Hertsmere, I am besieged by the complaints of constituents in different communities in the constituency. For example, two weeks ago I attended a meeting of concerned residents in Farriers way in Boreham Wood, who were addressing the problems of antisocial behaviour caused by youths, as well as responding to a murder inquiry that arose out of the death of a local man in tragic and appalling circumstances. I pay tribute to the courageous and public-spirited way in which local councillors and residents are facing up to such issues in Boreham Wood.

Three weeks ago, I attended a meeting at a synagogue in Bushy. The meeting was called as result of an incident in Bushy Heath on a Friday night not long before, when a small group of boys who were making their way home from Friday evening prayers were set upon by a much larger group of youths and abused in a very unpleasant way. That incident seems to be part of a pattern of antisocial behaviour in Bushy Heath, with youths roaming around and abusing shopkeepers and members of the public. On one occasion, the local vicar was prompted to call for police assistance after abuse was hurled at his parishioners as they made their way into church.

Similar stories of antisocial behaviour were ventilated at another public meeting that I attended in a different part of Bushy—the Hertford road area. Again I pay tribute to the members of the public and the councillors of all parties who are trying to tackle such problems. Likewise, in Potters Bar, I have been contacted by members of the public who are worried by crime and antisocial behaviour in different parts of the town. Among other things, they are worried by recent thefts and robberies from shops in the town. I have also met one group of residents who were worried by the prevalence of robberies of individuals and their families in their own homes. I believe that "aggravated burglary" is the correct term. It is a despicable crime when somebody's home is invaded by desperate men and the householder and his family are set upon and their property stolen. It is a serious offence that should be distinguished from the generality of burglaries. It has left a group of my constituents living in some fear.

My constituents as a whole are deeply concerned by what they perceive to be a serious and growing problem. I hope that the Minister will acknowledge their well-founded concerns and respond to them. One way in which the Government could begin to respond—and my hon. Friends have anticipated this point in their interventions—would be by reconsidering the pay and differentials that make it much easier for the Metropolitan police to recruit than it is for the Hertfordshire force. That point is made by the Hertsmere group leaders in the letter to which I have already referred. I accept that the Government have partly addressed the issue with the introduction two years ago of a new allowance of £2,000 for forces in the south-east. However, the fact remains that Metropolitan police officers still receive an additional £4,000, as well as generous travel concessions. The difference between the forces is significant and it is widely believed to disadvantage Hertfordshire. As the group leaders say in their letter to the Minister:

> "Until something is done to address the marked pay inequality between the two forces, it seems likely that there will always be a high percentage of vacancies in our local force. We would therefore urge you to address this issue as a priority and thus demonstrate your commitment to community safety."

Mr. Page: I apologise for having to leave: I have to address a meeting in a few short moments over in

Parliament street. Will my hon. Friend consider the role of the specials? They put in a great number of hours in Hertfordshire. I believe that it is policing on the cheap, but it is a good recruiting source for the police force. Perhaps the Minister, when he responds to my hon. Friend, will tell us what he intends to do to encourage more people to become specials. There are many already in Hertfordshire, but we could encourage more volunteers, and therefore get a cadre from which to strengthen the numbers in our police force.

Mr. Clappison: My hon. Friend makes an important point and I am sure that the Minister will want to address it. We would all, on behalf of our constituents, want the Government to take a constructive approach towards special constables, who undoubtedly have an important role.

There is a problem with full-time police officers. I have already explained Hertfordshire's disadvantages when it comes to recruiting officers, but the same issues of pay and conditions create problems in retaining those officers. Hertfordshire constabulary has written to me about a growing concern

> "at the rising number of experienced officers who are leaving the Constabulary—either for the Metropolitan Police Service who are allowed to pay higher allowances or to parts of the country where the cost of housing is cheaper."

The letter continues:

> "The continued loss of experienced staff is debilitating and compromises our ability to provide the services we want our public to receive".

Although many excellent people are joining the police force, it is a fact that the proportion of officers who are probationary staff is increasing. That may be a result of the loss of those experienced officers.

The Hertfordshire force faces serious problems. I believe that the police authority and the constabulary are facing up to those problems, but they need more help than they are receiving at the moment if they are to be successful. They need more support, and I look to the Minister for a constructive response to the problems of law and order that the constabulary faces.

We know that the inner cities and the great metropolitan areas have problems with law and order, but communities in Hertfordshire and other shire counties have problems as well. In many cases, those problems are getting worse. Leave those problems to fester and our constituents will pay a heavy price. We need the Minister to acknowledge the depth of concern in those communities and to make at least a start in addressing them.

8.17 pm

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire): I will say a few words, as we have time available. I start by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) on obtaining this Adjournment debate. It could not be more timely, as the effects of the settlement from the Government become known.

My hon. Friend the Member for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page) mentioned the specials. On Saturday, I was in Royston with the specials, trying to advertise the work that they do as part of "specials week". I pay tribute to the eight officers in Royston and district who do such a fantastic job in supporting the regular officers. They enable operations such as the bike marking that I saw on Saturday, and they allow patrols on the streets of Royston, Baldock and Letchworth to take place. Without the specials, it would be a sorry picture. They help to provide a much more visible police presence than would be possible if we were to rely solely on the regular officers.

In the paper this week, I noticed that the leader of the Labour group on North Hertfordshire district council—Councillor David Kearns—was outlining his concerns about antisocial behaviour in the Grange estate in Letchworth. Elsewhere in the constituency—in Royston and Baldock—concerns are regularly expressed to me about antisocial behaviour. Recently, in Buntingford, the deputy manager of the Co-op was assaulted when he refused to serve alcohol to youngsters. His mother attended my surgery on Friday to express how worried she was that a small market town such as Buntingford suffered from such incidents. She expressed concerns about law and order and the behaviour of young people, and made the point that there is not an adequate police presence in our area.

I have the highest regard for our local constabulary. I have spoken to Chief Superintendent Andy Wright about the incident over the new year in which Mr. Llewellyn was assaulted. The chief superintendent is doing his best, with extra patrols, to try to reinforce the sense of public safety and order in Buntingford. However, such problems are not new: during the past four or five years, I have received regular complaints about the lack of officers in that rural division of Hertfordshire. It is not good enough that we have such vacancy levels, which are not caused by a lack of recruitment; retention is the real problem in Hertfordshire.

I have made the point to Ministers over and again that, because of the railway or the good transport links that we have with London, officers live in Hertfordshire and work for the Metropolitan police in London. Many officers go over the border into the Met area because of the incentive to do so—the extra £6,000 makes such a difference.

I should also like to point out that rural areas are often discounted. It is often said that they are very safe and that the area that I am talking about is the safest part of one of the safest counties, but when burglaries occur in remote rural areas, the feeling of vulnerability is extreme for those who live there. They are a long way from help; it is not like the situation in a town, which is bad enough. Burglary is a very serious invasion of privacy, but it is really very worrying in rural areas.

Mr. Prisk: I am sure that my hon. Friend will be familiar with the village of Hunsden, which is further south in east Hertfordshire, and those who live there share that sense of vulnerability. Every week for the past six months, the parish council has reported to me different incidents, some involving people coming from Harlow. That sense of vulnerability is underscored by the fact that the elderly often suffer the most.

Mr. Heald: It is particularly sad that elderly people, many of whom have been through the conflicts of the 20th century and survived, should now be worrying,

[Mr. Heald]

in their 80s and 90s, about going out of the door early in the evening. The only way to tackle that is with a combination of the sort of targeted, intelligence-led policing that I am sure the Minister supports. Of course we need that, but we also need an adequate, visible police presence on the streets. The fact is that Hertfordshire is 200 special constables short. I did my bit to try to recruit a few more, but we could do with more. We have often been 200 regular officers short. Although figures are given for the police force's strength, we are always down on those figures because we lose officers at such a rate.

We in North-East Hertfordshire face another particularly rural problem: illegal hare coursing. Gangs of up 50 men have often come up to the area in the past to gamble on illegal hare coursing, which creates huge public order problems. Policing something like that takes a large number of officers. After a campaign in the early 1990s, it was possible to put much more police effort into tackling illegal hare coursing in the Royston and Buntingford area, and the problem pretty well subsided. However, in the past year or so, there have been about 90 incidents involving illegal hare coursing and it is becoming more of a problem.

Those policing illegal hare coursing need four-wheel drive vehicles, as well as a considerable number of officers skilled in dealing with what is a difficult public order problem. When working against a background where recruitment and retention is difficult, the officers coming through are still new and learning what they should do, and where resources are thinly stretched because there are not enough officers in the county and because the Government have provided a hopelessly inadequate settlement, it becomes difficult to deal with some of those peculiar rural problems, such as illegal hare coursing.

I should like to end my speech by saying how much I support my hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere in raising this issue, by paying tribute to the work of the chief constable, Paul Acres, and the chairman of the police authority, Peter Holland, who is about to retire after many years excellent service in that role and by telling the Minister that it is sometimes necessary, even in a peaceable county like Hertfordshire, to have enough money to do the job properly, and we really did not get what we needed in the latest police settlement.

8.25 pm

The Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community Safety (Mr. John Denham): I congratulate the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) on securing a debate, not for the first time, on crime and policing issues in his constituency and the other hon. Members who have spoken on taking the opportunity of slightly less pressure on parliamentary time than normal to contribute to the debate. Some very important issues have been raised, and I shall try to address as many of them as possible.

It is always important in such debates, without any suggestion of complacency, to put the overall crime picture into context. The best measure that we have of crime in this country comes from the British crime survey, which shows that overall levels of crime have fallen by some 27 per cent. since 1997, including significant falls in vehicle crime, burglary and so on. In fact, according to the BCS, the chance of being the victim of crime is at its lowest level since the survey began under the previous Government in the early 1980s.

Those figures are generally regarded as being more reliable because they do not require individuals to report the crime to the police or, indeed, for the police to have recorded it. Recorded-crime figures need to be followed carefully—particularly at police force level, as the BCS has insufficient coverage to give force-by-force data—but we need to be a little cautious about drawing to much from the month-by-month or year-by-year recorded crime figures at force level, not least when forces have been introducing new crime recording standards.

To say all that is, yes, to undercut the idea that crime is running out of control across the country—there is no evidence that it is. There is rising public concern about certain types of crime, such as street robbery and antisocial behaviour, which the hon. Member for Hertsmere mentioned, and we have worked very hard to get on top of them. Having said all that and put things in context, of course we are committed to continuing our efforts to reduce crime, which must include Hertfordshire, Hertsmere and every other community.

I am glad that the hon. Member for Hertsmere paid tribute to the Hertfordshire constabulary, and he will have been pleased—as will the chief constable and the members of his force—when we published the police performance monitors for the first time last week. Although they do not cover everything, they give a rounded assessment of police performance. Hertfordshire was compared, as it should be, with the most similar police forces: Suffolk, Sussex, Thames Valley, Kent and Avon and Somerset, all of which contain a mixture of urban areas, deprived community problems and rural communities that may have both prosperous and deprived areas. Hertfordshire did very well in comparison with its most similar forces. It had higher levels of crime detection and offenders brought to justice and lower levels of crimes such as robbery, vehicle crime and burglary, as well as somewhat higher levels of citizen satisfaction with the police. I therefore think that it is worth building on what the hon. Gentleman said to congratulate Hertfordshire on what it has done. Some specific issues remain, however, with which we need to deal.

First, in relation to the overall picture on resources, the casual listener to the debate might have got the impression that the Government had set out to starve the police service in England and Wales of resources. The reality is that, in the past three years, including the new financial year, the overall funding increases for the police service have been 6.2 per cent., 7 per cent. and 10 per cent. The increase in cash terms in funding over the spending review period will be 16 per cent. That is why, across the country as whole, we have record numbers of police officers, and we have a target to reach 132,500 in 2004. There are particular issues in Hertfordshire, to which I shall refer, but that is clearly evidence that the investment that we have been making in the police service is making a direct difference in police numbers.

The hon. Gentleman is right that examining the pattern in Hertfordshire over recent years is made more complex by the fact that his constituency used to be covered by the Metropolitan police service and others, it was transferred into Hertfordshire, and a secondment took place of officers from the Metropolitan police to Hertfordshire, many of whom have now made their way back to the Met. I entirely accept that, but let me say two things. First, Hertfordshire has not been immune from the benefits of the increased Government investment in the police service over the past couple of years, in which numbers have been rising. Hertfordshire has a particularly impressive record on recruitment—I shall refer to retention in a moment. In the April-December period 2002, 223 officers were recruited, and the force plans to recruit another 60 officers in the January-March period this year. That would give recruitment figures for 2002–03, if achieved, of 283, compared with 183 officers recruited in 2001–02. That is a significant achievement by the Hertfordshire police force.

I understand that Hertsmere is now part of the central area basic command unit in Hertfordshire. On 31 March 2002, the basic command unit had 481 officers. That represents an increase of 61 in comparison with the number deployed on 1 July 2001 in the three divisions that now form the central BCU. The hon. Gentleman quoted figures that were possibly slightly more localised than those that I have just quoted. We can probably sort out the matter in correspondence afterwards—I do not have the figures that he quoted. My point, however, is that the number of officers available to serve his part of Hertfordshire has increased over that period.

Mr. Clappison: I am listening carefully to the Minister's points. I will have to examine figures for the central division, but the figures that I gave were for Hertsmere and were supplied to me by the Hertfordshire constabulary. The Minister referred a moment ago to rising police numbers in Hertfordshire as a whole. The figures that I quoted in debate came from a written answer that he gave to me, which showed that police strength had fallen in Hertfordshire from 1,954 on 31 January 2001 to 1,825 in March 2002. I gave some further figures showing that there had been a slight increase since then but, even taking account of the increase to which I referred, the figure is still lower than it was two years ago.

Mr. Denham: As the hon. Gentleman said—I do not want to mislead him on this matter—there has been an upturn in those numbers. I am happy to accept that because of the boundary changes, the secondment of officers, their return to the Metropolitan police and so on, the benefit of the overall increase in police numbers has come later in the day and is showing up much later in the figures than has been the case in other parts of the country, many of whose police forces can track increased numbers over a three-year period and have achieved record numbers within the past year or so.

Mr. Clappison: I was very careful in my remarks to take account of the changes in secondment. My figures were on a like-for-like basis since the transfer took place. On that basis, there are fewer police officers in Hertfordshire today than there were two years ago.

Mr. Denham: I do not think that we disagree about that. It is primarily the return of seconded police officers to the Metropolitan police service that gives Hertfordshire a lower base from which to start. Any increase in numbers now builds on that.

Mr. Heald: Of course, we receive regular updates from the chief constable and the chairman of the police authority. They say to us, "Yes, we've done much better on recruitment, but, sadly, it hasn't made any difference because we've lost so many officers on the retention side of the equation." That is the problem about which we are all very concerned.

Mr. Denham: Indeed, that is the problem to which I now wish to turn. The debate has covered the difficulties in retaining officers which Hertfordshire undoubtedly faces. Recruitment has been quite impressive, particularly for a force of that size.

The Met offers a higher salary. A few years ago, the situation was reversed. The Met was finding it extremely difficult to recruit and retain officers. It is important to sustain numbers in the capital, not least because one of the areas of growth in London is in the strength of the counter-terrorism service, which, as hon. Members know, the Met effectively provides to the country as a whole. The solution is not as simple as removing the differential; we have to tackle the problem from a number of different directions.

As hon. Members have acknowledged, there is an additional allowance for officers in the forces immediately outside London who are not in receipt of the housing allowance. Hertfordshire gets the higher of those allowances, which is £2,000. In my area of Hampshire, the allowance is £1,000. We already have 1,112 places on the starter home initiative in the south-east. We are discussing a number of options with forces just outside London, including Hertfordshire. Peter Holland, the chairman of the police authority, who was mentioned earlier, and Paul Acres, the chief constable, have taken part in meetings with me about that issue.

We are considering ways in which the Government can put their weight behind attempts to secure better transport deals, although we are advised by the forces that those need to be localised. We are looking to introduce special priority payments, which will be worth 1 per cent. of the pay bill this year, rising to 2 per cent. in a couple of years. Those will work with forces in two ways. First, they will make sure that there is no competitive bidding between London and the south-east forces, and secondly, they will try to achieve the maximum effect on retention. We are considering whether we can give greater assistance with housing, building on what we have done in the past. I hope that on at least one of those initiatives I will be able to make an announcement in the very near future that will be of benefit to forces in the south-east.

We are considering also whether we can make recruitment from the south-east to other parts of the country less attractive. It would be wrong to think that all movement is from outer London forces into the Metropolitan police service area. There is clearly some movement from the south-east to other parts of the country.

Mr. Prisk: May I impress upon the Minister the fact that many officers tell me that what concerns them is

[Mr. Prisk]

cash in hand? The remaining £4,000 gap between the Metropolitan force and the Hertfordshire force is of concern, and many officers in my constituency find that they are policing Metropolitan officers who live in the area when Hertfordshire officers cannot afford to do so. Police officers are looking for cash, and another £2,000 may close the gap without causing the problems in the Metropolitan force to which the Minister refers.

Mr. Denham: I always listen with interest to Conservative Members. I recall that when the Conservatives were in power, police numbers were falling and there were huge problems in the Met because most of the current allowances and the transport assistance did not exist, and nor did the current regional allowances. I should be interested to know whether the Conservatives are saying that they would simply pay extra allowances.

Even if money and total resources were not an issue, simply closing the differential, with the possible effect of moving the cliff edge further from London or creating a crisis in the Metropolitan police service, is not the best way to address the issue. However, one obviously understands why officers say what they do. We are tackling a range of pay, housing and other issues with the south-east forces to see how we can maximise the impact on retention, and I believe that we can make worthwhile moves this year.

I am grateful for the comments made by the hon. Members for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page) and for North-East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald) about national specials weekend. I wrote to all right hon. and hon. Members about that, and I know that the hon. Gentleman took part in promoting that weekend, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Watford (Claire Ward). I took part in a promotion for the specials in Hampshire. We can do much over the next couple of years to promote the special constabulary as a key component of the policing service and a complement to full-time professional police officers. Numbers have suffered in the past two or three years, ironically partly because of the rapid expansion of police service recruitment. A significant number of specials who joined as a precursor to taking up a full-time career in the police service have moved across. We need to rebuild those numbers.

On Hertfordshire's funding, I mentioned the headline level of police funding, which will increase by 6.2 per cent. going into the next financial year. The police grant is somewhat below that figure and Hertfordshire's share of the increase is 3 per cent., which is below the average of [illegible] per cent. We operate a funding formula that was developed under the last Government and from which we phased out the establishment figure. It is based largely on policing activity. In our review of funding formula, we did not introduce the option of a deprivation component, as Hertfordshire police authority urged us not to do. We have ensured that forces like Hertfordshire are protected by having a floor on the level of increase received by any particular authority. Importantly, the money received through the police grant is only part of the resources available to the police authority. In Hertfordshire's case, the police authority will receive up to £3.14 million next year from the crime fighting fund, which is over and above the 3 per cent. increase. That money goes directly on the costs of recruiting, paying and retaining police officers and translates into a direct level of service to the people of Hertfordshire.

The police authority will also receive £290,000 to help it move ahead with the implementation of the Airwave radio communication system. That is a significant investment in more modern and effective communications technology. Hertfordshire will receive just over £500,000 from the basic command unit fund, which will strengthen the ability of BCU commanders to work with local authorities on the implementation of crime reduction strategies. The force will also receive £1.74 million in capital funding. Those sums do not include additional funding for the DNA programme, the money made available for special priority payments or any money that Hertfordshire might get this coming year from the premises improvement fund, from which it received £1 million last year. It is important to stress that the grant to Hertfordshire is not just the money covered by the 3 per cent. increase in funding.

Mr. Prisk: Those sums are obviously welcome, but council tax payers know that they have to pay 21 per cent. more to get the same service. Does the Minister understand their frustration?

Mr. Denham: It is the hon. Gentleman's judgment that the service will remain unchanged. I hope that police numbers will increase and there may well be investment in other aspects of the service. It is ultimately the decision of the police authority what precept they wish to levy after consulting local people. The reality is that the increases received by the police service over the past three years compare well with levels historically. That is why the police service as a whole has a record number of officers and why the number continues to improve.

I have put the debate in the context of overall crime figures, which have decreased in the past few years. None of us is complacent, however, especially about particular crimes. Hertfordshire police force has a good performance record compared with similar forces, but there are issues about its history, the transfer of officers back to the Met and retention. We have acknowledged those and are working with the force in the hope that we can assist it to deal with those in the coming year.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at sixteen minutes to Nine o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 25 February 2003

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

The Secretary of State was asked—

Zimbabwe

1. **Mr. Harold Best** (Leeds, North-West): If he will make a statement about the situation in Zimbabwe. [98782]

5. **Mr. Bob Blizzard** (Waveney): What action he is taking regarding human rights abuses by the Government of Zimbabwe. [98786]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mike O'Brien): The situation in Zimbabwe continues to deteriorate. The leader of the opposition is on trial for treason. Arrests and torture of those opposed to President Mugabe's regime continue unabated. The economy is in crisis: unemployment is at over 70 per cent., inflation is above 200 per cent., the currency is in free fall, there is a critical shortage of foreign exchange, and more than 7 million Zimbabweans now need emergency food aid. We are doing what we can to feed the population: Britain is the largest governmental donor to the humanitarian programme. Our aim remains a democratic, prosperous and stable Zimbabwe, under a Government of its people's choosing.

Mr. Best: I share my hon. Friend's concern about the catalogue of disasters that have befallen the Zimbabwe people; but does he share the pleasure that I felt on observing the bravery of two cricketers from Zimbabwe who wore black armbands to demonstrate their solidarity with the people?

Mr. O'Brien: I do share my hon. Friend's admiration—and, I think, that of all Members—for the two Zimbabwean cricketers who stood up to the Mugabe regime and in their own way, quietly expressed their abhorrence of the behaviour that the Government are causing in the countries to which they belong. They were an example to everyone.

Mr. Blizzard: Although our own cricketers were understandably concerned about their own safety in the event of their playing in Harare, I think it was clear from the comments of many of them, particularly the captain, that they also took a moral position. Will my hon. Friend join me in congratulating those cricketers on showing that they were not willing to compromise their own position or to compromise with Mugabe?

Is not one of the big problems in dealing with Zimbabwe the fact that South Africa sees the position rather differently? What discussions is my hon. Friend having with South Africa to enable it to see what we can see, and what President Mbeki does not seem willing or able to see?

Mr. O'Brien: I agree that the England cricketers were very uncomfortable about the prospect of playing a game of cricket in Zimbabwe in the circumstances in which the Zimbabwe people find themselves under the Mugabe regime. We have been trying to work with a number of countries, including South Africa, to bring about an international understanding that that regime is unacceptable, and is making its people's lives a misery. Only if South Africa, the Commonwealth countries and indeed the European Union recognise the abhorrent nature of the regime and try to change it can we give the opposition in Zimbabwe the support—both political and other support—that it requires.

Mr. Andrew Mackay (Bracknell): Many of us strongly support the comment by the Secretary of State for International Development that a tacky deal was done with the French on Zimbabwe. Will the Minister assure us that we have told our French allies, in the strongest possible terms, that their action in allowing Mugabe to come to Paris last week has totally undermined the west's condemnation of the human rights abuses in Zimbabwe?

Mr. O'Brien: President Mugabe's visit to Paris certainly constituted a sad day for France. It was deeply regrettable. On the positive side, however, it produced a robust condemnation of President Mugabe in *Le Monde* and other French newspapers. I think that that brought home to many French people the detestable nature of the Mugabe regime.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): What precisely have the Government done in the last two months to put pressure on the evil tyrant Mugabe? Following last week's disgraceful scenes in Paris, will the Foreign Secretary be summoning the French ambassador to tell him that the actions of the President of France are held in utter contempt by Members in all parts of the House of Commons?

Mr. O'Brien: On 18 February we agreed, through the European Union, to extend the ban on travel. Unfortunately the ban was interrupted for four days, between 14 and 18 February. We regret that, and we regret that President Mugabe was able to visit Paris; but we managed to ensure a continuation of the ban from 18 February, which was a result of the efforts of the

British Government—working with others—to convey the message that as far as we are concerned, Robert Mugabe's Government are unacceptable.

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): My hon. Friend referred to the courageous action of Henry Olonga and Andy Flower in standing up to bemoan the death of democracy in Zimbabwe, and the Government have already shown support for their stand. However, as both are Commonwealth citizens, will the Government consider honouring them in a specific way, to show that we really do want to see change in Zimbabwe?

Mr. O'Brien: My hon. Friend makes a very good suggestion, and I shall take that idea away with me. We are certainly prepared to consider any similar suggestions from other Members, and as I have said, those two cricketers are an example to us all.

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): Given President Chirac's contemptible demolition of the EU travel sanctions as he danced attendance on Mugabe in Paris last week, and given the almost certain failure of the Commonwealth to renew Zimbabwe's suspension, is not the Government's policy on Mugabe now in tatters? Why will they not show the same moral outrage and determination in relation to human rights abuses in Zimbabwe that has been shown in relation to those in other parts of the world, and mobilise the international community—if necessary, through the United Nations—to bring about fresh elections in Zimbabwe, and to end this brutal human tragedy? When will they understand that they can no longer pass by on the other side?

Mr. O'Brien: In the real world, Zimbabwe is a sovereign country, and the sad reality is that if a regime is determined to destroy its own country and its own people, there is a limit to what the international community can do. However, the international community is making clear to the Zimbabwean Government the effects of their policies, and we have made it very clear that the Zimbabwean Government are behaving in way that is totally abhorrent to us. Through the Commonwealth, through the European Union and through our contacts with other countries, we have made plain our detestation of that Government, and we are continuing to apply as much pressure as we can to ensure that that message goes out throughout the whole of the international community.

Gibraltar

2. **Mr. Andrew Rosindell** (Romford): What assessment he has made of the outcome of the referendum held by the Government of Gibraltar on 7 November 2002. [98783]

The Minister for Europe (Mr. Denis MacShane): We have taken note of the outcome. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister told the House on 18 November last year, we have always been clear that no deal will be imposed on the people of Gibraltar against their will.

Mr. Rosindell: The Minister will know by now just how proud the people of Gibraltar are of being British, and who can blame them? Bearing in mind what I have just said, has the Minister had time to study the recent United Nations press release, in which it recommends that the decolonisation of such territories should include the option of integration? Does he agree with the United Nations, or not?

Mr. MacShane: The hon. Gentleman, who is an expert on this matter, poses an important technical question. Gibraltar is an overseas territory with considerable devolved powers of self-government. We do of course support the principle and the right of self-determination, but it must be exercised in accordance with the UN charter, and with other treaty obligations. In Gibraltar's case, as the hon. Gentleman knows, that includes the treaty of Utrecht.

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley): It is clear that everybody recognises the voice of Gibraltar through the referendum, and their overwhelming support for remaining British citizens. Will my hon. Friend now look forward to helping to celebrate 300 years of British sovereignty of Gibraltar next year?

Mr. MacShane: As an historian, I find that the idea of celebrating the 300th anniversary of the treaty of Utrecht has considerable appeal. However, we should perhaps note that, at the moment, Spain is standing shoulder to shoulder with the people of Britain over the great question of Iraq. I hope that the patriotic people of Gibraltar will welcome the fact that currently, we have a very strong ally on the big issue that confronts us all.

Mr. Richard Spring (West Suffolk): I remind the hon. Gentleman that the referendum, far from being eccentric, was judged to be fair and open. Will he take this opportunity to reflect on the bullying, arrogance and inaccuracies that have been characteristic of Ministers on this issue? I invite him to apologise now to the people of Gibraltar, whose only cardinal sin in the eyes of this Government is simply to want to remain British.

Mr. MacShane: I have been accused of many things since I became Minister for Europe, but being a bully is not yet one of them. The hon. Gentleman is an expert on being arrogant. I am happy to repeat what has been said again and again at this Dispatch Box—as long as I am Minister for Europe, it will be the people of Gibraltar who will decide their future. That is the position of the Government. It was the position in the past, it is the position now and it will be the position in the future.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): Do not the people of Gibraltar, especially the 98.97 per cent. who voted as they did, have an inalienable right to self-determination? Has not the treaty of Utrecht been overtaken by concepts of international law and are not the secret Anglo-Spanish talks in breach of international law?

Mr. MacShane: There are no secret talks in which I have taken part. The treaty of Utrecht remains valid under international law—pacta sunt servanda, to use the Latin phrase. That means that we obey international law. I would not want to be a member of a Government who tore up international law just because it suited some people.

Iraq

3. **Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington): What recent discussions he has had with EU partners about Iraq. [98784]

4. **Annabelle Ewing** (Perth): What the Government's policy is on Iraq; and if he will make a statement. [98785]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): I have had frequent discussions with my EU counterparts on Iraq, including yesterday at the General Affairs and External Relations Council. Our policy is to ensure that Iraq complies with its obligations under relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions. Resolution 1441, which served notice on Iraq that it must now give up its weapons of mass destruction or face serious consequences, is strongly supported by the EU and the international community as a whole. The United Kingdom, Spain and the United States yesterday jointly tabled a draft second resolution in New York and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will make a statement about that at 12.30 pm today. The House will also wish to know that I have presented to the House today, for the convenience of right hon. and hon. Members, a Command Paper containing relevant diplomatic documents relating to Iraq, including the main inspectors' reports, statements to the Security Council and 13 of the—

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): Who wrote it?

Mr. Boris Johnson (Henley): Was it a PhD?

Mr. Straw: It was written principally by the Security Council—and I think most of them have PhDs. It contains 13 of the main Security Council resolutions.

Tom Brake: I thank the Foreign Secretary for his response. In his discussions, did he confirm that the UK and the US would uphold international humanitarian law, which precludes the use of cluster bombs and attacks on water and electrical infrastructure? Did he also confirm the role that the UK and the US would play in rebuilding Iraq after a conflict and establishing democratic government there?

Mr. Straw: We have always made it clear that we will act strictly in accordance with all aspects of international law. The reason we are so focused on Iraq at the moment is to require it to meet its clear obligations under international law. If right hon. and hon. Members are unconvinced about the need for us to take firm action on Iraq, I urge them to read the 13 separate Security Council resolutions, which chart the obligations on Iraq, the threat posed by it and the fact that, year by year, its defiance of the UN has become greater. At the European Council yesterday we did not discuss humanitarian relief if military action takes place, but that is the subject of intensive discussions, not least with the Secretary-General of the United Nations

Annabelle Ewing: What is the Foreign Secretary's knowledge of the reported attempts by the US Government to bully, bribe and blackmail members of the Security Council into supporting the new US-UK draft resolution? Do those activities form part of the Government's moral case for war against Iraq?

Mr. Straw: My knowledge of such activities is zero. All members of the Security Council seek support for their positions, but I hope very much that they will all recognise that, after the decisions of 8 November, Iraq has been, and remains, in material breach of a string of very clear obligations that have been imposed on it. It has had a final opportunity to deal with those violations of international law but continues to pose the clearest possible threat to international peace and security through its possession of weapons of mass destruction and long-range missiles, and its defiance of international law. I hope that the whole of the international community will recognise the responsibilities borne by it and by individual members of the Security Council to ensure that international law means what it says. I still hope that we can gain enforcement by peaceful means but, if we cannot, the serious consequences that we spelled out in operative paragraph 13 of resolution 1441 will have to follow through.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): Is my right hon. Friend aware that, when I ask the spokesmen for the Scottish National and Liberal Democrat parties what credible alternative they have for dealing with Saddam Hussein and his weapons of mass destruction, they do not have an answer? *[Interruption.]* That is why they are shouting. Is not it clear that their approach is irresponsible opportunism—not for the first time—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not think that the Foreign Secretary will have an answer.

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): Does my right hon. Friend share my concern at reports in last weekend's press that, because Germany did not support this country's stance with regard to military action in Iraq, the US was threatening to withdraw troops from that country, with all the economic consequences that would ensue? Does my right hon. Friend support America in that?

Mr. Straw: There have been some sharp exchanges between individuals in Germany and in the US. I regret the nature of those exchanges on both sides, and believe that we all have to acknowledge our overwhelming responsibilities to act in a diplomatic way and to continue to search very hard, even at this stage, for a peaceful and diplomatic solution to the crisis.

Mr. Michael Moore (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): Liberal Democrat Members believe that the draft resolution tabled by the UK and US Governments is premature. At a time when the international community should be coming together to maximise the opportunity for peaceful disarmament of Iraq, the measure is completely divisive. Will the Foreign Secretary explain why the weapons inspectors are not to be allowed to continue their work for as long as they believe that it is worthwhile and productive? Will he set out why he is opposed to the alternative approach tabled by France, Russia and Germany?

Mr. Straw: Well, Mr. Speaker, I hope that that question gives me a legitimate opportunity to respond, through you, to the points made earlier about the position of the Liberal Democrats. I thought that my right hon. Friend the Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) was unfair to say that they had no answer to the issue. They have a number of answers, and they vary day by day, as the record shows—not least on the question of whether a second resolution is needed.

There is no suggestion—and I do not know where the hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Moore) got the idea—that we are saying to the inspectors that they must stop. We have put forward the draft resolution, and said that a vote should not be held on it until we have received the next set of reports from Doctors Blix and el-Baradei. We must be clear about that, but it must also be understood, not least by the Liberal Democrats, that there is only one reason why the inspectors have been readmitted to Iraq. That reason is not, sadly, all the words in the 13 or more resolutions passed by the Security Council. It is because we in the UK, the US and some other countries have been willing to follow through chapter VII of the UN charter and to back our diplomacy with a credible threat of force.

As for the proposals from France, Germany and Russia, I shall put them before the House and ask hon. Members to consider them. We always take proposals of that kind seriously. However, I have to say to those of our colleague countries on the United Nations Security Council who are now praying in aid the importance of Security Council resolution 1284 that it should be remembered that it was we in the United Kingdom who pushed 1284 and finally got a vote. As a matter of record, it so happens that France did not support 1284. In any event, the inspection regime that was established by 1284 in December 1999 was inoperable until we got 1441 through and backed the process with a credible threat of force. I submit to the House that the only way in which to disarm Saddam Hussein peacefully is the strategy that this House has endorsed and the position of the Government.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Coatbridge and Chryston): Is my right hon. Friend aware that many people hope that when he has discussions with our partners in the European Union, he will bear in mind the grave reservations of the Kurds in northern Iraq about the new-found role of Turkey, given Turkey's human rights record and its treatment of the Kurds in the past, both of which leave a great deal to be desired?

Mr. Straw: Yes. One of the paragraphs of 1441 and one of the paragraphs of the draft resolution that we submitted for consideration to the Security Council yesterday says explicitly that the territorial integrity of Iraq, including the Kurdish area, has to be preserved, and we will make sure that that happens. As my right hon. Friend will know from his contact with Kurdish representatives, they are the first fully and actively to support the strategy of the Security Council as endorsed by this House.

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): In relation to Question 3, will the Foreign Secretary join me in condemning the increasingly arrogant and bullying behaviour of the French President? Will he make it clear to President Chirac that threatening to veto applicant countries if they do not toe the French line is intolerable in a union of sovereign nations? Does he agree that fundamental divisions in Europe on the meaning of resolution 1441 can only give comfort and encouragement to Saddam Hussein? Surely the words "une dernière possibilité" and the words "a final opportunity" mean one and the same thing, and did not France sign up to those words last November? Is not the only silver lining in France's otherwise murky behaviour that it demonstrates once and for all that a unified European foreign policy is an unachievable fantasy?

Mr. Straw: As far as the right hon. Gentleman's first remarks are concerned, I repeat what I said earlier. If we are to resolve the issue by diplomatic means, we all have a responsibility to moderate our language. There will be no way in which serious negotiations can take place unless we do that.

On divisions in Europe, it is sad that divisions have been exposed, and all the sadder given that every single member of NATO and every single member of the European Union signed up fully to the terms of 1441. It is not the case, as people sometimes suggest, that this is the US versus Europe—that is a parody. Of the total number of countries that are due to enter or already in the European Union, just over half are fully in support of the strategy followed by the United Kingdom, Spain, Italy, Denmark, the Netherlands and a number of others, and just under half are not.

The last point that the right hon. Gentleman raised concerned the terms of operational paragraph 13 of 1441. That says, in French, in English, and in all the other official languages of the United Nations, that this is a final opportunity. Paragraph 13 then says that if Iraq fails to take that final opportunity, serious consequences will follow. That underlines the full terms of 1441 and underlines the fact that while we would prefer to achieve a second resolution, and we want to see further consensus inside the Security Council for action that is necessary to resolve the matter peacefully, the full terms on Iraq, including the consequences that will follow, were laid out on 8 November when the Security Council unanimously passed 1441.

Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): Will my right hon. Friend clarify a point that I believe he just made? Last night, the news reported that a vote on the new resolution would be sought on 10 March and that a further inspectors' report would be presented on 15 March. Will a vote be sought before all the inspectors' scheduled reports have been made?

Mr. Straw: We have not been specific about the dates for putting the resolution to a vote. I continue to hope that a vote can be avoided because the purpose of the resolution is to serve very clear notice on Saddam. Its intention is to give him two weeks' notice that the final opportunity has nearly passed. I have not heard speculation about 15 March, but I assure my hon. Friend that the inspectors' reports will be presented before a vote is taken. Reports are due by the end of the month.

Convention on the Future of Europe

6. **Mr David Heathcoat-Amory** (Wells): If he will make a statement on his policy aims in the Convention on the Future of Europe. [98787]

The Minister for Europe (Mr. Denis MacShane): The Government's aim in the Convention on the Future of Europe is to build a Europe that is better understood, more democratically accountable and works better.

The convention's recommendations will be discussed in an intergovernmental conference, when Heads of State or Government will make decisions, acting by unanimity. The outcome will be put to Parliament before ratification.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: As the Minister knows, the convention has published a draft constitution, which is organised on a federal basis, as it puts it, with massive new powers, especially over economic policy, and with full legal incorporation of the EU charter of rights. Since all that is contrary to the Government's previously expressed policy positions, will he either explain why they are making all those concessions in the convention or instruct the Government representative, who is not in his Department, to start saying no, clearly and unambiguously, to the new constitution? It will be impossible to retrieve all the new concessions at the intergovernmental conference that the Minister mentioned.

Mr. MacShane: The key noun in that question was "draft". Member states have already tabled more than 1,000 amendments to the proposal. It will be changed and emended by all the interested parties, including the British Government, the right hon. Gentleman and other hon. Members of the House of Commons and the other place who represent British interests on the convention. I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman will make a doughty job of presenting his point of view.

Mr. Wayne David (Caerphilly): Will the Minister join me in welcoming the convention's great emphasis on developing parliamentary democracy, with regard not only to the European Parliament but to national Parliaments?

Mr. MacShane: Indeed. I hope that that avenue will be explored further in the remaining months of the convention's work. The Government and, I believe the House, want to see national Parliaments brought fully into play in terms of subsidiarity and in terms of oversight of what the EU does.

Mr. Boris Johnson (Henley): Given the far-reaching changes envisaged in the constitution, to which my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) alluded, will the Minister explain whether the Government intend to put the matter not only to Parliament, but to the people in a referendum—and if not, why not?

Mr. MacShane: This country does not have a tradition of plebiscites that allow populists to range over plebiscitary politics, using their weekly magazines to pump out endless anti-European propaganda. Every previous treaty from the treaty of accession in 1973 to Maastricht, Nice and Amsterdam has been debated properly in the House, and I think that ratification by Parliament is the right way forward.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Hull, North): Reference has already been made to the charter of rights. Can my hon. Friend say whether it is still the position of Her Majesty's Government that they want the EU to sign up to the European convention on human rights and want that convention to be the primary human rights document for Europe as a whole? Are the Government prepared to introduce the necessary changes into the European convention, along with our allies and other members of the European Union, to ensure the possibility of accession by the EU?

Mr. MacShane: As my hon. Friend knows, that issue has been discussed; indeed, I discussed it recently with parliamentary delegates at the Council of Europe. The Government of France, for example, have grave reservations about the proposal. We have incorporated the European convention on human rights into our domestic legislation. The issue of whether the European Union as a whole should adhere to it is very technical, and it will be properly examined and discussed by the convention. Finally, of course, it will be decided by the intergovernmental conference.

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): Will the Minister confirm that a European constitution containing a legally enforceable charter of fundamental rights, the creation of a separate legal personality for Europe and the subjection of our foreign and defence policy to European jurisdiction would constitute a crossing of the rubicon between a Europe of sovereign nations and a federal Europe? Does he accept that no democratic Government have the right to surrender such fundamental areas of sovereignty without the specific consent of the people? Given that the Government support referendums on mayors, the euro and regional assemblies, will he now accede to the demand of my hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Johnson) for a referendum before any new European treaty containing such a surrender is agreed or ratified, so that the British people can reject it out of hand?

Mr. MacShane: Let me say this:

> "I do not think that one can have a federal Europe. The Creation of a United States of Europe is not realistic, because not a single nation is prepared to give up its identity."

I was quoting the President of the French Republic, Monsieur Jacques Chirac, and I agree with his words. However, I ask the right hon. Gentleman whether he agrees with this quote:

> "I'm very worried about enlargement . . . the European Union is . . . going to get much worse when we try and absorb a lot of other countries with different cultures."

That is an extract from remarks made on the BBC by the Conservative party's representative on the European Convention, the right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory). I should like him now to say that the Conservative party supports enlargement and that we should not insult and patronise our friends in Poland and the Czech Republic with such extremist, anti-east European nonsense.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): In view of the wide-ranging significance of the draft constitution for Europe, does the Minister think that it is appropriate for the United Kingdom to adopt it simply through the exercise of a treaty-making power? Is it really appropriate for the proposal to be made binding upon us simply through exercise of the royal prerogative in this matter, bearing it in mind that, by doing so, one limits significantly the ability of this House to consider the proposal? Is it still appropriate in this day and age to regard the European Union as a foreign country?

Mr. MacShane: I was not in the House at the time, but I recall the folklore memories of nights and days spent debating the Maastricht treaty. It will be the House of Commons and Parliament that will decide whether to ratify any treaty that is the outcome of the intergovernmental conference and the convention. I have complete confidence that the right hon. Gentleman and other hon. Members will deal with the matter in the traditional British parliamentary way.

Middle East

7. **Mr. James Gray** (North Wiltshire): If he will make a statement on the implications for global security of securing a peace settlement between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. [98788]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): A settlement of the dispute between the Israelis and Palestinians would plainly enhance global security, including the security of the immediate region and of Europe and the United Kingdom. We are in active support of the Quartet of the European Union, the Russian Federation, the United States and the United Nations in working for renewed negotiations, including the publication of the road map to give effect to President Bush's vision of a two-state solution by 2005.

This morning, I spoke with Chairman Arafat of the Palestinian Authority to welcome the constitutional changes that he has announced and press for the early appointment of a credible Prime Minister with effective powers.

Mr. Gray: The whole House will be grateful to the Foreign Secretary for reconfirming that he views the peace process as central to future global security. Do his close allies in the United States take the same view? Does he think that there is any possibility of the central importance of the peace process being compromised in any way by action against Iraq?

Mr. Straw: The answer to the hon. Gentleman's first question is that the United States takes broadly the same view. However, it certainly does not take precisely the same view. We have been encouraging it to be more forward in recognising the need to implement fully the very welcome statements that President Bush made last June and the very welcome United Nations Security Council resolution that was passed at the behest of the United States and that laid down for the first time that there should be a clear two-state solution. We continue in very intense dialogue with our American and other friends.

As far as conflict with Iraq is concerned, all Palestinians—including Ministers—to whom I have spoken have made it crystal clear that they are the last people in the world to have anything good to say on behalf of Saddam Hussein. The case for advancing the peace process and trying to continue to get both sides together stands on its own merits. However, I accept—given the allegation of double standards—that the case for pursuing it is all the greater when set against the possibility of military action in Iraq.

Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North): Given the current readiness of the United States and the United Kingdom to discount UN Security Council vetoes, can my right hon. Friend estimate how many UN resolutions there would have been on Israel and Palestine over three and a half decades, and of what seriousness, had it not been for the use or threatened use of the US veto?

Mr. Straw: We are not discounting the use of the veto. As has every member state of the United Nations, we have had to acknowledge that there could be circumstances in which we would take action without a second resolution. However, let us be clear. As the Command Paper that has been published this morning makes clear, the authority for any military action in respect of Iraq is based very firmly on UN Security Council resolutions that have already been passed. It is of profound importance that that point is understood. I invite my hon. Friend to read, in particular, resolution 687, which agreed a conditional ceasefire, and resolution 1441, including its final operative paragraph.

As far as Security Council resolutions in respect of Israel and Palestine are concerned, we want to see those implemented fully. What I know is that, if we stand by and fail to implement the resolutions in respect of Iraq—where the violation of the United Nations authority is the greatest—there is no prospect of getting resolutions implemented in respect of other conflict areas, including Israel and Palestine. The reverse is also the case.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): Our intentions, inevitably, are principally to do with Iraq. However, I agree with the Foreign Secretary and with my hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) that the peace process in the nearer middle east is crucial to the prospects for peace in the wider region. Those who think that the two cases can be treated separately are fooling themselves and risk making the world a more dangerous place.

Will the Foreign Secretary give the House his assessment of the security situation in Gaza and the west bank over the past few weeks—areas that have seen the deaths of quite a lot of Palestinians? Given that Ariel Sharon has been talking to Abu Ala, that he has at last formed a majority Government with Shinui and the

National Religious party, and that—as the Foreign Secretary has said—Mr. Arafat is prepared to accept a more ceremonial role, can the Foreign Secretary confirm that constructive talks are at last resuming and that they stand some chance of staying on track?

Mr. Straw: The security assessment in Gaza and the west bank is serious. In recent weeks, according to a count made yesterday, there have been 41 deaths of Palestinians, principally at the hands of the Israeli defence force, and one death within the state of Israel itself. I greatly regret those deaths; I regret the deaths whatever side they are on. We have called on, and continue to call on, the Palestinians to condemn terrorism and take effective action to control terrorists within the occupied territories and Israel. At the same time, we call on the state of Israel to act proportionately and in accordance with international law in the actions that it takes.

On the second matter that the hon. Gentleman raised, I have been in active discussions with a number of representatives of the Palestinian Authority—they were over here last week, led by Yasser Abed Rabbo of the Palestinian Authority—and although the situation is dire, there are some improving signs because of the position now taken by the Palestinian Authority. But now that a Government have been formed in Israel, we look to Israel and the United States to agree to the early publication of the road map that was endorsed by President Bush on 20 December.

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): Can my right hon. Friend tell the House how he expects to be taken seriously in his determination to deal with the very real problems that Iraq poses to the rest of the world when we have assembled an army and, for the second time, flown it past the most blatant example of daily repression and breaking of international humanitarian law by a Government who are signatories to the convention? Can he tell me why he expects that country to act proportionately, when it has never done so in the past, when there is another right-wing Government in Israel?

Mr. Straw: I understand, as I said earlier, the argument about double standards and the fact that it has some resonance based on fact, not only in the Arab and Islamic world, but in the wider world. But what I would say to my hon. Friend is that Security Council resolutions such as 242, 338, 1397 and 1402 impose obligations not only on the Israelis, yes, to recognise a viable state, to withdraw from the settlements, to negotiate the future of East Jerusalem and to deal with the issue of refugees, but on the Palestinian Authority properly and effectively to control terrorism and on all the surrounding Arab states to recognise the state of Israel and not to support terrorism themselves. The answer to the terrible issue of the middle east is for us to continue to apply pressure to all sides to achieve an effective negotiated settlement.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): The Foreign Secretary has just said that the Government urge Israel to be consistent with international law. How many Palestinians have been killed since September 2000 by Israel's policy of extra-judicial assassination? Do the Government believe that that policy is consistent with international law?

Mr. Straw: I am afraid that I cannot give the hon. Gentleman an exact number, but I am certainly happy to write to him about that. As to whether that is consistent with international law—no, and we have made our view very clear to the Government of Israel.

International Criminal Court

8. **Mr. John Robertson** (Glasgow, Anniesland): What recent discussions he has had with his counterparts in the USA about the International Criminal Court. [98789]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mike O'Brien): There have been no discussions on the International Criminal Court with US counterparts since 17 October. On that date, officials met at US request for preliminary discussions on the US request for a bilateral agreement under article 98.2 of the Rome statute. We await a further approach from the US side.

John Robertson: I thank my hon. Friend for his reply, but he will be aware that the US Government have sought bilateral agreements with other countries that revoke article 98 of the Rome statute to exempt US officials from prosecution by the international courts and, as has been already alluded to earlier, to strengthen economic sanctions such as the termination of military aid to countries if they do not comply with US demands. Does he agree that such action undermines the process to establish an effective International Criminal Court and that, without ratification by the US, the International Criminal Court will essentially be a toothless tiger?

Mr. O'Brien: We are strong supporters of the International Criminal Court and, of course, we will do nothing that conflicts with the statute. We understand US objections to the court, but we simply do not share them. Of course article 98.2 provides a procedure, and therefore acting within that article would comply with the statute. However, we will act on the basis of the guiding principles agreed by European Union Ministers on 30 September: no immunity for US citizens, no exemption for UK citizens and exemptions only for US citizens sent by their Government. Unfortunately, there is no common EU position on that. It appears that the French have opted for their soldiers to be excluded for seven years. The French seem to be taking a more American position on this issue.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): It has been suggested that one solution to the Iraq crisis would be for Saddam and his clique to go into exile. How would that be affected by the existence of the International Criminal Court in the unlikely event that he decided to go into exile, but did so in a country that had signed up to the ICC? Would not there be a clash between the terms of his exile and the possibility that someone could rightly bring him before the ICC for the many crimes that he has committed?

Mr. O'Brien: The hon. Gentleman raises an interesting point, which I shall consider in detail. Of course, Iraq is not currently a party to the ICC statute, so the court can exercise its jurisdiction only following the referral of an allegation by the UN Security Council under chapter VII of the UN charter. Therefore, if somebody was in a country that was adhering to the statute, I assume that the procedure would still be to use the UN charter chapter VII. I would have to consider in detail the legalities of that, and I will write to the hon. Gentleman.

EU Enlargement (Czech Republic)

9. **Mr. Mike Hall** (Weaver Vale): If he will make a statement on enlargement of the EU; and what progress is being made in respect of the Czech Republic's application to join the EU. [98790]

The Minister for Europe (Mr. Denis MacShane): Following the conclusion of negotiations at the European Council in December, the existing EU members, the Czech Republic and nine other candidates will sign an accession treaty on 16 April. Subject to treaty ratification, the Czech Republic will accede on 1 May 2004. That is good news for the UK, the EU and the Czech Republic.

Mr. Hall: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. Does he share my concern that the nations seeking to join the EU were invited to the summit in Brussels last week to discuss Iraq, but were not allowed to participate? It seems to emerge that, after that meeting, President Chirac was threatening those nations wishing to join with a veto if they did not agree with his views on Iraq. Would not a better way of taking forward EU membership be whether they meet the criteria, rather than whether they agree with the President of France?

Mr. MacShane: Yes.

Angus Robertson (Moray): The Minister will be aware that coalition discussions in Austria have centred in large part around the issue of nuclear power stations in the Czech Republic. Threats have been made by the far right, extremist Freedom party to block Czech membership of the European Union. Does he agree that it would be much more welcome for the Austrian Government to discuss issues of substance rather than accede to the extremist designs of Jörg Haider?

Mr. MacShane: Ja—yes.

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): When negotiating with partners for the accession of the Czech Republic and other applicant countries, will my hon. Friend ensure that the rights of Roma people in those countries, which are not upheld at the moment, will be fundamental to conditions for accession to the EU? That will prevent us from ending up in a situation in which the problems of the Roma people are settled by them resettling in our country and other parts of the EU.

Mr. MacShane: My hon. Friend raises a sensitive point. Since the end of communism, steady progress has been made on dealing with all the different minority questions in central and eastern Europe. The issue of the treatment of the Roma people figured largely in the assessment about new member states joining the European Union. My hon. Friend is right that we must keep a careful eye on the matter.

Serbia and Montenegro

10. **Mr. John Randall** (Uxbridge): If he will make a statement on the political situation in Serbia and Montenegro. [98791]

The Minister for Europe (Mr. Denis MacShane): The Serbia and Montenegro state union was proclaimed on 4 February. Elections to the new Parliament are taking place there. We urge the new Government, when in place, to press ahead with reforms, including co-operation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia.

Mr. Randall: Does the Minister agree that one of the biggest problems facing Serbia and Montenegro is the huge number of refugees and internally displaced people within its borders? That exerts a great deal of pressure, and will possibly lead to political instability. What will the Government do to try to return those people to their rightful homes?

Mr. MacShane: The hon. Gentleman, who takes a great interest in the region and contributes positively to the House's discussions and debates on it, raises an important point. We still have a large number of British troops in the region to try to ensure that people can go back to their homes and villages. The hon. Gentleman will know that one of the best contributions that might be made is for the new Serbian and Montenegrin Government to surrender to The Hague all the alleged and indicted criminals, given the actions that took place. That is the most important step that could be taken to bring peace and stability and to restore confidence to the region as a whole.

Mr. Tom Cox (Tooting): Is my hon. Friend aware that I have represented the Council of Europe as an election observer in the last two presidential elections in Serbia? Because of a ruling introduced under Milosevic that means that there has to be a turnout of 50 per cent, the clear wishes of the people of Serbia were not met. Such a turnout was not achieved on either occasion. Therefore, when my hon. Friend next meets the Serbian authorities, will he say that that ruling does not meet the wishes of the people of Serbia and that it needs to be changed?

Mr. MacShane: I am not quite sure that it is for the British Government to dictate the electoral system for the election, under the old arrangements, of the President of Serbia. We now have a new entity, Serbia and Montenegro, and elections to its Parliament are taking place today. Perhaps if there were a candidate who could command sufficient support because he or she was saying the right things for a new Serbia and Montenegro, that person might receive the support to overcome the technical barrier to which my hon. Friend referred.

Afghanistan

12. **Tony Cunningham** (Workington): If he will make a statement on the political situation in Afghanistan. [98793]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mike O'Brien): Afghanistan has made progress towards implementing the Bonn agreement, but the situation remains fragile. Over the coming year the transitional Government will focus on improving security, including through the development of the new Afghan national army, the development of a new constitution and, of course, preparations for elections in 2004.

Tony Cunningham: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Very obvious security issues affect Afghanistan, but to what extent does political instability hinder the reconstruction of this tragic country? What more can be done to deal with that?

Mr. O'Brien: There is a large amount of work being done to ensure that we give political support to the Afghan Government, and they are responding enormously well. I was in Kabul some months ago and saw the very high calibre of many Afghan Ministers. They are doing a very good job. One of the key advantages that we have seen in recent months is that there are now 4.5 million children in school in Afghanistan, and half of them are girls. Few schools operated under the Taliban, and girls could not go to them. Steps are being taken forward not only on security, but on education, health and other issues. The position is precarious but the steps forward show the benefit of the steps that the British, American and others Governments were prepared to take in intervening in Afghanistan. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. There is far too much noise in the House.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Does the Minister agree that a satisfactory security situation is crucial to a positive political development in Afghanistan? Can he assure the House that there is no question whatever of the Federal German Government withdrawing their peacekeeping contingent as has been mooted in many quarters of the press?

Mr. O'Brien: We are in discussions with the Germans, as are other countries. We very much hope that they will remain there until the change to other forces is undertaken. We believe that there will not be the gap or lacuna that the hon. Gentleman suggests.

Iran

13. **Ms Julia Drown** (South Swindon): What steps he is taking to assist in tackling human rights abuses in Iran. [98794]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mike O'Brien): We regularly raise human rights issues with the Iranian authorities at all levels. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary did so most recently with the Iranian Foreign Minister this month. We support the EU dialogue on human rights with Iran and also provide practical bilateral assistance for a range of projects.

Ms Drown: A hundred thousand people have been executed in Iran since 1981 and many of them were stoned to death for adultery and homosexuality. The United Kingdom Government have not specifically condemned stoning. Will they do so and will they continue to work with those pursuing serious human rights concerns with Iran?

Mr. O'Brien: We and our European Union partners have repeatedly expressed concerns about stoning, and are working to deal with some of the changes that need to take place in Iran. Reform has been called for, especially by women's groups in Iran that have campaigned on the subject for years. We therefore welcomed the announcement at the end of last year by the head of the supreme administrative court that the practice of stoning had been suspended.

Iraq

12.30 pm

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): With permission, Mr Speaker, I will make a further statement on Iraq.

Let me again, for the benefit of the House, briefly recap the history of this crisis. In 1991, at the conclusion of the Gulf war, the true extent of Saddam's weapons of mass destruction programme became clear. We knew that he had used these weapons against his own people, and against a foreign country, Iran, but we had not known that in addition to chemical weapons, he had biological weapons, which he had denied completely, and was trying to construct a nuclear weapons programme.

So on 3 April 1991, the UN passed the first UN resolution on Saddam and weapons of mass destruction, giving him 15 days to give an open account of all his weapons and to co-operate fully with the UN inspectors in destroying them. Fifteen days later, he submitted a flawed and incomplete declaration denying that he had biological weapons and giving little information on chemical weapons. It was only four years later, after the defection of Saddam's son-in-law to Jordan, that the offensive biological weapons and the full extent of the nuclear programme were discovered. In all, 17 UN resolutions have been passed. None has been obeyed. At no stage did he co-operate as he should have done. At no stage did he tell the full truth.

Finally, in December 1998, when he had begun to obstruct and harass the UN inspectors, they withdrew. When they left, they said that there were still large amounts of weapons of mass destruction material unaccounted for. Since then, the international community has relied on sanctions and the no-fly zones policed by US and UK pilots to contain Saddam. But the first is not proof against Saddam's deception and the second is limited in its impact.

In 2001, the sanctions were made more targeted, but around $3 billion a year is illicitly taken by Saddam, much of it for his and his family's personal use. The intelligence is clear: he continues to believe that his weapons of mass destruction programme is essential both for internal repression and for external aggression. It is essential to his regional power. Prior to the inspectors coming back in, he was engaged in a systematic exercise in concealment of those weapons.

That is the history. Finally, last November, UN resolution 1441 declared Saddam in material breach and gave him a "final opportunity" to comply fully, immediately and unconditionally with the UN's instruction to disarm voluntarily. The first step was to give an open, honest declaration of what weapons of mass destruction he had, where they were and how they would be destroyed. On 8 December, he submitted the declaration denying that he had any weapons of mass destruction, a statement, frankly, that not a single member of the international community seriously believes. There have been two UN inspectors' reports. Both have reported some co-operation on process; both have denied progress on substance.

So how to proceed? There are now two paths before the United Nations. Yesterday the UK, along with the US and Spain, introduced a new resolution declaring that

> "Iraq has failed to take the final opportunity afforded to it in Resolution 1441".

But we will not put this resolution to a vote immediately. Instead, we will delay it to give Saddam one further final chance to disarm voluntarily. The UN inspectors are continuing their work. They have a further report to make in March, but this time Saddam must understand: now is the time for him to decide. Passive rather than active co-operation will not do. Co-operation on process but not substance will not do. Refusal to declare properly and fully what has happened to the unaccounted for WMD will not do. Resolution 1441 called for full, unconditional and immediate compliance: not 10 per cent., not 20 per cent., not even 50 per cent., but 100 per cent. compliance. Anything less will not do. That is all we ask: that what we said in resolution 1441, we mean; and that what it demands, Saddam does.

There is no complexity about resolution 1441. I ask all reasonable people to judge for themselves. After 12 years, is it not reasonable that the UN inspectors have unrestricted access to Iraqi scientists? That means no tape recorders, no minders, no intimidation, and interviews outside Iraq, as provided for by resolution 1441. So far not one of those interviews has taken place.

Is it not reasonable that Saddam provides evidence of destruction of the biological and chemical agents and weapons that the UN proved he had in 1999? So far he has provided none. Is it not reasonable that he provides evidence that he has destroyed 8,500 litres of anthrax that he admitted possessing, and the 2,000 kilos of biological growth material, enough to produce over 26,000 litres of anthrax? Is it not reasonable that Saddam accounts for up to 360 tonnes of bulk chemical warfare agent, including 1.5 tonnes of VX nerve agents, 3,000 tonnes of precursor chemicals, and over 30,000 special munitions?

To those who say we are rushing to war, I say this: we are now 12 years after Saddam was first told by the UN to disarm; nearly six months after President Bush made his speech to the UN accepting the UN route to disarmament; nearly four months on from resolution 1441; and even now, today, we are offering Saddam the prospect of voluntary disarmament through the UN. I detest his regime—I hope most people do—but even now, he could save it by complying with the UN's demand. Even now, we are prepared to go the extra step to achieve disarmament peacefully.

I do not want war. I do not believe anyone in the House wants war. But disarmament peacefully can happen only with Saddam's active co-operation. Twelve years of bitter experience teaches us that. If he refuses to co-operate, as he is refusing now, and we fail to act, what then? Saddam in charge of Iraq, his weapons of mass destruction intact, the will of the international community set at nothing, the UN tricked again, Saddam hugely strengthened and emboldened—does anyone truly believe that that will mean peace? And when we turn to deal with other threats that we know confront our world, where will our authority be then? When we make a demand next time, where will our credibility be then? This is not a road to peace, but folly and weakness that will only mean that when the conflict comes, it is more bloody, less certain and greater in its devastation.

Our path laid out before the UN expresses our preference to resolve this peacefully, but it ensures that we remain firm in our determination to resolve it. I have read the memorandum put forward by France, Germany and Russia in response to our UN resolution. It is to be welcomed at least in these respects: it accepts that Saddam must disarm fully, and it accepts that he is not yet co-operating fully. Indeed, not a single member of the European Union who spoke at the summit in Brussels on 17 February—not a single one—disputed the fact of his non-co-operation.

But the call is for more time—up to the end of July, at least. They say that the time is necessary to "search out" the weapons. At the core of this proposition is the notion that the task of the inspectors is to enter Iraq to find the weapons, to "sniff them out," as one member of the European Council put it. That is emphatically not the inspectors' job. They are not a detective agency, but even if they were, Iraq is a country with a land mass roughly the size of France or Spain. The idea that the inspectors could conceivably sniff out the weapons and documentation relating to them without the help of the Iraqi authorities is absurd. That is why resolution 1441 calls for Iraq's active co-operation.

The issue is not time. The issue is will. If Saddam is willing genuinely to co-operate, the inspectors should have up to July, and beyond July—as much time as they want. If he is not willing to co-operate, equally time will not help. We will just be right back where we were in the 1990s. Of course, Saddam will offer concessions. This is a game with which he is immensely familiar. As the threat level rises, so the concessions are eked out. At present, he is saying he will not destroy the al-Samoud missiles that the inspectors have found were in breach of 1441. But he will, under pressure, claiming that this proves his co-operation. But does anyone think that he would be making any such concessions, or indeed that the inspectors would be within 1,000 miles of Baghdad, were it not for the US and UK troops massed on his doorstep? And what is his hope? To play for time, and to drag the process out until the attention of the international community wanes, the troops go, and the way is again clear for him. Give it more time, some urge on us. I say that we are giving it more time. But I say this too: it takes no time at all for Saddam to co-operate. It just takes a fundamental change of heart and mind.

Today the path to peace is clear. Saddam can co-operate fully with the inspectors. He can voluntarily disarm. He can even leave the country peacefully. But he cannot avoid disarmament. One further point: the purpose in our acting is disarmament, but the nature of Saddam's regime is relevant in two ways. First, weapons of mass destruction in the hands of a regime of this brutality are especially dangerous, in particular because Saddam has shown his willingness to use them. Secondly, I know that the innocent as well as the guilty die in any war. But let us at least not forget the 4 million Iraqi exiles, and the thousands of children who die needlessly every year due to Saddam's impoverishment of his country—a country which in 1978 was wealthier than Portugal or Malaysia but is now in ruins, with 60 per cent. of its people on food aid. Let us not forget the tens of thousands imprisoned, tortured or executed by his barbarity every year. The innocent die every day in Iraq—victims of Saddam—and their plight, too, should be heard.

I also know the vital importance in all of this of the middle east peace process. The European Council last week called for the early implementation of the road map. Terror and violence must end. So must settlement activity. We welcomed President Arafat's statement that he will appoint a Prime Minister—an initiative flowing from last month's London conference on Palestinian reform. I will continue to strive in every way for an even-handed and just approach to the middle east peace process.

At stake in Iraq is not just peace or war. It is the authority of the United Nations and the international community. Resolution 1441 is clear. All we are asking is that it now be upheld. If it is not, the consequences will stretch far beyond Iraq. If the UN cannot be the way of resolving this issue, that is a dangerous moment for our world. That is why, over the coming weeks, we will work every last minute that we can to reunite the international community and disarm Iraq through the United Nations. It is our desire, and it is still our hope, that this can be done.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): I thank the Prime Minister for updating the House on the latest situation. The decisions that are taken over the next few weeks and months will, perhaps, determine the course of world events for years to come. Twelve years and 17 resolutions on, it is crucial that we understand exactly why we are pursuing the course that we are. Saddam Hussein is a tyrant who tortures and murders his own people and poses a threat to the safety and stability of the middle east. There are few people in Iraq or in the surrounding area who would at any stage mourn his passing. When Iraq's prisons are opened and the stories of persecution and repression can truly be told, many people inside and outside the House will wonder why we waited so long to take such action.

However, Saddam Hussein is not the only example of evil in our world. The difference is that he has the means, mentality and motive to reach beyond his own borders and pose a threat to the safety and security of many—crucially, to British people at home and abroad.

As we head towards the process outlined by the Prime Minister and tabled at the United Nations last night, several questions arise. The Prime Minister told the House on 15 January that the only way he would support military action without a second resolution would be if any country used an unreasonable veto. I assume that that is still the Prime Minister's position. For example, would a French veto at the Security Council constitute an unreasonable veto? What if there is no majority in the Security Council? Would that also be considered an unreasonable position?

France and Germany have today outlined a plan for dealing with Iraq, to which the Prime Minister referred, with a specific timetable for the inspectorate that would take us deep into July. The Prime Minister clearly said that he does not agree with them on the timetable or the plan. Could he specify exactly what timetable should exist as part of the draft resolution announced last night and tabled by Spain, the United States and the Government?

[Mr. Iain Duncan Smith]

If Dr. Blix tells the Security Council on 7 March that Iraq is not complying with resolution 1441, will Britain and America push for an immediate vote on a second resolution—and will that constitute the timetable? This morning, the Foreign Secretary seemed not too clear about that matter. I hope that the Prime Minister will be able to clear it up.

Saddam Hussein is reported today as saying that he will not comply with his obligation to destroy his al-Samoud missiles. The Prime Minister made it clear in his statement that a failure by Iraq to do that would constitute a material breach of resolution 1441. However, if at the last moment Saddam Hussein destroys his missiles but still does not produce the evidence to show that the biological and chemical stockpiles that we know he had in 1998 have been destroyed, will the Prime Minister confirm that the destruction of the missiles is not enough to avoid a vote on the second resolution?

At this time, the thoughts of the whole House will be with our servicemen and women but they need to be assured of certain things. Will the Prime Minister assure the House that equipment failures alluded to by the National Audit Office and the shortage of personnel equipment reported have all been rectified and that our troops will have the very best equipment by the time they get into place? If military action takes place, it is vital that we are clear what may happen after that action concludes. My hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) has consistently been critical of United Nations contingency planning for humanitarian relief in Iraq and the Government's part in that. Will the Prime Minister assure the House that all those shortcomings have been addressed and that mechanisms are now in place? Of perhaps most critical importance now is the need to understand what contingencies the Government have planned for a representative Government in Iraq. Have the Prime Minister and his US counterparts discussed that at any stage, and will he now give an indication of what those discussions have entailed? He rightly spoke about his plans for the middle east and the peace process. Can he now go further and give any specific details of his plans to bring those two sides together beyond what he said in his statement?

This issue is not about time, as the Prime Minister said, but about Saddam Hussein's attitude. There are many in the House who legitimately fear the consequences of military action in Iraq and therefore urge us not to take it. However, I put it to them that there is a greater fear—the failure to deal with Saddam Hussein now will lead to greater suffering, not just for the people of Iraq but for the whole world. We still believe that Saddam Hussein holds in his hands the power to pull his country and his people back from the brink of war, which any soldier will tell you, must always be the last resort. This is a crucial test, not just for the UK or the USA, but for the United Nations. For the sake of the United Nations and the peace of the world, such a tyrant must be left in no doubt that if he does not disarm after years of terror and evasion, he must finally face the consequences of his actions.

The Prime Minister: First, I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his support for the Government's general approach. He talked about the circumstances in which countries might use their veto—I am still hopeful that that will not be the case. I reject the timetable set out by France and Germany for the reasons that I gave. I do not think that it deals with the central point—whether Saddam is willing to co-operate fully. As for our own timetable, it is obviously open, but we have already said that this has to be resolved within weeks, not months. The coming report of Dr. Blix will evidently be extremely important in that, but the precise moment at which we put the second resolution in the UN to a vote is something that we are discussing with key allies.

To deal simply with the issue of Army equipment, about which there are many stories, I should say that those stories are categorically denied both by people in the military and ourselves. I urge people not to take everything that they read at face value. I very much hope that people understand that not only are our armed forces among the finest in the word but they are also among the best equipped. The best testament to that comes from members of the armed forces themselves.

In relation to humanitarian considerations and what type of Government might succeed the Government of Saddam, again that is something that we are discussing closely with allies and the UN. I should like to emphasise that in my view if it comes to conflict, the UN's role in the resulting humanitarian situation and in finding the right way through for Iraq will be immensely important, so we will continue to work with allies, even if there are differences on the military side of things, to find the right answers to those questions.

Finally, on the middle east peace process, I very much hope that we will be in a position to announce further steps on that in the not too distant future. It is tremendously important in its own terms, but it is also obviously important in the broader context of giving a very clear statement to the Arab and Muslim world that we approach these issues in an even-handed and just way. There is nothing more important but that they understand that, and our commitment to taking that process forward remains absolute.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): Given that there is unanimous agreement in the House about supporting the United Nations in its efforts to rid Saddam Hussein of weapons of mass destruction, and that the best route for doing so is the UN-authorised weapons inspectorate, will the Prime Minister amplify his opening remarks, as there will be considerable anxiety in this country and others that in tabling what could be construed as a pre-emptive draft resolution, Britain is in fact undermining the very work of the weapons inspectors? Given Dr. Blix's explicit statement that he feels that the inspectors are meeting with a degree of success but that more time is required, should not we as a country subscribe to that view rather than conducting ourselves as we are?

Why is the Prime Minister so fundamentally hostile to the memorandum that the French and others have now tabled? Should we not respond more positively? Would that not offer a better way forward? On several occasions, senior military opinion in this country has been publicly expressed to the effect that the best route for disarmament is the location, detection and dismantling of any weapons of mass destruction in Iraq by the weapons inspectors themselves. Is that not preferable to a precipitate war?

Is the essence of what the Prime Minister has told us today that there are now no circumstances in which, [illegible] the Americans decide to take action against Iraq, Britain will not be there in support? Is that not the fact of the matter, whether it is UN-authorised or not?

As for the conflict itself, which seems increasingly inevitable, will the Prime Minister clarify an issue that he has not chosen to clarify thus far? What will be the operational military chain of command? Will British forces that this House of Commons will ask to go into battle in our name be under an American chain of command? I think that those forces and the House have a right to know the answer.

Finally, what post-war scenario do the Government envisage? Would they prefer a United States-administered post-conflict Iraq or some form of UN protectorate? What will our contribution be in such circumstances?

The fundamental anxiety felt by many in this country is that the argument has shifted from regime change last summer, through the UN route—which we strongly support—to the Prime Minister's most recent utterances about the overwhelming moral case for this action. When the argument keeps shifting like that, there can be little doubt, and every reason for people in this country to remain highly sceptical about the wisdom of the current approach.

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman asked about post-conflict Iraq, if it comes to conflict. I have made it clear that the UN must have a key role; exactly what that role will be is another thing that we are discussing with the UN and with allies now. As for the military chain of command, it will be as it has been in previous military conflicts. We will set out all the answers to those questions very plainly if it comes to military conflict. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman is not suggesting that there is any problem in the military chain of command itself, because I think that that would be irresponsible and unfair to our armed forces.

There is one issue on which I agree with the right hon. Gentleman. He said that it would be preferable for the disarmament of Iraq to take place by means of the UN route. I agree: that is exactly why we have tried to use the UN route. With respect, however, the question is this: if disarmament cannot happen by means of the UN route because Saddam Hussein is not co-operating properly, then what? We shall be left with a choice between leaving him there, with his weapons of mass destruction, in charge of Iraq—the will of the UN having therefore been set at nothing—and using force.

The right hon. Gentleman described the resolution as pre-emptive. I must take issue with him. Resolution 1441 has this logic—to which I see no answer in what the right hon. Gentleman said. It called on Saddam Hussein to disarm voluntarily, and to comply fully, unconditionally and immediately with the inspectors. It said that he was in material breach, and that this was a final opportunity. Now, is Saddam Hussein co-operating fully? No. Not a single person disputes that. He is therefore in breach of resolution 1441. This was supposed to be his final opportunity. With the greatest respect, it is not us who have to justify why we are putting down a resolution stating what is a fact—that he is not co-operating fully and is in breach of resolution 1441—it is for others to say why, having given him the final opportunity that he has not taken, we still should not act. My worry in that situation—no doubt it is Saddam's hope—is that what people really mean when they put forward these alternatives is that we are not prepared seriously to force him to disarm.

On the chances of conflict, I should tell the right hon. Gentleman that the bitter irony of some of what has happened in the past few weeks is that unless Saddam gets a clear and united message—unless he knows that there is no alternative to voluntary disarmament—he will not disarm. That is the history of 12 years in which we played this game of to and fro, back and forth with him.

Let me deal with one other point. The argument about regime change has not changed. I have always said that the purpose of any action has got to be the disarmament of Iraq of weapons of mass destruction. That is the purpose, but the nature of the regime is relevant in two ways. This is not a regime that has weapons of mass destruction but is otherwise benign: it is—as I hope the right hon. Gentleman agrees—a deeply murderous, barbaric regime that subjects its people to terrible humiliation, and which, every time it has been able to do so, has conducted external aggression. *[Interruption.]* Well, some of the right hon. Gentleman's colleagues may disagree, but I think that objective people will agree with that proposition. Those people who say that the regime is not relevant ignore the fact that weapons of mass destruction in the hands of Saddam are a greater threat precisely because of the nature of the regime, and because of the fact that he has used them.

The second point is that there is a reason why I responded to a moral case, namely, that a moral case was being put against action. It was being said that, of course, innocent people will die in conflict, and that is true. Innocent people do die, which is why we have striven so hard over 12 years to avoid going back into conflict with Saddam. However, it is also right, in responding to that moral case, to point out the utter misery and deprivation of the people in Iraq, and to state what is a fact: that those who have most to gain from the end of the regime of Saddam Hussein are the Iraqi people themselves.

Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): As we enter a crucial three weeks that will decide whether there is peace or war, my right hon. Friend has made a very powerful case. It is clear that Saddam Hussein responds only to pressure, and that his aim is to divide the Security Council and to buy time. My right hon. Friend and the Cabinet have tabled a motion for tomorrow, so he clearly agrees with its observation that Iraq has a

"final opportunity to comply with its disarmament obligations."

Does he equally accept that, as the likely amendment to it states, the case for military action is as yet unproven, until Dr. Blix reports to the Security Council this Friday and during the following week on whether Saddam Hussein has complied with his disarmament obligations?

The Prime Minister: The truth is, of course, that it is clear that Saddam is in breach of resolution 1441, because he was supposed to co-operate fully and is not

[The Prime Minister:]

doing so. However, because we want—consistent with the attitude that we have taken throughout—to give every single possible chance for him to co-operate fully, we are prepared, even at this stage, to delay in order to give him that chance. What my right hon. Friend implies is absolutely right: Saddam is not co-operating fully, and there is no great mystery in what is being asked of him. Anyone would think that the problem with Saddam is a failure to communicate with him adequately—that, somehow, he is not quite sure what this disarmament process means. He is probably more familiar with the ins and outs of UN inspectors and with the demands of UN resolutions than any one of us. However, the fact is that at the moment he believes that he can trick us back into the game that he played in the 1990s. That is why I honestly say that if there is any chance of getting him to change his mind and his heart, it will happen only if we send the strongest possible signal at this stage.

Mr. William Hague (Richmond, Yorks): Will the Prime Minister accept—*[Interruption.]* This may not help him, but will he accept from a long-standing critic and opponent that his policy is absolutely in the interests of this country and the wider world? Will he explain to the leader of the Liberal Democrats that British and American forces have been familiar with a shared chain of command since D-day in 1944 and before? Will the Prime Minister stress that any lifting of the threat of invasion of Iraq would set Saddam Hussein off once again on the search for nuclear weaponry, with probable success? On the implications for European policy making, does the Prime Minister consider that if an EU diplomatic service—as will be proposed by the Convention on the Future of Europe—were now in existence, it would be lobbying for his resolution or against it?

The Prime Minister: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his support and for showing us what we are all missing—*[Interruption.]* Including me. I agree with the points that he makes, but I wish to make one thing clear about the European convention. There is no way that the foreign or defence policy of this country will be conducted by an EU diplomatic service. It will carry on being conducted by the Government of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): My right hon. Friend's statement did not refer to what must be the main argument for a potential war—the nature of the threat that Saddam Hussein's regime poses to this country and others, especially through weapons of mass destruction and whether they might fall into the hands of terrorists. I would also like some analysis of the level of that threat and what happens to those threats in the event of a war that is not supported by the international community, especially given the backdrop of the current bloody conflict in Palestine. Would we end up, post-war, in a world more threatened by terrorism, not less?

The Prime Minister: On the nature of the threat, it is the UN resolution that described Saddam Hussein's programme of weapons of mass destruction as a threat, so that was established by the international community. I have not gone into the arguments about the link with international terrorism again, but I believe that link to be real. It is important that we understand that if we allow rogue or unstable states to develop or proliferate weapons of mass destruction, the links with international terrorists who are trying to acquire those weapons will be all too clear. I agree with my hon. Friend that if this is done with a unified UN and against the background of progress in the middle east, it will become easier to unite the international community. That is why I am trying to ensure that both things are done.

We should know enough about terrorists to realise—although I understand why people worry when we take a strong profile on the issue that we may make our country a target in some way—that they will strike at us wherever and whenever they can. A trial took place in the last few days in Germany of international terrorist groups. A big cache of arms was found near Charles de Gaulle airport in France a short time ago. All over the world such groups are being arrested. Who would have said that Indonesia was a great supporter of America, or the war against terrorism? Who would have said that Bali had made itself into a threat? The terrorists will not leave us alone if we are pleasant to them, but will come after us whenever they can. That is why the best signal to send them is a signal of strength.

Tony Baldry (Banbury): What does the Prime Minister say to the statement by Hans Blix the day before yesterday that after eight years of inspections and four years of no inspections, to call it a day after 11 weeks of inspections seems a bit short?

The Prime Minister: I would say to him what I have said to him and others throughout—the time is relevant only if the will is there to co-operate. If it is not, nobody seriously suggests—and in my conversations with Dr. Blix, he has not suggested—that if Saddam is not co-operating, the inspectors can go in and search out the weapons. The best proof of that is what happened in the 1990s when there was a complete denial of the existence of an offensive biological weapons programme. For four years the inspectors were in there searching for it and they did not find it, because it is very difficult to find it if there is no co-operation from the authorities. Then Saddam's son-in-law defected to Jordan and said that there was an offensive biological weapons programme. The Iraqis then admitted as much, and at that point the programme was at least partially shut down. The son-in-law was then lured back to Iraq and murdered.

I think that all the evidence of the past 12 years shows that disarmament cannot be accomplished without the full co-operation of the Iraqis. That is why I say that time is not the issue. The issue is that Saddam must decide to change the nature of his regime from one that relies on weapons of mass destruction to one that does not. All the evidence that we have, and all the intelligence evidence, shows that he has no intention of doing so.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): May I thank my right hon. Friend for the strong emphasis that he continues to place on the utterly essential nature of a peace process in the middle east between the Israelis and the Palestinians? In light of the daily almost casual slaughter of Palestinians by Israelis, and of the threat to the Israelis from terrorism, will my right hon. Friend give an undertaking that, regardless of the outcome of this crucial confrontation with Iraq, he will continue to ensure that this Government will yield to no one in their assurance that there will be a middle east peace process that will give dignity and safety to the Palestinians, and security to the people of Israel?

The Prime Minister: I agree with that entirely. That is precisely what we will do.

Sir John Stanley (Tonbridge and Malling): Does the Prime Minister agree that, where major issues of security are concerned, the clear responsibility of the elected Government is to lead, and not to follow, and that this is the moment for clear-sighted and brave leadership?

The Prime Minister: I do.

Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East and Washington, West): I recognise the huge efforts that the Government have made to work through the UN, and to encourage and persuade the Americans to do the same. I also recognise that without the threat of action the inspectors would not be back in Iraq. However, will my right hon. Friend reassure me that the timing of the renewed push against Saddam Hussein arises from evidence and knowledge of his activities, and not from a political agenda on the part of President Bush?

The Prime Minister: I can assure my right hon. Friend on those points, which are precisely the ones that concern people. That is why we decided to take the issue back through the UN last year. In his speech to the UN—which was, I think, very well received—President Bush corrected a lot of the problems that had existed between the US and the UN. At the time, I had conversations with President Bush in which I said—and he accepted entirely—that, if the UN ended up being able to disarm Saddam voluntarily, that would be an end to the matter, detestable though the regime is. That is why we took such care to ensure that the resolution made it clear that it offered Saddam the truly final opportunity to disarm. The difficulty is that he has not taken that final opportunity. I think that that is because he believes that it is still possible, somehow, to divide the international community and play us all off against each other, and thereby to manage to retain his capability. However, I assure my right hon. Friend that when we went back through the UN, we did so in the full knowledge that if Saddam Hussein complied, that had to be an end to the matter. That is precisely why I still hope and believe that the UN can be the instrument for resolving it.

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire): The Prime Minister has made a very convincing argument, with which I wholly agree. I agree especially about the need to threaten war in order to try prevent it and to make Saddam comply. However, although we all hope that there will not be a war, it is becoming ever more likely. Is it not perhaps time for the Prime Minister to share with the House the overall aims of the war? He says that the objective is disarmament, but does he expect that to be achieved by allied forces occupying Iraq and seeking out weapons of mass destruction, or simply by defeating the present regime and installing one that will comply with 1441?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman makes an entirely fair point. The objective is the ridding of Iraq of weapons of mass destruction, and while Saddam's regime stands in the way of that it is an obstacle that has to be removed if it is not prepared to disarm voluntarily. Whatever successor regime comes in must of course comply with the UN instruction, because it is an instruction to Iraq, and whoever the Government of Iraq are, the WMD programme has to be dismantled. I am sure that that can be achieved—if Saddam maintains his present position—by a different regime. What is more, in those circumstances the sanctions can be lifted and the country can revive, grow and prosper. It is potentially a very wealthy country.

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Manchester, Central): My right hon. Friend has the whole House with him on the fact that Saddam's regime is an odious one. However, what he has not demonstrated, not only to many hon. Members but to the country as a whole, is the fact that the threat posed by Saddam to us and to his neighbours is sufficiently serious to warrant the act of war—a war that will have many human casualties. Does my right hon. Friend believe that between now and any potential military conflict that evidence base will be put into the public domain in this country?

The Prime Minister: The threat from Saddam is serious, and the fact that the UN has tried so hard over such a long period shows that the international community accepts that it is serious. When the UN came together last November, the whole basis of resolution 1441 was that he did indeed constitute a threat, as he still does. Moreover, there is a whole set of related dangers to do with unstable states developing or proliferating such material and with potential links with terrorism. That is why, in the end, the world has to take a very strong view of the matter and deal with it.

I agree, of course, that the dangers of military conflict are clear. That is why it should only ever be a last resort. That is why, as I stand here today, we are not at war—there is not a military conflict in place at the moment. What is important is to ensure that the will of the United Nations is upheld. Otherwise, what we will have said as an international community is that yes, the threat is serious, but we lack the will to do something about it. I assure my hon. Friend that if there is any military conflict we will do everything that we possibly can, as we have in previous conflicts in which this Government have been engaged, to minimise any potential civilian casualties.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): I note the Prime Minister's reference to his part welcome, at least, for the German, French and Russian memorandum, and I welcome his reference to continued efforts to disarm Iraq via the UN. I nevertheless contrast that with the publicly known behaviour of America towards Germany and the current bribing and cajoling of other Security Council members in order to secure a

[Mr. Elfyn Llwyd]

UN mandate. How can that be part of the right hon. Gentleman's moral case for war? Does he realise that such behaviour will not only undermine the UN, but may well be the beginning of the end for the UN?

The Prime Minister: Despite what is put across in various conspiracy theories, I have had many conversations with UN Security Council members—those who are in the permanent five and those who are not—and each of those conversations has related simply to the justice or otherwise of the case against Saddam. The idea that this is about bargaining, commercial contracts or any of the rest of it is nonsense. It is a genuine desire to make sure that Saddam ceases to be a threat to the world.

As for the UN, I agree with the hon. Gentleman that it is important that the UN's authority is upheld, but I still cannot understand the answer to this point: we gave Saddam a final opportunity with which he was supposed to co-operate fully; nobody accepts that he is co-operating fully, so why has he not taken his final opportunity?

Someone asked earlier, "Is not war now inevitable?" Of course it is not. However, part of the reason for such a question is that nobody, even those who oppose military action, seriously believes that Saddam wants to co-operate fully. People sense that matters may come to conflict because they know that he has no intention of changing his heart or mind. However, that is his choice, not ours. Our choice, preference and desire are to resolve matters peacefully through the United Nations.

Jeff Ennis (Barnsley, East and Mexborough): Can my right hon. Friend see any special circumstances in which the Americans might attack Iraq without this country's support?

The Prime Minister: We have worked closely throughout with the United States and we shall continue to do that. There is no point in my speculating about various matters that may not happen. However, the international community made a request to President Bush last year to go through the United Nations. He agreed and did that. If Saddam fails to comply with the UN demand, it is important to take action, not only for the sake of all our other objectives but to show that the UN means what it says.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): During the past few weeks, the Prime Minister has held many meetings and conversations with President Bush. Has he raised with him the status and future of the eight UK citizens who are now held in Guantanamo Bay in Cuba? What steps is the right hon. Gentleman personally taking to ensure that those people are either charged or released, and that they otherwise have their status defined and receive the full protection of the law?

Mr. Speaker: Order. That does not relate to the statement.

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): May I support all my right hon. Friend's comments today? I especially welcome his response to the question by my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) about the middle east. Will he assure the House and the country that dealing with Saddam Hussein will not be the end of UN and international community action on weapons of mass destruction? Will we move on to deal with North Korea and the Indian subcontinent and to create a nuclear-free zone in the middle east?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right. Indeed, disarming Iraq must not be the end of the international community's effort and activity to rid the world of weapons of mass destruction that are held by unstable states. Many such issues will be tackled differently, but they need to be dealt with. It is also true, as I believe my hon. Friend implied, that if we fail to disarm Iraq of weapons of mass destruction, it will be much harder for us to make our will plain and implement it in respect of any other nation.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): I welcome the careful and cautious way in which the Prime Minister is leading his Government in order to avoid war at all costs, and his consequent determination to use every avenue of diplomacy that is open to him. Will he do what he can to shake the Arab League and the Gulf Co-operation Council from their seeming lethargy and helplessness and ask them to play a greater role in jointly and severally persuading Saddam Hussein of the necessity for him and his wicked cronies to go, thereby avoiding visiting terrible suffering on the rest of the middle east?

The Prime Minister: There is a real role for the Arab world and I agree with the hon. Gentleman's comments. It remains possible to envisage circumstances in which matters can be resolved peacefully in the way he describes. However, the best chance of doing that is through the international community demonstrating a strong and unified will and the Arab world demonstrating an equally strong resolve. We are in close contact with many Arab nations to achieve that.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): In the unlikely event that Saddam decides fully to co-operate with the UN weapons inspectors, has my right hon. Friend had time to consider what UN processes would be involved following that co-operation and whether it would simply involve weapons inspectors or whether there would be any attempt to impact on human rights abuses in Iraq?

The Prime Minister: That is a very good point. Yes, of course, we would try to ensure that there was also an impact on the human rights situation. Of course, there are UN resolutions in respect of that situation as well, all of which are being breached. There is a sense, certainly on the part of Saddam, which indicates that he sees the maintenance of the weapons, which he has used against his own people, as essential to the machinery of repression. The truth is that the regime would be a different type of regime without those weapons of mass destruction. That is why it is certainly important that we highlight the human rights aspect of the situation as well.

Mr. Paul Marsden (Shrewsbury and Atcham): The briefings—*[Interruption.]* Those Members could not silence me when I was on the Labour Benches, and they certainly will not silence me on the other side of the House. The briefings given to the United Nations on 14 February said that there was no evidence of a nuclear weapons programme, that access was freely being given for the 400 inspections without any problems and that the 300 chemical and biological samples taken were completely consistent with the Iraqis' declarations. Therefore, surely the answer is to give the United Nations inspectors many more months to let them do their job and bring about a peaceful change, rather than enter into a war that will kill thousands of men, women and children.

The Prime Minister: The point that the hon. Gentleman makes is, of course, a point that people frequently make, but if he looks at the UN inspectors' reports, he will find that both Dr. el-Baradei and Dr. Blix make it clear that full co-operation is not happening yet. The point about testing whatever they manage to find simply comes back to what I think is the central fallacy of those people who simply say "Give the inspectors more time." Unless there is full co-operation, the time will not work because the inspectors could stay in the country for months and years. Simply trying to search out the weapons is a hopeless task to expect them to carry out. That is why, when the UN passed resolution 1441, it said that there had to be not merely passive co-operation, but active co-operation with the inspectors in every way—and there is simply no such co-operation at the moment.

Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): Every day, particularly in the American press, it seems that a report emerges about how the Americans will administer Iraq, and which particular general will do so, after the war is over. Will the Prime Minister assure me that he has not been party to any such agreements and that he agrees that the consequence of taking the UN route is that Iraq, after the war, will be administered by the United Nations until a democratic state can be set up there?

The Prime Minister: Again, the point that my hon. Friend makes is entirely right and justified. All I can say to him is that no decisions have yet been taken on the nature of how Iraq should be administered in the event of Saddam's regime being displaced by force. I said earlier that I thought that the role of the UN had to be well protected in such a situation. The discussions that we are having on that matter are proceeding well. When we have reached conclusions and decisions, we can announce them so that people can discuss them.

David Burnside (South Antrim): The Prime Minister rightly raises the credibility of this Government as being at issue if we do not act after 12 years of bitter experience. If he took Saddam Hussein with him to Belfast next Monday, what reaction does he think Saddam Hussein would have if he did not outline sanctions against republican and loyalist terrorists who have not disarmed over the past five years?

The Prime Minister: I do not really think that it is fair, whatever the difficulties in Northern Ireland, to compare Northern Ireland with Iraq. The hon. Gentleman will know that, as a result of the peace process in Northern Ireland over the past few years, unemployment there is 6 per cent. today—it is no longer the region that has the highest unemployment in the UK; inward investment and money are coming in; and many people's lives have been transformed. There is still a long way to go, but I do not think that we can read across between the two situations.

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): I can absolutely understand my right hon. Friend's wish to stand firm alongside our friends and allies in the United States—who have, after all, sacrificed much in the cause of wider humanity over many years. However, is not the role of a true friend, in present circumstances, to be candid with the President of the United States and tell him that the evidence is not yet compelling, that the work of the inspectors is not yet done, and that the moral case for war—with all its consequences—has not yet been made?

The Prime Minister: I agree—it is indeed our function to be candid with the President of the United States and, indeed, with all our allies. I have to say to my right hon. Friend, however, that I think that the evidence is indeed compelling. That is the reason the United Nations passed resolution 1441 last year. The evidence of the resolution is there for all to see. The evidence that Saddam is not co-operating fully is accepted by everyone. Indeed, the statement yesterday by France and Germany accepted that he was not yet fully co-operating. There was not a single person in the Council of the European Union who said anything other than that the co-operation was less than full. Dr. Blix has said the same.

Surely the position is really this: if we meant what we said in resolution 1441, that it was Saddam's final opportunity to disarm and that he had to comply fully, unconditionally and immediately—and everybody accepts that he is not fully complying, not unconditionally complying and certainly not immediately complying—then surely our statement that Iraq is in material breach is clear. We have delayed action to go through the UN—even again now—in order to give Saddam a final chance. However, that is not going to happen unless he has a real change of heart and mind.

The other point that I would make to my right hon. Friend—I know that he has thought about these issues very deeply—is this: if we were dealing with a regime where this was the first time that this issue had arisen, and if there were no history of dealing with Saddam or weapons of mass destruction, one might think that there was some problem in the way that the inspectors were communicating their wishes to him, or that there was some difficulty in what he understood he had to do. However, this regime has had 12 years of this. It knows perfectly well what the UN is asking it to do. When Saddam's son-in-law defected to Jordan and disclosed the regime's offensive biological weapons programme—a programme that it had utterly denied the existence of, saying that it was all a CIA and British intelligence conspiracy—Iraq suddenly discovered the means to co-operate fully, and did co-operate fully for a time. There is no mystery for Iraq about what it needs to do.

[The Prime Minister:]

I know that there is a very delicate balance about the time, but the danger is that, if we give a signal of division at the moment, it will allow Saddam to go straight back into the game that he has played before, and will allow him to pull the international community into months of delay. Once the international community's attention has gone, he is back, free to do what he has done again. That is my worry. *[Interruption.]* Yes, of course, I should be candid with the President of the United States, but my strong view is that we have given Saddam, time and time again, the opportunity to comply. Now is the time when we have to force the issue to a decision, making sure that he does comply or face the consequences.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): In providing the national leadership for which my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir John Stanley) called—and which the Prime Minister is providing with exemplary calmness and courage—will he consider making a broadcast to the nation, explaining to all the doubters that, if we do not stand firm on this issue, the United Nations will go the way of the League of Nations?

The Prime Minister: Whatever way we may communicate will be a decision for a later time. I will bear in mind what the right hon. Gentleman says. The point that he makes is obviously right.

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead): My right hon. Friend has constantly used the expression "full co-operation". However, does he understand that many people in this House want to see a sufficient degree of co-operation by Saddam Hussein to achieve a peaceable decommissioning of the weapons of mass destruction of that barbaric regime? Does he accept that the people who are in the best position to say whether that degree of co-operation is being achieved are the weapons inspectors themselves?

The Prime Minister: It is precisely for that reason that the weapons inspectors have made it clear that, at present, there is not that full co-operation. My hon. Friend says "sufficient co-operation", and it is important to go back to the words of resolution 1441. Presumably, when we passed it, as an international community, we were aware of what we were saying, and we said that the co-operation had to be full, unconditional and immediate. The reason for that is that we had 12 years of trying to have a sufficient degree of co-operation, but it has never actually been sufficient to disarm Saddam, so that is the problem that we face.

I agree that the very reason why we went through the UN route is precisely so that the inspectors could go into Iraq and witness the facts of what is happening, but the reason why Dr. Blix has sent a whole series of further questions and demands to the Iraqis is that they know that they are not co-operating. The best test of that is twofold. First, the leftovers were unaccounted for in 1998—all that is properly documented—and we need to know what has happened to them; we have not the faintest idea because Saddam has denied the existence of the stuff.

The second issue relates to the witnesses and the way to deal with such programmes. For example, when South Africa was disarmed, nine inspectors went in and they interviewed the scientists—the people concerned in the programme—and they were told all about it. There have been, as I understand it, only about half a dozen interviews so far. Not one of those interviews has been without either a minder or an insistence that it is tape-recorded. The fact is that I cannot seriously believe in those circumstances that they are free and fair interviews. So those are the tests. If Saddam is prepared to come forward and say that they will deal with all those issues, it would put the thing in a different framework.

Mr. Duncan Smith: I asked earlier—as a number of hon. Members have done—about contingency plans for government if military action takes place in the event of Saddam Hussein being deposed. Will the Prime Minister now clear up some of that confusion? First, will he say whether contingency plans for future government are being discussed and formulated right now between members of the UN and the US and UK Governments? I understand that Kofi Annan has described those arrangements to members not just of the Security Council, but of the General Assembly, so will the Prime Minister share with the House and for the benefit of the British people what such contingency plans may well entail, so that they can secure in their minds whether there are not just short-term plans, but long-term plans as well?

The Prime Minister: Such contingency plans are being discussed. The reason why I have not given the details of those discussions is that they are not yet concluded. There is no point in us speculating about them before their conclusion, but, yes, they are being discussed among members of the UN, with the key allies. I would like to make it clear that whatever disagreements there are—for example, among European countries at the moment—it is still important, when all this is done, that we try to reach the broadest common agreement in the UN as to what the nature of any future regime in Iraq may be if it comes to conflict and, in particular, how we make sure that there is the proper humanitarian provision for people in Iraq.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Speaker: Order. We now come to the ten-minute Bill.

Protection of Freedoms

1.38 pm

Mr. Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to require each item of legislation to be subject to a statement as to how each measure included in it affects the freedom of expression, assembly, conscience and association; and why the benefits of the measure outweigh any loss of freedom.

Despite the current noise caused by Members leaving the Chamber, I am pleased to say that the Bill has attracted considerable support on both sides of the House. Not only has it received support from within the House and, indeed, the other place, but I am pleased to say that it has secured the support of the free country campaign in *The Daily Telegraph* and the campaign group, Liberty, and its director John Wadham.

It is fair to say that the natural instinct of any Government, of whatever political persuasion, is to seek more powers. However, the flow of legislation has grown dramatically in recent years. During the 1970s, the average number of measures passed by the House equated to between 1,000 and 1,500 per annum. Yet in the past five years, the average annual number of measures passed is now 3,866, or 15 new laws every working day, and that figure excludes what I can only describe as a continuous tidal wave of directives from Brussels.

That ceaseless flow of rules and regulations has eroded the true role of the House as a champion of liberty. Instead of a presumption in favour of freedom, there is a constant demand that "something must be done". All too often, that "something" is to interfere in or intrude into our lives, to restrict, to restrain, to control and to direct. In short, we have become a legislative factory in which producing more laws is an end in itself.

Of course, in the current uncertain and insecure climate, it is not surprising that people wish to see strong government. After all, the terrorist threat is at home, as the Prime Minister highlighted in his earlier statement. The problem, however, is that all too often legislation strays from its original purpose. Members will be familiar, for example, with the draft Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Bill, which came before the House late in 2001. That Bill included powers that would have enabled intrusive investigations not into someone found guilty of perhaps a terrorist crime, but into anyone suspected of any crime whatever. Fortunately, after considerable pressure, that ill-considered and authoritarian part of the Bill was removed. The fact that it was included in the first place and was defended robustly by Ministers, however, highlights the potential danger of security measures. In seeking to protect us, Government can undermine the freedom that they seek to defend.

My case is not to deny that there will be times when a Government need to take on new powers. My argument is rather that, when the Government of the day judge that they need to act, there must be a counterbalance and a specific requirement that they justify why we should relinquish our freedom. My Bill would protect our freedom by creating a liberty test. That test would be simple to administer, but it would have the widest of implications.

My Bill would require a sponsoring Department to identify how each measure affects our freedoms. The Bill lists four specific freedoms, as those are already established in law, but they should not be regarded as exclusive. The responsible Minister would have to publish the assessment and state to the House why the benefits of the measure outweigh any loss of liberty.

The advantages of the Bill would be threefold. The first advantage would be openness. As I said earlier, with nearly 4,000 Bills or statutory instruments passing through the House each year, it is impossible for us to identify, let alone challenge, each incursion into our freedom. The issue would be forced into the public domain by including the results of the liberty test in the Bill. While we all tend to focus on the big issues—for example, compulsory identity cards—we should not lose sight of other laws that erode our freedom bit by bit. Those include the following: the laws allowing closed circuit television; the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000; the heavy-handed regulation of parish councillors under the Local Government Act 2000; the banning of hunting; and, of course, the sweeping powers of Her Majesty's Customs and Excise. Each of those measures chips away at our freedom to go about our lawful daily lives without fear of Government interference. This Bill would enable everyone—Members of the House, media and public alike—to understand how each and every proposed law would affect us.

The second benefit of the Bill would be to effect a lasting cultural change in Whitehall and to re-establish a presumption of freedom. At present, there is no requirement on our civil service or Ministers to give specific consideration to the impact of legislation on freedom, or for Ministers to explain why a new law is justified in diminishing our liberty. My Bill would help to change that culture, and would put every demand that "something must be done" into the context of a presumption in favour of existing liberties.

The third benefit would be improved accountability. The ministerial statement that I described earlier would, of course, help the House in its efforts to scrutinise each and every measure. Just as importantly, however, the Bill would enable us to measure the overall impact of new rules and regulations, right across Government. This measure—what I call a "liberty audit"—would enable us and those we represent to understand how the balance is changing year on year between our personal freedom and the power of government. After all, we already count the cost to business of legislation in the form of regulatory impact assessments, so is it not now time that we measured the effect of government on our freedom?

All too often, Parliament today resembles a legislative factory, acting always with good intentions but often in the misguided belief that new laws are the answer when all too often they are the problem. This Bill would reverse that trend. By making our freedom an explicit factor in the preparation of Bills, the Bill would help to change the culture of Whitehall. By requiring Ministers personally to justify any loss of freedom, it would improve accountability, and, by applying this test across all UK laws, it would, for the first time, allow us to measure the overall impact of laws, rules and regulations in our lives.

[Mr. Mark Prisk]

I believe that this Bill would provide a simple, but effective means of restoring the true role of Parliament as the champion of liberty in our country. For that reason, I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Mark Prisk, Mr. Graham Brady, Mr. Peter Lilley, Angela Watkinson, Mr. George Osborne, Peter Bottomley, Mrs. Marion Roe, Mr. Bill Wiggin and Mr. Stephen O'Brien.

PROTECTION OF FREEDOMS

Mr. Prisk accordingly presented a Bill to require each item of legislation to be subject to a statement as to how each measure included in it affects the freedom of expression, assembly, conscience and association; and why the benefits of the measure outweigh any loss of freedom. And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 7 March, and to be printed [Bill 60].

Orders of the Day

Communications Bill

As amended in the Committee, considered.

New Clause 3

COMPOSITION OF SERVICES IN RADIO MULTIPLEXES

'(1) Section 54 of the 1996 Act (conditions attached to radio multiplex licences) shall be amended as follows.

(2) For paragraph (h) of subsection (1) (conditions as to composition of service) there shall be substituted—

> "(h) that, while the licence is in force, at least the required percentage of the digital capacity on the frequency or frequencies on which the service is broadcast is used, or left available to be used, for the broadcasting of services falling within subsection (1A)."

(3) After that subsection there shall be inserted—

"(1A) The services falling within this subsection are—

- (a) digital sound programme services;
- (b) simulcast radio services;
- (c) programme-related services; and
- (d) relevant technical services."

(4) In subsection (2) (meaning of services referred to in paragraph (h) of subsection (1))—

- (a) for "paragraph (1)(h)" there shall be substituted "subsection (1A)"; and
- (b) in subparagraph (i), for the words from "(within" to "1990 Act" there shall be substituted "(within the meaning of section 240 of the Communications Act 2003)".

(5) After that subsection there shall be inserted—

"(2A) In subsection (1)(h), the reference to the required percentage is a reference to such percentage equal to or more than 80 per cent. as OFCOM—

- (a) consider appropriate; and
- (b) specify in the condition."

(6) In subsection (3) (power to vary percentage in subsection (1)(h))—

- (a) for "subsection (1)" there shall be substituted "subsection (2A)"; and
- (b) for "paragraph (h) of that subsection" there shall be substituted "that subsection".'—*[Dr. Howells.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

1.47 pm

The Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting (Dr. Kim Howells): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 158, page 265, line 12, [Clause 303], at end insert 'and'.

No. 159, in page 265, line 13 [Clause 303], at end insert 'and music'.

No. 160, in page 265, line 16 [Clause 303], at end insert

'taking into account the way in which the existing range of programmes and music (taken as a whole) is calculated to appeal to a variety of tastes and interests'.

No. 181, in page 266, line 6 [Clause 304], leave out from 'services' to end of line 8.

No. 182, in page 266 [Clause 304], leave out lines 20 to 30.

No. 162, in page 267, line 4 [Clause 304], after 'news', insert 'and music'.

Government amendment No. 65.

Government amendment No. 68.

Dr. Howells: I will deal first with new clause 3. At present, clause 239 allows the Secretary of State to set a minimum percentage of television multiplex capacity that must be devoted to broadcasting services and not, for instance, to data services. The Office of Communications may set a higher percentage in a particular licence, but not a lower one. There is a no similar provision for radio, and consequently any change in the percentage for broadcasting material on a radio multiplex can be made only by order.

We now think that it would be more sensible to bring these provisions into line by replicating the television provisions for radio multiplexes. This would allow Ofcom, rather than the Secretary of State acting through Parliament, to set a higher percentage for the minimum amount of broadcasting data that must be carried on a particular radio multiplex. The percentage set by the Secretary of State would still represent the lowest percentage that could be specified in a licence.

Amendment No. 65 corrects a minor omission from earlier drafting. Paragraph 3 of schedule 18 is a transitional provision to ensure that contracts and agreements between relevant parties are not terminated because the prevailing regime of licensing changes to one of general authorisations in cases where the contract or agreement depends on one or other of the parties holding a particular licence. Although it is mainly aimed at the holders of telecommunications licences, it also covers cases in which a Broadcasting Act licence may no longer be needed for a particular activity as a result of the Bill.

Paragraph 3(2) of schedule 18 defines "relevant licence" for the provisions of the paragraph. The list should also include satellite radio services as defined in section 84(2)(b) of the Broadcasting Act 1990. Such licences will be abolished and most services will be provided under radio licensable content service licences. However, it is conceivable that some services that currently need a satellite radio service licence might not need a radio licensable content service licence. That outcome will be made more likely because the Bill changes the jurisdiction rules. Our minor amendment rectifies that omission so that the list of licences to which the provisions apply is comprehensive.

Amendment No. 68 is to schedule 19 and repeals section 54(7) of the Broadcasting Act 1996 which is now superfluous.

Rosemary McKenna (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth): I am interested in amendment No. 65. The Minister will be aware that many hon. Members, especially those in the cross-party music group, are concerned that local radio stations play the same music throughout the country and that there is no diversity. Will he reconsider our concerns and those of the industry and require Ofcom to ensure that local music is treated in the same way as news?

Dr. Howells: We discussed that at great length in Committee and will revisit it on Report. I know that my hon. Friend cares passionately about the subject. I assure her that we want to do all that we can to promote and strengthen the localness and regional identity—by which I mean the cultural identity as much as anything else—of areas. As music is such an important factor in the health of broadcasting, especially radio broadcasting, we will give her suggestion serious consideration.

Section 54(7) provides for section 94 of the 1990 Act to apply to radio multiplex services. Section 94 gives Ministers power to require radio broadcasters to include specified announcements in their services or to refrain from including specified matters in those services. The Bill reproduces section 94 in clause 326 and repeals it. The application of section 94 by section 54(7) of the 1996 Act is therefore no longer needed.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): New clause 3 seems sensible and will help to ensure that Ofcom has the flexibility to set higher percentages devoted to radio multiplexes which match the television arrangement, as the Minister said. However, as I said several times in Committee, we want a greater sense of urgency and a greater priority afforded to the roll-out of digital radio. The new clause would allow Ofcom to provide more digital radio opportunities if more of the multiplex was devoted to radio. I hope that the need to ensure a faster uptake of digital radio is well registered in the Minister's mind. We will need to consider his explanation of amendments Nos. 65 and 68, but we are happy to accept that they are minor drafting amendments.

I shall speak to amendments Nos. 181 and 182, which relate to the new provisions in the Bill now renumbered as clause 304, which seek to define localness for commercial radio stations. It is fair to say that the clause is the cause of deep resentment in the commercial radio industry. The clause was not included in the original draft Bill and was added after the Scrutiny Committee did its excellent work on the draft Bill, not as a result of anything that the Scrutiny Committee said about the original draft Bill, but as a result, we strongly suspect, of the decision by the Secretary of State—a decision that we wholly applaud—to change the original three-plus-one requirement to only two-plus-one.

That could be said to have given rise to concern that there may be a greater concentration of ownership, but the question for the House is whether the change justifies the far-reaching and, some would say, draconian powers given to Ofcom in respect of clause 304. The clause has been described by the Commercial Radio Companies Association as

> "an astonishing leap from a proposed duty to protect output to a recipe for interfering in microregulation."

The CRCA is also critical of the fact that the clause makes no reference to the views of listeners. It is surely more important to base judgments on localness—on what the listeners think—than on the entirely subjective judgment of Ofcom, notwithstanding the requirement for it to consult with persons whom it thinks may have a view.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): As my hon. Friend knows, I have a long-standing interest both in communications, having served on the Committee that considered the previous Bill when we were in

[Mr. Nick Hawkins]

government, and in commercial radio. I endorse my hon. Friend's comments about the concerns of commercial radio companies, and urge him to press the Government hard. It would be hugely damaging if the regulator had powers that were so draconian, yet could not take account of the views of local people. That is the crucial point.

Mr. Greenway: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his intervention. I hope that by the time I sit down, he will think that I have pressed the Government sufficiently hard on the matter. He intervenes at an extremely interesting point. I was about to explain to the House how we approached the issue in Committee. I commend the debates in Committee on the matter, particularly the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford and East Maldon—sorry, Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale). We had seven weeks to get that right, but I still got it wrong.

In Committee, we sought to persuade the Minister to drop the clause. If I recall correctly, we even had a vote—quite a rare vote—in the Committee—*[Interruption.]* which the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) says we lost. That is correct. We were not able to persuade the Minister. He insisted that the clause should be retained.

Not only did we win the argument, but with the help of my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley), we tried to persuade the Minister to make the provisions of the clause more akin to a longstop power for Ofcom to intervene, but to allow a self-regulatory approach, which is a key objective for Ofcom. Again, the Minister was unmoved, so today we are suggesting another approach which, although we do not agree with it, acknowledges that the clause might have some value. Let us take that as a base and assume that the clause has some value. We want to remove the elements that we and the commercial radio industry believe to be potentially the most damaging, and for which no real justification has been made—namely, the power of Ofcom to interfere in the day-to-day running of a local radio station to the extent that the station must employ local people, provide local training and development, and use

> "premises within the area or locality"

served by the station.

2 pm

We are in complete agreement with the general objective that local commercial radio stations should provide a local service. The vast majority thrive because that is precisely what they do. Since serving on the Committee, I have had the opportunity to visit Scotland. I went to Radio Clyde, and I commend a visit to it to the Minister. Everyone there would be very pleased to see him, and I am sure that they would apply to him the same arguments that they applied to me. At the end of our discussion, however, it was clear that we agreed with them, whereas, at present, the Minister would not.

Some years ago, Radio Clyde invested heavily in substantial new premises in Clydebank, and it runs its two radio stations from those excellent studios. The programming that it offers has huge appeal to local listeners, and provides the most popular radio stations for the two age groups: Clyde 1 for the younger generation, and Clyde 2 for the older generation. I asked the presenter of a lunchtime programme why they were so popular, and why people listened to them and not to Virgin Radio, Radio 1 or other BBC stations. The answer was, "We relate to the local community. Our output relates to it, and the nature of our whole programme is local. We talk about things that people are talking about locally, rather than nationally." Notwithstanding that, the main item for discussion on the news that day was the fact that there were tanks at Heathrow airport, although I did not see any when I was there.

John Robertson (Glasgow, Anniesland): As someone who lives only a mile and a half away from the studios that the hon. Gentleman visited, I hope that he drove through Glasgow, Anniesland and that he enjoyed that. May I ask him to cast his mind back to when we were discussing these matters in Committee? The great fear was that commercial radio would leave itself open to takeover by concerns outside this country. Working on the basis of what had happened to radio in America, it was felt that it would become centralised but still have a localness about it. Radio Clyde has been so successful owing to the fact that it is a west of Scotland radio station—or stations, as the hon. Gentleman rightly says—that caters for local people. This American import, which could happen—I am not saying that it will, but it could—would get rid of stations such as Radio Clyde.

Mr. Greenway: There is so much that one could say in response to the hon. Gentleman's intervention. Yes, I did enjoy my visit to Glasgow. I particularly enjoyed going to Hampden Park for the Scotland-Ireland match, although not many locals enjoyed the result. The point that I would make to him, however, is that the Radio Authority does not have such powers now, so why is it thought necessary to give them to Ofcom? The Radio Authority has not found it necessary to intervene in this way. The idea that some gabby cabby in New York could have a 10-minute phone-in to Radio Clyde because it was now being transmitted from the United States of America is complete nonsense. Radio stations will be able to provide a local service only by using people on the ground locally. The issue is whether we should be asking Ofcom to micro-manage what the commercial radio stations do to such an extent as is provided for in the Bill, or whether we should point out that local radio stations have been hugely successful and that the most successful are those that provide the most local service. Why do the measures need to extend so far?

Mr. John Grogan (Selby): Is not the simple reason for tighter regulation that media ownership rules are loosening? Does not the hon. Gentleman fear the experience in the United States, where Clear Channel has removed most concepts of localness from many of its stations?

Mr. Greenway: No. There are real dangers in trying to predetermine what commercial radio stations may need to do. The issue for the regulator is content, to which the licence granted relates. That is the most important issue and the Bill provides for the powers that are needed. I urge the hon. Gentleman to read the three or four sentences that we seek to omit, which relate only to micro-managing of employees, training and premises.

Pete Wishart (North Tayside): I am encouraged by the hon. Gentleman's knowledge of the radio stations of Scotland. I am sure that Radio Clyde is listening carefully to his remarks. As to local content, the hon. Gentleman seems to be referring only to the spoken word. Does he not agree that music is also important and that local acts should be included?

Mr. Greenway: I agree with the hon. Gentleman's sentiment and will mention music later. It should not come as a surprise to any hon. Member that a Conservative party spokesman is familiar with the United Kingdom as a whole because we believe in precisely that.

Given the track record of local commercial radio stations such as Radio Clyde and Radio Forth, it is something of an insult—at the very time when the Government are promising a light-touch regulatory future—to give Ofcom such far-reaching powers as would allow it to question and determine who a station employs, how much and where employees are trained, and how premises are used. Those issues are not central to whether or not a station can be defined as providing a local service—which is determined by reference to content and the relationship between a station and its listeners. Those are matters that the broadcasters themselves should be allowed to determine. As long as a broadcaster provides content output that listeners believe to be local, that should be the test when determining whether or not a station meets the local content requirement.

In Committee, members of the Front Benches across parties agreed that Government and Parliament must be careful not to impose regulatory requirements on commercial television and radio broadcasters that may not be capable of being resourced in future. I understand the point made by the hon. Members for Selby (Mr. Grogan) and for North Tayside (Pete Wishart) that a greater concentration of ownership may mean that some studios may not be as local as now. However, given the harsh commercial realities under which many stations operate, surely that is for them to determine. They will not be successful in providing a local service unless they have local people on the ground. Interestingly, Radio Clyde—having moved to Clydebank—would now like a studio in Glasgow city centre, as that is where many of the people they want to interview are based. Scottish Television makes great use of its studio in Edinburgh for interviewing MSPs for local news and current affairs opt-outs. It seems physically impossible to provide a local service without a local presence but that is for the broadcasters to sort out, not a matter for interference by the regulator.

Mr. Hawkins: Does my hon. Friend agree that in the early days of successful local commercial radio the commercial freedoms that he has argued for both on Report and in Committee made smaller stations most effective? He has given examples from Scotland, and I would point to a station that I knew well in the past—Radio Wave in Blackpool, which was successful because it had the very freedoms that would now be micro-managed, as proposed by the Government. We are opposed to that.

Mr. Greenway: As ever, my hon. Friend is extremely helpful and has added to my argument.

Commercial radio is not hugely profitable. To make money, it has to be extremely successful. Success is achieved by offering something different—the local service. We should give broadcasters more credit for what they have achieved and ensure that the obligations—the longstop powers for Ofcom—agreed in the Bill are proportionate and necessary. The provisions in clause 304 are too prescriptive and give Ofcom too much power to micro-manage the workings of individual radio stations. As I have already said, I know of no difficulty experienced by the Radio Authority in ensuring localness in the past, and no case has been made for Ofcom to have such powers of interference in future. We therefore urge the Government to think again. I believe that they will encounter difficulty in relation to the clause in the other place, and it would be helpful if the Minister could signal his willingness to reconsider the matter, especially as the clause, as I have already said, was not subject to pre-legislative scrutiny.

Turning briefly to amendments Nos. 158 to 160, and amendment No. 162, I sympathise with hon. Members who are concerned about the interests of the music industry, especially about local music. Local bands feature prominently on local radio, more so on commercial radio than on the BBC as a matter of fact. I hope that Ofcom will keep in mind the views of the House when assessing and judging the quality of local service provision. It is unthinkable that "local material"—the definition used in clause 304—should be interpreted to exclude local music. Putting it more positively, music is the mainstay of much radio content, to answer the point made by the hon. Member for North Tayside in his intervention. Local music contributes greatly to the local material on local radio.

Dr. Howells: It does not.

Mr. Greenway: Perhaps it needs to feature more, but I would be surprised if the Minister said that local material, as defined in the Bill, should not include music—it should. Whether the word "music" needs to be added to that definition is a matter for the House to determine when it has heard the arguments that are about to be made by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Anniesland (John Robertson). However, we have considerable sympathy with the concerns of the music industry. As I have already said, in my experience, commercial radio stations—clause 304 applies to them, not to the BBC—are doing more to promote local music than the BBC.

John Robertson: I should like to draw the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Interests. May I also add that British Music Rights gave me a ticket to last Thursday's Brit awards, which helped me to compile the information that I am about to use? I had an excellent time.

[John Robertson]

May I tell the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) that while he was enjoying the Scotland-Ireland game in Glasgow, I was in my office in London enjoying the England-Australia game on television? I know that he would get back to me if I did not mention that.

2.15 pm

I wish to speak to amendments Nos. 158 to 160, and amendment No. 162, which I tabled with my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Mr. Dhanda), who unfortunately cannot be here as he is away on constituency business. The Bill could damage British music creators if it is not amended. A letter, which was also sent to me, has appeared in the *Financial Times*. In it, Mr. Tony Hadley, who used to be the lead singer of Spandau Ballet, said:

> "Looking at the music business now, I realise how lucky we were when we started Spandau Ballet in the early eighties. We found our audience through a vibrant live music scene and through national and local radio stations playing music which, like ours at the time, was outside the mainstream. Musicians today have far fewer opportunities, and the Government's approach to the Communications Bill threatens them still further when it should instead be a great opportunity."

Michael Fabricant: Will the hon. Gentleman go further back in time and acknowledge the role of stations such as Radio Caroline and Radio London, without which we would never have heard of the Who or even the Beatles?

John Robertson: The hon. Gentleman is all too familiar with those radio stations. I could mention Radio Scotland, which was based somewhere in the Irish sea, and Stuart Henry, who was a great DJ from our parts. I agree with the hon. Gentleman, and commend those stations.

Mr. Hadley continued:

> "Opening up our radio market to US competitors"—

I alluded to that in my intervention on the hon. Member for Ryedale—

> "when the US does not grant the same rights to European operators is just foolish. US operators will do here what they have done in their home market—buy up stations, merge their operations, centralise and computerise their programming, and generate their playlists entirely from computers."

I expressed concern about that in my intervention. Mr. Hadley concluded:

> "UK artists will undoubtedly lose out to US artists and both musical diversity and local character will also suffer. Fewer operators means fewer stations, fewer types of records played, fewer opportunities and lower earnings for UK performers. All for absolutely no corresponding benefit whatever for UK music or audiences."

A letter in *The Guardian* today signed by 29 professional artists says:

> "The government's proposed changes to the radio sector make it all the more crucial that the BBC deliver on its local and regional remit to support the arts. The current bill offers a great opportunity for the government to do something. Yet it seems deaf so far to our pleas."

Mr. Hawkins: I have been listening carefully to the hon. Gentleman. What he has just said about the BBC and its responsibility for its remit leads me to ask whether he has received letters from his constituents complaining bitterly that the BBC is dumbing down and chasing ratings, and that we are losing the best public service aspects that used to be the hallmark of the BBC? I am receiving lots of letters like that—is he?

John Robertson: I have received letters. If they were only about the BBC, I would not be so concerned, as we could tackle that, but they are about problems across the board, including those experienced by commercial radio stations. However, the hon. Gentleman is correct.

The letter in *The Guardian* continues:

> "An NOP opinion poll in January found that 68 per cent. of 15 to 24-year-olds want to hear a wider variety of music played on general radio stations, and some 72 per cent. of people would support measures to encourage local radio stations to cover local music. It is time this government started listening."

Following my contribution today, I hope that that will be addressed.

The Bill may have been amended to provide reassurance to other creators, primarily independent television producers, but the introduction of relatively stiff content regulation has not been extended to cover music. Given the Government's deregulatory approach to foreign ownership and consolidation, particularly in relation to the radio sector, the omission of any consideration of, or means of redress for, music creators is worrying. If one asks people what single thing has had the biggest influence or effect on them, most would say music. The young in particular are influenced by the music industry. At a time when politics is not, shall we say, high on their list of priorities, is it any wonder that they switch off when we cannot even be bothered to consider their favourite pastime?

The amendments to clauses 303 and 304 are intended to counteract the potential for consolidation in the local radio market undermining musical diversity and local character. They are intended to act as a vital counterbalance to the power that the regulation will give the larger players to control access to, and thereby access within, the UK music market. The Bill defines a local radio operator as one who broadcasts to a specific locality or region within the United Kingdom, not nationwide. Given the technology that exists even now in both digital and internet radio, enabling people to listen to some so-called local stations from anywhere in the country, that premise is surely outdated before even being introduced. No matter how we seek to define it, for music creators local radio is a crucial route to national exposure.

My amendments are important for two reasons. They would provide support for music at grass-roots level, encouraging local stations to cover local musicians and musical events and, more crucially, to support the British repertoire. The more airplay our artists are given, the more likely they are to succeed in the United Kingdom, in Europe, in—importantly—the United States and, indeed, in the world as a whole, and the more likely they are to contribute to the UK economy.

I stress that this is not about setting quotas, as the French do. It is simply about giving our artists a better chance of breaking through. As was pointed out by the living legend Tom Jones, whom I saw at the Brit awards last week, "If you don't get played you don't have a career—it's as simple as that."

Amendments Nos. 158, 159 and 160 are intended to enable Ofcom to prevent the diversity of music from being diminished. Diversity of service results from careful approval of a range of programme applications.

Pete Wishart: I, too, had the good fortune to attend the Brit awards on Thursday night; it was indeed a very enjoyable event. When I listen to local radio stations, however, I struggle to detect much local character and content, and presumably more foreign investment and ownership will cause local programming to decline further. Can the hon. Gentleman suggest any ways of encouraging local radio stations to include much more local content in their schedules?

John Robertson: The hon. Gentleman is a former member of Runrig, a band whose compact discs I have in my house. I enjoyed his music, along with that of his fellow artists.

It is difficult to force people to play certain music, and some would say that we were misusing our power if we did so. Last night I was present at a meeting with a telecom group, attended by the new chair of Ofcom. He agreed that local music must be given a chance, and said he would look favourably on any complaint that that was not happening. Perhaps the Minister will consider that when reports are produced on the extent of diversity among radio stations throughout the country. Who knows? Perhaps one day a private Member's Bill will be presented here with the aim of bringing about what the hon. Member for North Tayside (Pete Wishart) wants.

My amendments are intended to tighten the conditions that an applicant must meet in order to secure Ofcom's approval of mid-term changes in the character of a programme service. That would mean a requirement for Ofcom, before approving any mid-term licence changes, to be satisfied that the departure would not narrow the range of programmes and music available, by way of relevant independent radio services, to persons living in the area or locality for which the service was to be provided. Service providers should honour their licence commitments in regard to diversity, unless Ofcom is genuinely satisfied that all the conditions under clause 303(3) have been taken into account in a properly balanced way.

Clause 304 gives Ofcom a general duty to promote and protect the local content and character of local radio, specifically news broadcasts. However, the current definition of local material regrettably fails to provide the crucial safeguard for musical creativity and diversity. It is interesting to compare the conclusions of recent research carried out by commercial radio companies that want the clause removed—the hon. Member for Ryedale mentioned that—with those of the music industry, which wants it amended to mention music specifically. I wholeheartedly agree with that proposal.

The radio industry survey revealed that most young people no longer consider radio to be an important source of news. As I said earlier, however, an NOP world poll found that 68 per cent. of those aged between 15 and 24 would like to hear a wider variety of music on the radio. Perhaps if we supplied that variety the young would see radio stations in a different light, and as well as making local music available to young listeners we politicians might become accessible to them.

Michael Fabricant: Having implicitly criticised the BBC Light programme when I mentioned Radio Caroline and Radio London, I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman agrees that Radio 1 is performing a valuable role in broadcasting more experimental and less mainstream music than many independent stations.

John Robertson: I shall have to take the hon. Gentleman's word for that. I have now reached the age at which the music broadcast by Radio 2 becomes more one's kind of music. Radio 1's slot on the dial is sadly ignored these days: I am obviously getting very old. I understand what the hon. Gentleman means, however. I do not share the fears apparently felt by some of his colleagues about the BBC; I quite enjoy its coverage. My greatest fear is that it will be dumbed down, and will become a national rather than a local and regional service—covering, of course, not just regions but nations. That is intended for my nationalist colleagues on the Opposition Benches.

While music may be given appropriate recognition by Ofcom as material relevant to the definition in clause 304, I do not think the clause properly reflects the significance that music clearly has for the public—particularly younger audiences—in the context of local radio services. For the avoidance of doubt, Ofcom should be specifically required to take account of local music when drawing up guidance for radio stations on local material.

In amendment No. 161, which unfortunately was not selected, and in amendment No. 162, which was, I have sought to incorporate a safeguard for local jobs and skills in the music sector. The employment or use of local people is one of the determining factors in the requirement for local links to have been observed, but it is also important for that to reflect the way in which local radio provides a vital platform for the performance of local musicians and new bands that are establishing local fan bases.

I commend what the Government have done and the scrutiny of the pre-legislative Committee. Along with many Members on both sides of the House, however, I was disappointed by the omission of music. Music is singularly the most important thing in most people's lives, as I have said. We think that it is nice to talk about politics, but then again, we would, wouldn't we? Fortunately, I doubt whether there is a single Member of this House who does not regard music as one of the greatest influences in their lives, particularly during their formative years.

I hope that the Minister will take on board what I have said about our amendments, and that he will examine the issue and ensure that the word "music" appears in the Bill, and that musicians and local radio stations are encouraged to ensure that we develop a strong and vibrant music industry.

2.30 pm

Mr. Richard Allan (Sheffield, Hallam): I rise to express sympathy with the amendments moved by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Anniesland (John

[Mr. Richard Allan]

Robertson), and to express our view that the amendments on local commercial radio moved by the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) should be resisted. As it stands, clause 304 provides quite a good arrangement for Ofcom's powers in respect of local radio. The hon. Member for Ryedale was right to point out that these discussions are continuations of those that began in Committee.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Anniesland was right to point out that news may no longer be the principal item of local interest on radio stations. He put me in mind of a report that I read yesterday on the transition that is taking place in South Korea, where younger people in particular are turning to the internet as their primary source of news media, and a similar shift may well occur in the UK. As we write legislation, we must be aware that if we define local content in terms of news, even though people are no longer turning to radio stations to look for news, we may be missing the point. That strengthens the hon. Gentleman's argument that local music may be a primary determining factor in people saying that they want a local service, rather than a national one. They know that on a local radio station, they will get the local music content that they may not get anywhere else.

The hon. Member for Selby (Mr. Grogan) rightly mentioned the fear of the worst-case scenario—of what might happen if these powers are not given to Ofcom—and that is why we want to resist the amendments moved by the Conservatives. In a sense, we have to return to the underlying principle, which is that a radio spectrum broadcasting licence is a privilege. There is a limited supply of such licences, and conditions can be associated with the awarding of them that express certain public goods that go beyond those that the market alone might provide. Indeed, where the market alone does provide local radio stations that use local people, work from local premises, provide local music content, and so on, there is no reason for Ofcom to intervene. However, we have a legitimate fear, based on the experience of other countries, that that might not always remain the case. Owners of radio stations could seek to break down the local infrastructure, which is why provisions that extend the public good beyond mere content by referring to other requirements are significant.

The hon. Member for Ryedale said that we should talk only about content, but we disagree. In other areas, particularly local television production, we are going beyond the field of content by saying that a licence can have associated conditions that go beyond mere content of the material put out by referring to the media infrastructure. The awful phrase "media ecology" was used in Committee—I do not know whose fault it was; I certainly do not want to claim ownership of it—but it is true that elements such as the skill bases in local media and the associated training take a very long time to build up.

As I said in Committee, I am particularly sensitive to this issue. I come from Sheffield, which has quite a good media environment. A couple of local universities—Sheffield and Sheffield Hallam—have great media schools, but we are not the regional capital. The regional capital is Leeds, and even a reduction in local content that moved everything up to Leeds would be significantly to our disadvantage. As a result, a young Sheffielder who wanted to get into music, the media or broadcasting could be discouraged, because there would be nothing on his or her doorstep. It is essential that we retain localness, and I hope that we can keep clause 304 as it is. We hope that these powers will not have to be used in any significant way, and that Ofcom can adopt a very light touch. The media environment will be such that local radio licence holders will in any case want to do all the right things. However, we have to be prepared to use back-stop powers in situations where owners decide to do things differently and seek to withdraw local services for financial reasons. I do not believe that Ofcom would be so silly as to realise the fear that has been expressed by making the conditions so onerous that they put everybody out of business. That would be a nonsense. The reality is that there are plenty of bidders for limited spectrum local licences that are, as I said, in effect privileges. It is entirely right that we have a regulating public body that ensures that, in return for that privilege, we extract certain public goods that the market on its own may not deliver in all circumstances.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): I want to offer a word of support for my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway), who spoke to amendments Nos. 181 and 182, and to speak briefly about the other amendments. The hon. Member for Glasgow, Anniesland (John Robertson) advanced a very good argument for the inclusion of music in material for local radio broadcasting, and I do not disagree with the desirability of that. Of his various amendments, I hope that the House and the Government will incline towards amendment No. 162, so as to make it clear that music is comprised especially within the definition of local material. I cannot go along with him on amendment No. 160, however. If we start to litter the Bill with references to the desirability of appealing

"to a variety of tastes and interests",

one wonders why that objective was elevated to a general duty in clause 3. If that duty is included in clause 3, it should be one of Ofcom's strongest considerations in taking into account a range of other matters. I therefore see no need to repeat the provision in clause 303.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale put forward a very strong argument concerning the manner in which Ofcom should regulate the local content and character of services. Given the desire expressed in clause 6 to maintain only those regulatory burdens that are necessary, it seems entirely inconsistent for Ofcom to be asked elsewhere in the Bill not only to pursue a purpose—the maintenance of local programming and content—but to specify precisely how that is to be achieved. My hon. Friend is seeking to remove from the Bill not the purpose of local programming, but Ofcom's effective obligation to specify training, employment, premises, and so on. In setting up Ofcom, it is clear that we must try to move away from that, and try instead to extend commercial freedom in terms not only of ownership, but of the manner in which such stations are run.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Anniesland will recall from our deliberations in Committee examples such as 'Clear Channel', in Australia. It may have set out with a commercial desire and an imperative to cut costs that led to centralisation, but in so far as the result was a reduction in localness, it proved to be a commercial danger and a handicap to those services. The argument rests on the commercial imperative of localness as part of local radio stations. In the absence of it, any amount of legislation will not lead to localness. If it exists, we do not need to legislate for it to happen. If we pursue local content as a purpose, Ofcom will be able to regulate with a very light touch, because it will discover that that is what the radio stations themselves are setting out to achieve.

The Minister took us briefly through new clause 3 at the beginning of his comments, but I must confess that I am still unsure about the purpose of it. The Broadcasting Act 1996 provides for a 90 per cent. prescribed percentage for digital multiplex services. In 1998, that was reduced to 80 per cent. by way of statutory instrument. The nature of the argument is how far can one go while still retaining the necessary digital capacity to ensure not only the provision of services, but the CD quality of digital audio broadcasting, and the bit rate available for it. Those matters are quite technical, and it can happen over time that the parameters change, not only commercially but technically.

Section 54 of the Broadcasting Act made it possible for the Secretary of State to come to Parliament to change the percentage up or down, but the Minister is asking us to remove the ability to take that percentage below 80 per cent. I cannot construct an argument for why it would be necessary to go below 80 per cent., but changes in technology could mean that the requisite quality for digital audio broadcasting could be achieved with a lower bit rate and, at the same time, the simulcast of television services was considered desirable. It does not automatically follow that because something is broadcast on television, there is no demand to listen to it. For example, some people like to listen to news programmes from the television and others are happy to listen to soaps, perhaps with additional commentary, but not to watch them. Such services are not included in the list. It does not automatically follow that 80 per cent. is now and for all time the minimum percentage of capacity on the digital multiplex that is required for those particular services. I am, therefore, slightly concerned that the Minister is attempting to remove that flexibility.

Michael Fabricant: One of the attractions of the Bill was the light touch that it would give to Ofcom, so I am a little concerned that there will now be a little too much prescription. Hon. Members have made some interesting points. I especially liked the comments from the hon. Member for Glasgow, Anniesland (John Robertson), who mentioned the need for experimentation in music. It is its unique funding—as the BBC would call it—that enables Radio 1 to support that, and it is to be congratulated on it. Other, commercially funded, radio stations are attempting to do the same. However, it would be wrong for the Government or Ofcom to try to prescribe programming policy.

Ofcom makes the decision when it issues the licensing agreement in the first place. Once the agreement is made, it must be up to the independent radio broadcaster to decide for itself how to maximise its audience. As my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) said, the imperative for independent broadcasters is to be commercial. Ofcom can legislate as much as it likes, but it will do no good if a radio station goes out of business—as has happened with Centre FM, which was based in Leicester, and Gwent Broadcasting in Wales. The old Independent Broadcasting Authority tried to prescribe too much the sort of programming that those radio stations should put out. As a consequence, their overheads were too high and the advertising revenues they received were not enough to sustain cashflow and allow the stations to broadcast.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): The hon. Gentleman is making an important point about the commercial aspect of radio broadcasting, but that is only one side of the coin. The spectrum is owned by the nation and sold or licensed to those who wish to make profits from it. That is an effective use of the market to deliver a service to a wide number of people, but we must acknowledge an ongoing public service remit throughout all aspects of broadcasting. It is stronger in the BBC and weaker in commercial radio, but still present. We must ensure that the Bill contains a framework sufficient to ensure the relevance of local broadcasting, whether commercial or not.

Michael Fabricant: The hon. Gentleman raises an interesting point. It is almost a philosophical question. One could argue that if a radio station is popular and pulling in a large audience, it is providing a public service. One could also argue that if a radio station is broadcasting in the Reithian tradition of programmes that people ought to hear but it has no listeners, it is not providing a public service. As in all things, it is a question of balance. The thrust of the hon. Gentleman's question is right. There is a duty of care, including the need to ensure that the spectrum, which is one of the nation's assets, is used wisely. That includes the content of programming, such as music and news, and its localness—or indeed its Welshness, as the hon. Gentleman would have it.

If a radio station is solely funded through the sale of advertising time, it must be popular. It is not for Ofcom to impose conditions that would force the station into bankruptcy, because it would provide no public service if that happened.

2.45 pm

John Robertson: We need a balance between what is local and what is popular. I am concerned that the popular takes over and the local is forgotten. Therefore, we need someone who oversees the matter and Ofcom will be in an excellent position to do that. It will have a light touch, but it is necessary. One of the great successes of the local radio stations that have survived is their identification of local audiences. The radio stations that fell by the wayside made the mistake of trying to be too popular.

Michael Fabricant: I disagree with the hon. Gentleman when he draws a distinction between local and popular as though they were mutually exclusive. They are not. As my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire pointed out, Clear Channel in Australia—if not in the United States—discovered that

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a more centralised programming format, with all its output coming from Melbourne, proved to be unpopular. The whole point is that local can be popular. Ofcom should be a regulator, but it should have a light touch. The House would be right to resist anything that would mean Ofcom could interfere in the day-to-day programming of radio or television broadcasting.

Dr. Howells: I wish to set the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan) straight on the origin of the appalling phrase "broadcasting ecology". I suspect that it was born on the media pages of *The Guardian*, but it was nurtured on the south-facing slopes of the Rhondda by the hon. Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant), who took an inordinate interest in that ecology. The hon. Gentleman reminded us of the great difficulties in trying to balance the question of localness and the worthy Reithian principle, with the hard realities of broadcasting in a commercial world. I congratulate him on having done that with great clarity.

Amendments Nos. 158 to 160 were tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Anniesland (John Robertson). Among other things, clause 303 sets out the factors that Ofcom must take into account before agreeing to a request for changes to the character of a licensed radio service. A licence will contain conditions that are appropriate to securing that the character of a licensed service, as proposed by the licence holder when making his or her application, is maintained. Ofcom will be able to vary those conditions if, and only if, the departure would not substantially alter the character of the service or narrow the range of programmes available, which is an important consideration. The departure in the case of local licences would need to be conducive to maintaining or promoting fair competition or require evidence of significant local support for the change.

The final two elements added by the new clause are new factors for Ofcom to consider. The Government accept the case for some further relaxation to make it easier for licence holders to respond to local audience expectations and demand. In well-developed major markets, Ofcom will now also be able to allow format changes in mainstream stations to facilitate competition. That could result in stations going head to head, where it is felt that that would be beneficial to competition and to listeners.

Amendment No. 160 proposes that Ofcom should take into account the effect of any proposed changes on the range of programmes and music offered by a service. I have sympathy with the intention behind the amendment. It is clearly important that Ofcom takes into account the effect of any changes on the range of a station's music output. However, that in essence is what Ofcom will have to do under the new clause as drafted, as its purpose is to guide Ofcom in its consideration of changes to the character of commercial radio services.

We all know that commercial radio is about music. It would be impossible for Ofcom to consider the effect of a change in the range of programmes without also considering the range of music on offer. In this context, the two are virtually synonymous, and I do not consider that the amendment would add anything substantial or usable to Ofcom's range of powers. However, I fully expect that, in considering these issues, Ofcom will consider the implications for music.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Anniesland on raising a matter on which discussion of the Bill has been slow to touch. However, I spend much time travelling around the country, as do many hon. Members. I always listen to my car radio, and there is an incredible sameness and blandness about the music on offer everywhere.

I recently attended the biggest meeting of representatives from the music industry that I have ever attended. They banged their gums about the need to protect local music on radio. I asked what they meant by the term "local music", and no one came up with a clear answer. Does it mean British music or European music? Wherever I go, I hear the same sort of music on the radio.

I have great respect for the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway), but I got lost when he compared the BBC and commercial stations, which have different set-ups. Classic FM is an exception among commercial stations, as I think it was bailed out by American money when no British money was available. I think of Radio 3, and my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Anniesland—who is getting old and past it—has talked about Radio 2. The subject of music and creativity is often discussed on Radio 4, which also some very good arts programmes. I do not see that variety in commercial radio in general. Indeed, I have gone on record with my disappointment about what has happened to Jazz FM. There is an incredible blandness through the day. It still has some decent jazz after 7 pm, thank God, but it disappoints people looking for variety in music, and for specialist music on some channels.

Mr. John Whittingdale (Maldon and East Chelmsford): I was also present at last week's Brit awards, which demonstrate what British music is capable of. The BBC has a duty to promote different sorts of music. Radio 1 is a good example, but commercial stations, in the end, are obliged to attract listeners. This debate is more a commentary on the sad state of British music, a lot of the blame for which I attach to programmes such as "Pop Idol" and the various reality TV shows. London has a number of good commercial stations, such as XFM. It provides a very different type of non-chart music and is an example of how a commercial station can provide opportunities that are not always available on the BBC, let alone any other station.

Dr. Howells: I agree, and I know that the hon. Gentleman is an avid listener to contemporary music on the radio, as he told us so in Committee. His analysis is broadly correct, and I was careful to say that, in general, the commercial stations around the country to which I listen have a sameness about them. However, the hon. Gentleman is right to say that there are exceptions, and they prove the rule.

Mr. Simon Thomas: I should like to mention one such exception. I listen to Radio 1 on my way back to my constituency on a Thursday evening, because it opts out and becomes a Welsh station. Bethan Elfyn's two-hour programme covers the Welsh music scene. The programme is very popular, with live bands, reports and reviews and so on. It shows that the BBC can do such things, in contradiction of the contention from the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale). Commercial radio could act in the same way.

Dr. Howells: Yes, indeed. I shall take no more interventions on the matter, as I am sure that many stations could be mentioned, but the hon. Gentleman is right: the programme is excellent and a real innovation. I hope that the policy of BBC Wales to nurture local bands and talent will continue, and that it will be replicated around the country. That is happening in some areas.

I note that it has been stated that the amendment would also ensure that Ofcom must be satisfied that all conditions are fulfilled before agreeing to any changes in licences. That is not so, but let us look at the intention. The proposed change would be more restrictive than the current legislation. I have heard no convincing reason why we should take such a retrograde step, which would mean that there could be no departure from the character of a station, even if a change would promote competition, or if there was evidence that people in an area would significantly support that change.

The hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) gave an example of a programme that has a cult following in Wales. If it were a commercial station, and the amendment were accepted, would we say that the change was not in the original licence condition? We must be very careful and flexible about such matters, so that we do not tie ourselves down to a regime that would not allow the degree of flexibility and innovation that the hon. Gentleman described. If there is considerable local demand for a change, why should the regulator be prevented from agreeing to it? That would be self-evidently wrong.

The hon. Member for Ryedale moved amendments Nos. 181 and 182. We discussed the issues involved at some length in Committee. There is no difference of opinion between me and the hon. Gentleman about the importance of local radio to the community that it serves, nor about the overriding need for local radio to be genuinely local. We do not disagree either about the need for a code to safeguard localness—at least, I do not recall any such disagreement in Committee. We agreed that the code should be designed to ensure that programmes consisting of local material would be included in local services.

I am pleased that the importance and desirability of such a code is widely recognised. That should go a long way towards protecting the vital localness of local radio, regardless of who owns it. That very important point was stressed by the hon. Member for Ryedale, as that localness is what we have to protect. The disagreement hinges on what else the code should contain. We agree that it should cover outputs, but not about whether it should also cover what we call inputs. I want to concentrate on the nub of the disagreements—the importance of inputs—as all the rest is broadly agreed.

First, I shall explain what I mean by the terms "inputs" and "outputs". A station's output is essentially what one hears coming out of the speakers—the music, the news, the travel and weather updates and local information, and everything else that one hears on switching to a local radio station. We all agree that such material should have a genuine local flavour and relevance. We believe that the code will ensure that.

The inputs are the things that happen on the other side of the speakers. They are not necessarily heard directly, but they contribute to a station's distinctive character and give it a vital, physical presence at the heart of its community. I was perplexed by the example given by the hon. Member for Ryedale. He is right to stress how important it is that Radio Clyde feels that it should be right in the middle of the city—that it should be part of the public that it serves. That is why we have to consider carefully the inputs, which are the vital elements he talked about. They have a good effect on the character of a radio service and are good for the community that it serves.

3 pm

Michael Fabricant: Just for clarification, what are the inputs? The Minister defined output as being that which comes out of the loudspeakers, but what does he mean by the inputs?

Dr. Howells: The hon. Gentleman has such a vital and energetic brain that he is leaping ahead.

Clause 304 identifies a number of possible inputs that could be covered by the code, namely locally made programmes and local advertising, local employment opportunities, local training opportunities and the use of premises in the area. The amendment would remove some of the items from the code. The code should be able to include local employment opportunities, local training opportunities and the use of premises in the area. I stress the words "be able to". The code does not have to include them—the clause merely allows Ofcom to include them if it considers it appropriate to do so. That is an important proviso, because whether they are included is very much in the hands of the industry. The code should be able to include those matters for two reasons. First, local radio stations get their spectrum for free, as the hon. Member for Ceredigion reminded us, and therefore have an obligation to the local communities they serve that goes beyond simply playing popular music. Secondly, those factors can have a perhaps unquantifiable, but not insignificant, effect on the character and ultimately the sound of a station.

On the first point, local radio stations are awarded licences by the Radio Authority on the basis of a beauty contest based largely on their ability to appeal to the tastes and interests of those in the area, to broaden local choice and in recognition of the degree of local support for their proposals. Unlike national licences, those licences are awarded for free—apart from the application costs, which can be hefty. In those circumstances, it is not unreasonable that certain requirements should be placed on licensees. Those stations have, in a less explicit way than TV, certain public service broadcasting obligations, and it is reasonable to expect them to have a physical presence and to provide employment opportunities and training in the locality from which, after all, they generate their profits.

Michael Fabricant: Does the Minister accept that smaller radio stations may find that to be a particular

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burden? Although he is right to say that a local radio station should have a presence, it may be based out on an industrial estate—and why not, because the outputs that he spoke about will be just the same? Does he recognise that if the burdens are too tough the radio station's output will become nil, because it will not survive?

Dr. Howells: I entirely agree. That is why I stressed that Ofcom will have to take those issues into account when it considers particular radio stations. As both the hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Ceredigion have said, there are two sides to the coin—a tightrope has to be walked, and it is not easy.

It is not unreasonable to expect local stations to be genuinely, not virtually, local. I take the hon. Gentleman's point about being stuck out on an industrial estate, as many stations are. However, they often employ local people and despite the fact that they are on an industrial estate they are nevertheless regarded as part of the infrastructure of the community. In my experience, those are important elements.

On my second point, real links with the local community can have a subtle impact on the quality of stations. In other words, the more physically local a station is, and the more roots that it has in its community, the better it will reflect the community's needs and wishes. It has long been recognised in broadcasting regulation that inputs have a clear and definite effect on outputs. To quote the Commercial Radio Companies Association in another context, "You are what you eat." That is why we have quota requirements for public service broadcasting in terms of television and regional production.

The industry has argued that localness is its bread and butter—its unique selling proposition—and that it does not need the regulator or the Government to tell it how to be local. However, the fact that the industry is opposed to the code including inputs shows that its view of localness is narrower than ours. We are about to enter a new world for radio, as my hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Grogan) said. The ownership rules have been and are being radically overhauled. We listened to representations from the industry and relaxed our original proposals, which were tighter than our latest proposals, and which already represented an enormous liberalisation so as to allow for the possibility—I hope that it does not come to pass—of two large radio groups dominating the UK market. If we do not take steps to prevent it, that level of concentration could lead to a drift away from localness. Many local radio stations strive to be more local. The hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam gave an important example when he pointed out that there is an enormous difference between the idea of localness if one lives in the city of Sheffield and the idea of localness if one regards Leeds as the most vibrant commercial centre of the region—in effect, its capital.

Localness is the most expensive part of programming, so there is arguably a commercial incentive to do as little as one can consistent with maintaining audiences at a viable level. We have already seen nationwide playlists for local stations, the removal of local station managers in favour of national brand managers and extensive computer-driven automation of services. That has not been mentioned, but it is up and running. In the situation of a national near-duopoly, there could be a further drift away from the parts of programming that are expensive. One may think that if the other side is doing it, it is better from a business point of view to do the same and to cut costs accordingly, especially if one believes that local listeners are mainly interested in music—in international music, if I might use that expression. We need a localness code to prevent that from happening.

That brings me to an important aspect of the code. It does not have to include factors to which Opposition Members object, but it can. The extent of its coverage will depend largely on the actions of the radio industry itself. I am already on record as having said that the code should, as far as possible, be co-regulatory. That is also the view of the industry and the regulator. Clause 6 will place Ofcom under a duty to review regulatory burdens and it will have to have regard to the extent to which its duties can be secured or furthered by effective self-regulation.

Amendment No. 162 would make it clear that music should be specifically included in the definition of local material. I have a great deal of sympathy with that sentiment. Music is central to the output of any local radio station, and a degree of local music would be desirable in any station's output, if we are to believe the rhetoric that is put out by the commercial radio station owners. They say that localness is very important to them, so there should be no problem with their wanting to play local music. There is nothing in the Bill to prevent Ofcom from including music in the definition of local material—the hon. Member for Ryedale rightly made that point—and I would be rather surprised if it did not do so. Among other things, that would guard against playlists being concentrated in too few hands, with the result that it becomes difficult for new bands to be heard on the radio. The question turns on whether we need to put the point beyond doubt by making provision in the Bill.

There is always a danger that the more aspects that are specified in the definition, the greater the presumption that those that are not mentioned are excluded. That is the problem, although I have a great deal of sympathy with the point. I know fanatical members of the Cabinet, whom I could ring any time, night or day, when I worked with them, but never on a Sunday evening when they listened to "Poetry Now" on Radio 4. I never rang them at that time.

Mr. Greenway: Local sport constitutes a good illustration of the Minister's case. I am sure that he would not want to miss local commentary on Pontypridd.

Dr. Howells: Pontypridd is a great place.

John Robertson: I have never heard of it. I understand my hon. Friend's point about music, but his argument could apply to politics and news. Why include those subjects in the Bill? Why not simply refer to "programmes"? We believed that the definition should include news and politics. I believe that music should also be included. "Music" covers an enormous range. It could not be interpreted to exclude something because it encompasses so much. I implore my hon. Friend to reconsider and include the word "music" somewhere in the Bill.

Dr. Howells: I understand my hon. Friend's point. However, I am not convinced that music should be included and I am wary of over-prescription. There is no need to specify music, although I support the sentiment behind my hon. Friend's amendments. I repeat my hope and expectation that Ofcom will consider music to be an important element of local material.

I hope that hon. Members will not press their amendments.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 4

INVESTIGATION OF THE BBC BY THE NATIONAL AUDIT OFFICE

'( ) In Part 2 of Schedule 4 to the National Audit Office Act 1983 (c. 44), the words "the British Broadcasting Corporation" shall be omitted.'—*[Mr. Leigh.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following: New clause 6—*BBC research on television licensing*—

'It shall be the duty of the BBC annually to commission and publish independent research into the efficacy, cost effectiveness and public acceptability of television licensing in the United Kingdom subject to such conditions and restrictions as the Secretary of State may by direction require.'.

New clause 7—*OFCOM research on television licensing*—

'It shall be the duty of OFCOM annually to commission and publish independent research into the efficacy, cost effectiveness and public acceptability of television licensing in the United Kingdom subject to such conditions and restrictions as the Secretary of State may by direction require.'.

New clause 8—*Preserved rights in respect of certain concessionary television licence fees*—

'(1) Part 1 of Schedule 2 to the Wireless Telegraphy (Television Licence Fees) Regulations 1997 (S.I. 1997/290) shall be amended as follows.

(2) After entry 5 in column 1 (type of licence), there shall be inserted—

> "Television licence (including colour) (Accommodation for Residential Care (preserved rights))."

(3) After entry 5 in column 2 (description of licence), there shall be inserted—

> "A licence to install and use television receivers at such parts of accommodation which, in whole or in part, previously met the requirements specified in entry 5 in this column, where the resident of a unit of accommodation was resident in that accommodation at the time that the accommodation or part of that accommodation met the requirements specified in entry 5 in column 2 and was paying the issue fee specified in entry 5 in column 3."

(4) After entry 5 in column 3 (issue fee), there shall be inserted—

> "£5 for each unit of accommodation occupied by a resident, as defined in Part II of this Schedule, meeting the requirements specified in column 2.".'.

New clause 9—*Public services fund*—

'(1) The Secretary of State shall by order make provision for the establishment of a fund to be known as the Public Services Broadcasting Fund.

(2) There shall be at least 3 trustees of the Fund and the order shall make provision for the terms of their appointment, including their remuneration.

(3) The primary function of the Trustees shall be the making of financial contributions to groups or organisations which make or propose to make programmes of local, regional or sectional interest for inclusion in a programme service.

(4) The Trustees shall have such other powers as may be conferred on them by the order.

(5) The BBC shall pay to the Trustees for the Fund in January of each calendar year in accordance with the provisions of the order made under subsection (1) an amount equal to 1 per cent. of the licence fee received by the BBC in the preceding calendar year.

(6) The Secretary of State may by order vary the percentage for the time being specified in subsection (5).

(7) An order under this section shall not be made unless a draft of the order has been laid before Parliament and approved by a resolution of each House.'.

Mr. Leigh: The purpose of the new clause is to enable the Comptroller and Auditor General to enjoy full value-for-money access rights to the BBC and thus to open it up to exactly the same scrutiny on Parliament's behalf as all other bodies that are funded by tax.

I stress from the outset that we are not considering a party-political issue. There is total consensus among members of the Public Accounts Committee, on which I serve, and in both Houses that the BBC's position outside the Comptroller and Auditor General's remit is a matter for concern.

The new clause is supported by the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel), who is in his place, my hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr. Bacon), the right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams), who is Chairman of the Liaison Committee and one of the most senior Members of the House, the hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Geraint Davies), who is in his place, the hon. Member for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg), my hon. Friends the Members for Fareham (Mr. Hoban), and for Tatton (Mr. Osborne), the hon. Member for Tamworth (Mr. Jenkins), my hon. Friend the Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale) and the hon. Member for Knowsley, North and Sefton, East (Mr. Howarth).

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield): A fine body of men.

Mr. Leigh: Indeed. Those names show that there is consensus, at least on the Public Accounts Committee. Like many hon. Members, I believe that the BBC should be in the same position as other public bodies.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Is the new clause confined solely to the audit of financial management in the BBC or would its purview extend to considering

[Mr. John Bercow]

whether the BBC had honoured its obligations to observe due impartiality in matters of political and industrial controversy?

Mr. Leigh: I am grateful that my hon. Friend, with his usual perspicacity, has moved to the central argument. Let me make it clear straight away that there is no intention to undermine, affect or question the BBC's editorial independence through the new clause.

3.15 pm

We all acknowledge that although we may tear our hair out about various aspects of programmes that we personally dislike, including political views with which we disagree and interviews on "Today", the new clause has nothing to do with that. I assure my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) that the Comptroller and Auditor General, who is an officer of the House, is uninterested in what happens in programmes. He simply wants to subject the BBC to the same financial scrutiny as everyone else.

We are considering £2.5 billion of taxpayers' money, which is raised through a compulsory licence fee. Let us be honest: it is effectively a poll tax on the majority of people in the country. It is no longer sustainable to keep that large sum beyond our scrutiny. I believe that the Minister privately acknowledges that, that his civil servants recognise it and that many people in the BBC accept it. Even the current chairman of the BBC publicly acknowledged that before he took up his current position. Whatever the Minister's negotiating position, I believe that everybody realises that the time is right for the BBC to come under Parliament's scrutiny.

For those who are not familiar with the system, the Comptroller and Auditor General audits central Government and the bodies that they fund. I am delighted that the Government have made progress. They are in the process of correcting past anomalies—for example, the Comptroller and Auditor General was not allowed to scrutinise some non-departmental public bodies or Government-owned companies. I bend over backwards not to be party political when I speak on behalf of the Public Accounts Committee. I therefore pay tribute to the Government for their tremendous progress.

However, the position on the BBC is much less clear. The Comptroller and Auditor General has only limited rights of access, which are far short of what is necessary. He can examine the arrangements for collecting the television licence fee and the use that the BBC makes of the grant from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to support the World Service. Those are only two small aspects of the enormous empire that constitutes the BBC. He cannot examine or report to Parliament on the bulk of the BBC's spending, which amounts to £2.5 billion. That is wrong. I want to convince the Minister that we must right the wrong now.

Michael Fabricant: Does my hon. Friend acknowledge that there is an argument, to which I do not especially subscribe, that, if the National Audit Office were allowed to investigate the BBC, it would be in a position to judge and interfere with programming and creative policy in the corporation? Will my hon. Friend either assure me that that would not happen or at least justify the reasons for it?

Mr. Leigh: I know that my hon. Friend takes a deep interest in those matters. He talks to senior executives in the BBC and understands their mindset. I assure him, and perhaps BBC executives through him, that we have no desire to compromise the BBC's independence or limit its creativity. It would be a retrograde step if Members of Parliament, the PAC, the Comptroller and Auditor General or anybody else tried to inhibit editorial independence. The argument that that independence would be compromised—if such an argument is being put forward—simply does not stand scrutiny. Let us consider what the CAG already does. He reports on the Arts Council and no complaint has ever been made by anybody in the Arts Council saying that the National Audit Office has been questioning their artistic judgments—*[Interruption.]* The Minister knows all about that. Perhaps people in the National Audit Office do not have the facility with words that he has shown on previous occasions in dealing with artistic matters, but there have never been any complaints about the activities of the CAG with regard to the Arts Council. The CAG also reports on our universities, but not a single complaint has come from any university saying that he has inhibited academic freedom. That simply has not happened.

The editorial judgments made by the BBC would be the CAG's starting point. He would say "I am not responsible in any way for the editorial judgments that are being made", but he would provide a valuable insight into how the public funds that are at the BBC's disposal are being spent. We are outlaying all the money and we want to know that it is being spent efficiently and without waste. The CAG would provide Parliament with an independent insight into the quality of the BBC's financial management. That is what the process is all about. This House started its work a long time ago in scrutinising the Executive and trying to ensure proper financial management. There are still only two areas where Parliament does not have a right to investigate financial management where public money is used—the BBC and the civil list.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): Is not the ultimate absurdity the fact that the BBC squeals at the very thought of a non-policy Committee such as ours considering its finances, but turns up to give evidence at the appropriate Select Committee, which can consider policy?

Mr. Leigh: I am grateful that the right hon. Gentleman has mentioned that point, as I want now to deal with the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport. BBC executives have claimed that their appearances before that departmental Select Committee, which is involved in policy, while the Public Accounts Committee never is, provide some sort of accountability. I believe, however, that the appearances of BBC representatives before that departmental Select Committee have proved that, despite its best efforts, it does not have the expertise or support staff, including the support of the National Audit Office and its 700 staff, that are necessary to provide an in-depth analysis of what is going on in the BBC's financial management.

Mr. Brian Jenkins (Tamworth): Surely my friend realises that no matter how much experience, expertise and will there is, without the figures, one cannot possibly make any judgment on effective use of resources?

Mr. Leigh: That is absolutely right; indeed, it explains why a Committee of Parliament that is supported by its own civil service in the shape of the National Audit Office is needed to investigate the BBC and ensure that £2.5 billion of our money, which we spend, is being spent properly. I understand that members of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee, some of whom are present in the Chamber, agree with me and realise that they cannot provide the sort of scrutiny that would be afforded by the CAG.

Last July, when the Culture, Media and Sport Committee took evidence from the BBC on its annual report, my hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant), who is present in the Chamber, remarked to the BBC witnesses that the idea that his Committee could substitute itself for the NAO in scrutinising the BBC was—I hope that I am not misquoting him—"frankly ridiculous". That is the view of that departmental Select Committee and I entirely agree with it.

If there were some problem with editorial independence, surely a complaint would have been made about the scrutiny that we provide in respect of the World Service. As far as I know—I have checked this matter with the National Audit Office—there has never been any complaint from the chairman or chief executive of the BBC about any findings or recommendations on the World Service ever made by the Public Accounts Committee in working on Parliament's behalf. There has never been any complaint that we have interfered in the editorial judgments or freedom of the World Service. Our work on the World Service could be regarded as a pilot study. We have been looking at the World Service for all these years, we have done our studies and we have tried to improve the service and make it work better, and never has a single complaint been made about our compromising editorial independence.

The CAG is simply an officer of the House. He is wholly independent of the Government and is effectively appointed for life. The National Audit Office gives him complete discretion in respect of the topics that he chooses to examine, how he carries out his work and whether he produces a report. I cannot force him to undertake a particular inquiry and neither can members of my Committee. He is an independent officer and is completely outwith any sort of party political or even political process. He is supported by an expert staff. They have expertise and experience that are second to none, and we believe—I want to be helpful to the BBC—that they would add genuine value to the financial management of the BBC. We believe that they could help it. They are not bean counters who will crawl all over it and subject it to all sorts of difficulties and time-wasting processes. They can help the BBC, using all the experience of the NAO, in trying to ensure that that great organisation, of which we are all proud in our various ways, is as modern and progressive in its financial management as any other Government body.

Brian White (Milton Keynes, North-East): One of the criticisms made in the IT world is that fear of the Public Accounts Committee inhibits innovation and risk taking in the public sector. How does the hon. Gentleman respond to that criticism in the context of modernisation of the BBC?

Mr. Leigh: That is a fair point and I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman has made it. The point that we make to Whitehall is that we are not risk averse—quite the contrary. We want Whitehall to take risks, as long as they are well thought out. My Committee has made numerous recommendations over the years that prove that point. We recognise that the BBC has to take risks. For example, it had to be prepared to take a risk in launching BBC News 24. All sorts of problems may be involved, but we would not create an atmosphere or background in which executives think "I am not going to launch a new television or radio channel because I might be summoned by the PAC to account for myself." If executives make mistakes and are wasteful or take decisions that result in the mishandling of tens of millions of pounds of public money, however, surely it is only right that they should be brought in front of Parliament to account for their actions.

Why should it be the case that in one part of the public sector—the BBC is effectively a part of the public sector—executives are not held to account by shareholders, of whom there are none, and are not subject to discipline under the Companies Act 1989, but are not accountable to Parliament either? I say to them that we are not trying to prevent them from taking risks. All we are saying is that, like everybody else in the public and private sectors, they should be held to account.

Michael Fabricant: Does my hon. Friend agree that executives who are in a position in which they can be investigated are also thereby given a degree of protection? From time to time, the corporation has been criticised on the ground that it has used public licence money to compete in the commercial market. It has always denied doing that, but it is currently its own judge and jury. Would not the locus of my hon. Friend's Committee include an investigation in that area if such an accusation were made? Does he agree that his work and that of his Committee might be more believable than that of the corporation in trying to defend itself?

Mr. Leigh: In some ways, I feel sorry for the BBC. It is the national butt of complaints. We all complain about it, saying that it is not doing this or that right. We all have an opinion on it. One reason for resentment of the BBC—from MPs, members of the public and its private sector competitors—is that it is an entirely independent empire that is not held to financial account by anybody. It would be a defence mechanism for the BBC to come in front of a parliamentary Committee to explain its decisions.

3.30 pm

Dr. Howells *rose*—

Mr. Lansley *rose—*

Mr. Leigh: I had better give way to the Minister first.

Dr. Howells: No, it is all right.

Mr. Lansley: Perhaps the Minister and I were about to make the same point. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh), but I do not want his argument to stretch too far. He appeared to agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant), but I think that the argument is being stretched too far. If the BBC were to use licence fee money to subsidise services in a way that went beyond its public service remit and interfered with competition, it would be subject to scrutiny from the competition authorities. This does not diminish my hon. Friend's argument, but we must be clear that there are certain BBC activities that are subject to scrutiny.

Mr. Leigh: I accept that. If there is unfair competition, or if the BBC is acting outwith its statutory framework, there are other ways of righting the wrong.

Dr. Howells: The hon. Gentleman's hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) second-guessed me. However, I wanted to ask the hon. Gentleman another question. This is an important debate and I am enjoying his contribution very much. He said that people should be held to account. As a veteran of the PAC, I can well imagine that, if somebody had invested in a computer system—and such systems provided great fare for the PAC in many investigations by the CAG—and millions of pounds had been lost, that would be well worth investigating. However, what about an executive who was responsible for producing a series or a top-end drama that had lost millions of pounds? How would the PAC investigate that kind of loss, where earnings could have been made from the product but were not?

Mr. Leigh: That is an important intervention and it probably goes to the heart of what concerns BBC executives. It is difficult for me to give the House a categorical undertaking. I do not speak for the Comptroller and Auditor General in the way Ministers speak for their civil servants. I cannot tell the House exactly what the CAG would want to investigate. However, I have some experience of what he would want to investigate in other parts of the public sector. The Minister has put his finger on the central issue. I suspect that the CAG would, as the Minister suggests, be interested in the purchase of a new computer or information technology system that had not been properly thought through, resulting in major financial loss for the BBC. However, I cannot conceive of any circumstances in which the CAG would think that he had the expertise to second-guess the editorial judgment of senior executives in the BBC who had thought that a particular programme or series would be popular when in fact it was a great flop that nobody wanted to watch, leading to it being taken off the air with the waste of vast sums of money.

We all accept that creative people have to take risks and that sometimes they will get ahead of what public opinion wants. However, why anybody in the National Audit Office would think that they had the expertise to second-guess that kind of decision, I cannot imagine. It is not going to happen. It is not for me to speak for the CAG, but I think that I can give the Minister and the BBC that reassurance.

Mr. Jenkins: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that it is not what is produced that we want to consider, but how it is produced? Within the enclaves of the BBC—an organisation that is protected from the rigour of the world of commercial enterprise—we want to ensure that the most effective use is made of resources that are, in effect, a donation from the taxpayer. We are critical not of the programmes but of the methods used to put them together.

Mr. Leigh: The hon. Gentleman has put the argument far better than I could have done. What is being produced is none of our concern. We do not have the expertise to question whether a particular programme is desirable or not. However, how the BBC is run—this huge public corporation that spends £2.5 billion a year—is surely of some interest to Parliament.

Let me describe how the Public Accounts Committee works. The PAC does not question the right of the Government to make a particular policy decision—for example, to introduce individual learning accounts. If the Government of the day want to introduce ILAs, that is for the Government. We do not question that. However, we have a perfect right to say, "You introduced ILAs but you didn't get a sufficient grip and the whole thing went out of control. There was massive fraud and the taxpayer ended up losing tens of millions of pounds." A similar argument would apply to the BBC. We will not get involved in its policy decisions. That is the key. The PAC has a defence mechanism: we never get involved in policy decisions. We will not question a particular policy decision of BBC senior management to produce a series of programmes or even to set up an entirely new service. However, we would be interested in how the programmes were produced or the service set up.

Brian White *rose—*

Mr. William Cash (Stone): I apologise for coming to the debate rather late. I heard my hon. Friend talking about policy decisions. Does he agree that it is essential that the BBC should subscribe to its charter and to the ingredients that go with it? If it does not, it will be under attack on two fronts—on impartiality and the way that the guidelines function, and on its accounts.

Mr. Leigh: I am not going to be taken down the route of saying that we should in any way get involved in impartiality. To do so would be to defeat immediately all the arguments that I have been trying to elucidate for the past 20 minutes. It may be that the BBC is not impartial, but that is none of my business. Other mechanisms can deal with that issue, and I contend that they work perfectly well.

My hon. Friend refers to accounts management. That is something in which Parliament has a perfect right to get involved. There is no adequate mechanism—under the charter or by any other means—to question whether things are being done properly.

Another hon. Member has tried to intervene, but I must finish soon to allow other hon. Members to contribute.

Brian White: I want to ask about the BBC's quota of independent productions. Would the PAC be involved in monitoring those contracts? If so, what is to prevent it from becoming a sort of court of appeal for independent contractors who feel that they have been hard done by?

Mr. Leigh: The hon. Gentleman has done a good job in presenting some fears that BBC management may have expressed. However, some people do not understand the way in which the Public Accounts Committee operates. In this country, we raise and spend the best part of £700 billion of public money every year. The PAC is only one Committee of the Parliament. We have twice as many hearings as any other Committee but we still meet only 60 times a year. I assure the hon. Gentleman, and anybody else who takes a close interest in these matters, that the PAC will not spend the whole year—or indeed a half or a quarter of the year—crawling over every aspect of the BBC, whether quotas or anything else. I suspect that, if Parliament gets this Bill right, people in the BBC will say, "Well, we'll have to be a bit careful about our financial decisions because we could be held to account." However, there will be only one hearing, or maybe two hearings, on the BBC each year. The CAG will feel his way extremely carefully. He is very attuned to all the sensitivities about his ever getting involved in editorial independence. He will not go down any route that will get him into trouble.

Michael Fabricant: The Minister intervened on my hon. Friend to ask an interesting question from which this discussion—this sub-debate, if you like—has arisen. The Minister asked about a series, or an individual programme, that made a loss. Does my hon. Friend accept that a programme that is made for the BBC cannot, in itself, make a loss? It is not made as a commercial production, unless we have to take account of some co-production deal with, for example, an American broadcaster. Does my hon. Friend—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. This is rather a long intervention.

Mr. Leigh: I agree with my hon. Friend. I cannot conceive of a situation in which the CAG would want to become involved in decisions about the way in which the BBC is run, or in which it would be appropriate or right for the CAG to question why a series of programmes had been made. We can put that canard to rest now; it simply will not happen.

I wish to say in conclusion—I am trying to get to the end of my speech without too many interventions—that the practical and constructive work of the CAG has saved £1.5 billion over the past three years. His independence is a safeguard for the BBC and for Parliament. It is important that we keep in view the principle that lies behind the new clause: simply to increase parliamentary accountability of the BBC. In 2001–02, the licence fee raised £2.5 billion, yet although the CAG can examine its collection, he cannot look at how well the money raised is spent. That is a significant weakness in public accountability.

Arguments in favour of extending the CAG's rights of access to the BBC have been repeatedly and forcefully made on many occasions by the PAC, by the Culture, Media and Sport Committee, by Lord Sharman in his review of audit and by many others. I recognise that, in the Davies review, the BBC has been subject to some external reviews and other measures designed to improve its financial accountability, but, of course, they do not provide the ongoing parliamentary scrutiny and accountability that is needed.

The Bill provides a unique opportunity for the House to rectify a wrong that has existed for too long. It is essential that the BBC is opened up to proper parliamentary oversight. This argument will not go away; nor should it until the requirements of the House and the licence payers whom we represent are met and the new clause is accepted.

Jon Trickett (Hemsworth): I rise partly to correct an omission: because of an oversight, my name did not appear in support of the new clause. I am a member of the PAC, and I would deplore any suggestion that the PAC's support for the proposal was anything but unanimous. All its members, from all parties, endorse all the points that have just been made so persuasively in making what is, frankly, an irrefutable case.

From time to time, probably quite frequently, all hon. Members will encounter constituents who wish to raise certain matters about the BBC and the licence fee. We are answerable for the fact that the licence fee is now well over £100 a year and is sometimes levied on extremely poor households. Yet, as we have just heard, Parliament is unable to scrutinise the mechanisms that the BBC uses to organise itself and its expenditure patterns. That is clearly wrong.

The Chairman of the PAC has just said that there are two only two areas of public expenditure where the Comptroller and Auditor General is not currently allowed to venture—the civil list and the BBC—but the PAC and certainly the NAO have looked at certain elements of royal expenditure, such as royal travel and grace-and-favour flats and other properties that belong to the royal household. So the principle itself has been accepted that Parliament, which votes the civil list, may consider certain items of royal expenditure.

The BBC is the last bastion to resist parliamentary control, although all hon. Members will notice that it frequently knocks on the door when it wants the licence fee to increase. If it expects us to be able to argue the case for raising money for the BBC, as we all do, it should accept the associated principles of accountability and transparency. A fairly puerile argument has been developed as a defensive mechanism by the BBC, which suggests that, somehow or other, its integrity would be affected by such scrutiny.

3.45 pm

All hon. Members understand the difference between a democracy and a totalitarian arrangement. In totalitarian countries—for example, Zimbabwe—the press is subject to close control by politicians. That must be resisted in a democracy. Whatever the political, editorial and creative impulses behind the media, their independence must be protected at all costs. That is precious and must be kept independent of the political

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[Jon Trickett]

process. That is well understood, and for the BBC to develop such an argument in defending itself from financial scrutiny by Parliament is, frankly, an insult to ourselves as parliamentarians, to Parliament as in institution and to the electorate, by suggesting that they would allow elected politicians to interfere in something as precious and important as the BBC's editorial and creative independence. Frankly, that argument is not sustainable, and displays a fundamental misunderstanding of the way in which the PAC and certainly the CAG conduct their business.

The fact is that the argument about the BBC's editorial independence is almost exactly analogous to the argument that we in the PAC frequently have about policy. Every member of the PAC well understands that we may not stray into policy issues when questioning civil servants. The relationship between the policy advice given to Ministers and the ministerial response is beyond the PAC's remit; it is for Parliament to address. Although we understand that, our questions may be robust occasionally, but if a member of the PAC inadvertently strays into policy issues, the other members and certainly the Chairman—I pay tribute to him for his independence and the non-partisan way in which he chairs the Committee—would quickly remind that member that he or she was straying into an inappropriate area.

It is a fact that our modus operandi is well established—the PAC is the oldest Committee of the House—and we do not stray into policy issues, but we frequently tackle financial irregularities, inefficiencies and so on. That distinction is clear in our minds, and it is precisely analogous to the argument about the way in which the BBC's finances, but obviously not its editorial policy, should be accountable to Parliament through that process.

The NAO, supported by the PAC, has identified substantial savings across the public sector over the years. That has been well demonstrated, and I should have thought that the BBC would welcome any assistance that Parliament could provide in identifying savings, which could then be redeployed into additional programming and, perhaps, more creative activities. So, if anything, I see us as an ally of the BBC.

Finally, I would tell those in the BBC who think that they are defending it that they are actually exposing themselves to criticism. This is an Achilles' heel for the BBC. I see myself as a great advocate and friend of the BBC, and I suppose that most hon. Members feel the same. When constituents ask me, "You are raising £110 a year from me"—or whatever the licence fee may be—"How do I know that I'm getting value for money from the BBC?", I would like to be able to tell them that they are getting value for money, that the accounts are subject to close scrutiny and that we are convinced, because we can demonstrate that the BBC is being examined, that such efficiency has been achieved. However, the fact is that we cannot say that, so those hon. Members who would like to defend the BBC are unable to do so, and the BBC is doing itself a great disservice. The argument is beyond persuasive—it is irrefutable—and I hope that the Minister will indicate that the Government are moving in our direction even if he does not accept the new clause this afternoon.

Mr. Whittingdale: I want to speak to new clauses 6, 7 and 9. Before I do so, I should say how pleased I am that my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) tabled new clause 4. I am even more pleased that the other members of the Public Accounts Committee have put their names to it. We debated the issue in Committee, and it was notable that everyone who spoke in Committee, from all parties represented on it, supported the idea that the BBC should come under the scrutiny of the National Audit Office. I had an impression from the Minister's response in Committee that he, too, could appreciate the arguments, and that it was a question of time rather than a debate about the desirability of such scrutiny. I hope that he may be able to provide a further guide on that point this afternoon.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough has set out a powerful case. The BBC receives some £2.5 billion of public money, and anybody who has had any dealings with the BBC recognises that it is not exactly a model of efficiency—one does not have to look hard to discover examples of waste. Nor is it a model of transparency. I am sorry that the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant) is not present this afternoon, as he played a considerable part in debates in Committee, and he is a former employee of the BBC. He said:

> "When I was at the BBC, whenever there was a threat that somebody might start looking at the books, it was a bit like Saddam Hussein trying to hide things from the weapons inspectors; things would move from one office to another and an exciting time was had by all."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee E,* 6 February 2003; c. 1063.]

That is his account of his experience as a senior employee of the BBC—*[Interruption.]* I am sure that he performed an important function in the BBC—he told us that he wrote the chairman's speeches, as I seem to recall, which is a very important function. As a former speechwriter, I recognise that. Not only has almost every Member of the House who has spoken on this subject supported the idea of scrutiny, but almost every external examination of the BBC has reached the same conclusion that it is anomalous, to say the least, that the BBC, almost alone among public bodies, should remain outside the scrutiny of the PAC.

The report to which I wanted to draw attention in particular, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough has already referred, is the review of the funding of the BBC conducted in 1991. It stated:

> "The most serious lacuna that results from this structure concerns financial control. The BBC is disposing of a substantial sum of what is essentially public money."

The report concluded:

> "The Panel does not accept, therefore, that more scrutiny need mean more interference. There is nothing in the National Audit Office's remit which threatens the proper independence of the BBC."

It is worth remembering that the person who chaired the committee that reached that conclusion is now the chairman of the BBC. It is strange, to say the least, that since arriving in his new position he has changed his mind on that point, particularly when we consider every other report that has been conducted. Reference has been made already to Lord Sharman's report, which concluded that the Comptroller and Auditor General

> "should be given access to the BBC as originally recommended by the Davies Review".

The Culture, Media and Sport Committee reached the same conclusion, and the Public Accounts Committee has been making the case strongly, not just under the chairmanship of my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough but under its previous Chairman, my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis), who, I am delighted to see, has joined us in the Chamber. This is not a party political matter, as my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough said at the beginning of his remarks: the need for such scrutiny is widely recognised across all parties.

One or two reasons have been given for why the BBC has been so reluctant to allow the PAC and the National Audit Office access to its accounts. I recall that when the right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) attempted to draw those out from the director-general of the BBC at the PAC hearings, the director-general said that he knew what they were but was not prepared to tell the PAC on that occasion. In the past, however, the BBC has argued that involving the NAO might result in interference with programming decisions.

In relation to the Minister's point about a programme that might lose money, my hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) is right: it is difficult to say whether a BBC programme loses money. The raison d'être of the BBC is not to make money but to fill a market failure and, therefore, make programmes that are likely to have a relatively small audience. It might be possible to sell those programmes overseas, providing an income in future, although BBC programmes are produced not for financial reasons but as part of the public service remit. I see no evidence to suggest that the Comptroller and Auditor General would wish to get involved in any question relating to programming decisions. Nor is there evidence that the involvement of the NAO would in any way affect the impartiality of the BBC, which is another argument that has been put by those who are opposed to allowing the CAG in.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough made the decisive point that the PAC and the NAO already scrutinise one part of the BBC's output—the World Service. If there is one part of the BBC in which it is most important that there should never be any suggestion of partiality, interference by Government or any political consideration, it is the World Service. The reason why the World Service is respected across the world is that people trust it for its objectivity and impartiality. When the permanent secretary was questioned on that point, she made it clear that the Foreign Office had never had any complaints about interference in the World Service. It is on that freedom that the World Service's reputation rests, yet it can be subject to examination by the NAO without any damage to its impartiality.

The arguments in favour of new clause 4 are absolutely overwhelming. I was encouraged when the Minister said in Committee that he was examining the matter, and that he would present the Government's conclusions in due course. I hope very much that he will be able to say this afternoon that he has reached a conclusion, and that he will support new clause 4, which has the unanimous support of all the members of the PAC.

New clause 7, which is linked to new clause 6, relates to the question of the future of the licence fee and its part in financing the BBC. That question, too, has a long history. It has been the subject of examination by outside bodies over several years. It was considered by the Peacock committee, and it was examined again by the committee chaired by Gavyn Davies in 1999. Most people who have examined the licence fee have recognised that, as a method of financing, it has many drawbacks. Until now, however, it has been argued that it is perhaps the least bad method of financing the BBC. Examination has been made of possible alternatives such as financing the BBC through advertising, subscription, and, possibly, direct Exchequer grant. I fully recognise that drawbacks are associated with each of those methods, too.

There is no question but that, since the issue was last examined, the whole broadcasting world has completely changed. I shall resist the temptation to refer to broadcasting ecology, as I share the Minister's distaste for the term, although I found in my research that it appeared in the original Peacock report, so it has been around for some time. The fact that we live in a world in which people have access to hundreds of television channels rather than just three or four means that the time has come when we need to look again at the licence fee. That appraisal is also particularly important given that the licence fee has been increasing year after year. Indeed, the Secretary of State confirmed only the other week that it would rise to £116.

The licence fee, as everyone who has examined it knows, is a highly regressive charge that bears heavily on those with the lowest incomes. The Gavyn Davies review said:

> "The licence fee, correctly described, is a tax and a poor tax at that. It is levied on everyone who has a television set. It takes the same amount from every household, rich or poor. A wage-earner on the national minimum wage has to work for a week to earn enough to pay it, but pay it he or she must, whether they choose to watch the BBC or not."

That is an accurate description of its effect.

4 pm

As my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough said, the licence fee is a poll tax. Indeed, it is considerably worse than the community charge, which attracted that label. Unlike the community charge, there is no means-tested benefit available for those who are on low incomes and who cannot afford to pay. It is almost impossible to think of any other charge levied by the state on almost every person in the country for which no means-tested assistance is available whatever.

Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): Do not people over the age of 75 receive a free television licence?

Mr. Whittingdale: People over the age of 75 receive a free licence, and that is very comforting for them. However, the rest of the population—whatever their income—have to pay the licence fee, so it remains a poll tax.

[Mr. Whittingdale]

The effect of the licence fee was examined by the Davies review and it conducted its analysis by splitting up the proportion into income deciles. The review discovered that the flat rate charge was highly regressive and represented 1.7 per cent. of the net income of the poorest decile, but just 0.28 per cent. of the income of the top decile.

Michael Fabricant: My hon. Friend is arguing that the licence fee is a highly regressive tax, but is he suggesting that it should remain a tax that is perhaps based on income or council tax bands? Alternatively, is he suggesting that there should not be a licence fee at all and that the BBC should be funded completely from commercial sources?

Mr. Whittingdale: I do not want to anticipate the rest of my speech, but I will argue that I agree with the Government in that there needs to be a full debate on this issue. I think that the arguments in favour of the licence fee are becoming weaker by the day. I will set out why I believe that to be the case, but before that I shall conclude my comments on the drawbacks of the existing system.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) has tabled a new clause that has considerable merit. It draws attention to the enormous resentment that is felt by many people about the existing concessionary licence system in which some people find that they are eligible to pay just £5 whereas their next-door neighbour may have to pay the full amount. Those who pay the full amount may look around and see that others, who may be better off than they are, are able to claim a concessionary licence. That is a cause of great anger and frustration and I suspect that every Member will have heard people complaining about how unfair the existing concessionary licence scheme is. I therefore very much welcome my hon. Friend's new clause. I hope that she will elaborate on it shortly.

The other aspect of the existing system that gives rise to real anger is the way in which the collection system is enforced. The BBC has responsibility for collecting the licence fee and it contracts that operation out. That results, however, in many people being hounded by inspectors who refuse to believe that people do not have a television set and have no particular wish to possess one.

The Committee chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough conducted a useful examination of the system of collecting the licence fee. Other than the World Service, that is the only part of the BBC's activities that the Committee is currently allowed to examine. It reached the conclusion that, although the licence fee enforcement officers were extremely assiduous in trying to pursue people evading the licence, they were also remarkably unsuccessful. Out of 3.5 million visits conducted by inquiry officers, only 459,000 suspected evaders were actually caught. The result is that a huge number of people are hounded, and I have heard examples of that in my constituency. I am sure that other Members also know of people who have repeatedly been pursued despite the fact that they have made it clear to the licensing office that they do not have a television set and that they have no intention of acquiring one.

The criminal sanctions that are brought against those who do not have a licence are often brought against some of the poorest people in our community. In the most recent year for which figures are available, 120,000 people had proceedings brought against them for their failure to have a television licence. That resulted in a number of convictions over the year and in prison sentences when people did not pay the fines.

I have no particular wish to endorse in any way the failure to pay a fine or, indeed, the failure to purchase a television licence, but this part of the criminal law is biting at people who are among the poorest in our society. Indeed, I understand that, in some years, licence fee crime has accounted for more than half the criminal convictions among women. That is an extraordinary figure, and it is another reason why we need to reconsider whether the licence fee remains the best way of financing the BBC.

It has been said that the licence fee still commands public support and that most people regard it as providing value for money. Indeed, for many years the BBC ran campaigns on television in which it argued that many people were unhappy that they were not able to pay even more for the BBC because it provided such wonderful value for them. However, that view is not borne out by the evidence that has been accumulated. For example, the Gavyn Davies committee considered the future of the financing of the BBC—

Geraint Davies: The report of the Public Account Committee and the report of the National Audit Office that preceded it found that about 30 per cent. of those who had had fines imposed on them for not paying the licence fee simply did not pay their fines. The hon. Gentleman seems to be suggesting that those people should not have had to pay for the licence in the first place. However, in another report from the Public Accounts Committee, we found that a similar number of people were not paying any fines at all for criminal activity. Is the hon. Gentleman therefore suggesting that they should be let off? His arguments do not hang together. People should pay fines, but he seems to think that they should not.

Mr. Whittingdale: I specifically said a few moments ago that people should pay fines and should pay the licence fee. However, as the hon. Gentleman's Committee has identified, many people do not pay the licence fee and do not pay fines. They are among the poorest in our society and, at the very least, that should give rise to questions as to whether the licence fee is the best way of continuing to finance the BBC.

I was about to say that the licence fee does not continue to command widespread public support. At the time of the Gavyn Davies review, an opinion poll was conducted. It found that 45 per cent. believed that the licence fee provided good value for money and that 42 per cent. did not. A majority of just 3 per cent. supported the view that it was good value. However, when they were asked whether the BBC should introduce advertising, 55 per cent. as opposed to 40 per cent. supported that view. When they were asked whether the BBC should introduce the sponsorship of programmes, the figure was 74 per cent. in favour as opposed to 16 per cent. against.

Since that time, a number of further opinion polls have been conducted. One conducted last October concluded that 46 per cent. favoured the licence fee whereas 51 per cent. favoured some other means of financing the BBC. In another poll conducted a few weeks later, 58 per cent. said that

> "the licence fee was no longer justifiable in an era when as many as 300 television channels were available."

That resentment will increase as the licence fee increases, especially as other broadcasters are suffering and finding it far harder to raise money. The fact that in the past few weeks the Secretary of State agreed to a further increase in the licence fee to £116 merely adds insult to injury. The original decision to increase the licence fee was taken at a different time, when commercial broadcasters were much better off than they are today.

There is another cause of resentment. A large and growing number of people have access to digital television channels and pay to receive channels that they choose to watch. People who pay a subscription for additional channels that they want to see resent the fact that they are also made to pay a licence fee to receive channels that they might not want to watch. While those who can receive digital television are beginning to resent the imposition of the licence fee, those who do not receive it equally resent the fact that they have to pay a significant amount for the development of the BBC's digital channels when they have no opportunity of watching them.

Those problems have given rise to challenges to the licence fee. Hon. Members may be aware that a particular journalist, Mr. Jonathan Miller, publicly announced that he does not intend to pay his licence fee and, in doing so, cited the European convention on human rights. He pointed out that article 10 says:

> "Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. That right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority".

The Minister may tell us that that does not apply to the application of the licence fee, but the BBC and the Government seem remarkably reluctant to put that to the test. Although they are happy to hound people who cannot afford to pay their licence fee and, in some cases, to send them to prison, there has been an interesting delay in taking any action against Mr. Miller.

Mr. Miller is not alone. Vladimir Bukovsky recently joined his protest. I would not go so far as Mr. Bukovsky, who has compared his anti-licence protest to the hunger strikes that he organised when in prison in the former Soviet Union, but he has said:

> "The BBC's TV licence is such a medieval arrangement I simply must protest against it. The British people are being forced to pay money to a corporation which suppresses free speech—publicising views that they do not necessarily agree with."

There is also the test case in Liverpool which involves people who have failed to pay the licence fee. So a growing body of opinion is undoubtedly unhappy with the existing system of financing the BBC.

It appeared for a long time that the Secretary of State had ruled out the possibility of change to the licence fee system. She went on record as saying that she regarded it as

> "somewhere between the improbable and the impossible".

However, she appears to have changed her mind in recent weeks. I welcome her statement that the BBC needs to demonstrate that the licence fee still represents value for money and to justify that it uses licence-fee payers' money, and earns their support,

> "by offering services that extend the range and enhance the standards of what is available".

I am pleased that the Secretary of State has recognised that there will have to be a public debate in the run-up to charter renewal on whether the licence fee is still the best system for financing the BBC. Alternatives are available. It may be that no one single method is appropriate and that we have to look instead to a mix of different sources of finance for it, but the debate must happen and we contend that it must be properly informed. One way to do that is by determining the attitude of the public because they are the people who are required to pay the licence fee.

The purpose of new clause 7 is relatively modest. It would simply put a duty on Ofcom to carry out research into the efficacy, the cost-effectiveness and the public acceptability of the licence fee so that the debate, which the Secretary of State rightly said will take place, is properly informed and we know what the public think. We can no longer accept the assurance that the vast majority of people believe that the BBC is a wonderful institution for which they would happily pay as much as they are asked to contribute.

4.15 pm

New clause 9 is also a relatively modest proposition. It suggests that part of the licence fee money is used to

Geraint Davies: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. On the list of amendments selected for discussion, new clause 7 is not included in the group of amendments that we are debating.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The group includes new clauses 6 to 9.

Mr. Whittingdale: I am speechless. If the hon. Gentleman cannot read the list of selected amendments properly, it is not for me to correct him.

New clause 9 proposes that a small part of the licence fee proceeds should be put to one side and placed in a public service fund. The essential justification for having a state-owned and state-funded broadcaster is that it supplies public service programmes that the market would not otherwise produce. I accept that the BBC will be the main provider of public service programmes for the foreseeable future, but I do not understand why it has to have a monopoly on that. Commercial broadcasters are under an obligation, as part of their public service remit, to produce public service programming. Although one can identify many excellent programmes that are produced by the BBC which no one would argue are not part of the public service broadcasting obligation, for every "Lost Prince"

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that it produces there is a "Forsyte Saga" on ITV; for every "Daniel Deronda", there is a "Dr. Zhivago". Many programmes that are produced by the commercial channels are equally desirable and fit the public service remit. Indeed, it is sometimes hard to distinguish between the output of BBC and ITV.

New clause 9 would put just 1 per cent. of the licence fee to one side so that broadcasters could bid for it to receive finance for public service programming. The remaining 99 per cent. would stay with the BBC. Our proposal would inject that little bit of extra competition and break the monopoly that the BBC enjoys on receiving proceeds from the licence fee. The idea is not new. It has been proposed many times. The Davies committee recognised it as having merit and the Peacock committee discussed it. Many people think that there is no reason why the BBC should continue to enjoy a monopoly of public finance for producing public service programmes. I hope that the Government will consider our modest proposal.

Mr. Lansley: Does my hon. Friend recognise that there is an argument for going further than new clause 9 in respect of the proportion of the licence fee that could be available for competitive bids to provide the public service remit and to expose the BBC directly to competition? As it is drafted, it would take 1 per cent. out of the BBC's ambit as distinct from applying competitive pressure on how well it meets its public service remit compared with other public service broadcasters.

Mr. Whittingdale: Personally, I find that an attractive suggestion, and over time, the public service fund that we suggest could grow in size and achieve that purpose. In the new clause we make provision for the Secretary of State to increase the proportion of the licence fee that could be diverted to the public service fund. At this stage, however, I do not want to be too ambitious. We are suggesting a modest first step in that direction. Given the modesty that we are displaying on the matter, I hope that that will make it all the more attractive to the Minister.

Geraint Davies: I shall speak briefly in support of new clause 4, which would give the National Audit Office and the Public Accounts Committee unfettered access to the accounts of the BBC. Through their effectiveness, the NAO and the PAC are saving about £500 million of public money each year—10 times the cost of providing the facility. Given that the BBC spends £2.5 billion, it is not unreasonable to infer that the public would save millions of pounds if the National Audit Office were able to carry out value for money and financial audits of the BBC and if scrutiny took place.

It has been argued that that would undermine the editorial independence of the BBC, but, as has been said by others, the remit of the Public Accounts Committee extends not to policy, but to effectiveness. When we audit the national health service, for instance, we are in the business not of telling surgeons how to perform heart operations, but of telling people how to manage their affairs effectively to save money. As has also been said, the millions of pounds that we would undoubtedly save could be ploughed back to provide value for the viewer in terms of the quality of programmes.

Other speakers, particularly the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale), referred to the work of the Public Accounts Committee in the context of the BBC and the licence fee. As our report states, we found that of 3.5 million visits to try to catch evaders, 80 per cent. were unnecessary. In almost 60 per cent. of those cases, people failed to answer the knock at the door, perhaps because they knew who was knocking, or because they were not in. Twenty per cent. of the visits were to vacant properties, and a further 22,000 visits were to householders who had moved. Through that simple analysis, and by examining the number of prosecutions that ended in paid fines and in people getting licences, we provided valuable insights to improve value for money in the collection of the licence fee, and thereby to help the public.

It is clear, therefore, that the activity of the NAO can help to deliver value for money. In the past three years, savings of £1.54 billion have been achieved, so the arguments for allowing a national audit to provide better value for viewers and the public are virtually unchallengeable. I urge the Government to give positive consideration to the probing new clause.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): I shall speak to new clause 8, which seeks to amend part 1 of schedule 2 to the Wireless Telegraphy (Television Licence Fees) Regulations 1997. I raise the matter because since those regulations came into law constituents and local authority housing departments have brought to my attention material changes concerning the effect of the licence on people who live in accommodation for residential care, and the concessionary rules that apply.

I wrote to the Minister last year on behalf of East Devon district council, and I hope that his portfolio tonight carries that correspondence. He wrote back to me on 25 March last year, and it may save time if I outline from the Minister's own correspondence the current qualifying criteria for what is called the ARC—accommodation for residential care scheme. They include the requirement that sheltered housing must be provided for occupation by disabled persons or retired persons aged 60 years or more. The criteria also include the requirement that that sheltered accommodation should have a person such as a warden whose function is to care for the needs of the residents and who lives on site or works there for at least 30 hours per week.

The purpose of the existing requirements is to ensure that qualifying sheltered accommodation is directly comparable to a residential home. Under those conditions, people living in such accommodation and over the retirement age—but of course now under 75 years of age—qualify for the £5 a year concessionary licence. In practice, although there may be purpose-built or purpose-acquired accommodation for an older population, many housing departments are finding that if at any time they cannot fill that accommodation with people who are disabled or over the retirement age, they necessarily have to put people of mixed age groups in the accommodation. They, of course, do not qualify for the concessionary television licence, and the status of the accommodation changes.

People who lived there and previously qualified for the £5 licence suddenly find that they no longer qualify. I had a case in Crediton in my constituency where an elderly lady living in such accommodation moved from the ground floor to the first floor. On the ground floor she had qualified for the £5 licence, but unbeknown to her, by moving to a different floor of the same building, she lost that entitlement. New clause 8 seeks to tidy up the regulations in the light of the changing circumstances to give people preserved rights, so that if at any time they had qualified in a particular building but the external circumstances had changed, they as individuals would continue to benefit from that £5 licence and the preserved rights would apply to them as individuals.

When I wrote to the Minister on behalf of East Devon district council last March, he wrote back to me and stated:

> "The Government intends to introduce preserved rights for ARC beneficiaries whose accommodation ceases to meet the qualifying criteria in such circumstances"—

as I described—

> "so long as it continues to be provided or managed by a local authority, a housing association or a development corporation."

I have no disagreement with that. The Minister went on to tell me that consultations had already begun between Department for Culture, Media and Sport officials and the BBC on the formulation of the necessary amendments to the television licence fee regulations.

The Minister stated that the Government intended to introduce the amendments as soon as they could. That was a year ago, so I was a little disappointed to find that he had not used the opportunity of the Bill to amend the regulations, as there seems to have been a reasonable amount of time for the details to be finalised. I hope that tonight the Minister will look favourably on the new clause in order to tidy up the existing regulations in the light of changing circumstances. Although there are not millions of people who would qualify, there are sufficient numbers of people. As I know from the individuals with whom I have spoken in my constituency, they feel aggrieved when they previously qualified for the concession and it is removed from them through no fault of their own.

Mr. Grogan: The remarkable speech from the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale) deserves some response. He described his new clauses as being relatively modest and a first step, but it is clear in what direction he would take us and what his second and third steps would be were he to find himself the Minister for Culture, Media and Sport in 2006–07—we must imagine under which Prime Minister he would be serving. His remarks today were a sustained assault on the licence fee and, at times, on the BBC as well.

The hon. Gentleman referred to a recent article in *The Sunday Times* about a widespread refusal to pay the licence fee, and he offered us two examples—a gentleman called Jonathan Miller and a Soviet dissident, Vladimir Bukovsky. The hon. Gentleman said that he would not go quite as far as Mr. Bukovsky, but those two examples were supposed to demonstrate the widespread refusal to pay. He also referred to press attacks on the BBC and the general dumbing down of the BBC. He is right; there have been such attacks. I shall give the House three brief examples.

> "The Corporation has fallen woefully short of its duties to the public";

> "Many of the BBC's present popular programmes would have been condemned by the BBC itself five years ago as intolerably shoddy";

> "The BBC's policy seriously threatens the unique role the BBC has played in the cultural and intellectual life of the country."

It could prove

> "disastrous to the standards and quality of public service broadcasting."

The first quote came from *The Times* in 1958, the second from *The Observer* in 1960, and the third from a letter written in 1969. The fact that this is an old debate does not mean that it is not important. The BBC quite rightly has to justify its licence fee to each generation, but I believe that it can do so.

4.30 pm

The hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford rightly characterises his new clauses as modest, but I would also characterise them as somewhat lop-sided. In the case of new clauses 6 and 7, it is like the Government doing a survey on what the public think of VAT, then using the finding that they do not particularly like paying it to conclude that the public do not like the health service, the education service or whatever. The proposals are very lop-sided. I am sorry about that, given that the hon. Gentleman appears to have liked "The Lost Prince". Like him, I was invited to its première. I was among the B-list category of celebrities, in that I was invited to "The Lost Prince", and not to the Brit awards as most contributors to this debate seem to have been.

How about asking what the public think of the BBC's output, and whether they think, for example, that Radio 2 has a successful schedule or whether they like programmes such as "The History of Britain" and "The Blue Planet"? We were talking about dumbing down, but those programmes are watched by far more people of this generation—between 6 and 7 million—than ever watched landmark programmes such as "The Ascent of Man" and "Civilisation" in the late 1960s and early 1970s, which achieved only about 1.5 million viewers. It is important to take a rather more comprehensive view of public opinion than those two new clauses propose.

Obviously, there are conflicting pressures on the BBC in regard to the efficiency of licence fee collection. If it did not collect the fee with sufficient vigour, it would be open to the criticism—such as that levelled by the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh)—that it was evading its financial responsibilities. It is worth noting that since 1991, when the BBC took over responsibility from the Home Office for collecting the licence fee, levels of evasion have shrunk considerably. In 1991, there were 19.4 million licences in force; last year, the figure had grown to 23.7 million, yet evasion rates dropped from 8.8 per cent. in March 2001 to 7.9 per cent. in March 2002, and to 7.6 per cent. this year.

Despite the existence of Mr. Miller and Mr. Bukovsky, I do not really detect a mass refusal to pay that would justify the comparison to the poll tax that the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford made. Life was very different when we had the real poll tax in operation some years ago. Obviously, the licence fee is economically regressive, although it has been

[Mr. Grogan]

pointed out that those over 75 receive not just a rebate but a complete exemption from it. Indeed, that exemption was introduced three days before my father was 75. That was the one time that he thought that I had any real political influence. Of course, the licence fee is economically regressive, but, in the wider context, it is extremely progressive, because it means that the very best of our culture and national life can be made available to everyone who has either a radio or a television. Those things are not only available to the wealthy on subscription. The hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford mentioned subscription TV.

When we examine carefully the alternatives to the licence fee, I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman—who clearly wants to move away from the licence fee—would really carry his party with him. I would relish a political fight in the marginal seat of Selby, if, for example, someone suggested introducing advertising to the very middle England Radio 2 channel, or privatising Radio 1. It is going to be hard to hold Selby next time, but a real challenge to the licence fee and the BBC would help me to reach parts of my electorate that I might not otherwise reach.

I do not think that such a challenge would be electorally popular, especially given some of the alternatives to the licence fee, such as advertising, subscription and sponsorship. If they were introduced, the BBC would have to serve commercial priorities, not just those of the licence payer. It would also have to start competing for revenues with other commercial broadcasters. If it were funded by subscription, it would no longer be able to serve everyone. No longer would everyone be able to watch the football World cup; only those who could afford the subscription would be able to do so. Direct funding by the Government would surely endanger the political independence of the BBC.

Mr. Whittingdale: The hon. Gentleman says that direct funding from the Exchequer would surely affect the political independence of the BBC. Does he think that the World Service is affected by the fact that it is directly funded by the Government?

Mr. Grogan: Under the Conservative Government, the World Service's whole financial structure was threatened by cut after cut. That really politicised the World Service in a way that proved very difficult at the time. Thankfully, the present Government have reversed the effect of some of those cuts.

The licence fee, which funds the BBC so well, and has done over so many generations, should not be thrown aside lightly. The hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford said that other public service channels produce public service programmes, and of course they do. But part of the role of the BBC down the generations has been to raise standards and to raise the aspirations of some of the commercial channels that have other pressures. The fact that we see excellent public service programmes on ITV, for example, is partly a reflection of that.

Having had some measure of disagreement with the hon. Gentleman I would agree with him on one thing. The BBC's governors must take serious account of today's debate on new clause 4, regarding accountability to the National Audit Office and the Public Accounts Committee. I urge the BBC's board of governors to discuss this issue at an early date—I know that there are differences of opinion among its members—because it is inevitable that this change will be made at some stage. It is time that the BBC recognised that.

Another allegedly modest measure is the new clause that would set up a public services fund run by trustees and would, for the first time, split the licence fee from the BBC. Obviously, the long-term aim of that proposal is to increase the percentage from 1 per cent. to perhaps 5, 10 or 20 per cent. and perhaps to have an arts council of the air, as has been introduced in New Zealand, and destroy the BBC altogether. Again, I would urge great caution. In New Zealand, it has now been decided to reverse that measure and to re-fund the public service broadcaster, because a group of trustees sitting around doling out money cannot make quality public service programmes. The BBC has a value in terms of its public service ethos and of the creativity of its producers, its staff and its training that goes back for generations, and we must be very careful indeed before we rip up that tremendous heritage.

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): I should like to start by making a few remarks about new clauses 6 to 9 on behalf of my hon. Friends—my hon. Friend the Member for North Devon (Nick Harvey), our chief spokesman on these issues, has suggested that, to speed up today's debate, I might make those remarks instead of him before I go on to the real purpose of my speech, which is to speak in my capacity as a member of the Public Accounts Committee about new clause 4.

My hon. Friends and I believe that new clauses 6 and 7 are unnecessarily bureaucratic and would involve the BBC in a lot of extra research work. In practice, new clause 4 will fulfil the financial requirements. It is much better to hand to the NAO the job of making sure that the money is properly spent. We have no particular problem with new clause 8 and have some sympathy for it. New clause 9 introduces an interesting idea, albeit one that should more properly be discussed when the licence system is reviewed at the time that the charter comes up for renewal. The hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale) pointed out that it would be possible for a future Government or a different Minister to increase the figure of 1 per cent. Since the whole basis of the hon. Gentleman's argument for new clause 9 is that 1 per cent. is so insignificant that we need not worry about it, for him to admit that it could be increased at the will of a Minister seems to destroy his argument.

I am delighted to join the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee in his support for new clause 4, for which PAC members have been fighting for some time. I spoke on the proposal in the House a year ago; it was part of the Sharman report and it enjoyed the support of the PAC even before then. As the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford pointed out, the current chairman of the governors of the BBC was fully in favour before assuming that office. It is funny how people sometimes change their views. Nevertheless, if the Minister chooses to go down that route, he may not meet quite the resistance from the BBC that might have arisen under previous chairmen.

The only counter-argument to new clause 4 is that we must defend the BBC's independence. It is hard to understand why anyone should imagine that it is necessary to defend the BBC's independence against someone such as Sir John Bourn, the Comptroller and Auditor General. It is absurd to argue that Sir John would say it was important to have Jim Davidson rather than Sandi Toksvig on Radio 4 or that the NAO would ever interest itself in editorial decision making. It will examine not policy or editorial matters but whether the licence payers' money is used effectively. That is even more important now that the BBC is doing much more contracting out and buying in of programmes from independent sources. The more that is done, the more important it is to examine the contractual processes and procedures.

Only yesterday, the Comptroller and Auditor General, talking to the Public Accounts Committee about his budget for next year, made the point that he can in many ways be more objective even than a private sector auditor, who may work on a one year or three-year contract. As the contract comes up for renewal, the firm will begin to wonder whether it will be reappointed—so it comes under a little pressure to do what the client wants. Anyone who doubts the difficulties that that situation can create only has to think of the problems that Enron got into with an auditor that perhaps did not do its job well. If the National Audit Office were appointed for the BBC, it would not be under pressure to keep the BBC happy with its work because the NAO would be accountable not to the corporation but to the House.

Whereas company shareholders theoretically have the right to reappoint auditors or throw them out on a regular basis, television licence payers—in effect the shareholders of the BBC—do not have the same right. There is a standard case for appointing the NAO as the auditors for the public. It is not the Government's auditors but Parliament's auditors—and through Parliament, the NAO is the auditor for the public. Where large sums of money are spent on behalf of the licence payers, the NAO should serve as the objective watchdog guarding that money and making sure that it is properly spent.

4.45 pm

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: I draw the attention of the House to my registered interests.

I enter into debate with some hesitation, having listened to an interesting discussion as an outsider surrounded by many experts on media and culture in all parts of the House.

The case made by my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) when moving new clause 4 was unanswerable. I am ashamed to say that I was not aware that his Committee was unable to look at the BBC in the manner in which he described. I hope that the Minister, who has an enviable reputation for his willingness to unsheathe his sword and do battle with powerful vested interests, will not forbear from doing so on this occasion with the governors of the BBC.

I rise to speak as a humble seeker after truth. The Bill clearly addresses an important lacuna in broadcasting arising from far more competition and much more economic activity. All independent surveys show that the media and other creative industries will grow enormously over the next 10 years and that we will all spend much more money on such activities. It is in almost everyone's interests that the position of independent producers is improved. There is a need for a good plural marketplace in which dominant broadcasters cannot be overbearing and property rights will be properly protected.

The BBC raises by means of a compulsory tax £2,500 million a year in public money. That represents a massive privilege for the BBC and a massive interference in normal practices and terms of trade in the commercial marketplace. I listened with great interest to my hon. Friend's comments about the licence fee. I do not entirely agree with his analysis but recognise the power of his arguments. I yield to no one in my admiration for the BBC, but where there is a powerful, rampant force in the marketplace it is important that we understand the ramifications.

The Minister will recall that in 1988 Lady Thatcher made the landmark decision that 25 per cent. of public sector broadcasting should be made by the private sector—a decision that was welcomed at the time. News and sport were exempted, so in fact the percentage is probably nearer the low teens.

I think we would all agree that the best ideas in the marketplace should attract the money. That is good for our culture and for our country. Some 75 per cent. of the BBC's production is therefore in-house. Given that that does not tend to vary much over the years, the 75 per cent. is clearly guaranteed; otherwise the figure might be 76 per cent. or even 80 per cent. in one year, and rather lower in another.

That brings me to a point made by one of my hon. Friends, whose view is that the BBC's position is entirely justified by the fact that it cures market failure. Certainly it is responsible for some wonderful productions, such as costume dramas and foreign affairs documentaries, but what worries me is that it seems to cause more market failure than it addresses. Let me give four examples.

First, I understand that the BBC—funded with public money—attracts more than 50 per cent. of all radio audiences. That must have a real effect on the marketplace. Secondly, I believe that the BBC has the dominant website in the UK. It does not, as I thought, cover only news, although it covers a huge amount of news; it also deals with entertainment, children's issues and lifestyle. That dominance is deeply resented by the commercial operators, and it must crowd out some of the commercial markets.

Thirdly—I mention this with some misgivings—there is BBC Worldwide. We should be fair to the BBC, which was charged with greatly increasing its revenues by commercial means. At the same time, however, it enjoys a luscious funding settlement. BBC Worldwide is, in my view, an example of unfair competition, although that is hardly its fault. It should be told either to maximise its income, or to trade fairly in the market. It cannot do both.

Fourthly—this strikes me as, in many ways, the most powerful justification for the argument—the BBC is a publisher of books and magazines. Those publications, however, seem to me to constitute an exploitation of pieces of intellectual property. "Top Gear Magazine" is

[Mr. Andrew Mitchell]

an example. I do not think the BBC has any right to intervene in the magazines market in that way, or that it should be allowed to do so. Books and magazines should be licensed into the magazines market. There should be a bidding process to provide transparent valuations in the marketplace, enabling the licence fee payer to receive the benefit and preventing the magazines market from being distorted by public money.

I end as I began. We are dealing with a huge, rampant beast in the market, at a time when many of the companies with true commercial interests are in a greatly weakened state. That is clear from some of their share prices, valuations and profit schemes. In no other UK industry do we allow public money to distort the market in this way.

I hope the Minister will give us his views, and perhaps encourage us to believe that tight control will be exercised. I should certainly like to think that ministerial attention will be focused on the points I have made.

Michael Fabricant: My hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr. Mitchell) has raised an interesting and important point. The BBC would argue that the magazines to which he refers are not funded by licence fees, but operate in a commercial market. It would argue that the profits made from their production are used to supplement television licence fees so that programmes can be made. The point is that we have to take the BBC's word for that.

Perhaps the BBC is right, but we do not know. This returns us to a fundamental point that I made time and again in Committee, in connection with both the National Audit Office and Ofcom's role in controlling the BBC—that the BBC ought not to be its own judge and jury. Time and again, people and commercial organisations have complained about the BBC, and not just in respect of publications. When the BBC launched its own computer some years ago, in competition with other manufacturers, it was said that it was using the licence fee to fund a commercial operation.

The BBC has produced a grand document about fair trade. It states that the BBC will never compete using licence payers' money, that it always operates independently, that it is audited by a good firm of auditors, and so on. However, as I said, we can never be sure about such matters, and we need an independent organisation—not merely an auditor—to look after them. I shall be interested to hear whether the Minister proves to be the only person in the Chamber who argues against the NAO having the power to investigate such matters. It is quite extraordinary that in this day and age, only the civil list—as has already been pointed out—and the BBC are exempt from such investigation. Although I have the greatest respect for the BBC, I do not put its chairman, whose hospitality I so recently enjoyed, in quite the same category as Her Majesty the Queen.

The NAO would give protection to the BBC. Many of the accusations made against the BBC are probably not well founded. When the Bill was being considered in Committee, we were approached by The History Channel. It suggested that the BBC was acting unfairly in setting up UK History, which is available on Freeview. The BBC argued hard and well, saying, "No. We are operating in competition. Why should we provide programmes to The History Channel any more cheaply than we provide them to the public service broadcasting organisation in the United States, to the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, or to any other broadcaster?" I rather suspect that the BBC was right, but The History Channel rightly felt that this was yet another case of the BBC being its own judge and jury. How can we be sure that the BBC was right? In my view, the NAO would give the BBC the necessary protection in that regard.

I realise that the BBC would not want the NAO to interfere in its direct running, and particularly in the creative side of the corporation. The Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee offered good reassurance that the PAC has neither the time nor the inclination to interfere in that way; nor, indeed, would the Comptroller and Auditor General have the necessary resources or interest to do so. The Minister mentioned a particular programme or series perhaps proving a loss-maker. The only such programme that I can think of is "Eldorado", but on the other hand the BBC has to experiment. It seemed like a good idea at the time—isn't that what it always says?—and it would be very wrong for a particular organisation to say with the benefit of hindsight that the BBC was wrong to experiment. It is experimentation that has given the BBC its very strength.

I wonder whether you, Madam Deputy Speaker, saw "The Great War"—the 40-year-old series that was originally shown on BBC2, and which is being re-run on Saturday nights. Before it was broadcast, a documentary was shown about how it was made, including the arguments and the struggle within the BBC that led to its production. The series "The Great War" was earth-shattering—

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): So was the war itself.

Michael Fabricant: As my hon. Friend points out, the war itself was obviously earth-shattering, but so was the series. It was the first time—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman should relate his remarks to the new clause.

Michael Fabricant: They are related to the new clause, Madam Deputy Speaker. The Minister rightly pointed out the locus of new clause 4, which would allow the NAO to investigate the BBC. I simply mention "The Great War" as an experimental programme made by the BBC. It was the first time that a broadcaster—ABC also showed the series—had ever invested in producing a 24-episode series on such a specialised issue. *[Interruption.]* Hon. Members may chortle, but from that came the series on the second world war. That was produced not by the BBC but by the old Associated Rediffusion, which reinforces the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale) that it is not only the BBC that produces public service broadcasting.

5 pm

The National Audit Office would and should not look at that area, and as I suspect that that is the only area that concerns the BBC, it need not worry. The BBC can be reassured that the NAO would consider only the structure within which the corporation's operations take place in the broadest terms, not the cost of producing individual programmes, such as that groundbreaking series, "The Great War".

As my hon. Friends the Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford and the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee have said, universities are investigated by the PAC and they have not complained. The Arts Council falls within the ambit of the PAC, and it has not complained. I hope that the BBC will regard the change as a protective shroud, not as something that will endanger the BBC or its ethos.

I have mixed feelings about the licence fee. It is a regressive tax, but there are no easy solutions. The BBC costs £2.5 billion, which is, on the whole, probably well spent. We do not know for sure, because the NAO has not been allowed to investigate. However, if £2.5 billion were taken out of the total amount of advertising revenue available to television now, it would cripple an already semi-crippled ITV, it would cripple Channel 4 and it would destroy Channel 5. Nor would it be possible for the BBC to be funded from subscription. In that case, it would be the BBC that was destroyed. It would no longer be the public service broadcaster that most of us respect at present.

On the other hand, I support new clause 7, which would provide for research on television licensing and alternative funding for the BBC. I do not share the fears of the hon. Member for Selby (Mr. Grogan)—he spoke eloquently in support of the corporation, and I agreed with much of what he said—that if the BBC were funded by a system based on council tax bands or a percentage of income tax, it would necessarily result in the Government interfering in the daily operation of the BBC. I do not seriously suggest either method as a way of raising funds for the BBC. A percentage of income tax might be a better form of revenue for local government, although I would certainly be out of order if I pursued that thought Madam Deputy Speaker. The NAO would not wish to interfere in the daily operation of the BBC either.

In 1936, the Government—I presume that it was a Conservative Government, although I look to the historians among us to correct me if I am wrong—

Mr. George Osborne: National Government.

Michael Fabricant: The National Government set up the BBC World Service, which has received a grant in aid ever since. In 1940, there was a battle between the Government and the World Service over editorial policy, which the BBC won. Ever since, no such battle has taken place. No Government, Labour or Conservative—or a future National Government, God forbid—would ever wish to interfere with the internal editorial independence of the BBC, regardless of whether it was funded by licence fee or some form of income tax. We could always ensure that protection was provided, by modifying this legislation or the royal charter.

The BBC should regard the new clauses as helpful to its future governance. More importantly, I hope that the Government will consider them helpful, and that they will accept them.

Mr. George Osborne: I begin by saying that I enjoyed very much the speech introducing new clauses 6 to 9 by my hon. Friend the Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale). It was very eloquent and did credit to the Guild of Speechwriters, of which I am also a member.

I rise to support new clause 4, so ably moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Mr Leigh), the Chairman of the Select Committee on Public Accounts. I note that almost every hon. Member to speak in the debate also supports the proposal. The diversity of that support shows that this is a non-partisan issue. I draw the Minister's attention to the words of the right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams), who has enormous experience. He was a member of the Public Accounts Committee before I was born. I always bow to his much greater experience. In Committee, the Minister said that there was

> "no one else in the House to whom I would look for more wisdom on the subject of public accountability."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee E*, 6 February 2003; c. 1065.]

The right hon. Gentleman has now joined the Chairman of the PAC and hon. Members of all parties to urge the Government to accept a recommendation from an inquiry set up by the Government. If the Minister were still a PAC member, I suspect that he would have put his name to the clause as well, and probably spoken in favour of it. I am sure that his instincts are correct and that we shall hear from him shortly.

In the bipartisan spirit in which the new clause was moved, I want to congratulate the Government on the way in which they set up the Sharman inquiry and on their acceptance of almost all the inquiry's recommendations. In the coming months and years, the Comptroller and Auditor General's remit will be extended to many non-departmental public bodies that previously escaped public and parliamentary scrutiny.

That that is an excellent thing is accepted on all sides of the House, and it makes all the more strange the Government's refusal to accept Sharman's recommendation about the BBC. That is the only major recommendation in Sharman that the Government do not support, and it is a glaring omission. The arguments advanced by the Government are not convincing to any hon. Member who has taken part in the debate.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough made it clear that the BBC is nervous about the proposal because it believes that it threatens the corporation's editorial independence, the way it goes about commissioning programmes or covering political events, and all sorts of other activities. That concern demonstrates an ignorance of the work of the CAG and the National Audit Office. I hope that that ignorance is genuine and innocent. As has been said several times, the new clauses deal with the implementation of policy, not with policy itself. That must be right, given the amount of public money—£2.5 billion—involved.

[Mr. George Osborne]

It must be a central principle in a democracy that there should be clear and transparent accountability when it comes to the spending of public money. That is not the case with the BBC at the moment. There are 12 BBC governors, supported by a small staff. Even if they had the inclination, they are unable to provide the same scrutiny of the BBC's finances as the NAO, which has more staff and greater expertise.

The BBC has nothing to fear. After they have survived an encounter with the PAC, departmental permanent secretaries say that they have learned something and that the discussion has served to improve the way in which they manage their Departments and run Government programmes. It is one of the reasons why the Government accept the overwhelming majority of the recommendations from the National Audit Office and the Public Accounts Committee. It would do the BBC a lot of good, on its own terms, to have its work scrutinised and improved on by the NAO. As my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough said, there is no question that the Comptroller and Auditor General would try to second-guess the BBC's right to make a drama series out of a Jane Austen book or to cover a particular political event. That would not happen; it is not the way in which the Comptroller and Auditor General operates. It must, however, be correct that someone—I would argue that it should be the Comptroller and Auditor General—should examine matters such as the way in which the BBC commissions programmes and the cost of commissioning programmes vis-à-vis other organisations, how it makes use of its extensive property holdings and whether those buildings are being efficiently used, how it provides digital services, and the way in which it commissions IT systems. That is the bread and butter work of the PAC and the Comptroller and Auditor General in relation to Departments, and they produce pretty outstanding results. The BBC has nothing to fear from that kind of scrutiny.

That is not just my view but the view of a vast range of organisations, reports and independent inquiries into the subject. It is the conclusion of the Sharman inquiry and of the independent review panel chaired by Gavyn Davies. It is worth reminding hon. Members of what the review panel's report said:

> "The most serious lacuna that results from the structure of the BBC concerns financial control. The BBC is disposing of a substantial sum of what is essentially public money."

It then quoted a letter that had been sent to the panel by the then Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee, my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis), who said:

> "The Comptroller and Auditor General's inability to report to Parliament on the way the BBC uses the licence fee seriously weakens the accountability of the BBC."

Gavyn Davies' review panel said:

> "We agree and, accordingly, recommend that the National Audit Office should be empowered . . . to carry out periodic financial audits of the BBC's accounts and its fair trading arrangements."

It is also the view of the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport and the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), who said to the BBC:

> "The idea that Parliament, which creates you and funds you, ought not to have the right for the NAO to investigate you I have to say . . . is a misuse of the very important ethos of BBC independence in terms of politicians not interfering in any way with what you broadcast."

He was absolutely spot on.

I shall be interested to hear what the Minister says. Every hon. Member who spoke, on both sides of the House, supported the new clause. If the Minister were to say that it does not have to be done through legislation, but can be done by amending the BBC charter, and gives a commitment to do that, we would all be satisfied. I want to hear from him either a defence of the indefensible—the exclusion of the BBC from the remit of the Comptroller and Auditor General—or, I hope, a clear indication that the Government will move forward on a central recommendation of a report that they initiated.

Dr. Howells: This is not an easy one for me. The hon. Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) spoke elegantly and convincingly. He is right that I am a veteran of the Public Accounts Committee, and I have a theory that once one has experienced that, one is changed for ever. When he responded to my intervention, he said some reassuring and important words about what the Comptroller and Auditor General does and what the Public Accounts Committee is interested in. I trust that those important words will be heard throughout the country.

5.15 pm

I note that there are many race courses in the constituency of the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Osborne). I do not know whether that is significant. He said that he would perhaps think more kindly of the Government if I gave him an undertaking to consider the new clause.

Mr. Whittingdale: Not consider, but act.

Dr. Howells: The master of semantics has spoken and I shall not argue.

The hon. Member for Gainsborough convinced me that the Comptroller and Auditor General is not interested in trying to influence editorial policy and that his scrutiny would not therefore constitute a threat to editorial independence or the governors' important powers. If I have anything to do with the matter, such scrutiny will be one of the most important matters that is considered in the course of charter renewal, and of the renewal of the agreement between the BBC and the Secretary of State.

Michael Fabricant: Will the Minister give way?

Dr. Howells: In a second. Let me finish the point first.

As I explained in Committee in response to an almost identical new clause, the Public Accounts Committee's recommendation can be implemented without amending schedule 4 of the National Audit Office Act

1983, as new clause 4 proposes. Section 6(3)(d) of the 1983 Act permits the National Audit Office to carry out value-for-money reviews of the BBC by agreement between the corporation and a Minister of the Crown. I understand the difficulty that the hon. Member for Gainsborough experiences with that.

The amount of NAO access that the hon. Gentleman proposes could be achieved without changing existing legislation, but I agree that it is by no means such an elegant solution. It is complicated and should be examined at the appropriate moment, when the charter is up for renewal and we reconsider the agreement between the Secretary of State and the BBC.

David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden): The interim proposal that the Minister outlines is better than nothing but not much better. The NAO sought such powers over the Housing Corporation and housing associations; it now has them through the Government's response to the Sharman report. It explicitly sought to negotiate access, but that was denied it on the occasions when it was necessary, for example, in cases of criminal fraud. That is the problem. Negotiation of access gives people who are misbehaving, or not behaving as well as they should, the right to opt out of the process. That is why the Minister's option is so weak.

Dr. Howells: I agree with the right hon. Gentleman that it is a weaker option, although not as weak as he suggests. It has been suggested that relying on section 6 of the 1983 Act would give the BBC a power of veto over NAO access. However, agreement between the Secretary of State and the BBC is at the centre of the corporation's regulatory framework. That arrangement works effectively and has not prevented the Government from introducing necessary regulatory measures.

Mr. Lansley: Does the Minister recall paragraph 18(4) of the BBC charter? It states:

> "The Corporation shall at all reasonable times upon demand give to Our Secretary of State or Our Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and all other persons nominated by either of them full liberty to examine the accounts of the Corporation"

and so on. It is therefore not necessarily the case that access to the accounts happens with the BBC's agreement. Are the Government willing to use that paragraph of the charter?

Dr. Howells: Obviously, I would have to consider the request that was made, but I am not aware of any request having been made in those terms. I may be wrong and the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis), who chaired the Public Accounts Committee, or even the hon. Member for Gainsborough, its current Chairman, might be able to help me, but I am not aware of any such request. If I discover that such a request has been made, I shall let the House know.

Michael Fabricant: I sought previously to intervene on the Minister to ask a question that it is even more suitable for me to ask now. He recognises that the proposed solution might be unsatisfactory as a short-term solution and has accepted in Committee and today that there is an argument for national audit investigation, although perhaps not under the mechanism proposed through my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh). He said that if he was still around when charter renewal was discussed, the matter would then be considered. What is the current policy of the Department? Just as there may or may not be life after death, there must also be policy after a Minister goes.

Dr. Howells: The policy is precisely what I am saying to the House: we can rely on section 6 of the National Audit Office Act 1983. However, I hope that I have hedged that about with enough reassurances to provide the hon. Gentleman at least with a clear picture of what this Minister thinks. I hope that that is helpful.

I recognise that many hon. Members feel strongly about this subject and I understand their arguments about the need to ensure the BBC's accountability to Parliament and licence payers. As I explained in Committee, successive Governments have been reluctant to grant the NAO greater access to the BBC because of concerns that that could compromise the corporation's editorial independence and inhibit its creativity. I repeat that I think that the hon. Member for Gainsborough eased very considerably the worries and concerns of this place in that regard. Instead, other means have been adopted to ensure financial accountability, and the BBC is subject to a range of external reviews as well as to independent audit. However, the Government will respond formally to the report of the Public Accounts Committee. It would not be right for me to pre-empt that response, but I can assure hon. Members that, in reaching our conclusions, we will certainly bear in mind the very powerful arguments that have been advanced here and elsewhere.

New clause 6 would require the BBC to commission and publish every year independent research into the efficacy, cost-effectiveness and public acceptability of television licensing in the United Kingdom. In contrast, new clause 7 would impose the same obligations on Ofcom. The National Audit Office already has power to carry out reviews on the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of arrangements for collecting fees and enforcing the television licensing system. The NAO's most recent report on the subject was published in May last year and the Public Accounts Committee published its report on 18 December last year. The independent research proposed by new clauses 6 and 7 might therefore be in danger of overlapping with the NAO and PAC review arrangements. Moreover, that research would have to be undertaken with a frequency that we do not believe to be necessary.

Of course, the question whether the television licence fee is the best way of funding the BBC is a different matter. Public acceptability of the licensing system is part of that broader question. We shall be considering that issue in detail during the charter review process, which is due to begin in 2004. The proposed research would therefore also duplicate the Government's own deliberations and consultations in the charter review period. If the television licence fee is retained as the mechanism for funding the BBC, it will be after very careful consideration of all the relevant issues, including its sustainability in the longer term. We therefore doubt the need for an annual review of the arrangements.

[Dr. Howells]

In any event, it seems inappropriate for such research to be commissioned by the BBC, as new clause 6 proposes. It is for the Government and not the corporation to determine how the BBC should be funded. New clause 6 requires the research to be independent. However, because the issue here is the way in which the BBC should be funded, we do not think that it would be appropriate for the corporation to be responsible for commissioning that research.

Let me turn to new clause 8. I can well understand the concern of the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) over the loss of entitlement to the accommodation for residential care—ARC—concession on the television licence. She gave the House some reasons for that, such as changes in the housing mix and the level of warden provision in sheltered housing schemes. I can also understand the sense of frustration that she and others feel—and I include myself in this—that the preserved rights to the concession, which the Government undertook to introduce nearly two years ago, are still not in place.

In drafting new clause 8, the hon. Lady may have appreciated the reasons for the delay. At least, I assume that she may have. The regulations that govern the ARC scheme are very complex and the scheme gives rise to a number of anomalies. We were anxious, when introducing preserved rights, to avoid creating new anomalies or further complicating the administration of the scheme—which has often been the effect of previous changes. I am pleased to tell the hon. Lady that, in the next few weeks, we shall introduce amending regulations that will introduce preserved rights to the ARC. The regulations will be subject to the negative resolution procedure but will be in place well before this Bill receives Royal Assent.

I should add that new cl[illegible] as it stands, would not achieve its aim of introdu[illegible]reserved rights; it would require a person to have been paying the issue fee for a concessionary licence.

Mrs. Browning: I am very pleased to hear what the Minister has said. As many others will be, I am delighted at his pledge to introduce the new regulations in the next few weeks. I tabled the new clause, but I had hoped that the Government would have done so. I accept that it may be technically flawed, but I wanted to prompt the Minister into the action that he has just announced.

Dr. Howells: I think that the hon. Lady made a very good fist of it, which is why I wondered whether she had found it difficult. I certainly do.

Mrs. Browning: I had a lot of help.

Dr. Howells: That goes without saying—*[Laughter.]* I did not mean that in a nasty way—this place is besieged by lobbyists.

New clause 9 would establish a public services broadcasting fund, funded by the BBC licence fee, to pay grants to groups or organisations to allow them to make programmes of local, regional or sectional interest for inclusion in a programme service. As I understand the new clause tabled by the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale), the programme services that could benefit are not limited to BBC services. The fund would be set up by order of the Secretary of State and would be approved by a resolution of each House.

I am afraid that we cannot see our way to accepting the new clause. It would not be sensible—at least at present—to require that licence fee funds be deployed on the basis proposed. The BBC is at the heart of our broadcasting system and the licence fee is the way in which we have chosen to fund it. That decision was endorsed by Parliament at the time of the last renewal of the BBC charter—in 1996 under a previous Government. I accept that there is reasonable discussion about the proper role of the BBC and about the way in which it is constituted and funded. That discussion will no doubt lead to a more structured debate when we embark on the process of charter review in 2004.

The hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) reminded us that the proposal in the new clause would amount not to a small sum of money but to £25 million. There would be no obvious means of accountability, which would be difficult to accept. As I have said, next year will see the beginning of the process of charter renewal.

Mr. Leigh: The Minister has said that he is prepared for the Comptroller and Auditor General to look into the finances of the BBC during the process of charter renewal, which he has said will be in 2004. When will the Government resolve this issue? Will the Minister start the process now, having listened to this debate? Will the process have ended by 2004? May we have an idea of the time scale?

Dr. Howells: The hon. Gentleman is quite right to ask that question. The charter comes up for renewal in 2006, but the process starts in 2004. Therefore, it begins in a very short time.

As I have said, we will begin the process of charter renewal next year. I assure the House that the Government will be very content for the issues that have been touched on today to be fully examined in that context. At this stage, however, it does not seem to us that the proposed new clause could be justified in the framework of the BBC's current role and constitution, or that it would add anything useful to the arrangements on the BBC agreement set out in the Bill. I therefore ask the hon. Gentleman to withdraw new clause 4 and suggest that new clauses 6, 7, 8 and 9 should not be pressed to a Division.

Mr. Leigh: I wish to say a few words to thank all those hon. Members who have spoken in the debate. In particular, I wish to thank my hon. Friends the Members for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale), for Tatton (Mr. Osborne), for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant), and for Sutton Coldfield (Mr. Mitchell) and the hon. Members for Newbury (Mr. Rendel), for Hemsworth (Jon Trickett), for Croydon, Central (Geraint Davies) and all those hon. Members who have spoken in favour of new clause 4. I am very grateful to them for their support.

Some people say that debates in the House do not matter. I am a parliamentarian; I believe that they do matter, and this debate has made a difference. Debates make a difference when strong and independent-minded Ministers are prepared to listen and respond to them, not to take refuge in the conceptual bullshit of their brief. The Minister has done precisely the opposite of that today. He has given a very important commitment on behalf of the Government. After all, Ministers speak on behalf of the whole Government; there is such a thing as collective responsibility, and therefore what a Minister says at the Dispatch Box must be considered with great care.

The Minister has said today that, hitherto, there was an objection to Parliament, in the shape of the NAO, having a statutory right of access to investigate the BBC's finances because of the concern about its editorial independence. One assumes that the Government accepted that concern. In reply to what I have said today, the Minister has said that he accepts our reassurances. He accepts my reassurance, as Chairman of the PAC, that in no way do we want to interfere with the BBC's editorial independence, and he did so speaking for the Government.

I believe that the debate has taken matters a great deal further. It is true that the Minister did not say that he accepts new clause 4. I did not expect him to do that—it is not the way the House operates—but he went almost as far as he possibly could in saying that, like every other hon. Member who has spoken, he accepts the inevitable logic of statutory access. Voluntary access is simply not good enough.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis) made an important intervention in saying that we simply cannot have a situation where an organisation's auditors have to request access to examine what may be a very difficult issue. That is not acceptable, but the Minister has given some important reassurances. I have listened to his speech very carefully, and I am grateful to him for what he said.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Does the hon. Gentleman wish to press new clause 4 to a Division?

Mr. Whittingdale: We would like to press the new clause to a Division.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 200, Noes 304.

Division No. 93] **[5.33 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, rh Michael
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Barrett, John
Beith, rh A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James *(Beverley)*
Curry, rh David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr. Liam
Francois, Mark
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gidley, Sandra
Goodman, Paul
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Gummer, rh John
Hague, rh William
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hogg, rh Douglas
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howard, rh Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Mackay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury & Atcham)*
Maude, rh Francis
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, rh Michael
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Redwood, rh John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*

Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Weir, Michael
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wishart, Pete
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Mark Hoban and
Mr. John Randall

NOES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Austin, John
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barron, rh Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, rh Stephen
Cairns, David
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, rh Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Galloway, George
Gardiner, Barry
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, rh Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kelly, Ruth *(Bolton W)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, rh Peter
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Morgan, Julie
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, rh John
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian

Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, rh Clare
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Southworth, Helen
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Stevenson, George
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Phil Woolas and Charlotte Atkins

Question accordingly negatived.

New Clause 10

POWER TO CONFER FURTHER FUNCTIONS ON OFCOM RELATING TO THE BBC

'(1) The Secretary of State may by order amend this Act to such extent as he considers appropriate to give effect to the provisions of—

(a) any Royal Charter granted to the BBC after the commencement date;

(b) any licence granted by the Secretary of State to the BBC after that date;

(c) any agreement made by the Secretary of State and the BBC after that date.

(2) In subsection (1) "the commencement date" means the date of commencement of section 193.

(3) An order under this section shall not be made unless a draft of the order has been laid before Parliament and approved by a resolution of each House.'.—*[Mr. Whittingdale.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Whittingdale: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss amendment No. 199, in page 171, line 22 [Clause 193], at end insert—

'( ) the BBC Charter;'.

Mr. Whittingdale: We have made it clear throughout that, in the main, we are supportive of the general provisions. We support the liberalisation of the ownership rules and the establishment of a new single regulator, Ofcom. As has been demonstrated in all the debates in the Chamber and in Committee, there is no doubt that Ofcom will be a powerful body. It brings together five existing regulators and will have considerable powers to oversee all the broadcasting organisations with one exception. It is that exception that the new clause is designed to address. The glaring omission from the Bill is the fact that the biggest and most powerful broadcaster—the BBC—is not fully within the scope of Ofcom.

The first part of the Bill deals with the regulation of the telecommunications sector. If one draws a comparison between that part of the Bill and the section dealing with broadcasting, it is like arguing that the telecommunications sector should be subject to regulation so that all the small companies seeking to compete are subject to scrutiny and regulation, but the biggest, in the form of British Telecom, is not subject to the oversight of the regulator. In the same way, the Government propose that all the broadcasters competing and operating commercially should be subject to oversight and regulation, but the BBC should not.

That would seem an extraordinary proposal at any time, but it is particularly so now, when the dominance of the BBC has continued to grow. As we discussed in the previous debate, in recent years the amount of resources available to the BBC has been growing steadily and now stands at more than £2.5 billion, with a further £100 million coming from the next increase in the licence fee. At the same time, other broadcasters have been subjected to a considerable squeeze as a result of the downturn in the advertising market, which has meant that many of the independent commercial broadcasters must make cuts. Channel 4 is now loss-making.

John Robertson: If the independent television companies had been receiving the same amount of money as in the past, would the hon. Gentleman still attack the BBC as he has done during our consideration of the Bill?

Mr. Whittingdale: I should like to think that I have not been attacking the BBC. I should like to think that my suggestions are helpful to the BBC. However, even if the commercial companies were not subject to a financial squeeze, it would not change the position: the BBC would still be the biggest and most powerful broadcaster in British broadcasting. Given that, the argument would still be overwhelming that it should be subject to the same scrutiny and oversight by Ofcom as other broadcasters are.

The overwhelming dominance of the BBC is not just financial. In recent years it has undertaken a programme of expansion that is still continuing. As new opportunities have arisen for broadcasting, both digital television programmes and digital audio stations, in each case the BBC has felt it necessary to enter those areas and to match the activities of the commercial channels. There are therefore concerns about the way in which the BBC is competing with some commercial broadcasters, and a more general concern that has been growing over many years about the way in which the BBC meets its public service remit.

There will be programmes that nobody could argue are not public service broadcasting in the finest tradition. We have covered some of them this evening. Some have also been highly successful. "The Blue Planet" was not just a wonderful programme that would certainly meet the public service remit; it was also

[Mr. Whittingdale]

extremely successful in terms of the number of viewers that it attracted and in terms of overseas sales. I am not by any means arguing that the BBC should not make successful programmes. The BBC has demonstrated that it is possible to make high-quality public service programmes and extremely successful programmes which command a very wide audience. However, there have been other activities by the BBC which, in my view and the view of many other people, have strayed a long way from the BBC's original public service remit. I do not want to give a great catalogue of examples, but I shall cite one or two. ITV developed an extremely successful concept in the form of "Pop Idol", which has been repeated in the form of "Popstars—The Rivals" and other reality music shows. I still do not understand why the BBC felt it necessary to try to emulate that by making "Fame Academy", particularly as it seemed to be a rather pale imitation.

At the same time, the BBC spends a great deal of money seeking to buy Hollywood blockbuster films. In bidding for those rights, it often finds itself in competition with commercial broadcasters. The overall effect of that is to increase the price that has to be paid to the American distributors. It also means that the British licence fee payer is having to spend a lot of money on purchasing American-made movies that would be shown anyway, since the commercial broadcasters have made clear their wish to purchase them. The effect is therefore simply to increase the amount of money that goes into American pockets from the licence fee payer. That, too, seems difficult to justify, particularly when we consider the BBC's record of showing British films, which is not that impressive. That issue is covered by amendments that we might debate later.

Mr. Simon Thomas: Surely there is a public remit for the BBC to bid for blockbuster films. If the BBC did not go for them, they would possibly be available only on pay-per-view or satellite television. While it remains the case that the majority of people in this country have access only to analogue television, is it not right and proper that the BBC should provide the widest range of entertainment, including blockbuster films?

Mr. Whittingdale: Almost every film is first shown on a box-office channel, which is pay-per-view. Normally, they are then shown on a premium movie channel and finally end up on terrestrial television. So this is not a question of people being denied the possibility of seeing them because they are being shown on a pay channel; it just means that they usually have to wait a little bit longer. In the cases that I am describing, however, ITV was seeking to buy the films in question. The most recent example was "Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone", over which a bidding war took place between ITV and the BBC. That seemed wholly unnecessary and simply meant that we ended up having to pay more for it than we otherwise would have done.

The BBC and, indeed, other broadcasters should be concentrating their efforts on screening British films, if they are to meet their public service remit. In this regard, the BBC's record is not at all impressive. In one study that I have seen recently, out of the total of 186 films broadcast by the BBC, only 44 were UK films, and only six were less than five years old. That means that recent British films only formed 3.2 per cent. of the BBC's output, yet one would hope that the BBC, above all, would be willing to give a platform to British film makers, rather than screening a constant succession of Hollywood movies that are easily available on other channels.

Michael Fabricant: I have considerable sympathy with my hon. Friend's argument about English—not just English, but British—films being shown on BBC television. But surely he cannot be arguing that the public service remit means that the BBC cannot also seek large audiences. If the BBC became a small ghetto with a tiny number of people watching it, there would be no justification for it at all.

Mr. Whittingdale: That is an interesting debate that could occupy the rest of the evening. The BBC should obviously not set out to become a ghetto broadcaster or to attract only very small audiences. "The Blue Planet" is a very good example of a high-quality public service programme that can also attract very large audiences. I differ to some extent from my hon. Friend in that it has always seemed to me that the prime purpose of—indeed, the justification for—the BBC is to provide programming that is not otherwise available. Its motivation should not be to attract audiences, but to make high-quality programmes that meet its public service obligations. If it does that well, it can also expect to win substantial audiences. The BBC has produced programmes that cannot by any definition be described as public service broadcasting. One recent example is "Celebrity Boxing"—which not even commercial channels would claim met their public service remit. At a time when the general view is that there is dumbing down and that many programmes cater for the lowest common denominator, there has been a growing lack of high-quality programming of the kind that the public think the BBC is designed to broadcast.

6 pm

Much concern has been expressed in all parts of the House about the BBC's coverage of Parliament and politics in general. When that coverage was recently subjected to considerable change, we were given reassurances that the extent and depth of political coverage would not be diminished. Although it is early days, I do not believe that those reassurances have been met. The programmes that I have seen of the BBC's current political coverage do not provide anything like the depth of some of the programmes that they replace.

Considerable concern has been expressed also about the BBC's coverage of the arts—particularly the recent decision to drop "Omnibus", which for 35 years was the UK's premier arts programme. Jonathan Miller commented that unless one's idea is for a programme about decorating houses or chopping up vegetables, it is impossible to get anyone at the BBC to commission it. There is widespread concern that the BBC is straying from its central public service remit.

That matter is currently for the governors of the BBC. Unlike the other channels—which are required to report to Ofcom and are at the same time subject to monitoring and scrutiny by Ofcom to ensure that they meet their public service remit—the BBC, which should have a stronger public service obligation than any other channel, is excluded from scrutiny. Responsibility for that rests with the governors, which seems entirely wrong. The BBC above all, because of the strength of its public service obligation, should be subject to external scrutiny.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr. Mitchell) spoke earlier of the BBC's capacity to compete with commercial broadcasters, take advantage of its privileged position, being funded by the licence fee, and offer unfair competition. One needs to distinguish between activities funded by the licence fee and others. A number of new BBC ventures have already given rise to complaints from commercial broadcasters that such developments represent unfair competition and replicate existing commercial programmes. The launch of BBC3 was delayed while the Secretary of State built in stronger safeguards against unfair competition. Even now, having watched BBC3, it does not seem to be a great innovation in public service broadcasting but competes head on with existing broadcasters such as E4 and Channel 4. Reviews of some BBC3 programmes shown to date do not justify the large sum of money that has been committed to that channel—including "Tories with Talent", despite the fact that about 1 o'clock this morning, I enjoyed watching my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) punch through a wooden log.

Similarly, BBC4 should in many ways define public service broadcasting, being dedicated to arts coverage. There have already been complaints from Artsworld, an existing broadcaster, and Digital Classics—which directly blames BBC4 for its closure after making losses in the last year. Digital Classics has said that the BBC's free digital cultural channel has distorted the digital market. Moreover, concern about BBC News 24 was so great that the Secretary of State felt it necessary to commission an independent report on its activities, which led to new requirements being placed on the channel to ensure that it was "distinctive and different".

It should not have been necessary for the Secretary of State to intervene. The fact that it was necessary demonstrates the inadequacy of the current arrangements, and the lack of action on the part of the governors. It would have been far better if an external body had been there to monitor the BBC's output constantly. Such a body could have ensured that the BBC was not breaching its fair trading commitment, and was providing channels that were both "distinctive and different" and in line with the public service obligation.

We already have eight children's television channels. The BBC has launched two of its own, CBBC and CBeebies. In many ways those channels are distinctive and different, but it is a cause of great concern when their controller says that his ambition is to create the biggest children's channel and to take over those currently watched on the commercial channels.

My hon. Friends have mentioned UK History, whose creation gave rise to complaints from the existing broadcaster, The History Channel, that it would merely replicate a channel that was already being provided commercially. UK History is not funded by the licence fee; it is part of the BBC Worldwide activities that are supposed to be separate and insulated from the licence fee. I agree, however, with my hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant), who asked whose assurance we had that that was the case. Any complaints relating to whether the BBC is properly maintaining an arm's-length relationship between its licence-fee-funded and its commercial activities are subject to adjudication by the governors: only they can look into such complaints.

We now understand that there are to be two new channels, UK Comedy and UK Nature, on top of all the existing UK television channels. We have heard complaints about the BBC's provision of educational software: existing manufacturers of that software have complained vociferously about the unfair competition. The latest revelation is that the BBC has just acquired a stake in an Anglo-Dutch music and television production company, and will produce classical DVDs. There is already a thriving classical DVD market in this country, and I see no need for the BBC to move into it. The move is likely to prompt more complaints from those who are already in that area of the market, and who also consider that the BBC is engaging in unfair competition.

Whether or not those complaints are justified, if the public are to be reassured that the BBC is meeting its public service obligations and is not engaging in unfair competition with commercial operators, there must be a mechanism allowing independent examination of the complaints. There must be a public assurance that they will be properly examined; it is not enough to rest on the assurances given by the governors of the BBC.

The governors are, in fact, in an impossible position. They represent the overall management and control of the BBC, while at the same time being expected to act as independent adjudicators when complaints are made. A number of people think it is increasingly difficult for them to fulfil both remits. Many besides Conservative Members believe that Ofcom needs to extend its activities to cover the BBC. In recent years there has been a growing chorus of complaints from people who are certainly not the BBC's enemies. Lord Puttnam, a strong supporter of the BBC, says that there is a danger of "everyone's favourite Auntie" being turned into "an abusive Uncle". Barry Cox, a distinguished broadcaster and a great friend of the Prime Minister, has described the BBC as

> "a cultural tyranny—a . . . benevolent one, but a tyranny none the less".

Lord Lipsey, another Labour peer, said that the current director-general of the BBC has failed to grasp

> "the emerging threat . . . if the BBC is just doing the same thing as other broadcasters, what is the case for it? Why should it get public funding, regulatory privileges, legislative protection?"

Finally, in commenting on the current arrangements for oversight of the BBC, David Liddiment, ITV's director of programmes, said:

> "If the BBC is, as it claims, the most regulated broadcaster in Britain, this must happen invisibly, because I can't see it. There's little evidence of the governors having an objective perspective on the organisation for which they are accountable."

So the truth is that many people feel that the existing arrangements for the oversight and control of the BBC are inadequate. The governors are trying to do two different jobs, and it is becoming increasingly difficult for them to do so. There is a need for an independent

[Mr. Whittingdale]

regulator, and Ofcom has been set up for that purpose. The purpose of new clause 10 is not necessarily for Ofcom immediately to take over the job of overseeing the BBC; it is to lay the ground for that to happen. In particular, it would allow the Secretary of State to make an order to extend Ofcom's powers to cover the BBC.

The Government have said that this matter should be considered in the run-up to charter renewal, and we are grateful for that concession. Nevertheless, we know what will happen. If the Government conclude that Ofcom should indeed take greater control over the BBC, we will be told that that is not possible without primary legislation, and that we will have to wait until a suitable opportunity arises. New clause 10 would give the Secretary of State the power to amend the legislation in order to give effect to any changes to the charter, or to the agreement, at some future date, without having to return to this House. We believe that such change will be necessary at some point, and the new clause is designed to ensure that it can be achieved easily.

Mr. Grogan: It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale). I shall try to be brief, because, although we have heard a lot about the power of the BBC, we have yet to discuss media ownership and the powers of those such as Mr. Murdoch. I shall not be tempted to reply to the hon. Gentleman by making a complete tour of last month's *Radio Times*, but I shall respond to a few of his comments. The BBC's new children's channels, which carry no advertising, show very few cartoons and have a largely British content, do provide something very different for parents and for children. They are a prime example of public service broadcasting. Many of the new digital radio channels—such as BBC 7 and Radio Five Live Sports Extra, which broadcast comedy and drama, and additional sports coverage respectively—add something to the BBC's firmament.

The hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford is obviously a man of very fastidious tastes. I quite enjoyed the celebrity boxing, and as for the new politics shows, the contributions of the right hon. Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Mr. Portillo) on the late-night Thursday show have been as incisive as his contribution to the debate on the future of the Conservative party.

I agree with the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford when he says that the BBC should try to encourage original British films. Indeed, since the demise of Film Four, BBC Films is the only company that is involved in the co-production of British films. In that regard, "Billy Elliot" stands out. In the debate about dumbing down, there is a danger of looking back to a golden age. One must not forget that in the 1980s, "Kojak" and "Dallas" were very much prime-time BBC1.

John Robertson: Does my hon. Friend agree that Ofcom perhaps needs to look at the provision and showing of British films?

Mr. Grogan: Indeed, and it is a pity that we will probably be unable to discuss the amendments relating to that issue today. On the question of exactly what the BBC should do, I would argue that blockbuster films on Christmas day, top quality sports coverage and good quality popular drama—all without adverts, which viewers seem to like—have a place in public service broadcasting. The BBC, in a way, exists to distort the market. Some Tory Members appear to think that the only thing that it should show is BBC Parliament. No one could argue with it showing that, but in every other sphere it will always have a commercial competitor somewhere.

6.15 pm

Under the Bill, the BBC will come under the auspices of Ofcom. The BBC will be under Ofcom on tier 1 regulation of taste and decency, and on tier 2 regulation of quotas for regional production—introduced for the first time—as well as original and independent production. On tier 3, the BBC will be influenced by Ofcom, because periodically it will have to review the whole firmament—I had better not say ecology—of public service broadcasting, and that will include the BBC. It is only the back-stop powers of judging whether the BBC is fulfilling its programme policies and remits that will remain with the governors, and with good reason. Ofcom is meant to be a light touch regulator of public service broadcasting in commercial television. It would be a very different role for it to perform the heavy touch regulation that is needed for the BBC. If the BBC were completely under Ofcom, we could be sure that every 10 minutes some commercial opponent would complain to the regulator that the BBC should not be doing something or other. Before we embark on that course, which will be considered when the time comes for charter renewal, the least we should do is revisit the debate in primary legislation, not have the changes slipped through under an order. On those grounds, I oppose new clause 10.

Nick Harvey (North Devon): I am sorry that the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale) has felt it necessary to go over this ground yet again, because we have had these debates several times before. He has heard the response from Ministers that charter renewal will be the time to consider the big issues for the BBC, and that is a reasonable position for the Government to take.

One cannot help but feel that the hon. Gentleman would like the BBC to provide for minority tastes and fill the gaps that the market does not otherwise fill. However, the point was made—correctly—by the hon. Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) that if the BBC was penned into providing only for the minority tastes for which the market would not otherwise cater, it would inevitably become a ghetto and could not build the substantial audiences that it needs to fulfil its public service remit. By definition, everything that the BBC does distorts the market, because it has unique access to a privileged flow of income to which no one else has any equivalent.

It is a matter of public policy, not regulation, as to when and to what extent the BBC should be allowed to use that money to distort the market. The BBC is a market maker. If the BBC were not there, providing high quality programmes for large audiences, the overall quality of broadcasting would be much the worse for it. It is having a well funded and highly professional BBC setting the pace that means that the market forms around the lead that it gives. It is right and proper that that should continue.

The hon. Member for Selby (Mr. Grogan) makes the point, which has been made many times, that the Bill will put the BBC under the supervision of Ofcom in a substantial and meaningful way. What remains outside Ofcom is simply the test of whether the BBC has met its public service remit. The huge amount of money it has and the variety of television and radio channels it operates would mean that Ofcom's role would be completely distorted if it were tasked with the detailed supervision of the BBC in all its range and breadth. Some other apparatus has to be there for that purpose. The charter and the governing arrangements will be reviewed and revisited in the next few years. That would be the logical time to introduce such an apparatus.

The purpose of new clause 10 is to allow any changes that might emerge to be made on the nod—by order of the Secretary of State. I am by instinct usually opposed to Secretaries of State being allowed to act by order, and this is no exception. Substantial changes must be effected by primary legislation, and any short delay in their introduction would not matter much. Parliament must retain the right to decide such things through primary legislation. For that reason, I strongly oppose new clause 10.

Mr. Lansley: I rise to speak briefly to amendment No. 199, tabled in my name, and to express my general support for new clause 10.

My hon. Friend the Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale) did not have the opportunity to set out at length his view of the purposes and structure of the BBC, but I do not believe that the BBC's role is to provide the broadcasting that the commercial sector is unable or unwilling to provide. The BBC is a public service broadcaster, not a residual broadcaster. It can do many things that extend beyond the residual approach.

Under the residual approach, one might leave the networks and the channels in the hands of commercial providers, which would package them together. That would leave the BBC as simply a provider of programmes, handing them out to anyone willing to show them. The BBC is subsidised through the licence fee, and programmes would be provided as a result.

The BBC is more important than that. It provides channels that, in themselves, help to shape broadcasting, especially in the public service sector. For example, the programme "EastEnders" is ground breaking in drama terms but, along with key sporting events and certain films, it also renders the channel on which it is still shown attractive to a large number of people. They want to watch it regularly. If the BBC did not run channels, public service broadcasting would not have the reach and public impact that it has at present.

We can have a debate about what the BBC is for, but all of us accept that that debate will take place in the run-up to charter renewal in 2006. That is what amendment No. 199 is about, and new clause 10 does not interfere with that. The amendment would simply ensure that the decision could be given proper effect, in legislation and in relation to the function of Ofcom.

The difference between new clause 10 and amendment No. 199 is that new clause 10 would allow the Secretary of State to alter the legislation, by order, and place the BBC in a position analogous, in various respects, to that occupied by the licensed public service channels. As a result, the BBC would become the creature of statute, as distinct from being a charter body.

At present, the BBC is bounded by statute in some respects, but it is primarily a charter body. The Bill means that the BBC will be regulated by Ofcom and that it will put itself in the analogous position that I have described, notwithstanding its charter obligations. That will happen because it will come to that agreement with the Secretary of State. We saw in Committee the draft of such an agreement. I might say in parenthesis that the reference to the difference relating only to the public service remit is insufficiently precise. Matters such as impartiality will remain strictly the province of the governors and will not be subject to scrutiny by Ofcom. In substantial areas—the public service remit is the most important—Ofcom will not be able to exercise its function.

My continuing belief is that a major discontinuity will arise over time in relation to Ofcom's pursuing its objective of examining regularly, within five years at most, the overall public service broadcasting obligations of the BBC and other organisations. It will be able to enforce the conclusions that it reaches on that basis in relation to every public service broadcaster apart from the BBC. If the governors continue down the path of trying to be independent of the BBC management, as they profess to be at the moment, it is difficult to believe that that independence will not be manifested in their having their own distinctive view of the BBC's remit and how it discharges it. Over time, the governors are bound to seek to manifest that independence as independence from Ofcom, as well as from the BBC. We will have to decide whether the governors are effectively the board of directors of the BBC, as in the case of the board of directors of Channel 4, which is a perfectly acceptable solution, or, as new clause 9 suggests, trustees of the licence fee. Those are two different functions that will need to be separated.

Either way, it will not suffice, when it comes to charter renewal, to leave it in the hands of the BBC to come to an agreement on the extent to which it is bounded by Ofcom's powers. No matter how we move forward, it is likely, under the constitution of the BBC, that Ofcom will need to have a role if it is to be able to give proper effect to its scrutiny of public service broadcasting obligations as a whole, and that that will appear in the charter. To include in the Bill a reference to the possibility that Ofcom will have functions bestowed on it through the charter, as distinct from an agreement made consequent on the charter, would be an accurate reflection of the likely situation at the end of 2006. Furthermore, it would preclude the possibility of the BBC believing that it can resist an agreement, or aspects of an agreement, by arguing that it was inconsistent with the obligations placed on it in the charter and that it would be unable to delegate to any other body its responsibilities for the BBC's functions. We should be clear now that, under the charter, Ofcom may have those responsibilities.

[Mr. Lansley]

On the basis of that abstruse, quasi-constitutional argument, I profess my preference for amendment No. 199, but, in respect of the objective, I am sure that my hon. Friend and I are on exactly the same territory.

Michael Fabricant: I rise in support of new clause 10.

It was argued that the National Audit Office should be allowed to examine the operations of the BBC, partly to protect the organisation so that it can be seen not to be its own judge and jury. The same argument applies to Ofcom having control over the BBC, ultimately to demonstrate, as my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) explained, that the BBC board of governors cannot be its own judge and jury when people make complaints against the corporation. I do not hold the view that the BBC, in order to hold its public service remit, should be prevented from putting out popular programming. In an earlier exchange, I said to the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) that a fine balance must be struck between broadcasting specialist programmes and those of general public appeal. If the BBC has a small audience, not only will it fail to justify the way in which it is funded, but it could be argued that it does not provide a public service because it has few viewers and listeners.

6.30 pm

The unique way in which the BBC is funded means that it is different from other broadcasters. That is apparent in the programmes that it transmits, including its news output. It is worth repeating a point that was made in Committee. The BBC has more journalists than ITN, ABC News, CBS, NBC, FOX News and CNN combined. The reason for that is demonstrated in the quality of its overseas as well as its United Kingdom news coverage. If one visits the United States or Australia, one sees that BBC reporters often appear on television stations there. They are ambassadors not only for the BBC but for the United Kingdom. The corporation does that well.

The corporation is not well served by being perceived as its own judge and jury. Being in the ambit of Ofcom would protect the BBC. The Bill is a culmination of legislation. If we consider the Radio Authority and the Independent Television Commission, it is clear that we would create an imbalance if the Bill did not have equal control over the BBC. Such control is in the BBC's interest and in our national interest.

Dr. Howells: As the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) reminded us, amendment No. 199 would allow the BBC charter to contain Ofcom's functions in relation to the BBC. He will not be surprised to learn that I shall resist the amendment because I do not believe that the charter is the appropriate place for setting out such provisions.

When the amendment was discussed in Committee, the hon. Gentleman pointed out that the way in which the charter is renewed could lead to inconsistency with the agreement. He suggested that it would be better to proof the legislation by specifying in the charter Ofcom's role in relation to the BBC.

I assure the hon. Gentleman that circumstances in which the charter and the agreement were inconsistent would not arise. The two documents should be considered as a package. A renewed charter would include a new corresponding agreement. The Government's policy has been to set out the BBC's regulation in the agreement. The agreement, not the charter, establishes the BBC's obligations and remit. It is therefore appropriate that when Ofcom has a role in relation to the obligations, it is woven seamlessly into the provisions in the agreement.

An agreement between the BBC and the Government is just that—a document to which both parties have signed up. It is valid only when the House has approved it. The agreement does not give the BBC carte blanche to interpret the charter as it chooses, as the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire suggested in Committee.

By setting out the BBC's relationship with Ofcom in the agreement, we will bring the BBC into the overall regulatory framework while preserving its special position and its constitutional relationship with Parliament. That is a fundamental principle to our approach to the BBC's regulation.

The hon. Gentleman is right that I cannot pre-empt the outcome of charter renewal any more than anyone else can. There will be plenty of time for that during the debate on the review. The charter review itself could have any number of outcomes, many of which might require legislation. I am not convinced that it would be appropriate to single out a possible outcome for special recognition by catering for it expressly in the Bill.

New clause 10 would give the Secretary of State a Henry VIII power to amend the Bill after it is enacted when he considers it appropriate to do so to give effect to any new BBC charter, licence or agreement. As policy relating to the BBC is generally set out in the charter and agreement rather than in the Bill, no amendment of the resulting Act would generally speaking be necessary in practice to enable a new charter or agreement to have effect. Following the charter review, if the current system of regulation through charter and agreement were to be turned into something so radically different as to involve amendments to the Act, I would expect Parliament to be given the opportunity to debate those amendments fully in the context of fresh primary legislation rather than measures implemented under the power that new clause 10 would confer. That point is particularly important given the wide scope of the proposed power, which could, for example, be used to put the BBC on to an almost wholly statutory basis without any new primary legislation.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Grogan) pointed out, it is simply not true to say that the BBC governors will be judge and jury under the proposed regime. As he told us, in relation to most things, including most programme code standards, original productions, regional programme making, provision for the deaf and visually impaired, international obligations, equal opportunities and training, the BBC will not be judge and jury. In most cases, it will be Ofcom that decides whether the BBC has breached any requirements, as well as what those requirements will be. I therefore hope that Opposition Members will see fit not to press the new clause further.

Paul Farrelly (Newcastle-under-Lyme): Will the Minister join me in expressing regret about the fact that the Opposition have turned this debate solely into a determined onslaught against the BBC, so we have had no opportunity to discuss on the Floor of the House very important issues of media ownership that were not discussed in Committee either?

Dr. Howells: I understand my hon. Friend's ire about that. To be fair—I am a very fair person, except when I am watching England beating Wales at rugby—many defences of the BBC have been made, and they have come not only from the Labour Benches, but from the Opposition Benches. A sustained attack was made by the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale), but he had been behaving himself throughout the debate, so it had to come out sooner or later, as my hon. Friend saw. There is general agreement in the House that the BBC does a pretty magnificent job in most respects, but there is no question but that there is room for debate. As I said, that debate will be focused on charter renewal and renewal of the agreement with the Secretary of State.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): I think that my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Paul Farrelly) was inviting the Minister to share the regret of a number of people in this place and, no doubt, outside the Chamber that no time has been found today—and nor will any be found—for any discussion about the enormous changes to ownership of ITV and Channel 5 that the Bill proposes. Is that not an extraordinary situation that reflects badly on this House?

Dr. Howells: I am sure that my hon. Friend knows that there were 65 hours of Committee sittings on the Bill. There has been very rigorous scrutiny, including that of the pre-legislative scrutiny Committee, which was chaired by Lord Puttnam. This Bill has been crawled over like no other Bill that I have known in 14 years of having the privilege of being a Member of this House. There was a moment—I will not point any fingers at anyone in the Chamber—when certain amendments should have been moved, but it was very early in the morning, so they were not spoken to and we did not get around to the discussion that that would have involved. I regret that very much, as I think that we have a substantial and strong case to make with regard to our proposals about ownership.

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington): For the benefit of hon. Members who were not members of the Committee but who wish to enter the debate on media ownership, does my right hon. Friend agree that we should re-examine the programming motion so that the matter can be brought back for discussion?

Dr. Howells: No.

I hope that the new clause will not be pressed to a Division.

Mr. Whittingdale: We remain unconvinced by the Minister's arguments. We feel strongly that this is the biggest omission in the Bill. We hope that the Government will, in time, come round to that view. The purpose of the proposed new clause 10 was simply to allow that omission to be rectified without recourse to primary legislation. However, we have failed to persuade the Minister.

Bearing in mind the remarks of Labour Members to the effect that we do not have much time left, I am willing to withdraw the new clause to allow a little time to discuss the next group. However, in withdrawing it, I do not in any way suggest that we do not still feel that the case for it is overwhelming. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New Clause 13

MEANING OF CONTROL

'(1) Paragraph (1) of Part I of Schedule 2 to the 1990 Act shall have effect subject to the following amendments.

(2) For subparagraph (3) there shall be substituted—

"(3) For the purposes of this Schedule a person has control of a body corporate if that person is able, or it is reasonable to expect that person to be able, directly or indirectly to ensure that the affairs of a body are conducted in accordance with that person's wishes.

(3A) In determining whether a person controls a body corporate all relevant circumstances shall be taken into account including the level of participation in the body corporate of that person and the level of participation of other participants in the body, and if it is the case that the person does not ensure that the affairs of the body corporate are conducted in accordance with that person's wishes consistently or on a continuing basis, that fact shall be disregarded.

(3B) Without prejudice to the generality of subparagraph (3)—

(a) a person has control of a body corporate if that person is beneficially entitled to more than 50 per cent. of the equity share capital in the body or possesses more than 50 per cent. of the voting power in it, and

(b) a person has control of a body corporate if that person is beneficially entitled to 50 per cent. of the equity share capital in the body or possesses 50 per cent. of the voting power in it, and is party to an arrangement with another participant in the body corporate under which they agree to exercise their voting power or any of it in a particular way either generally or in relation to any particular issue or not to exercise their voting power or any of it in relation to any particular issue."

(3) Subparagraph (5) shall cease to have effect.

(4) After paragraph 3 there shall be inserted—

(3A)—(1) In this paragraph "guidance on control" means guidance on the matters which Ofcom consider should be taken into account in determining whether any person controls a body corporate within the meaning of paragraph 1(3) to (3A) above.

(2) In determining the question whether a person has control of a body corporate account shall be taken of any published guidance on control.

(3) OFCOM shall prepare guidance on control and shall publish a draft of the guidance in such manner as they consider appropriate for bringing it to the attention of persons who in Ofcom's opinion are likely to be affected by such guidance.

(4) OFCOM shall also publish, together with the draft, a notice that any person may make representations to OFCOM on the draft within such period as may be specified in the notice, not being less than one month from the date of publication.

(5) OFCOM shall take account of the representations made within the specified time in preparing the guidance on control and shall publish the guidance, not later than 3 months from the last

day on which representations may be made under subparagraph (4), in such manner as they consider appropriate for bringing it to the attention of persons who in OFCOM's opinion are likely to be affected by such guidance.

(6) OFCOM shall keep the guidance on control under review and may publish revised guidance from time to time; and subparagraphs (3) to (5) above shall apply to any such revised guidance as they apply to the original guidance with any necessary modifications.

(5) In Part 2 of Schedule 2 to the 1990 Act after 5A there shall be inserted—

"5B. For the purposes of this Part two or more persons or bodies shall not be taken to control a body corporate otherwise than by virtue of paragraph 1(3A) or (3B) of Part I of this Schedule unless they are acting together in concert.".'.—*[Mr. Greenway.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Greenway: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 12, in page 290, line 38 [Clause 337], leave out paragraph (a).

No. 179, in page 290, line 39 [Clause 337], at end insert—

'(bb) paragraph 2 (disqualification for religious bodies);'.

No. 184, in page 294, line 5 [Clause 340], leave out subsections (1) and (2) and insert—

'(1) Subsection (9) of section 32 of the 1990 Act (limits on participation in nominated news providers) shall cease to have effect.'.

No. 149, in page 302, line 13, leave out Clause 347.

No. 114, in page 424, line 4, [Schedule 14], leave out from 'order' to end of line 5 and insert

'amend or repeal the preceding provisions of this Part, but any such amendment must not have the effect of increasing the restrictions on the holding of any licence and, in particular, may not increase any number (whether expressed in words or figures) in this Part'.

No. 2, in page 424, line 5 [Schedule 14], at end insert—

'PART 1A CHANNEL 5 SERVICES

6A(1) A person is not to hold a Channel 5 licence if—

(a) he runs a national newspaper which for the time being has a national market share of 20 per cent. or more; or

(b) he runs national newspapers which for the time being together have a national market share of 20 per cent. or more.

(2) For the purposes of this paragraph, each of the following shall be treated as holding a Channel 5 licence—

(a) the actual licence holder; and

(b) every person connected with the actual licence holder.

(3) The provisions of paragraphs 2 to 4 of this Schedule shall apply for the purposes of this Part of this Schedule insofar as they relate to national newspapers as if a Channel 5 licence were a licence to provide a Channel 3 service.'.

No. 115, in page 429, line 33, [Schedule 14], leave out 'any provision' and insert 'Parts 3 or 4'.

No. 13, in page 451, line 33 [Schedule 15], leave out subparagraph (4) and insert—

'(4) For paragraph 1(2) and (3) of Part 2, there shall be substituted—

"(2) Subparagraph (1) shall apply in relation to any Broadcasting Act licence other than a licence to provide a Channel 3 service and a Channel 5 licence as if paragraphs (a) and (b) (and the reference to those paragraphs in paragraph (i)) were omitted.".'.

No. 14, in page 550 [Schedule 19], leave out lines 3 to 5.

No. 15, in page 550, line 6 [Schedule 19], leave out '(2) and'.

Mr. Greenway: New clause 13 seeks to clarify the meaning of control for the purposes of schedule 2 to the 1990 Act, which contains the provisions restricting cross-media ownership, and for the purposes of clauses 339 to 342, which introduce new powers for Ofcom where there is a change in control of a Channel 3 or Channel 5 licence holder. So many important licensing issues depend on what is meant by control that it cannot be right to introduce uncertainty into its meaning now. We are, after all, a long way down the path of development of the law in this area. We should have learned enough to be clear and certain in any alteration that we make.

The new clause is proposed as an alternative to clause 347, which, for the benefit of hon. Members who were not on the Committee, introduces the concept that a holding of 20 per cent. of equity or voting power is, of itself, evidence of control. That clearly is not logical or sensible. If enacted, it would introduce considerable uncertainty into this important area of media law. The presumption is rebuttable, but we all know how difficult it is to prove a negative. The 20 per cent. participant will, in many cases, be able to show that he does not control the company only by showing that another person does. However, there is no reason why he should have the necessary information to prove that another person has control. How would he know? The Government, in their response in Committee, did not justify the change. The Minister suggested that the reason for the change was that a 20 per cent. holding was the level at which questions started to be asked. We entirely agree with that, but it is a quantum leap from that position to the proposition that a person with a 20 per cent. holding should be deemed to be a controller unless he can show that he is not.

The hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) made an impassioned plea on the need for more time to debate these matters. He knows about the criminal law; if we were dealing with a criminal offence, the Government would be the first to agree that it would be quite wrong to move from saying that someone is suspected of committing a crime to saying that he is guilty unless he can show that he is not. That is the philosophy that underpins clause 347. That is the effect that it will have.

New clause 13 would change things so that a person would be deemed to have control only if that person does, in fact, have control—whether or not the control is exercised directly or indirectly, and whether or not it is exercised consistently. That would be so whatever the level of shareholding, but there is no chance that the licence-holding restrictions would hit someone who did not have control.

I want to make it clear to the Minister that what we are seeking to say is not that a 20 per cent. holding can never constitute control, but that such a holding does not automatically constitute control. Indeed, the new clause would still allow for lower percentages than even 20 per cent. to constitute control, but real control, not a mythical control that can never exist, would be considered under our scheme.

6.45 pm

The new clause does not include the changes proposed in clause 347(1). We are still not sure what those proposals are intended to achieve—no clear explanation was given in Committee—but they appear to add to the uncertainty that we are trying to remove. After all, if a person is to be judged according to whether he can get his own wishes carried out, he will be so judged whether or not he actually does that. In so far as clause 347(1) is an attempt to extend the definition of control to cases of limited control, it clearly adds to the uncertainty.

What is meant by the word "significant"? What will happen if individuals take a genuine view that something is not significant, but Ofcom takes the view that it is significant? For example, finance directors can determine many significant financial dealings without generally being thought to control the company. Most executive directors make executive decisions of some importance. Are all those directors to be considered as controllers now?

Any director with specific managerial responsibilities is likely to be able to get the company to carry out his wishes so far as they relate to those responsibilities, but can that director be described, in all seriousness, as controlling the company just because he has that kind of influence? We think not. The proposals in clause 347(1) appear to extend the notion of control to almost anyone with any influence. The Government need to give much more information to justify those proposals.

The final part of the new clause—subsection (5)—would move what is now subsection (5)(1) of part 1 of schedule 2 to the Broadcasting Act 1990 into part 2 of that schedule. That is intended to clarify the meaning of subsection (5)(1), which, if left where it is, appears at first sight to have a much broader application.

I now turn to amendment No. 184, which relates to the ownership of ITN by ITV. Colleagues will know that the 1990 legislation introduced the requirement for a majority shareholding in ITN not to be owned by ITV companies. As I made clear in Committee, I opposed those measures in the 1990 legislation against my own Government from the Back Benches, and the consequences that I predicted, chief among which was reduced investment by ITV in ITN, have come true. We can see no logical argument as to why ITV, or Channel 3, should not own its own news services in precisely the way that the BBC does.

The Minister will know that I teased him in Committee by suggesting that perhaps he might like to ring up Mr. Greg Dyke and say that, in future, BBC news will be provided by someone else. That is not a case of BBC bashing; on the contrary, I am simply asking why, if the channel funded by public money is allowed to own its news provider, a commercial channel, which has no public money and pays money into the Treasury, is not.

The changes in the 1990 legislation were intended to give ITN access to increased investment in news programming, but the opposite is the case, as ITN has to bid competitively on price with other news providers and, in the latest competitive round, against Sky News. That drives down the price that ITV has to pay to ITN, thereby reducing investment. The result is that the investment value of the ITN contract from ITV went down from £80 million to just £38.5 million. In consequence, the value of non-ITV majority ownership is also undermined. So we propose in amendment No. 184 that we should sweep away the provisions in the 1990 Act to require a majority shareholding from non-Channel 3 companies.

I want to remind Labour Members, should we have the opportunity to vote on this matter, of what happened when it was discussed in the 1990 Committee. All the spokespersons of the then Labour Opposition spoke generally against the provisions, including the current Secretary of State for Transport and several prominent Back Benchers, as did the Liberal Democrats and Plaid Cymru spokespersons. The only two Conservative Members who were able to speak in favour of the proposal were Mr. David Mellor and Mrs. Edwina Currie. Not only will Labour Members therefore be in extraordinary company if they continue to support the proposal but, if they stick with it, the lesson is that they will lose their seat at the next election, although they will have a career in radio—

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): Egg on their face!

Mr. Greenway: As the hon. Gentleman says from a sedentary position, they could get egg on their face. There are many more jokes that could be made.

In all seriousness, ITN itself wants the system scrapped—it is not just ITV Channel 3 companies saying that they would prefer to own their news provider. ITN can see that the time to reverse the proposal has come. Even if the nominated news provider system is retained, which is dealt with in another range of amendments and new clauses that we are unlikely to reach, amendment No. 184, which I commend to the House, at least scraps the nonsense of having to have majority shareholders other than those from ITV companies.

Finally, I come to amendment No. 179, which deals with an issue that I am sure will be familiar to every right hon. and hon. Member in the Chamber this evening: the vexed question of the existing restrictions on ownership of broadcast channels applying to religious organisations. I am sure that every Member present has received representations on the matter, and the Opposition have believed for some time that that unjustified discrimination should end. The amendment provides an opportunity for the Government to signal that they agree.

Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire): I am grateful to my hon. Friend—and to other hon. Friends on the Front Bench—for tabling the amendment. I congratulate him on supporting the removal of broadcasting disqualifications for religious bodies. Does he agree that if amendment No. 170 is defeated tonight, the House should have a further opportunity on Report to discuss amendment No. 86 to clause 4? That will allow the supposed reasons for the disqualification of religious broadcasters to be debated in the House.

[Andrew Selous]

Furthermore, does he agree that it is out of order that religious broadcasters are still disqualified from using eight different types of licence under the Bill as it stands?

Mr. Greenway: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I believe that he is right—subject to your selection of amendments for the second day of Report, Mr. Speaker—that we may have an opportunity to consider this matter again. As we are almost out of time, other hon. Members who might have wanted to contribute on this matter may wish to take that opportunity. My hon. Friend is also right that there are several broadcast stations that religious organisations are prohibited from owning. We are in danger of dismissing the arguments of religious organisations, so the Government should take a much more realistic view of the requests of those organisations. They are not asking to be awarded licences; they are asking to have the opportunity to apply for licences and to make their case in the same way as everyone else.

We understand that the Centre for Justice and Liberty has expressed gratitude to the Government for allowing religious organisations to apply for digital programme services. However, that is not the request of such organisations. Instead of having to apply under exceptional determinations while still being disqualified, why cannot the religious disqualification be removed so that religious organisations can apply for licences on a level playing field with other citizens and secular competitors? That is what amendment No. 179 seeks to achieve.

The religious organisations ask why they cannot have the same rights in our communications and broadcasting law that are proposed for citizens of non-EU member states, such as Mexico, the USA and Canada. That is a fair point. Why is a profession entered into by people as a vocation to serve the community rewarded by the Government with a legal disqualification? That is what happens for practitioners of this profession. Disqualification means, at the starting point in law, that religious organisations do not have the right to apply to broadcast.

This issue has been long debated and the arguments are not unlike those that my hon. Friends have made in respect of the BBC audit. The matter has been under discussion for a long time, and we strongly believe that this part of our broadcasting law is no longer justified. The time has come for the Government to grasp the issue, so I commend amendment No. 179 to the House.

Mr. Mullin: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I wonder whether you can assist me. There are relating major issues in the Bill to ownership—an issue on which we were just about to touch—but they have not been discussed either on Report or in Committee. However, a further day has been allocated for consideration of the Bill, so would it be possible to amend the timetable so that debate on the amendments dealing with ownership could be carried over?

Mr. Speaker: Order. I interrupt the hon. Gentleman to say to him that I am bound by the programme motion to which the House agreed. How we proceed is a matter for the House. I am therefore bound by the programme motion.

Mr. Greenway: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I remind the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) and the House that the programme motion originally agreed by the House allowed for only one day of debate and—

Mr. Speaker: Order. We are not going into that, because I must allow the new clause that the hon. Gentleman has moved to be debated.

Mr. Mullin: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am not going to allow any further points of order. Does the Minister wish to speak to the new clause? No. I call the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell).

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): In the minute or so that remains, may I remind the House that the question of ownership has not been debated? Amendments Nos. 12 and 2 in this group deal with that very issue. They would prohibit American takeovers that would drive down the market and would prevent people and organisations, such as Murdoch and Sky, from taking over Channel 5 and changing the whole ecology of the broadcasting system by creating a monster competitor that is largely unregulated. That is the issue that we should be discussing and I am grateful to you, Mr. Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to mention it if only briefly.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 138, Noes 367.

Division No. 94] **[6:59 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, rh Michael
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Cameron, David
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, rh Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James *(Beverley)*
Curry, rh David
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Dorrell, rh Stephen
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Fox, Dr. Liam
Francois, Mark
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Goodman, Paul
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Gummer, rh John
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver

Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hogg, rh Douglas
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howard, rh Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Mackay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, rh Michael
Randall, John
Redwood, rh John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Selous, Andrew
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Mark Hoban and
Mr. Laurence Robertson

NOES

Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Austin, John
Baird, Vera
Baker, Norman
Banks, Tony
Barrett, John
Barron, rh Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, rh A. J.
Benn, Hilary
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Breed, Colin
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Burnham, Andy
Burstow, Paul
Byers, rh Stephen
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, rh Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Ewing, Annabelle
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Galloway, George
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Harvey, Nick
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, rh Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Keetch, Paul
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lamb, Norman
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher

Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, rh Peter
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury & Atcham)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Pugh, Dr. John
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salmond, Alex
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, rh Clare
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh John
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Straw, rh Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watts, David
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Weir, Michael
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael
Wishart, Pete
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Charlotte Atkins and
Mr. Nick Ainger

Question accordingly negatived.

It being after Seven o'clock, MR. SPEAKER *put the Question necessary to dispose of the remaining business to be concluded at that hour, pursuant to Order [10 February].*

Remaining Government amendments agreed to.

Bill, as amended in the Standing Committee, to be further considered tomorrow.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6)(Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

CONSTITUTIONAL LAW

That the draft National Assembly for Wales (Representation of the People) Order 2003, which was laid before this House on 30th January, be approved.—*[Dan Norris.]*

Question agreed to.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT BILL (PROGRAMME) (NO. 3)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Orders [28 November 2001 and 29 October 2002],

That, in accordance with the Resolution of the Standing Committee dated 13th February 2003, the programme order of 7th January 2003 in relation to the Local Government Bill shall be amended by the substitution for paragraphs 4 and 5 (proceedings on consideration and Third Reading to be completed in one day) of the following—

"4. Proceedings on consideration and Third Reading shall be completed in two days.

4A. Proceedings on consideration shall be taken on each of the days as shown in the following Table and shall be taken in the order so shown, and each part of the proceedings shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the time specified in the third column of the Table.

TABLE

Day	*Proceedings*	*Time for conclusion of proceedings*
1st	New Clauses, other than new Clauses relating to Chapter 1 of Part 8; new Schedules, other than new Schedules relating to Chapter 1 of Part 8; and Amendments to Clauses 1 to 19, Schedule 1, Clauses 20 to 42, Schedule 2 and Clauses 43 to 92	The moment of interruption
2nd	New Clauses relating to Clauses 93 to 117; new Schedules relating to Clauses 93 to 117; and	5 hours before the moment of interruption

	Amendments to Clauses 93 to 100, Schedule 3, Clauses 101 to 105, Schedule 4, Clause 106, Schedule 5 and Clauses 107 to 117	
2nd	New Clauses relating to Clause 119; new Schedules relating to Clause 119; and Amendments to Clause 119	2½ hours before the moment of interruption
2nd	New Clauses relating to Clause 118; new Schedules relating to Clause 118; Amendments to Clauses 118 and 120 to 124, Schedules 6 and 7 and Clauses 125 and 126; and remaining proceedings on consideration	1 hour before the moment of interruption

5. Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the moment of interruption on the second of the days."—*[Dan Norris.]*

The House divided: Ayes, 293, Noes 184.

Division No. 95] **[7:17 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Austin, John
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barron, rh Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, rh Stephen
Cairns, David
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, rh Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Farrelly, Paul
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Galloway, George
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hume, John *(Foyle)*
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, rh Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mountford, Kali
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil

Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, rh Clare
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh John
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Straw, rh Jack
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Wills, Michael
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Charlotte Atkins and
Mr. Nick Ainger

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Bacon, Richard
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Barrett, John
Beith, rh A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, rh Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James *(Beverley)*
Curry, rh David
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Dorrell, rh Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr. Liam
Francois, Mark
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gidley, Sandra
Goodman, Paul
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Gummer, rh John
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harvey, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hogg, rh Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howard, rh Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Leigh, Edward
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Mackay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury & Atcham)*
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Randall, John
Redwood, rh John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Selous, Andrew
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Weir, Michael
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wishart, Pete
Young, rh Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Mark Hoban and
Angela Watkinson

Question accordingly agreed to.

NATIONAL MINIMUM WAGE (ENFORCEMENT NOTICES) BILL [LORDS]

Ordered,

That, during proceedings on the National Minimum Wage (Enforcement Notices) Bill [Lords], the Standing Committee shall have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it shall meet.—*[Dan Norris.]*

PETITIONS

South Elmsall, South Kirby and Upton

7.28 pm

Jon Trickett (Hemsworth): I wish to present a petition from year-11 students from Minsthorpe community college, South Elmsall, South Kirby and Upton, which are in my constituency, are former mining villages. Historically, they had a powerful sense of community, and were very tightly knit areas. I am proud to support the students of Minsthorpe community college, because they have shown the same sense of community that their parents and grandparents always possessed.

The petition declares:

The young people from South Elmsall, South Kirby and Upton, in the west Yorkshire area, would like to see changes.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge Wakefield metropolitan district council, local agencies and the police to provide youth club facilities for seven to 16-year-olds; a local or mobile cinema; more police on the beat, backed up by security cameras, and action taken; the removal of drug dealers from our streets, and rehabilitation centres for drug users; dog wardens on patrol; local people made responsible for allowing their dogs to foul public areas; and improved swimming facilities in South Elmsall, South Kirby and Upton.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

War in Iraq

7.29 pm

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): My constituents were dismayed when they learned that the Prime Minister could commit British troops in the Gulf without the approval of Parliament. In order to allow them to register their objections, I placed a petition on my website. To date, nearly 500 constituents have registered their support for the petition in that way. I understand that the procedures of the House do not allow me to register those names formally, but the number has been placed on the record, which is important.

I do have a more traditional paper petition, which states:

To the House of Commons

The petition of residents of South Gloucestershire and others,

Declares that British forces should not be committed against Iraq without the approval of Parliament.

The Petitioners therefore request the House of Commons to urge the Government not to commit British forces against Iraq without a prior vote in favour by the House of Commons.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Luton Airport

7.30 pm

Mr. Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden): I am proud to present a petition from 6,000 residents of Hitchin and Harpenden who believe that the Government's plans to expand Luton airport are unfair, because they assume that a new long runway will be built there, whereas plans to expand all other airports are treated as options, and because the site and infrastructure are unsuitable for an airport the size of Gatwick.

The petition states that the Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons oppose

the proposals for Luton airport as set out in the Government's consultation document.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Council Housing

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Dan Norris.]*

7.31 pm

Mr. Alan Hurst (Braintree): I am pleased to have the opportunity to raise before the House this evening the important subject of a future for council housing. I am especially pleased that the Minister for Social Exclusion and Deputy Minister for Women is to reply, because she has visited my constituency, albeit an ancient market-town, within the past two years.

It is somewhat of a contradiction for me to say that housing is a growing problem in my constituency, in the sense that Braintree, Witham and the other 45 villages that make up the constituency form one of the fastest growing areas in the country. Between the last two general elections, 7,000 extra voters were added to the list, and that has risen by another 4,000 since the last election. The town of Braintree is ringed by new housing developments, but they are mainly of executive-style houses with some social housing. The other major town in the constituency, Witham, is only 45 minutes from London Liverpool Street.

People who move to the area from London, or even from Brentwood and Chelmsford further south in Essex, regard the Braintree district as a relatively cheap housing area, but everything is comparative. Cheap in Braintree means that the average price is £153,000 for a house. Hon. Members will begin to see the difficulty in attracting key workers and others to move into the area when prices are running at that level.

That difficulty is exacerbated in the villages that surround the main towns. They are picturesque villages with country cottages that people would go out of their way to buy if only they could, but over the years the cottages have been renovated, refurbished and given every modern improvement. They are now way outside the price range of the local people who have grown up there and the families who have lived there for generations. Many local people live in the council houses that still exist in most of the villages, although many have been sold. Some social housing schemes have been built through housing associations but the number built is insufficient to meet the need.

Braintree has a larger council housing stock than many authorities. In 1979, we had 14,000 properties in the Braintree district, but that has now fallen to 9,000. Of course, the population was much smaller in 1979, so the ratio is rising all the time.

Witham is a mediaeval market town. It expanded enormously in the 1960s and 1970s. The Greater London Council developed estates there, and people were attracted to the area to work. The housing was considered to be cheap compared with that in London and the inner-city suburbs. The local authority ensured that people who went to Witham to work had adequate housing, whether bought or rented.

One of the schemes run by the old Witham urban district council involved houses built for sale. The council would build and sell the houses, and grant 100 per cent. mortgages on them so that people could move in straight away to work in the town. By chance, Mr. and Mrs. Hopkins from Witham came to my

[Mr. Alan Hurst]

advice surgery on Friday. It emerged from our conversation that they arrived in Witham in 1969. They were just married. Mr. Hopkins was working at the Crittall window factory in the town, earning £30 a week. He went to the council for a house, and was offered a new house—semi-detached, with three bedrooms—for £4,275. The council also offered him a 100 per cent. mortgage. His only outlay was £126 for legal fees and stamp duty. Recently, his son looked at a one-bedroom flat, priced at £105,000. Workers in the same position as Mr. Hopkins today would have to earn £54,000 a year—the same as a Member of Parliament, and not what a factory worker earns.

Over the past century, housing policy has ebbed and flowed. The Labour party can claim credit for a number of policies, including Wheatley's Housing Act 1924, which allowed local authorities to subsidise council house building. That was the first spur that allowed large numbers of working people to have decent housing accommodation.

David Lloyd George's remark about "homes fit for heroes" is often quoted, as though he betrayed the promise, but 1.5 million council houses were built between 1918 and 1939. To people used to slums and tenements, they were like small palaces. On the walls of many of the older council estates—in Witham, or Dunmow, for instance—one can still see the crest of some long gone urban or rural district council. They may be faded or covered in ivy, but they show the pride local authorities took in providing housing for their residents.

After the second world war, the two main political parties vied with each other as to how many houses they were building. Between 1945 and 1951, the Attlee Government built 1 million houses. The Conservatives said that they would build more, and did—although we said that they were not as good as ours. The point was that the two main parties were taking part in what amounted to an auction, striving to build more and better houses for millions of working people.

However, the shadow of the end began with the Heath Government of the early 1970s, when the sale of council houses started. It is true that our former colleague, when Prime Minister, was still building houses as well as selling them, but the change in the philosophy had already occurred. Of course, that led to the right to buy under Lady Thatcher's Government of the 1980s. It was a political—or cynical—stroke of genius. It was ultimately and understandably impossible to persuade tenants that they should not be allowed to buy their houses. How can those who already own houses argue with those who wish to buy them? However, the policy had a consequence.

Restraint on capital receipts and ring fencing moneys meant that councils could not even bring themselves to think about building affordable houses for rent. The figures speak for themselves. In 1953, 200,000 council houses were built. That may represent the peak, but for a long time, the figures for construction in one year competed with those of the previous year. Yet at the beginning of the new century, the figure was 700. I appreciate that we should add housing association properties to that, but they amounted to only 17,000 in 2000. There is a chasm between the actions of our political forebears and ours.

The total number of houses built has decreased. In 1968, 350,000 houses of all sorts were built. In 2000, the figure was 135,000. Again, that represents an enormous drop. The crisis is not equal throughout the country; the pressure is concentrated in the south and the east. Councils must consequently juggle with an impossible position. They are statutorily bound to house people, but they do not have the houses. That means that the composition of council tenancy is totally different from that in more egalitarian times.

I am encouraged by the starter home initiative and plans to help key workers, but I understand that the total number for Essex, one of the more populous counties, will be 179. Even if we greatly expand the programme, it will not deal with the devastating problem of the shortage of affordable housing.

The Union of Construction, Allied Trades and Technicians is running a vigorous campaign on several fronts, especially on stock transfer from local authorities to arm's-length or third-party organisations. We await the outcome of the National Audit Office's evaluation; it is about to announce its results. UCATT is also campaigning for a programme of social housing and seeking solutions to an overheated housing economy.

We all know that prices have soared in past few years in the south and east of our country. Low interest rates currently offer some comfort. However, not long ago, interest rates reached 15 per cent. If those times returned, current mortgages mean that a genuine housing disaster would loom. As Brer Rabbit rightly said about the old well, "What goes down must assuredly go up." Equally, what goes up must assuredly come down. We should remember that.

I believe that there is an old saying, "Planning the future by studying the past." I invite the Minister to examine the part of the past that I recently studied and consider reinstating the programme of build for sale. The right to buy has created mental paralysis, and low cost housing is not constructed in sufficient numbers. If councils were empowered to build low cost housing for sale, backed by municipal 100 per cent. mortgages, we might begin to create decent houses for people on lower incomes.

The Government should make land available. They and their many agencies have huge land banks. They are disposing of them, normally for private housing in a more expensive bracket than the sort of housing that I believe to be necessary for many ordinary working people in this country.

Of course, the beauty of build for sale is that the mortgage repayments would be roughly the same as rent. On the sale of properties, the person who bought them would keep the profit, the mortgage would be returned to the council and the money would recycle—the beginning of a pump-priming programme. The gem of the scheme is that right to buy is no longer a problem, as the houses will have been sold. I understand that some houses will be needed for rent and that many people will never be able to buy outright, but for modest-income families, build for sale with 100 per cent. council mortgages is a way of restoring the situation and providing the sort of house that my constituent, Mr. Hopkins, bought in 1969, and which my father bought in 1938 on the private market. We have to make certain that this generation can do as well as the previous one.

In conclusion, we must not be so timid. In five or six years, the Attlee Government created the national health service, built a million houses, furthered the welfare state and established the national parks. It did so against the background of the crisis of the second world war, rearmament for Korea and a serious international financial situation. I believe that we can take steps along the road that I have indicated.

In my constituency is situated the village of Silver End, which was founded in 1926 by my Labour predecessor as Member for Braintree, Sir Valentine Crittall. The Crittall family built the village as a far-seeing model village for the people who worked in their factories. It was a wonder of its time. The motto of the Silver End coat of arms demonstrates the will to act as a lesson for us today. That motto reads: "Why not?"

7.46 pm

The Minister for Social Exclusion and Deputy Minister for Women (Mrs. Barbara Roche): I warmly congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Braintree (Mr. Hurst) on raising this very important subject and on the extremely eloquent way in which he has done so. It is right to say that we do not discuss issues of housing and affordability as much as we should in this House, so I am very grateful to him for giving me the chance to air them in the Chamber. He was right to set the debate in the context of what previous Labour Governments have achieved. I hope that towards the end of my speech, I will have convinced him that what we seek to do is place the issue in today's context, but in a way that pays due tribute to those who came before us.

I well understand the sort of pressures that exist in my hon. Friend's constituency, which I have had the pleasure of visiting. Indeed, I hope to visit the area again soon—something that we discussed earlier this evening, before this debate. The sort of pressures that exist in his constituency are a good illustration of what is happening generally in the south-east. Like many districts in the south-east, Braintree has experienced significant population growth. It also benefits from its location near to key roads and is well connected with Europe. As my hon. Friend made clear, it has obviously been experiencing significant economic growth.

The truth is that in recent years all Governments, of whatever political complexion—this is not a party political point—have failed to face up to the implications of economic success, population change and the need to provide adequate levels of housing, especially in London and the south-east. On a constituency note, speaking as a London Member of Parliament, I know that only too well from my own experience.

Quite rightly, my hon. Friend has spoken about the importance of council housing. There is no doubting the innovation in the building and the reconstruction that took place in the post-war period. My hon. Friend has accepted that people have different aspirations. We must provide them with a variety of options. Some will want tenure of social housing or to be in a housing association, while others will want owner-occupation. The desire for owner-occupation is not new; it goes back a long way.

Our focus has to be on the interests of tenants, the conditions of their homes and the services that are provided to them. My hon. Friend mentioned arm's-length management organisations. We will certainly return to that subject. It is the standard and decency of homes that is important, not who owns them.

My hon. Friend's local authority, Braintree district council, has consistently been judged as one of the best performing authorities in the east of England in the annual housing investment programme. I remind the House that measures to be introduced in the Local Government Bill will give authorities the freedom to borrow to invest in public services, provided they do so prudently. We want to free up local authorities. Each authority will be required to establish the level of borrowing and debt that it is prudent for it to take on, in line with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy code of practice.

Hon. Members will be aware that the housing policy statement of December 2000 set out four housing management and investment options for local authority housing—arm's-length management organisations, the private finance initiative, housing transfer, and stock retention with existing resources. Three of those options see housing remain within local authority ownership; only housing transfer sees housing moving outside the local authority. No local authority and no tenants will be forced to adopt any particular option. It will be a matter of local choice. All we will require is that each local authority ensures that it has a plan in place by July 2005 for meeting the decent home objective. I know that my hon. Friend would agree with that objective. We are making good progress towards our target on standards on decency in houses. I know that that has the support of the great majority of hon. Members.

We want to encourage the separation of the landlord function from the role of the strategic housing authority, whether or not the local authority retains ownership of the housing. That is part of our policy to improve services to tenants. In the past, there has been a lack of concentration on the broad strategic implications of the rate of economic growth. We have to ask what planning functions and what economic drivers will mean that we have to consider housing provision differently. We have to allow the landlord to focus on improvements in the physical condition of the stock, management arrangements and tenant involvement. The local authority should be free to ensure that its statutory housing duties are carried out and that housing policy decisions contribute to securing wider community regeneration.

My hon. Friend mentioned build for sale. That is an extremely interesting concept and he gave us some fascinating examples.

My hon. Friend is keen that local authorities make the best use of their land so that we can provide more housing. We are implementing policies to offer local authorities greater freedom than previously to exercise discretion in disposing of their land. In the local government White Paper "Strong Local Leadership—Quality Public Services", published in December 2001, the Government made a commitment to give greater

[Mrs. Barbara Roche]

freedom to local authorities to dispose of land held under the terms of the Local Government Act 1972 for less than the best consideration reasonably obtainable.

My right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and the Regions announced in September that councils will no longer need to seek central Government permission to take action on a range of local matters. He announced that 84 consent regime powers were being deregulated, including approval of local authority housing cash incentive schemes and the disposal of land at less than best consideration.

My hon. Friend mentioned the role of land held by the Government, and English Partnerships will have a key strategic role to play in the disposal of public sector land, looking at its own sites and having a say in the disposal of surplus public sector land across government. English Partnerships and the Housing Corporation are working together towards that end. So I hope that I can reassure my hon. Friend that the good idea of the past has not been abandoned and that it has its successors in some of today's schemes.

Another key issue that I want to raise is the sustainable communities plan, which my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister announced to the House only a short time ago. That plan includes a significant increase in resources—£22 billion will be spent over three years—so investment to improve housing and communities will be 42 per cent. higher by 2005–06 than in 2002–03. We are investing £5 billion in more affordable housing—double what it was in 1997. At least £1 billion of that is for key-worker housing over the next three years, which is more than three times the current annual level of funding.

A massive new house building programme, worth more than £1.5 billion, has been allocated to the Housing Corporation's approved development programme. In the past three years, Braintree has received nearly £2 million in approved development plan funding from the Housing Corporation.

The starter home initiative, which my hon. Friend also mentioned, is helping key workers whose services are vital to communities—particularly teachers, the police, nurses and other essential health staff—to buy first homes in areas where high housing costs are undermining recruitment and retention. That is a key local issue. I am pleased to say that more than £500,000 of funding from the starter home initiative has been allocated to Braintree.

We are also taking tougher action on empty properties, including discretion to end council tax discounts on empty homes and proposals to give councils powers to bring long-term empty properties back into use. We are also modernising the planning system. That is very important and will provide speedier planning consents and remove delays from the system that might slow the pace of house building. We have helped Braintree to respond to the challenges placed on its planning service, and we have allocated Braintree a planning delivery grant of £275,000 for 2003–04.

We are very aware of trying to use land as effectively as possible. That is why we are introducing new measures to identify and restore more brownfield land and compiling a register of publicly owned surplus land for housing. Braintree has completed an urban capacity study, which has identified a large number of suitable brownfield sites for future development for housing. There is a real focus on helping local authorities, working with them and making sure that sustainable plans also become reality. The plan also announced greater focus on helping people into sustainable home ownership. We want to expand home ownership schemes that free up the supply of affordable housing.

I have touched on just a few of the plans that we have for change. After decades in which the housing needs of this country have been neglected, our approach confronts the major challenges, and it will deliver. It is comprehensive and integrated, and I assure my hon. Friend that we will take into account the points that he has raised this evening. I congratulate him on raising this important issue tonight.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at Eight o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 26 February 2003

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

TRANSAS GROUP BILL *(BY ORDER)*

Order for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time on Wednesday 5 March.

Oral Answers to Questions

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Health Services (Afghanistan)

1. **Linda Gilroy** (Plymouth, Sutton): What recent discussions she has had with non-governmental organisations about rebuilding health services in Afghanistan. [98726]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Ms Sally Keeble): My officials are in regular contact with NGOs in both Kabul and the UK. NGOs continue to have an important role to play in service delivery, especially as Government capacity is still weak. They have helped to immunise children against polio and measles, and have saved an estimated 30,000 lives. The Department for International Development has financed a number of these health activities.

Linda Gilroy: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Does she accept that the continuing insecurity, especially outside of Kabul, hampers reconstruction and aid work? In its discussions with NGOs and aid agencies, has her Department explored their concerns about the capacity of joint reaction teams to bring that much-needed security?

Ms Keeble: I begin by paying tribute to the work that my hon. Friend has done with the Save the Children Fund to raise money for a clinic in Afghanistan. I certainly agree that improving security is one of the key challenges. The aim of the teams to which she refers—they have since been renamed provincial reconstruction teams—is to extend the authority of the Afghan Government, and to help to secure the development of a stable environment in the regions. We have been talking to the NGOs about this matter, and I believe that we are due to have further consultations this week.

Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): Does my hon. Friend agree with the Minister for Women's Affairs in Afghanistan that jobs for women are now absolutely critical, especially given that so many widows are supporting children? Will my hon. Friend undertake to ask her officials to speak to the Minister in Kabul about the possibility of providing funds for some of the many projects that she has identified?

Ms Keeble: I agree about the importance of tackling gender equality issues and job opportunities for women. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has met the Minister for Women's Affairs, and we will certainly take forward discussions in the way that my hon. Friend suggests. Perhaps we can correspond about that issue.

Iraq

2. **Bob Spink** (Castle Point): What aid is planned for Iraq following the resolution of the current political situation. [98727]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): The people of Iraq are already suffering a humanitarian catastrophe. Some 60 per cent. of the people in this naturally wealthy and highly educated country are dependent on handouts from the oil for food programme. One third of children in Baghdad-controlled Iraq are chronically malnourished. If the UN authorises military action to force Saddam Hussein to comply with his disarmament obligations, it is essential that great care be taken to minimise any harm to the people of Iraq, who are already very vulnerable. This means very careful targeting of military action, and ensuring that order is maintained, that food distribution is quickly resumed, and that the health, water and sanitation infrastructure is rehabilitated as soon as possible. Planning is in hand for all of this. My greatest worry is that there is not yet agreement that the UN should have the lead role in a post-conflict Iraq. Without that, there would be significant legal and other difficulties for the working of the international humanitarian system.

Bob Spink: I am grateful to the right hon. Lady for that very comprehensive reply. Last week, the hon. Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Connarty) and I travelled to northern Iraq, and we visited the Parliament, refugees and hospitals. The Iraqi Kurds, who asked us to speak for them, support the Prime Minister's moral policy, but they do need protection and aid. Is the Secretary of State aware that only one third of the oil for food programme is getting through to Kurdistan, and what can be done about that? Will she ensure that during and after any conflict, food and medical aid will continue to get through to Kurdistan, and does she agree that Turkish troops must be kept out of Kurdistan, unless the Kurdish leaders specifically invite them in, for humanitarian reasons?

Clare Short: I agree that, if there is to be military action, it is essential that the authority of the UN be upheld. If such action is to be authorised by the UN, making sure that the people are protected, and that feeding continues, will be crucial. The people are in very bad shape, and 60 per cent. of them are dependent on oil for food, which would be likely to break down. It is a very large-scale operation, and it would be essential to act quickly to keep food moving in Kurdistan and in the rest of the country, and to get the medical infrastructure working. In fact, the people of Kurdistan, which has the same UN sanctions and oil for food as the rest of the country, are in much better shape. That shows the way in which Saddam Hussein has manipulated the UN regime against the interests of his people. I note what the hon. Gentleman says about Turkish troops, and I shall make sure that that is conveyed to the appropriate authorities.

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): My right hon. Friend will know that I paid a separate visit to northern Iraq, where the main concern is that Saddam Hussein may again use chemical weapons against the Kurds. People especially want to know what protection we can give them against those possible chemical attacks. Chamchamal is the mountain top on the road down from Kurdistan to Kirkuk. From there, one can see Iraqi troops on the hills, and they have rockets. The fears of the Kurds are very strong indeed. Will my right hon. Friend say what practical protection we are offering the Kurds?

Clare Short: I agree that the risk, in both Kurdistan and Baghdad, that chemical and biological weapons will be used by Saddam Hussein in a way that inflicts harm on Iraqi people is one of the most serious that we face. I assure my hon. Friend that those risks and dangers are being carefully thought through and that we are trying to minimise them, but I am afraid that no one can give an absolute guarantee that they can be prevented. However, every effort will be made to bring help to any people who might be affected.

Mrs. Caroline Spelman (Meriden): On 12 February, the Secretary of State told the International Development Committee that the military had not taken into account all the humanitarian risks that might result from military action. What did she mean when she said that she had struggled to be listened to by the military? Has communication improved?

Clare Short: I take the old-fashioned view that it is right to tell the House of Commons the truth, and not to pretend that all is well. If there have been delays in the military giving consideration to humanitarian risks—and there have—I have to tell the House of Commons that that is the case. There has been improvement, but getting agreement on a UN lead is absolutely key, and that is not in place. More work needs to be done to face up to all the eventualities.

Mrs. Spelman: Briefings given to hon. Members for today's debate by non-governmental organisations working in and around Iraq express concern that the Secretary of State has not been working closely with them in preparation for the humanitarian consequences of a war in the area. I recognise the sensitivities of military planning, but will the right hon. Lady explain why there has been so little consultation or sharing of information with NGOs, many of which have years of experience of working in Iraq and extensive experience of humanitarian relief and rehabilitation?

Clare Short: One of the least attractive aspects of some NGO behaviour is the attempt to grandstand and appear in the media when there is a crisis. We have had close relationships over a long period of time with some NGOs working in northern Iraq and with an even smaller number in Baghdad-controlled Iraq. My officials have met representatives of NGOs to talk about the present situation. As I made clear to the Select Committee, NGOs would not be operational in the early stages, as they are not the first call to get things right, but we are in contact with them. I really do not think that anyone should grandstand on these issues.

Mrs. Spelman: The whole House is aware of, and sympathetic to, the doubts and concerns that the Secretary of State has publicly admitted about the prospect of war in Iraq. However, does she accept that the effect of those doubts has been to prevent her from engaging properly in all attempts to discuss what humanitarian plans would be in place to mitigate the consequences of war? Does she also accept that, ironically, that could have grave consequences for the people of Iraq?

Clare Short: No. I think that the hon. Lady is engaging in cheap and inaccurate point scoring—another example of grandstanding about this crisis. She put this proposition in a debate some time ago, and I answered her fully. Her simplistic view that we should get on with the war, after which my Department and a few people can clean up, is ill informed. I and my Department have been fully engaged in trying to get the world to face the humanitarian risks and make preparations. I have explained that to the hon. Lady before, but she goes on with her cheap point scoring.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): In her discussions with those planning the military contingencies, has the Secretary of State discussed the imperative of ensuring that Basra is occupied at an early stage, is maintained as a safe haven—

Mr. Speaker: Order. There is so much noise in the House that it is unfair to those who are listening to the question.

Mr. Heath: Has the imperative that Basra should be maintained as a safe haven and a port of supply been considered? Is there an arrangement that might ensure that that is secured, thus avoiding displaced people finding their way into states that are incapable of supporting them?

Clare Short: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that there is detailed thinking about Basra, and I do not think that I can say any more than that.

3. **Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield): What contingency plans she has in place for aid to Iraqi displaced persons following possible conflict with Iraq; and if she will make a statement. [98728]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Ms Sally Keeble): My Department is holding regular discussions with international organisations about contingency planning for a range of eventualities in Iraq. In the event of substantial population movements, we would expect the International Committee of the Red Cross to be the lead international agency in helping internally displaced people and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to take the lead in providing assistance to refugees. In addition to our regular contributions we are giving an extra £3.5 million to support UN contingency planning for humanitarian relief in Iraq.

Michael Fabricant: I thank the Minister very much for that helpful answer, but she will be aware that the UNHCR is predicting that possibly 3 million people will be displaced following a regime change. I fully understand that neither the United Kingdom nor the United States can act alone, but what steps is her Department taking to encourage the UN and other powers to ensure that those people can be cared for after a regime change, which, I believe, is now inevitable?

Ms Keeble: I remind the hon. Gentleman that, in addition to any scenario that has been predicted, there are a substantial number of internally displaced persons—between 1 million and 2 million—now in Iraq as a result of the appalling regime there. I do not want to speculate on the outcome of any action, but our Department, as my right hon. Friend has said, is putting every possible effort into strengthening the UN role and response to deal with any humanitarian crisis afterwards.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): The Secretary of State told the House on 30 January that, if there is a war in Iraq, and without good organisation, there would be a humanitarian nightmare if large-scale ethnic fighting broke out in Iraq. What action is the Department taking to ensure such organisation in the event of the nightmare of an attack on Iraq?

Ms Keeble: Quite a number of scenarios are being considered, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has done a great deal of work to try to make sure that those eventualities do not occur and that we prevent the nightmare that my hon. Friend mentions. We are currently working very closely with the UN to consider what those scenarios might be and to ensure that we have a properly supported UN system in place to take the lead.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): It is the Government's position that resolution 1441 already provides the authority to use force against Iraq. If that force is used in those circumstances and UN authority and agreement has not been reached for the post-conflict administration of Iraq, it will be absolutely essential that the Department for International Development is fully involved in assisting with the civil administration of Iraq to ensure that the American military are in that position for the minimum amount of time. Will the Minister assure the House that her Department is making every effort to ensure not only UN agreement, if possible, but the full deployment of all the Department's resources to make sure that post-conflict Iraq is administered in a way that will ensure a peaceful settlement there?

Ms Keeble: As usual, the hon. Gentleman has hit on one of the key problems that we face: the legal position of the humanitarian assistance that is provided after any conflict that might take place. We are working very hard to resolve those issues and to strengthen the position and role of the UN. We are also obviously taking careful cognisance of the humanitarian problems that could unfold. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that no Department is more focused on that than the Department for International Development and no person in the Government is doing more on that than my right hon. Friend.

Afghanistan

4. **Mr. Ken Purchase** (Wolverhampton, North-East): What progress her Department is making towards rebuilding Afghanistan. [98729]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): Rebuilding Afghanistan will require strong Afghan leadership, large amounts of aid and policy support for the long term. Much has been achieved: the election of the Transitional Administration; the establishment of revenue and budget systems; the introduction of a new currency; 2 million refugees have returned; 3 million children are now in school, a third of whom are girls; and millions of children have been vaccinated against polio and measles.

There is much more to be done, however, and achieving security outside Kabul is key to speeding up progress.

Mr. Purchase: I thank the Secretary of State for that encouraging answer and the description of all the work currently being done. Does she agree that education must be at the heart of that work? Opportunities for education—especially tertiary education through the universities—are the greatest encouragement that we can give to young people in Afghanistan to remain to help rebuild that country. Will she do all that she can to encourage European and British universities to link with those in Afghanistan, and particularly those in Kabul, to bring those opportunities to thousands of young people in Afghanistan and help them to rebuild?

Clare Short: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. Expansion of rights to education is a human right, but getting girls to school is also profoundly developmental for any country. Girls who have been to school change their country as they grow up. Our focus is therefore on securing universal primary education, and on ensuring that girls are included. A tradition exists of high-quality higher education in Afghanistan, which is being redeveloped. I take my hon. Friend's point, however, and I will look into the question of links with our universities, which I have not yet examined.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): Despite what the Secretary of State says, she must know that only half the money decided necessary by the World Bank has been pledged to Afghanistan so far. Despite the Prime Minister's promises not to abandon the people of that country, that is precisely what is happening. The USA and her Government have moved on and plan even worse destruction for Iraq. Because she knows that that is true, will she seriously consider joining many of her colleagues and the Liberal Democrats in the Lobby tonight to avert a new disaster?

Clare Short *rose*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Secretary of State will not reply to that. It was out of order.

Mr. Russell Brown (Dumfries): I very much appreciate the work of my right hon. Friend and her Department, but how much collaborative and co-operative working is being undertaken by her Department with any US Government Departments?

Clare Short: In general, in international development, as in many other things, the US tends to take quite a unilateralist approach. It has a big commitment in Afghanistan and elsewhere, but it tends to operate on its own. The UK leads increasingly on rebuilding the institutions of the country, and on building its management of the economy and its capacity to provide services to its people. We collaborate, but we operate in different ways generally across the world, and we try to make sure that that is complementary.

Millennium Development Goals

5. **Helen Jones** (Warrington, North): If she will make a statement on progress towards the millennium development goals. [98730]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): The world is on track to meet the overarching millennium development goal of halving the proportion of people in poverty by 2015. That will mean 1 billion people having lifted themselves out of extreme poverty between 1990 and 2015. However, progress is not even across the world. Large parts of Africa are not on target, and better progress is possible on many of the goals. In short, the world is making progress, but with a greater effort we could do much better.

Helen Jones: I am very grateful to my right hon. Friend for that reply, but she will know better than anyone that achieving those goals will require a substantial increase in resources. What are the Government doing to make progress towards a target of spending 0.7 per cent. of GDP on development assistance? What is being done to encourage our European partners to do the same, bearing in mind that they agreed to that back in 2001?

Clare Short: My hon. Friend is right. We have about $52 billion in the international development system. When one reflects on the fact that 1.2 billion people live in abject poverty, half of humanity lives in deep poverty and how much we spend on public services in our countries, one realises that that is a pathetic amount, although it is increasingly effectively deployed. For that reason, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor is working internationally to mobilise commitment to an international financing facility that would double the amount of aid available to $100 billion, which is increasingly getting support across the international system. That was the estimate made at the Monterrey conference of the amount needed to support countries to meet the millennium development goals, and we must all work to support the Chancellor in that effort. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. There is still far too much noise in the Chamber.

Sir Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I greatly admire much of what the right hon. Lady is doing to reduce poverty in the world, which was the subject of the question that she has just answered. What more will she and the Government do to remove from office a man who is bringing an increasing percentage of his population into starvation and poverty? I refer to that tyrant, Robert Mugabe.

Clare Short: There is no doubt that the situation in Zimbabwe is serious and brutal. Seven million people need food aid. Projections suggest that the rest of the region will probably recover next year, but that things will get worse in Zimbabwe. There are only 11.2 million people in the country now and 9 million of them will need food aid next year.

As the hon. Gentleman will know, international law says that it is not legal for countries to seek to remove individual rulers. However, it is highly likely that the people of Zimbabwe will shortly bring down the leadership of Robert Mugabe. We will then all work to help the people to take their country forward again.

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): Among the millennium development goals is a significant reduction in HIV infection. Does my right hon. Friend agree that, if we are to achieve that reduction, it is important that the global fund for health is a success? Although it is welcome that the US has committed significant extra money over the next five years, there is a problem in the short term. This year, the fund does not have the money to deal properly with the commitments for round 3, which is due later this year. Will my right hon. Friend consider what can be done to ensure that the fund can go ahead with round 3 distributions this year?

Clare Short: I agree that the global fund for health is important, but I am afraid that it is not being as well led as it might be. Its role is to provide drugs and commodities for the treatment of tuberculosis, HIV and malaria, but health care systems must be in place to deliver them. A twin-track approach is therefore required. Unfortunately, the leadership of the fund has over-committed and is operating separately from health reform agendas. The US has just committed the money that it promised originally. However, I am holding back from any further commitments until there is a more clearly targeted effort to collaborate in the strengthening of health systems. Rather than simply giving more money, I am in dialogue with the fund about doing a better job.

Mr. Gary Streeter (South-West Devon): I commend the Secretary of State for the excellent work of her Department. Does she agree that the best way to reach vital targets is to encourage each developing country to move towards its own benign governance, the rule of law and a market-based economy? Ultimately, nothing else is sustainable. Will she say a little more about the capacity building measures of her Department to try to bring about such end results?

Clare Short: I agree with the hon. Gentleman—to achieve a growing economy, effective modern governance is needed, as well as a respect for human rights and democracy; also needed are a treasury that works, procures properly and is not corrupt; a central bank that works; and a macro-economic framework that allows the local private sector and inward investment to work. That is why, in developing countries, we put such stress on the building of effective and modern state institutions with democratic accountability. Progress is being made in many countries but, as the hon. Gentleman knows, some are not on that path. We have to make greater efforts.

Education (Developing Countries)

6. **Mrs. Betty Williams** (Conwy): What steps she is taking to improve girls' access to education in developing countries. [98732]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): Since 1990, the number of primary schoolchildren who are out of school has decreased from 130 million to 115 million, so progress has been made. However, the number of children who are out of school is still unacceptably high. Globally, girls still represent 56 per cent. of children currently out of school, and 66 per cent. in south and west Asia. We are working with a variety of partners to help to accelerate progress on girls' education. We plan to spend £1.3 billion on basic education over the next five years.

Mrs. Betty Williams: I thank my right hon. Friend for that encouraging response. She will be aware of the Global Campaign For Education, which is about to report on girls' education—its main campaign focus for 2003. Is she aware that the campaign will be holding a seminar in Portcullis House on 8 April, where my hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Ms King) will be on the panel? Will my right hon. Friend join me in encouraging the campaign and congratulating the people involved on their excellent work?

Clare Short: I am happy to congratulate anyone who is committed to driving forward the implementation of the millennium development goal to get all children in the world, including girls, into basic education. In the poorest countries, girls tend not to be in school. Getting girls to school and a generation of them through primary education brings the biggest development effect in any country. Girls who go to school as they grow up marry later, have fewer children who are more likely to survive, increase household income, get their own children into school and access health care. That is fundamental to progress in development in the poorest countries.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [98741] **Dr. Phyllis Starkey** (Milton Keynes, South-West): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 26th February.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I will have further such meetings later today.

Dr. Starkey: Thanks to this Government's increased spending on the NHS, Milton Keynes general hospital in my constituency has increased nursing staff by 27 per cent. since April 2000 and a new 28-bed unit is due to open at the end of next month. However, my right hon. Friend will be aware that Milton Keynes has been designated as a housing growth area, and it is estimated that we will need an extra 400 hospital beds to cope with the needs of the new population. Will he ensure that all Departments take into account the extra needs of Milton Keynes for public services to deal with the needs of our population and look at ways of funding that through the council tax and other funding mechanisms?

The Prime Minister: I can assure my hon. Friend that we will indeed take that into account in allocating resources. That is why in the primary care trust in Milton Keynes there has been, I think, a 10 per cent. real-terms increase. It is not just the number of nurses in her area; over the past few years, 40,000 extra nurses have been employed in the national health service. There are substantially more operations for heart, hip and cataract and there are more doctors and more consultants. That is all a result of the record investment in the national health service—an investment that the Labour party, at least, is committed to keeping.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): Does the Prime Minister agree that any country that supported resolution 1441 should support the second resolution that naturally flows from it?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I certainly do agree with that.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The Prime Minister recently said he would support action without a second resolution only if there was an "unreasonable veto" in the Security

Council. Given his answer to my first question, is not the logic of his position now that any veto would be unreasonable?

The Prime Minister: It certainly would be an unreasonable veto if Iraq is in material breach and we do not pass a resolution, because resolution 1441 made it absolutely clear that Iraq had a final opportunity to comply. If it is not complying, it is in breach. Therefore, that is why I believe that a second resolution should issue and it is also why I believe that, in the end, it will issue.

Mr. Duncan Smith: We all in the House obviously want to see a majority in the Security Council on that second resolution, but the Prime Minister made it very clear yesterday that it is essential that Saddam Hussein knows he faces a simple choice: voluntary disarmament or disarmament by force. Given those remarks, is it now the Prime Minister's position that he will support action even if there is no majority for a second resolution?

The Prime Minister: I believe that we will have support for a second resolution. As I said in answer to questions yesterday, I do not think that it is helpful to speculate on what might or might not happen. I believe that the logic of our position is very clear. Indeed, Dr. Blix has said today:

> "At the moment it is not even clear whether the Iraqis really want to co-operate."

That situation is very clear, and that is why I believe that our strategy of putting down the resolution and then bringing people round to the proposition that this was the final opportunity for Saddam to disarm—he has not disarmed—is so important. However, I point out that, at the present time, we are not at conflict and that Saddam still has the opportunity, if he were to take it, of full compliance. So far, he has not done so.

Q2. [98742] **Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff, West): With the inevitable focus today on the possibility of war with Iraq, does the Prime Minister understand the concern of those of us who have been in Northern Ireland this week that the moment of truth for the peace process is also imminent there? What assurances can he give the House that the prize of peace in these islands will not be lost in the gathering clouds of war with Iraq?

The Prime Minister: I hope that I can give some reassurance on that score, since I have had meetings both in Northern Ireland and here with the main parties concerned with the Northern Ireland peace process. I am due to have further meetings over the next few days, including with the Taoiseach and the main political parties. I can assure my hon. Friend that, whatever the difficulties, we have come a long way in Northern Ireland over the past five or six years. I shall certainly continue to do everything that I can to bring the process to the right conclusion and a fruitful and just one for all the people in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): Will the Prime Minister acknowledge that, unless the United Nations weapons inspectorate were to conclude that the inspection process itself had failed, it would be quite wrong for this country to participate in pre-emptive military action against Iraq?

The Prime Minister: I would put it in this way: it is for the inspectors to give us evidence as to the facts that they find, but what is crucial, because this is what the Security Council has laid down, is that there is full, complete, unconditional and immediate compliance by Saddam. That is what we all agreed when resolution 1441 was passed. Let me read to the right hon. Gentleman what he himself said last November:

> "I think that the present resolution that has been passed can be interpreted obviously, as giving further cause for military intervention if there have been material breaches."

The definition of the breach is that there has to be full co-operation, and if there is not, resolution 1441 says that Saddam is in breach. I would have thought on the basis of what the right hon. Gentleman said last November that he would agree with me.

Mr. Kennedy: If the Prime Minister is not prepared to rule out precipitate military action against Iraq, is not the greater consequence and danger that the international coalition against terrorism on which he and everybody else lay such rightful importance would itself be shattered?

The Prime Minister: Surely the right way to proceed is through the logic of the resolution that we agreed last November. The simple case is that, unless the United Nations carries through what it agreed last November, it is the authority of the UN itself that will be undermined. I simply say to the right hon. Gentleman that no one, surely, could accuse us of taking precipitate action when we have been trying for 12 years to get Saddam to give up his weapons of mass destruction, it is six months since President Bush addressed the UN and four months since the UN resolution, and still he is not in compliance. If the right hon. Gentleman wants any indication of the nature of the regime, I hope that he and others will listen to the words of my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd), who has come back from northern Iraq and will I think give powerful testimony as to the true effects of the regime under Saddam Hussein and exactly what is happening in Iraq today.

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North and Sefton, East): Although my right hon. Friend will have many pressing issues to discuss during his visit to Spain later this week, will he take the opportunity to raise the case of my constituent Kevan Sloan, who served 22 months of a sentence for armed robbery based on, in my view, hopelessly flawed legal proceedings? Will he impress upon the Spanish authorities the urgency of the case, since Kevan's application for deportation is due to be considered at the end of this week?

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend obviously knows, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary met him and the family of his constituent and we are in close touch with the Spanish authorities about this matter. We will remain in close touch and I hope that the matter can be satisfactorily resolved.

Q3. [98743] **Mr. Andrew Tyrie** (Chichester): Does the Prime Minister accept that the manipulative media operation that he installed at No. 10 Downing street after 1997 has eroded the electorate's trust in him? Does he also accept that that loss of trust in him personally is now carrying a huge price as it is partly to blame for his inability to convince the British people over Iraq?

The Prime Minister: The case that we have set out in respect of Iraq is a good one. I hope that if people listen to it and study it in detail they will accept that if we do have to act and go to war it will not be because we want to, but because of the breaches by Saddām Hussein of the United Nations resolutions. I believe that the more people hear that argument and understand it, the more they will accept it.

Q4. [98744] **Mr. Chris Mullin** (Sunderland, South): Has my right hon. Friend heard the concern recently expressed by the Prime Minister of Ethiopia that the crisis over Iraq is distracting attention from international efforts to save the people in his country—between 12 million and 15 million—who are facing starvation? He said that insufficient food has been pledged and that it is arriving too slowly. What assurance can my right hon. Friend give that the international community will not lose sight of the impending catastrophe in Ethiopia?

The Prime Minister: I met Prime Minister Meles of Ethiopia yesterday and we discussed the situation in his country. I assured him that we will remain entirely focused on it. Indeed, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development agreed a few weeks ago a memorandum of understanding that will pledge somewhere in the region of £60 million over the next few years to help famine relief and development in Ethiopia. I assure my hon. Friend that whatever other issues are going on, we remain completely committed not only to Ethiopia, but to the cause of Africa. Under this Government we will achieve over the next few years a doubling and then a trebling of the amount of aid that was going to Africa when we came to office.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): The Prime Minister and his Government promised that families would not have to pay steep council tax rises. Can the Prime Minister tell us by how much council tax has increased since he came to office?

The Prime Minister: Well, I can say to him that as a result of the additional sums of money that we have given there has been an increase of 25 per cent. in the amount of money that we have given to councils over the past few years, which contrasts with a 7 per cent. cut in the amount of money that was given under the Conservatives.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The answer is that average household council tax—*[Interruption.]* They do not want to hear it because it hurts. The average household council tax bill has increased by 42 per cent. since the Government came to power. Come April, council tax bills are set to rise by up to 10 times the rate of inflation. This from a Prime Minister who promised:

> "We've no plans to increase tax at all."

In the same month the Prime Minister is going to hike up national insurance contributions. Can he tell us how much extra a typical family will pay as a result of his national insurance tax hike and council tax increases?

The Prime Minister: A family on median earnings will pay just under £4 a week, but that is actually a good deal if it means more money for the national health service and does not mean that they are forced, as they would be under his proposals, to deal with a health service that is underfunded or, as the Conservatives want, forced out into the private medical insurance sector, which would be an absolute disaster for them, and which many of them would not be able to afford.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Well, broken promises, and he discards them very easily. The answer is that the average family will now pay £570 more—the cost to them of the tax hike through jobs and the extra council tax that they will pay, which he promised that they would not pay. This from a Prime Minister who said:

> "I vow that the promises we make on tax, we will keep."

After 53 tax rises all those promises have been broken, so people now know that instead of listening to what the Prime Minister says they should look at their wallets to see what they are now having to pay.

The Prime Minister: First, the tax burden this year will be less than in eight of the 11 years of the Thatcher Governments. That is just to set it in context. Secondly, I agree that we are indeed putting up national insurance contributions by 1 per cent. this April to pay for the national health service. However, the alternative is an underfunded national health service. That means that people will be forced to go outside the NHS and pay for their operations and health care in the private sector. He must explain how the health service will be improved not only through opposing the extra money for it but by imposing a 20 per cent. cut across the board in national health service spending. That would be a disaster for the people of this country, and it is why they rejected the Conservative party in the past two general elections.

Workload

Q5. [98745] **Mr. Graham Allen** (Nottingham, North): What steps he is taking to reduce his workload; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: None.

Mr. Allen: Given his workload, will the Prime Minister tell the House and the nation what legal or statutory authority he has to commit British troops to war?

The Prime Minister: I shall act in accordance with constitutional precedent and with the way in which this country has always approached such issues. The Government, including me, will act in accordance with international law.

Sue Doughty (Guildford): Is the Prime Minister aware that many people in Palestine fear that, in the case of military action, the eyes of the world will be distracted from them and that they are at risk of more illegal incursions by Israel? What will the Government do about that?

The Prime Minister: As part of my workload, it is important to focus on the middle east peace process. The Government have tried to play a part in that by taking forward the process of political reform in the Palestinian Authority. I believe that it is as important as anything else in the world today to try to ensure a just and lasting settlement in the middle east, based on the two-state solution: an Israel that is confident of its security and a viable Palestinian state. We will work towards that outcome.

Drugs Treatment

Q6. [98746] **John Mann** (Bassetlaw): How many drug addicts in treatment are (a) in residential rehabilitation, (b) on a course of methadone, (c) on a course of naltraxone and (d) on a course of buprenorphine.

The Prime Minister: The latest published Department of Health statistics show that nearly 2,000 individuals were in residential rehabilitation out of a total of 118,500 people in treatment in England in 2000–01. National figures for those receiving specific drug therapies have not been collected in the past, but they will be available later in 2003 following the introduction of a new recording system. Overall, the number of drug users who presented for treatment between 2001–02 showed an 8 per cent. rise.

John Mann: As the Government's updated drugs strategy states that for every £1 spent on treatment, there will be a saving of £3 in criminal justice costs, can I have the money to prove that assertion in my constituency? I promise that I will return every penny of the threefold saving to the Chancellor.

The Prime Minister: It is certainly a better offer than the Chancellor is used to on such subjects. My hon. Friend has lobbied me on the subject and we are considering the areas that the service will cover. We will focus on the 30 highest basic command unit crime areas and we want to ensure the provision of a service that tracks people from the moment of arrest, when they are tested, through bail, when they are given the option of treatment, or refusal of bail, to sentencing, when, in appropriate cases, they will be offered the prospect of treatment rather than custody. Massive resources are going into that; we are increasing the funding spectacularly in the next few years to accommodate the policy. If it works in the 30 main BCU areas, we can roll it out across the country. However, I shall again consider carefully my hon. Friend's request to be included.

Angela Watkinson (Upminster): In the light of the International Narcotics Control Board's report, which condemns the country's drugs policy, will the Prime Minister reconsider the reclassification of cannabis from class B to class C?

The Prime Minister: We did that for the reasons that the Home Secretary set out. We have not decriminalised cannabis for reasons that my right hon. Friend explained well. Of course, there is a big debate about the matter, but it is worth bearing in mind that the priorities for many police officers in this country are hard drugs.

Jim Sheridan (West Renfrewshire): My right hon. Friend will be aware, and no doubt proud, of the Government's track record on introducing legislation that provides protection for workers in the workplace—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am sorry but the hon. Gentleman should be asking a question on drugs.

Engagements

Q7. [98747] **Mr. George Osborne** (Tatton): On Iraq, does the Prime Minister agree that what lies behind some of the opposition to his policy is a caricature of President George W. Bush which is a gross distortion of the truth? Will he take this timely opportunity to set the record straight?

The Prime Minister: I suspect that I am surrounded by advice on that particular topic. I have always found in my dealings with President Bush that he has been honest and straightforward. What is more, he chose to go through the United Nations route last year when many expected him not to. We should pay tribute to him for that.

Q8. [98749] **Paddy Tipping** (Sherwood): Despite record high levels of police officers both in Nottinghamshire and nationally, concerns remain about the level of antisocial and yobbish behaviour. What further measures does my right hon. Friend intend to take to tackle that real nuisance?

The Prime Minister: The Home Secretary has two major pieces of legislation for this Session: one is the Criminal Justice Bill; the other is the antisocial behaviour Bill. He and I met some senior police officers yesterday to discuss what could go into the legislation. Both Bills offer us the real opportunity to reform the criminal justice system, which urgently needs reform, and to introduce simple and easy-to-use penalties for police officers to tackle antisocial behaviour. Part of the problem they face is that the law is far too cumbersome to allow them to deal with some of the low-level disorder that makes people's lives hell in local communities. Fixed-penalty notices in particular, which are being piloted in different parts of the country, have been immensely successful in tackling that problem.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): There are increasing reports of pupils of high ability and achievement being turned down by universities because of their social background. How would the Prime Minister justify that to the people who are losing out?

The Prime Minister: The simple point is that I would not. If universities are doing that, they are wrong. What is more, people should go to university based on their merit, whatever their class or background. That is what should happen. *[Interruption.]* Well, the hon. Gentleman asked me a question and I have given him an answer.

Q9. [98750] **Geraint Davies** (Croydon, Central): My constituent, Feroz Abbasi, has been detained for more than a year by the American authorities, without charge, in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. The Court of Appeal has described that as a contravention of the principles of law. Will my right hon. Friend undertake to receive and evaluate the evidence against my constituent and to press the American authorities to charge and punish him or return him without delay back home to Britain?

The Prime Minister: I totally understand the concern that my hon. Friend raises. The Foreign Secretary has indicated to me that he would be happy to meet my hon. Friend and the family of his constituent. It is a highly unusual and difficult situation. We have been in touch with and have visited on several occasions those British nationals who are detained in Guantanamo Bay, but the situation is difficult. The one caveat I would enter is that we are still receiving quite valuable information from people who are there. However, I agree that it is an irregular situation and we would certainly want to try to bring it to an end as swiftly as possible.

Q10. [98751] **Mr. Andrew Turner** (Isle of Wight): The Prime Minister promised in 1999 that within two years everyone would have access to an NHS dentist through NHS Direct. Yet in my constituency and many others there are no vacancies on NHS waiting lists. Given that the Government are developing a reputation for saying one thing and doing another, is it any surprise that people do not trust him on the important issue of Iraq?

The Prime Minister: I obviously do not know the exact circumstances of the hon. Gentleman's constituents. According to the briefing I have, however, almost £700,000 extra has been provided for dental services in his area. The reason we are putting so many additional resources into the national health service is precisely in order to ensure that people get proper access to it. What he will have to explain to his constituents at the next election is why he opposes the extra investment and supports a Conservative leadership that wants to cut investment in the health service by 20 per cent. across the board.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): Is my right hon. Friend aware that there are many of his Back Benchers who will support him in tonight's vote on Iraq but who cannot support war against Iraq unless there is a second United Nations resolution? Will he make time for the House to have a debate and a vote before we commit British troops to Iraq?

The Prime Minister: As the Foreign Secretary has already said, subject to the natural qualification that we must do nothing that would ever put the security of our troops in danger, I have no doubt at all that the House will have an opportunity to vote on this issue many times if we come to military action—and, if there is a second resolution, to do so in relation to that second resolution.

We are not actually voting on the issue of war tonight; we are voting on the issue of the Government's strategy. I assure my hon. Friend that I am well aware that many people want the second resolution, and that is exactly what I want. I assure him that I am working flat out in order to achieve it. But the best way in which we can achieve it is to hold firm to the terms of resolution 1441.

Increasingly, the whole issue before the international community really comes down to this. When we said last November that this was a final opportunity to Saddam, when we said that there must be full, unconditional and immediate compliance, did we really mean it—or did we mean that we would come along later and say "Well, let's postpone it again"? I believe that we meant it: that we intended this genuinely to be the final opportunity. That is why I say that the onus is now on Saddam to make sure that he has indeed come into compliance with the United Nations' wishes.

Q11. [98752] **Dr. Vincent Cable** (Twickenham): May I return to the issue of the national health service? Is the Prime Minister aware that when members of the public ring the NHS help line, they are greeted by an answering machine which tells them because of staff shortages the service is no longer manned? They are then connected to the Department of Health's inquiry service, which puts them on to a deputy patch manager who connects them with a security guard in a disused NHS building in Birmingham? Can the Government do better?

The Prime Minister: NHS Direct handles millions of people's calls. It may be that the health service is not improving in the hon. Gentleman's area, but I can tell him from my knowledge of my own constituency and many others I have visited that the health service spending is going in, and it is making a difference. I simply say to the hon. Gentleman that those who try to run down the national health service day in, day out do nothing but help the Conservative case to get rid of the health service altogether.

Q12. [98753] **Mr. Terry Davis** (Birmingham, Hodge Hill): Is there any other Labour party, Socialist party or Social Democrat party anywhere else in Europe that supports the British and American approach to dealing with Saddam Hussein?

The Prime Minister: Yes: for example, the Polish Government.

Mr. Bill Wiggin (Leominster): If Saddam Hussein was serious about peace, surely he would have released the 605 Kuwaiti prisoners of war who have been held for the last 12 years. What message has the Prime Minister for the young people flying out to Iraq who are going as human shields? What advice has he for any British soldier who might see them through the wrong end of a gun sight? And what will happen to those people after the war?

The Prime Minister: I very much hope that they do not put themselves at risk, as I think they would be doing so in the mistaken view that they were helping the situation—which they would not be. The hon. Gentleman is entirely right to point out that there are still some 600 missing people in Kuwait, but that number goes alongside side the literally hundreds of thousands of people who have died under the regime of Saddam. I received some of the letters that my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) brought back from Iraq only today, but I urge people to read them, and to get at least some sense of the appalling brutality of the regime with which we are dealing.

Q14. [98755] **Norman Lamb** (North Norfolk): Along with the concern of so many in the country about the possibility of a pre-emptive strike against Iraq, there is real concern among families of our troops who are already in the Gulf. Last night I received a very anxious call from a constituent who had had a letter from her son, who is in the Royal Marines 42 Commando, already in the Gulf. He wrote this to his mother:

> "If you wish to let it be known how the forgotten Commando is surviving with no newspapers, no proper shop, no forces radio station, no e-mails"—

Mr. Speaker: Order. Questions should be brief. Can the Prime Minister manage an answer?

The Prime Minister: First, as I told the House yesterday, some of those reports about the troops and their equipment are misleading and irresponsible. The fact is, the British Army is one of the best and best equipped anywhere in the world. I do not want to diminish in any way the letter that the hon. Gentleman read out from his constituent, but I bet what the vast bulk of British armed forces out there would really like to know is that if they have to go into conflict, they have a united House and country behind them.

Point of Order

12.30 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The House is in an absurd position today, as a long-awaited, oversubscribed and vital debate appears to have to finish at 7 o'clock. Is there any proper reason for that, Mr. Speaker? Is there any reason why, in another place, debate will continue for as long is necessary to hear all the speakers, whereas here we are apparently subject to an arbitrary and unnecessary 7 o'clock time limit? Is there anything that can be done even at this late stage, with your help, Mr. Speaker, and that of the Government, to extend the debate to allow more people to speak on a matter of the greatest importance to hon. Members and everybody in the country?

Mr. Speaker: I am in the hands of the House, and the House has decided that 7 o'clock will be the moment of interruption. There is nothing that I can do about that. However, the right hon. Gentleman gives me the opportunity to say that he is right—many hon. Members have applied to speak in the debate. Before we go onto the main business, we have the ten-minute rule Bill. It would not be appreciated if hon. Members approached the Chair to ask whether there will be an opportunity for them to be called. That would be out of order on a day like this.

Needle Stick Injury

12.32 pm

Laura Moffatt (Crawley): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make provision about the protection from needle stick injury and resulting infections of persons employed in the health care sector and of other persons engaged in activities at work which carry a significant risk of such injuries and infections; to establish requirements relating to the recording and publication of information about such injuries and infections; to establish standards relating to the supply and use of certain equipment for work which carries a significant risk of such injury and infections; and for connected purposes.

I should like to start—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is bad manners for hon. Members to hold a conversation, as the hon. Lady is addressing the House. Hon. Members should leave the Chamber quietly and should not walk in front of her, as that is also bad manners.

Laura Moffatt: A needle stick injury is a puncture wound in which the needle is either whole or broken. Astonishingly, 100,000 such injuries are reported to occur in the NHS alone every year. All workers in a health care setting are at risk—nurses, doctors, midwives, phlebotomists, cleaning staff, portering staff, domestic staff, ambulance staff, community nurses and therapists. However, the problem is much bigger because public sector workers, including refuse collectors, park wardens, road sweepers, police and their support staff, gardeners, builders and teachers—in fact anyone who may come into contact with a hypodermic needle—are at risk.

The injuries themselves are comparatively superficial—it is only a pin-prick, after all—and rarely serious, but that only increases the likelihood of under-reporting and failure to obtain necessary testing and treatment. I shall come back to that later. The real danger is the infections that may be transmitted, including blood-borne viruses such as HIV, hepatitis C, hepatitis B and 20 other serious blood-borne viruses. The first ever transmission of HIV to a care worker from a patient happened in the UK. So far, five staff are known to have contracted HIV in that way and, sadly, four of them are dead. The Department of Health study in 2001 found the risk of transmission following a needle stick injury to be one in three for hepatitis B, one in 30 for hepatitis C, and one in 300 for HIV.

It is astonishing to learn that needle stick injury is second only to violence and aggression as a cause of occupational injury in the NHS, but it is not only NHS staff who are affected. Between July 1997 and June 2002, the Public Health Laboratory Service received reports of more than 1,500 exposures to blood-borne viruses, of which 734 cases—140 a year—were caused by hollow bore needles, which are the riskiest. Nurses and doctors account for an astonishing 77 per cent. of those reports.

The Royal College of Nursing is involved in an excellent monitoring study called Epinet, and is working to improve our understanding of the size of the problem and its causes. As I said, the figures show that at least 100,000 needle stick injuries occur every year. Between January and June 2002 across 19 sites, the Epinet study found that 925 incidents were reported. Figures for the six months covered show that on average per 100 beds,

[Laura Moffatt]

12.74 needle stick injuries will occur each year. With under-reporting estimated at about 60 to 80 per cent., the actual figure is probably much higher than 100,000.

The highest cost of all is the distress caused by such an injury. As a nurse with 25 years' experience, I know only too well how much anxiety is caused as a result of needle stick injury. For some, it can take a year of routine testing before they know whether or not they have contracted a life-threatening infection. For most, thankfully, the test results finally come back clear, but for others the news is devastating, life-altering and sometimes life-threatening.

There are financial implications. The Safer Needles Network, which has spearheaded the campaign, has done a huge amount of work around the financial impact on the NHS of such injuries. We already know that people outside the NHS can be at risk, and they may have no idea of the level of risk that the needle with which they have been stuck could cause them.

What happens when someone suffers such an injury, whether it be high or low risk? Some of the implications are time off work, blood tests, occupational health time, vaccination, treatment, counselling, administration time on the part of managerial staff, and of course compensation. The cost to the NHS of a low-risk accident is £310. The cost of a high-risk accident could be as high as £35,000. Taken as a whole throughout the NHS, the cost of needle stick injuries is £300 million. The estimated cost of introducing safer needles into the NHS is £49 million. The figures speak for themselves.

Much of our current legislation and Department of Health guidance is about protecting patients from infected health care workers, and rightly so, but we must ensure that any public sector or health care worker who may be at risk is protected. Safer needles cannot do the job alone. Good education and training for groups at risk is a must. I commend the work of the Federation of Master Builders, which last October issued excellent guidance to its 13,000 members. In 2002, the World Medical Association called on all national medical associations to work with their Governments to develop effective policies on the safe and appropriate use of injections. That is why I am pressing for change today.

Many people are involved in the Safer Needle Network. It is made up of the trade union Unison, the Royal College of Nursing, the British Medical Association, clinicians, professional organisations and, of course, the manufacturers of the devices themselves, all of whom have been working extremely closely with the Department of Health, the Medical Defence Association and Her Majesty's Prison Service. I particularly want to thank Bob Wade for all the help that he has given. I should also like to thank the Minister of State, Department of Health, my right hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton) for the personal interest that he has taken in this matter, and for receiving a delegation led by my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham).

The Bill deals with an important issue that needs to be taken on board by the Government. It is time to protect all workers who are at risk from used needles by improving existing health and safety legislation. For that reason, I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Laura Moffatt, Mr. Michael Clapham, Mr. Ben Chapman, Mr. Neil Gerrard, Ann Keen, Anne Picking, Helen Jones, Jonathan Shaw, Mr. Kelvin Hopkins, Judy Mallaber and Ms Julia Drown.

NEEDLE STICK INJURY

Laura Moffatt accordingly presented a Bill to make provision about the protection from needle stick injury and resulting infections of persons employed in the health care sector and of other persons engaged in activities at work which carry a significant risk of such injuries and infections; to establish requirements relating to the recording and publication of information about such injuries and infections; to establish standards relating to the supply and use of certain equipment for work which carries a significant risk of such injury and infections; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 4 April, and to be printed [Bill 61].

Iraq

Mr. Speaker: I inform the House that I have selected the amendment tabled in the name of the right hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith).

12.42 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): I beg to move,

That this House takes note of Command Paper Cm 5769 on Iraq; reaffirms its endorsement of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1441, as expressed in its Resolution of 25th November 2002; supports the Government's continuing efforts in the United Nations to disarm Iraq of its weapons of mass destruction; and calls upon Iraq to recognise this as its final opportunity to comply with its disarmament obligations.

This motion means what it says. It is not an endorsement of military action by United Kingdom forces. No decision to deploy British forces in action has yet been taken. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister spelled out a few moments ago, we will put any decision on military action to the House, and the timing will be subject only to the usual caveats about the safety of our forces. It is as much in the Government's interest as it is in the paramount interest of the House that we should do that before the start of any hostilities. In addition, there will be oral statements to the House on the business of the Security Council, and a full opportunity to debate and vote on the outcome of proceedings on any second resolution.

Let me commend to the House the Command Paper "Iraq", which I presented yesterday. For the convenience of the House, this contains in one document the reports of Dr. Blix and Dr. el-Baradei, statements on the Iraq crisis by the European Union and by NATO, my statements at three recent Security Council meetings, and, above all, the full texts of 13 of the principal Security Council resolutions on Iraq passed since August 1990.

The situation that we face is plainly grave. It is a matter that, across a range of beliefs, arouses great concern and anxiety. So in this debate I want to answer what I think are the central and continuing questions in people's minds. Why Iraq? Why now? Why not more time, more inspectors? Why a second resolution? Why not persist with the policy of containment, rather than contemplate military action? And finally, is not the west guilty of double standards, especially in relation to Israel/Palestine?

Let me deal with those questions in turn. First, why Iraq? The best answer to that question is to be found in the 42 pages of text of the 13 Security Council resolutions that form the first section of the Command Paper. There we see, paragraph by paragraph, the exceptional danger posed by Iraq, and its continued defiance of the United Nations. On 2 August 1990, resolution 660 tells Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait. On 29 November 1990, resolution 678 offers Iraq a "final opportunity"—interesting words—to comply, which it fails to take. On 3 April 1991, resolution 687 gives Iraq until 18 April 1991 to make a full declaration of the "locations, amount and types" of all chemical and biological weapons and of all medium and long-range ballistic missiles. That resolution bars Iraq from ever developing biological, chemical or nuclear weapons.

On and on the resolutions go. Resolution 688 is "gravely concerned" about the repression of the civilian population in many parts of Iraq. In 1994, resolution 949

"condemns military deployments by Iraq in the direction of the border with Kuwait",

three years after the original invasion. In 1999, nine years after the invasion of Kuwait, resolution 1284 establishes a further inspection regime

"as a result of Iraq's failure to implement the Security Council Resolutions fully".

Iraq flatly and completely refuses to comply.

Last November, resolution 1441 recognised

"the threat which Iraq's non-compliance with Council Resolutions and proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction and long range missiles poses to international peace and security"—

and gave Iraq its "final opportunity to comply".

So, for the United Nations, the answer to the "Why Iraq?" question is very clear. Iraq is the only country in such serious and multiple breach of mandatory UN obligations. It is the only country in the world to have fired missiles at five of its neighbours, the only country in history to have used chemical weapons against its own people, and the only country in the region that has invaded two of its neighbours in recent years.

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley) *rose*—

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Straw: As I have explained to you, Mr. Speaker, normally I take many interventions in debates. Because of the intense pressure on time on this occasion, I do not intend to do so, but I will take a few. I give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell).

Mr. Dalyell: As a question of fact and before my right hon. Friend leaves the subject of documents, did the dossier that owed so much to that Californian student have the authority of Peter Ricketts and the Joint Intelligence Committee? Did the Joint Intelligence Committee authorise that dossier?

Mr. Straw: Mr. Ricketts ceased to be the secretary of the Joint Intelligence Committee about two years ago. All the information that was attributed as intelligence came from intelligence agencies and the whole of that dossier was accurate. I thought that my hon. Friend was going to ask me whether we had accepted his advice about taking the issue to the United Nations, because this matter has been the subject of 12 years of United Nations resolutions and 12 months of the most intense and proper debate in the House of Commons and in Westminster Hall.

Last March, when there was some speculation about the course of events and whether, for example, the United States would put its case to the United Nations, my hon. Friend said:

"Incidentally, if there is to be any action, it should be taken through the United Nations."—[*Official Report, Westminster Hall*, 6 March 2002; Vol. 381, c. 70WH.]

[Mr. Straw]

Several other colleagues who have put their names to the amendment agreed. All I say is that on this matter we have listened carefully to what the House has said. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has talked to President Bush and much discussion has taken place about putting the matter to the United Nations. That is exactly what we did and, on 8 November 2002, we obtained a Security Council resolution. All we are asking now of the international community, Iraq and this House, is that we follow through on the words that were agreed by the United Nations on 8 November and by this House on 25 November.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Hon. Members: Give way.

Mr. Straw: No.

The next question that I raised was, "Why now?" All the resolutions of the Security Council, 12 years of them, also help us answer that question.

Saddam's aim is that "now" shall never arrive. His tactics all along have been to prevaricate in the hope that by exploiting people's natural anxieties about military action he can string out the process for ever and keep his arsenal for good.

Let us look at the recent evidence. On 10 September last year, Iraq declared—I was there in the General Assembly when this was said—that it would never, ever readmit weapons inspectors under any circumstances. Then President Bush made his important and most welcome speech to the General Assembly. Four days later, Iraq said that it would after all readmit weapons inspectors, but made its offer subject to 19 spurious conditions of the kind that it has often come forward with. Fortunately, those were rejected.

There were then two months of intense negotiations inside the Security Council. In response, the international community united, resolution 1441 was passed unanimously and the Security Council agreed to back its diplomacy with the credible threat of force. The inspectors finally entered Iraq on 27 November, looking, as the resolution required, for full, active and immediate co-operation from Iraq.

But since the inspectors' return the story has been all too familiar. We saw first a 12,000-page Iraqi declaration, which Dr. Blix called

> "rich in volume but poor in new information . . . and practically devoid of new evidence."

There have been concerted Iraqi efforts to prevent unrestricted interviews with scientists. The issue of interviews with the scientists is not a trivial matter. It is the most important way in which we can arrive at the truth of Iraq's chemical and biological weapons programmes.

Iraq refused any interviews to begin with. Since the weapons inspectors pressed the Iraqis, there have been three private interviews, all within the closing days up to Dr. Blix's report on 14 February, and, despite what we see in some newspapers about increased co-operation by the Iraqis, not one interview has been granted since. Time after time after time the Iraqis seek to impose conditions that make free and fair interviews almost impossible.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Straw: I shall give way to the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) in a moment.

There have been categorical Iraqi denials that the al-Samoud missile has a range in excess of the 150 km limit prescribed by the United Nations, an assertion since disproved by an independent panel of experts from the five permanent members of the Security Council and by UNMOVIC.

Crucially, there have been no answers to the outstanding disarmament issues listed in UNSCOM's final report to the Security Council in February 1999.

As a result, as Dr. Blix himself indicates, in 15 weeks, the inspectors have not been able to close a single outstanding issue. There have been no answers to what has happened to the 8,500 litres of anthrax; no answers to what has happened to the 360 tonnes of bulk chemical warfare agent; no answers to what has happened to the 3,000 tonnes of precursor chemicals; no answers to what has happened to the 1.5 tonnes of the completely deadly VX nerve agent or to the 6,500 chemical bombs identified by Dr. Blix on 27 January. The intimidation of scientists and their families so that they do not give full evidence has continued.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): On 6 February, the same day as the dodgy dossier was exposed as a fabrication, the Prime Minister said on "Newsnight", in front of a studio audience, that the only circumstances in which force would be used without a further UN resolution were if the inspectors concluded that they could no longer do their work and if a further resolution was passed by a majority in the Security Council but was subject to an "unreasonable" veto by a single country. Is that still the position of the United Kingdom Government or has it changed again?

Mr. Straw: I heard the interview too. What my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister also made clear was that our policy is 100 per cent. support for and full implementation of resolution 1441. What the hon. Gentleman is now trying to do—having got resolution 1441 and having signed up to it, having asked for the United Nations to be brought in, having asked us to take the United Nations route—is to rewrite the terms of the resolution.

Mr. Hoyle: Can my right hon. Friend explain why we have the motion today and not next week, following the statement by Dr. Blix on Friday? We would all like to know why it is so important.

Mr. Straw: We have sought to have as many debates as possible, and, on the entirely proper request of hon. Members on both sides of the House, to do so on substantive resolutions, so that hon. Members are not voting on an Adjournment, but are voting on the substance of the issue. Normally the complaint is that we have not had a debate soon enough. I plead guilty to the fact that we have not delayed this debate. We are having it today because we thought it entirely appropriate, given that we have submitted a draft resolution to the United Nations Security Council. As I made clear in my opening remarks, once there is a conclusion to the Security Council proceedings—and it may well be before that, too—we shall have a further debate and a vote in the House.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Straw: I know that many hon. Members wish to take part in the debate, so the House will have to excuse me if I do not give way.

The next question that I raised was about more time and more inspections. I understand why there are calls for more time and more inspections, but Saddam has not shown that he is ready to break with the past. That is exactly what Dr. Blix said today. At present, it is not even clear whether the Iraqis really want to co-operate. In these circumstances, in the absence of active and immediate Iraqi co-operation, more time will not achieve anything of substance. Nor, without that active co-operation, can it be a question of more inspectors.

It took just nine inspectors to verify the disarmament of South Africa's nuclear weapons programme at the end of apartheid. It did not take 12 years. It did not take hundreds of inspectors. It did not take endless Security Council resolutions. It took three years, nine inspectors and no resolutions. Why? Because South Africa was complying with the inspectors.

It is critical that, in respect of Iraq, we all accept one reality above all, which is that what grudging concessions on process there have been from Saddam have been secured only because of the military build-up. What is the difference between the circumstances now and the circumstances when resolution 1284 was agreed at the end of 1999, the resolution that set up the organisation of weapons inspectors, UNMOVIC? There is some difference in terms of the powers of the weapons inspectors. But the only significant, material difference is that, back at the end of 1999, the world said, "Let us try giving them more time. Let us try by a completely peaceful route to secure the disarmament of Iraq. Let us plead with the Iraqis to do the decent thing. Let us impose some sanctions, too, and hope that they will work."

Saddam's answer was to slam the door in the face of the international community. The only reason for the difference between Saddam's refusal to co-operate with one dot or comma in resolution 1284 and his very reluctant co-operation on some process today, his statement that he will co-operate, is the build-up of the credible threat of force, something clearly recognised by the United Nations charter.

I was glad to note that President Chirac of France—and I pay tribute to him—conceded in an interview last week in *Time* magazine that it was the military build-up that had made the difference. There is a logic that follows—

Paul Flynn (Newport, West) *rose—*

Mr. Straw: I shall give way to my hon. Friend in a moment. I always do. I do not know why.

There is a logic that follows from what I have said that cannot be avoided and is for everybody in the international community. We are now close to the crunch point. Saddam must either embark immediately on voluntary and full disarmament or the Security Council must face up to its responsibility to see that he is disarmed by force. That is the truth. That is the reality.

Paul Flynn: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way.

My point is in connection with what my right hon. Friend said at the beginning of his speech, which seems to contradict what he told the House on 7 November. When he was asked what "serious consequences" in resolution 1441 meant, he replied:

"consequences up to and including military force"—[*Official Report*, 7 November 2002; Vol. 392, c. 436.]

Is it not right that anyone who votes for the main resolution today will in fact be voting for war?

Mr. Straw: For one moment, I was worried that I had said something inconsistent back in November—that sometimes happens, even with me—but on this occasion I agree entirely with the words that I uttered then. Indeed, I could not have been more accurate. I wanted then to spell out to the House what "serious consequences" meant. I wanted to tell the House without any dubiety that in voting to support resolution 1441, which we did by a huge majority, we were voting to recognise the serious consequences that would flow from a further material breach by Saddam Hussein, up to and including the use of force.

I repeat for my hon. Friend what I said at the beginning of this debate. The United Nations is responsible for its resolutions, but the House as a whole is responsible for the motions that it passes. Notwithstanding my hon. Friend's invitation that we should seek a mandate for military action, we are not seeking one today because the Government have not yet got to that point. If we do reach that point, we will come back and seek a vote, through a debate in this House, on a substantive motion.

Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Straw: No. I am so sorry, but as my hon. Friend knows, there is great time pressure.

The next question is why do we need a second resolution now? Resolution 1441 required Iraq's full, active and immediate compliance, as indeed did resolution 687, which was passed 12 years ago. Fifteen weeks after 1441, Saddam's response has been neither full, nor active, nor immediate. He has not complied, and not a single member of the Security Council says otherwise. In place of active voluntary co-operation, we have had a string of cynically timed concessions that are calculated to divide and to delay.

We saw more token concessions last night. According to the newspapers, Iraq has now told Dr. Blix that it has—and I quote—"found" a bomb. Iraq has found a bomb containing biological agents—it simply popped up from some gooseberry bush. Some will be tempted to regard this as evidence that Saddam is being successfully contained, and that the inspectors should be given

[Mr. Straw]

endless time. However, this latest "find" is the same old game of dribbling out small concessions at the last minute.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby) *rose—*

Mr. George Galloway (Glasgow, Kelvin) *rose—*

Malcolm Bruce (Gordon) *rose—*

Mr. Straw: It is completely ludicrous for the Iraqi regime to talk of "finding" weapons of mass destruction, as if it were someone else who made a 12,000-word declaration, claiming that the country had no weapons of mass destruction.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Straw: The conclusion—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Does the Secretary of State wish to give way?

Mr. Straw: I have given way to serious people on both sides of the House.

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I am sure that this is not a point of order, but I must listen.

Sir Robert Smith: I seek the advice of the Chair on whether it is in order for the Government to table at this late stage a business motion to suspend the 7 o'clock deadline, which would allow the Secretary of State time to take interventions.

Mr. Speaker: That is not a matter for the Chair.

Mr. Straw: The conclusion that we ought to draw from this overnight admission by Iraq is that we are right to say that it does have weapons of mass destruction, that it has lied about them, that it has tried to hide them, and that it is determined to keep them behind a charade of cynical concessions. Unless we bring this game to a halt, it will go on for as long as Saddam wants. I will not be surprised if, by the end of the week, Saddam is offering concessions on the proscribed al-Samoud missiles—having said that he will never destroy a single one—in the hope, once again, of playing for time. However, if the words "final opportunity", in operative paragraph 2 of resolution 1441, have any meaning, it is that this time we must not let Saddam lure the international community into endless indecision. Resolution 1441 called for disarmament "immediately". We have waited 110 days already, which is stretching the meaning of "immediately" to breaking point.

I ask our friends in France and Germany—who share our goal of Iraqi disarmament, and who fully support resolution 1441—why Saddam is more likely to co-operate actively, fully and immediately in the further 120 days that they now propose than he was in the past 110. What does he need 120 days for: to have a look for the weapons that he says he has not got, in case he has overlooked something; to search the homes of scientists for the incriminating papers that he ordered them to hide there; to tell those scientists to attend interviews and tell the truth that, through intimidation, he has instructed them to conceal?

Mr. Robathan: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Straw: I shall give way in one second.

No. Saddam would use a further 120 days to bring the authority of the United Nations lower week by week, to tie the weapons inspectors in knots, and to create further divisions within the international community. We know that this is what he will do, because it is what he has always done.

Joan Ruddock: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Straw: I shall also give way to my hon. Friend in a moment.

Worse, this delay would send Saddam the clearest possible signal that his strategy is succeeding. It would tell him that the international community lacks the will to disarm him, and it would tell all those who threaten our security that Saddam Hussein has broken the United Nations as an instrument for defending peace through the force of international law.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Straw: I give way to the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan).

Mr. Robathan: The Foreign Secretary is making a most powerful speech, but in the light of everything that he and the Prime Minister have said, can he clarify for the House, for the people of Britain, who are confused, and for the members of our armed forces, who may be about to lay their lives on the line for this policy, whether there are any circumstances in which this crisis can be resolved with Saddam Hussein's being allowed to remain in power? Is it not a fact that our objective is, and has to be, regime change in Iraq?

Mr. Straw: There are such circumstances, as it happens, and the important point is this. We are committed to implementation of 1441. I do not like the Saddam Hussein regime—I regard it as one of the most revolting and terrible regimes in the world—but the focus of 1441 is not regime change per se, but the disarmament of Saddam's weapons of mass destruction.

In his statement yesterday, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister spelled out that if there is full, active and immediate compliance by Saddam Hussein with the full terms of 1441 and the other resolutions referred to, Saddam would remain in government, but his power would be greatly reduced because those weapons of mass destruction would have been removed.

Joan Ruddock: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way. On the question of timing and taking a decision, can he tell me why half the UN staff involved in the oil-for-food programme have been withdrawn?

Mr. Straw: I cannot tell my hon. Friend directly, but I am happy to look into the matter. They certainly have not been drawn on any advice given by us. I have been involved in discussions with the Secretary-General of the United Nations about the humanitarian crisis that has existed in Iraq for the past 12 years, and about the circumstances that would arise if military action had to be taken. All the Security Council partners are of course concerned about that issue, and so is the Secretary-General.

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Straw: No. With the greatest of respect, I have given way a good deal. *[Interruption.]* I am sorry; I would love to give way, because I always enjoy doing so.

Time is pressing, so let me turn to the next question, which in many ways is at the heart of the amendment. Why not persist with the policy of containment, rather than contemplate military action? After all, some argue that Iraq has not invaded any of its neighbours or used chemical and biological weapons in the past 12 years, and that these weapons have either been destroyed, or do not present a sufficient threat to Iraq's neighbours or to the wider world to justify the use of force to remove them if Saddam refuses to do so peacefully.

I understand the containment argument, even if I do not agree with it. However, let no one be under any illusions: the policy of containment is not the policy of disarmament as set out in resolution 1441 or any of the preceding resolutions. There can be no stable, steady state for Iraq unless it is properly disarmed, and nor can there be stability for the region and the international community. What may appear to be containment to us is rearmament for Saddam.

We do not need to speculate on this, as we have witnessed it. A de facto policy of containment existed between 1998 and 2002 following the effective expulsion of inspectors by Iraq, and Iraq's refusal to comply with resolution 1284.

Far from keeping a lid on Saddam's ambitions, that period allowed him to rebuild his horrific arsenal, his chemical and biological weapons, and the means of delivering them against his enemies at home and abroad. UNMOVIC inspectors chart in their recent reports, which are before the House, how Iraq has refurbished prohibited equipment that had previously been destroyed by UNSCOM, the earlier inspectors. That equipment included rocket motor casting chambers and chemical processors. UNMOVIC has also found that Iraq used the four-year absence of inspectors—the so-called period of containment—to build a missile test stand capable of testing engines with over four times the thrust of the already prohibited al-Samoud 2 missile. All this happened during containment. There is no steady state—the choice is between disarmament or rearmament.

Thankfully, the so-called policy of containment ended on 8 November last year. Containment requires a degree of trust in Saddam that we cannot risk and which runs contrary to all the evidence. It means leaving Saddam as a standing example that defiance pays. We cannot allow Saddam further time and space to strengthen his capabilities and to rearm further. Only disarmament—the aim of all these UN Security Council resolutions—can deal with this issue.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Straw: I turn now to the next question. I am often asked, "Isn't the west guilty of double standards, especially in relation to Israel and Palestine?" [HON MEMBERS: "Yes."] Some of my hon. Friends say yes. I accept, as does my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, that there has been a considerable amount to this charge, and to the perception of double standards, which extends well beyond the Arab and Islamic world. However, we deal with this charge not by ignoring outstanding UN obligations, but by working even harder to see all of them implemented. The key ones on Israel/Palestine—242, 338, 1397—impose obligations on three sets of parties—on the Palestinians to end terrorism, on the Arab countries to end support for terrorism and to recognise the state of Israel, and on Israel fully to co-operate in the establishment of a viable state of Palestine with borders broadly based on those of 1967.

Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent): *rose—*

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow) *rose—*

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North) *rose—*

Mr. Straw: In difficult circumstances, we are working actively to implement this UN policy, including the early publication of the roadmap.

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): *rose—*

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park) *rose—*

Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield) *rose—*

Mr. Straw: I give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Richard Burden).

Richard Burden: I thank my right hon. Friend for giving way, and I welcome the Government's efforts to restart the peace process. However, the allegations and anger about double standards are not only to do with the lack of talks. They arise from the fact that, when a house in Gaza is destroyed, perhaps with the people in it, the destruction has probably been caused by an F-16. That aeroplane has probably been supplied by the US and may have parts supplied by Britain. Moreover, when the olive grove is destroyed, the destruction is probably carried out by a bulldozer bankrolled from the US. If we are to avoid the allegation of double standards, we must get talks going, and ensure that UN resolutions are upheld and respected.

Mr. Straw: As my hon. Friend knows, I entirely agree with that. We have to ensure the full application of international law by Israel, and—as I have told our friends in the Palestinian authority—we have to ensure as well that the Palestinians take even further action to stop the terrorist organisations in their areas. There is no

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alternative to that. The Arab states must also end giving terrorist organisations active support, finance and supplies.

Llew Smith *rose*—

Mr. Gerrard *rose*—

Jeremy Corbyn *rose*—

Mrs. Gillan *rose*—

Dr. Tonge *rose*—

Mr. Straw: All those things must happen, but we are committed to ensuring the implementation of the Security Council resolutions in respect of Israel and Palestine.

Mr. Gerrard *rose*—

Jeremy Corbyn *rose*—

Mrs. Gillan *rose*—

Mr. Straw: In difficult circumstances—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Foreign Secretary does not appear to be giving way.

Mr. Straw: We are working actively to implement this UN policy, including the early publication of the roadmap.

It must also never be forgotten, however, that the obligations on Saddam are singular, unilateral, and not for negotiation by him. We increase, not undermine, respect for the authority of the UN as a whole—and the prospects of a peace settlement in the middle east—if we implement fully the resolutions on Iraq, and do not shy away from their consequences.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Straw: No, as I am coming to my closing remarks.

Mr. Kaufman: Will my right hon. Friend give way specifically on this matter?

Mr. Straw: I will.

Mr. Kaufman: I thank my right hon. Friend. I think that the House will concede that I have been as outspoken as any hon. Member in condemning Israeli policy, and I shall continue to be outspoken on the matter. Given that, does my right hon. Friend agree that anyone who believes that Saddam Hussein gives a twopenny damn for the Palestinians, the Kurds or the Marsh Arabs is living in self-delusion?

Mr. Straw: As ever, I agree with my right hon. Friend. I knew that it was a wise move to give way to him.

International terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction are the crucial strategic questions of our time. Our answer to these threats will determine the stability of the world for decades to come. This is an awesome responsibility. It calls for courageous leadership. And it requires the vision and foresight to act decisively and, if necessary, with military force.

Once Saddam's invasion of Kuwait had been turned back by the international community, the international community, with our agreement, put on hold the military option, preferring of course to resolve the continuing crisis peacefully, first through weapons inspections and then, from December 1998, through a policy of containment. However, neither of those approaches has worked.

Following the adoption of resolution 1441, Saddam has now to be under no illusions that there will be no further resolutions calling for containment, no further attempts to tinker at the margins rather than to remove his weapons. This has to be a moment of choice for Saddam and for the Iraqi regime.

Mr. Robert Marshall-Andrews (Medway) *rose*—

Chris McCafferty (Calder Valley) *rose*—

Mr. Straw: However, it is also a moment of choice for the UN. As I told the Security Council on 5 February, the UN's pre-war predecessor, the League of Nations, had the same fine ideals as the UN. Yet the League failed because it could not create actions from its words: it could not back diplomacy with a credible threat and, where necessary, the use of force. Small evils therefore went unchecked, tyrants became emboldened, then greater evils were unleashed. At each stage good men and women said, "Not now, wait, the evil is not big enough to challenge." Then before their eyes, the evil became too big to challenge. We had slipped slowly down a slope, never noticing how far we had gone until it was too late. We owe it to our history as well as to our future not to make the same mistake again.

This is the hardest issue that I have ever had to deal with. I know that it causes very great anxiety to the British people and to Members of this House. It does to all of us. However, the issue of what we do about tyrannical states with poison gases, nerve agents, viruses and nuclear ambitions, and which defy international law and the principles of the UN, will not go away. We have to face the issue. We have to give Saddam Hussein a categorical choice, and after 12 long years he has to give us his answer now.

I commend the motion to the House.

1.17 pm

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): The Opposition support this motion. In many ways, it is a rerun of the debate in this House on 25 November last year, in which we also supported the Government motion. This motion poses no new questions or challenges. We have therefore tabled no amendment.

None of us wants war. For those of us who have spent a significant part of our political lives working to establish peace, it is a desperately sad prospect. However, sometimes conflict is necessary in the short term to achieve peace through the defeat of aggression, and sometimes it is the threat of conflict that can establish peace.

The current situation that exists in Iraq today is not peace. It is conflict waiting in the wings. It has been there for the past 12 years. As the Foreign Secretary has pointed out, that is what containment has meant. To prolong it in the absence of genuine disarmament would be to prolong the uncertainty and suffering of the people of Iraq. It would leave the conflict and the crisis unresolved. It would also send a message to Saddam Hussein that the urgent requirement to disarm was no longer urgent, that the determination to secure immediate compliance with resolution 1441 was no longer immediate. It would not be peace. It would be the procrastination of a conflict that would be more vicious and more damaging when eventually it came.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ancram: I will give way in a moment, but I want to make a few introductory remarks.

I believe that the Prime Minister's last push for peace is important. It is the language that Saddam Hussein understands. It is based on the clear understanding that Saddam Hussein only begins to comply when his feet are held to the flames and the heat begins to take effect. Equally, it is based on the knowledge that, the moment the heat is turned off, he returns to his old threatening ways, as we have heard from the Foreign Secretary.

The peaceful disarming of Hussein may, in the event, not be possible, but I believe that it has been right to try to do it. The Foreign Secretary has painted a very pessimistic picture in that regard today, but we know that, if there is to be a peaceful outcome, it will happen only if the determination of the international community to resort to force if necessary is clear and unambiguous.

Saddam Hussein has always taken ambiguity as a sign of weakness, so the last push for peace depends on his understanding clearly that there is no way out other than to disarm, and that the final opportunity that the Security Council signed up to in resolution 1441 means precisely what it says.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): Does my right hon. Friend agree that public opinion would be greatly reassured if Her Majesty's Government undertook to ensure that, before UK and US troops attacked Iraq, a specific resolution authorising war was tabled to the Security Council, and that a specific resolution was put before the House of Commons as well?

Mr. Ancram: If my hon. Friend checks the resolutions that are already before the House in the Command Paper, he will find that there is plenty of cover in every one of them. *[Interruption.]* I will come to the reason why I say that in a moment because it is very important; but we have supported the idea that a substantive motion should be put before the House, and we have also supported the second resolution before the UN because, although we do not believe it to be legally necessary, it is desirable to have it.

Mr. Barnes *rose*—

Mr. Peter Kilfoyle (Liverpool, Walton): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ancram: I will in a moment.

I want to ask whether the Government have asked France—politely, of course—what it understands by the phrase "final opportunity". I took the trouble to look up the French version of resolution 1441, and it talks about the "dernière possibilité". Although my French may be a little rusty, I believe that both phrases mean exactly the same thing. The French signed up to resolution 1441, but when I saw their counter-proposal, which they tabled on Monday, it seems anything but final in the proposals and demands it makes. It must give Saddam Hussein a very real hope that he might just get away with it once again, and with his weapons intact.

I hope that France and those who are tempted to support her position will think very clearly about the importance of the message that they signed up to in resolution 1441, as it is crucial to the last push for peace. It is worth recalling that the Arab League, the European Union and every member of the Security Council, as well as all the parties in the House, expressed their support for resolution 1441.

Mr. Kilfoyle: A few moments ago, the right hon. Gentleman said that it was the Conservative party's policy to seek a substantive motion in the eventuality of hostilities breaking out. Will he confirm whether that substantive motion would be tabled in the House before the commencement of hostilities, not after?

Mr. Ancram: We in the Opposition will obviously not be as aware as the Government are of when military action is likely to start. We have made it clear that, ideally, we would like that to happen before any such action, but there may be circumstances—the hon. Gentleman was a Defence Minister, so he must know this—where military action, for all sorts of security reasons, might have to begin before the House can debate it, and we should be very careful to do nothing that undermines the ability and security of our armed forces by setting improper and unworkable conditions.

Mrs. Gillan: The concern in the country about any future action against Iraq runs right across all sectors of our community, not least among the 1.5 million Muslims who live in the United Kingdom. Will my right hon. Friend support me in a request to ask the Foreign Secretary whether he will meet Dr. Siddiqui—my constituent and the leader of the Muslim Parliament of Great Britain—to listen to the views of those Muslims as expressed through the Muslim Parliament?

Mr. Ancram: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for having raised that issue. The Foreign Secretary will have heard what she said, but it is vital in the days and weeks ahead that hon. Members on both sides of the House

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continue to make it clear that this is a conflict not with Islam, but with a gangster who has weapons of mass destruction and who needs to be dealt with.

Today's debate will be one of deep but conflicting views. I have the greatest respect for those who hold strong and principled views on this difficult issue, even if those views may differ from mine, but I have no time for those who might seek to play politics with this issue, although it would have been easy to do so. It is far too serious for that. I also have very little time for those who have sought to face both ways. I look down the Benches to my left, at the leader of the Liberal Democrats. Yesterday and today, he criticised what he called the pre-emptive draft resolution. Is this the leader of a party which, ever since resolution 1441 was passed, has insisted on a second resolution? Indeed, is this the leader of a party whose foreign affairs spokesman, the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell), told the House last year that

> "legally, no new resolution is required for the use of force to implement resolution 687."

He went on to say

> "that from a political and diplomatic point of view, a new United Nations resolution is essential".—[*Official Report*, 24 September 2002; Vol. 390, c. 43–44.]

Well, he was talking not about a second resolution, but about the resolution that turned out to be 1441, which he had already said was not legally required for force to be used. It really is time that the Liberal Democrats decided what their position on such resolutions is. Is this the party leader who told the recent anti-war rally that he would not support military action without a second UN resolution, only two weeks after his defence spokesman, the hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. Keetch), when asked, in my presence, whether he would feel bound by a second resolution endorsing military action announced that his party's foreign policy would not be dictated by the UN? What a tangled web! The House has a right to know the clear and unambiguous position of the Liberal Democrats, and I hope that we will hear it today.

Mr. Paul Marsden (Shrewsbury and Atcham): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ancram: No, I will give way to the hon. Member for Hereford if he wishes to explain what he meant when he was talking to all those students the other day.

Mr. Paul Keetch (Hereford): I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for that invitation. It simply demonstrates why the official Opposition are so concerned about the Liberal Democrats: this party has been calling for support for our troops in the Gulf. As for what I said during Westminster Day, it has never been the case that the UN is the sole repository of international law. Indeed, if we had waited for a UN resolution, we would not have deployed troops into Kosovo—an action by the Government that this party rightly supported.

Hon. Members: More.

Mr. Ancram: I am even more confused about the Liberal Democrat position than I was before the hon. Gentleman intervened, but it is absolutely clear that they behave like weather vanes: every time the wind changes, they change direction, too.

Mr. Kaufman: The right hon. Gentleman asked the Liberal Democrats to have a clear and unambiguous position on this issue. Is he aware that, if the Liberal Democrats had a clear and unambiguous position on this issue, it would be the only issue, ranging from street lighting to council tax, on which they had such a position?

Mr. Ancram: I accept from the right hon. Gentleman that what I said was the triumph of hope over experience.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ancram: No. I want to make further progress because many hon. Members wish to speak.

Mr. Paul Marsden *rose*—

Mr. Simon Thomas: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Ancram: Many hon. Members have genuine fears and concerns, and the Government must take them seriously. I have to tell the Foreign Secretary that the public have been confused too often by the changing focus of the Government's arguments. It is now time they clarified their objectives and made the case more clearly.

All that I can do is set out my position and that of my colleagues. I believe that Iraq poses a threat to international peace and security, and, therefore, to us. That is why we support the Government today. The UN believes that Iraq poses a continuing threat to international peace and security, which is why 17 resolutions, including 1441, have been passed under chapter VII of the UN charter, which deals specifically with threats to the peace and permits military action. That was the point that I made when the matter was raised earlier. The draft resolution tabled on Monday in the UN Security Council refers specifically to chapter VII. The threat flows neither from the evil of Saddam Hussein nor from the existence of weapons of mass destruction, but from the combination of the two.

Mr. Simon Thomas *rose*—

Mr. Ancram: Other countries have weapons of mass destruction but they manage them responsibly. There are other evil and murderous leaders, but they do not possess weapons of mass destruction, nor have they shown readiness to use them even against their own people. Saddam in possession of weapons of mass destruction is, in the eyes of the United Nations—not just in the eyes of the House or of those on these Front Benches—a present and current threat to international peace and security. We would fail the people whom we represent if we were to turn a blind eye to that.

Mr. Andrew Tyrie (Chichester): Does my right hon. Friend not accept that the disparity between the treatment being meted out to Iraq and that being meted out to North Korea sends a worrying signal to all countries who fear that they will be bullied by the United States? Is not it a cause for concern that everyone in the world is seeing North Korea being treated with kid gloves while Iraq is treated with an iron fist? Is that not an invitation to all other countries that are threatened to try to obtain nuclear weapons?

Mr. Ancram: No. I understand what my hon. Friend is saying, but I was in China last week and I talked to the Chinese Foreign Minister, about North Korea in particular. The point was made to me—this is an important distinction—that whereas Iraq has been subject for many years to mandatory resolutions, North Korea has until recently been abiding by agreements that had been made. What is happening in North Korea is a matter of great concern, but we must be absolutely clear that to confuse that with what is happening in Iraq would be dangerous in terms of the consequences that could follow.

Mr. Simon Thomas *rose*—

Mr. Barnes *rose*—

Mr. Ancram: I shall give way to the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas).

Mr. Thomas: The right hon. Gentleman has just advanced two reasons for his party's support for military action, if necessary, in Iraq: first, the weapons of mass destruction that are likely to be present in that country; and secondly, the nature of the regime. I do not know whether the right hon. Gentleman was present in the House—the Foreign Secretary certainly was—when the Secretary of State for International Development said that it was illegal, and not permitted under international law, for one country to seek the removal of another country's leader. If his party's policy relies on that argument, it is doing a gross disservice to the people of this country.

Mr. Ancram: The hon. Gentleman has not considered the matter fully. What is clear, as we have made plain for some time, is that a sole objective of regime change would be outwith the bounds of international law. But that is not the case in this instance. We are seeking the removal and elimination of weapons of mass destruction that are a threat because they are in the hands of a gangster who uses them not only to threaten his own people but, as we know, to threaten the countries around him. That is why the United Nations believes that he poses a threat to international security and peace.

I understand the doubts that are expressed about whether we have sufficient evidence to proceed in the direction that the Government have outlined. It would help to meet doubts, of course, if weapons of mass destruction could be disclosed or discovered now. I continue to hope that, as far as is consistent with maintaining the integrity and security of our intelligence, the Government may yet produce more tangible evidence than they have done so far. What we know already, however, is that the elements of such weapons of mass destruction and the programmes for developing them existed in 1999 when the last team of UN inspectors had to leave Iraq. We heard details from the Prime Minister yesterday of the spine-chilling extent and nature of those weapons: the anthrax, the nerve agents and the thousands of special munitions. We know from UNSCOM and from previous Iraqi declarations—let us not forget that—that those weapons were there then. In the absence of evidence to the contrary, we must believe that they are there now. It is not for the inspectors to prove that they are still there; it is for Iraq to demonstrate credibly that they are not. That is not my demand: Hans Blix made it clear on 27 January, and set it more broadly as the test as to whether Saddam Hussein was genuinely seeking to comply with resolution 1441.

Angus Robertson (Moray) *rose*—

Mr. Ancram: Although we have not found a smoking gun, we learned in the presentation made to the UN Security Council by Colin Powell on 5 February that there is a lot of smoke. There is no killer fact, but there are vast amounts of circumstantial evidence that the elements of weapons of mass destruction and long-range missiles are still there and are still being developed. Those are weapons which, in malign hands, can threaten us directly. As a lawyer, I do not underestimate the importance of such evidence, and those who do are gambling with our future security.

Angus Robertson *rose*—

Mr. Ancram: We supported resolution 1441 because it gave Saddam Hussein a final opportunity to comply or face serious consequences. He has not taken that opportunity. He has failed to comply with and co-operate fully in the implementation of that resolution. For that reason, we support the draft second resolution, because it makes clear that when the UN Security Council says that non-compliance will lead to serious consequences, it means what it says.

Mr. Marshall-Andrews *rose*—

Mr. Ancram: My colleagues and I want peace. We see military action as a last resort. That is why we will support the Government in the Lobby tonight. We do not see tonight's vote as the final say of this House on this matter, however, and nor should it be. We will also want a further debate on a substantive motion at the first practical opportunity should military action become necessary. I welcome the undertaking that the Foreign Secretary has given in that regard.

In the interim, however, we need greater clarity on a number of important issues. We need more clarity on the timetable. At what moment will the second resolution be put to the vote? Will the Foreign Secretary confirm that Hans Blix will have reported to the UN Security Council before any vote is taken? That is an important point, to which he may wish to respond now.

Mr. Straw: The answer to that is yes. Dr. Blix is in charge of his reports, not us. He is due to make a report to the Security Council under the provisions of

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resolution 1284, which is his basic authority, on Friday 28 February. I understand that there will be a further report at some stage next week, before any vote.

Mr. Ancram: I am grateful to the Foreign Secretary for that clarification, which will reassure many people. Although I do not have a suspicious mind, will he also say what efforts the Government are making to win the backing of the Security Council, including the three African members, Guinea, Cameroon and Angola, whom the French Government entertained royally in Paris last week?

Mr. Straw: As will be expected, we are in active discussion with all our partners in the Security Council. As it happens, the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my noble Friend Baroness Amos, is currently visiting the Cameroons, Guinea and Angola.

Mr. Ancram: I am relieved to hear that.

Given that it is accepted by all that Saddam Hussein is not complying and is not showing the change of attitude that Hans Blix was seeking, what further information—perhaps this will be answered by the Minister in his winding-up speech—will be required to trigger or justify a postponement of a vote? Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that a last-minute agreement by Saddam Hussein to dismantle his illegal missiles will not be enough? I think that that was what the Prime Minister was implying yesterday, but we would like some clarity on the matter.

Mr. Marshall-Andrews: May I ask the right hon. Gentleman a question that I would have asked the Secretary of State had I been given half a chance? I will put it to the right hon. Gentleman as he may well have information that Labour Members do not. If the weapons inspectors report that Saddam Hussein is complying with their demands, but it is revealed that the original Iraqi declaration was false and misleading, will it be the position of the Opposition that that would legitimise war?

Mr. Ancram: I was in the United Nations when Hans Blix reported on 27 January. The test that he set is correct—that Saddam Hussein must show that his attitude has changed and that he is prepared to comply directly with the requirements of resolution 1441. That is not a question of time; it is a question of attitude. Hans Blix will be able to report on whether what is happening in Iraq convinces him that such a change of attitude has taken place.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): My right hon. Friend has rightly highlighted the danger of cynical, last-minute gestures by Saddam that are designed purely to save his own skin. Given that Saddam has demonstrated over a long period that he is a mass murderer and a compulsive liar, would my right hon. Friend agree that, in practice, the elimination of weapons of mass destruction will also require the removal of Saddam and his hated regime?

Mr. Ancram: We are all aware that, unless Saddam Hussein decides voluntarily to disarm, the likely outcome of the removal of weapons of mass destruction will be the removal of Saddam Hussein. That brings me on to my next point, and I will take no more interventions because I know that many hon. Members want to speak in this debate.

My right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition asked yesterday for information on contingency planning for the administration of Iraq after Saddam. I asked for such information as long ago as September. It is of grave concern that such information has not been forthcoming. With potential military action imminent, it is incredible that such contingency planning is not well advanced—although we were told yesterday that it was being discussed in the United Nations. We must be assured that there is no question of a long-term military administration and that early steps will be taken to see in place an administration that represents the interests and concerns of all parts of Iraq and all factions within it.

A key objective must be the preservation of the integrity of the sovereign state of Iraq. Does the Foreign Secretary agree that any break-up of Iraq would create enormous tensions and instability in the region? Does he also agree that, unlike Afghanistan, Iraq has a highly educated population and a suppressed but strong middle class? Within a relatively short period, it should be possible to establish a stable, representative and effective administration in Baghdad.

We need to know more about contingency plans for ensuring that immediate, adequate and effective humanitarian aid is available to the people of Iraq. That prospect would do much to reassure people in Iraq and the region, should military action prove necessary. The Secretary of State for International Development has shown a marked reluctance to come to the House to talk about this—she is not even in her seat today. I hope that the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs the hon. Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien) will give us some information when he replies to this debate.

Mr. Straw: With great respect, the Secretary of State for International Development has been extremely concerned about this issue and very forward in telling the House what she is doing about it. To my certain knowledge—because I heard her say it between 11.30 am and 12 noon today—she has spelled out what she is doing and the work in which she is involved.

Mr. Ancram: I have to admit that I was not here for that, but for a very good reason. My hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan), who spoke on my behalf, tells me that he received no information from the Secretary of State for International Development, other than a stream of abuse.

There is another important question on which we need reassurance. Everything that we are being asked to support is on the basis of the existence of weapons of mass destruction. We are told that they are well hidden. Are there contingency plans to ensure that, in the event of the toppling of Saddam Hussein, such material does not fall into the hands of terrorists or weapons dealers, or simply remain as a hidden arsenal that will be available to others in future? Even if we cannot be given the details, can we be reassured that clear plans exist to ensure that weapons of mass destruction and programmes to develop them will be well and truly eliminated by whatever action is taken?

I welcome what the Foreign Secretary has said about progress on the other area of concern in the region—the nearer middle east. It is essential for the reassurance of other countries in the region that that issue is not put to one side during the next few weeks.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold) *rose—*

Mr. Ancram: If my hon. Friend will forgive me, I will not give way. I really must draw my remarks to a close.

This is one of the most serious debates to be held in this House for many years. The Prime Minister faces momentous decisions in the days and weeks ahead. We have always made it clear that, so long as he is acting in the national interest, we will support him. That support has never been unconditional. We have been critical from time to time of the Government's failure to set out its case properly.

Mr. Paul Marsden *rose—*

Mr. Clifton-Brown *rose—*

Mr. Ancram: Some crucial questions remain to be answered and I have sought to pose them today. Most important is to do what is right. No international crisis is ever simple. No international questions are ever black and white. What is right and moral is sometimes difficult to discern. As I am sure we shall hear in this debate, matters are open to different interpretations. However, I am clear in my mind that, in the light of what we know, the direction and position of the Government in relation to this crisis is right. That is why, although it is not always the most comfortable or easy course, I believe that we owe the Government our support today. In the interests of the long-term security of our people, that is right. I urge my hon. Friends and right hon. Friends to support the motion.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. I remind all right hon. Members and hon. Members that Mr. Speaker has imposed an eight-minute time limit on all Back-Bench speeches.

1.46 pm

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): I beg to move, To leave out from "destruction" to end and add

"but finds the case for military action against Iraq as yet unproven."

The amendment stands in my name and the names of 115 hon. Members and right hon. Members from all sides of this House. Let us make no mistake. The Government motion before us talks—rightly—of the United Nations process. I welcome that. However, if the Government motion is passed unamended by this House, a signal will have been given that this House endorses the timetable that is now upon us—which will lead, I fear, inexorably to war within the next three to four weeks.

Three main arguments appear to be mounted in support of early military intervention in Iraq. The first is: "They have had the time to comply; they don't need more time." Actually, Iraq has had 11 weeks since the weapons inspectors went in this time round. Let us not forget that, from 1991 to 1996–97, the weapons inspection process produced substantial results. Substantial amounts of chemical and biological warfare capacity were destroyed by the process. I would argue that a strongly supported weapons inspection process—one that is given the time to complete the job—is what the international community should be arguing for.

Jim Knight (South Dorset) *rose—*

Mr. Smith: I have only eight minutes, so I will carry on.

The second argument is that there has not been full and complete co-operation with the weapons inspection process. That is true. However, there has been a substantial amount of co-operation. Are we seriously saying that, because Saddam Hussein has complied by 70 per cent. rather than 100 per cent., that is a cause for going to war?

Mr. Straw: There is no basis whatsoever—from any sentence of the Blix reports or any other evidence—for saying that Saddam has complied by 70 per cent. or by any fraction approaching that.

Mr. Smith: I have to disagree with my right hon. Friend. Everyone agrees that Saddam Hussein has not given full co-operation and is not complying completely. However, in such a situation, we must ask ourselves whether the degree of co-operation that he has given and which has undoubtedly been extorted out of him by the pressure from the international community falls so far short of what is required that it is a cause for going in and wreaking substantial havoc and destruction on Iraq. That case, as yet, is not made.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Smith: The third major argument that is used is that we will give comfort to Saddam Hussein by sending the wrong message. That is true only if we fail to maintain the pressure on him. There may well be a time for military action. I do not take the view that military action is never, ever likely to be required. There may well be a time when it becomes necessary.

Kali Mountford (Colne Valley) *rose—*

Mr. Smith: At the moment, the timetable appears to be determined by the decision of the President of the United States and not by the logic of events.

The other argument that has been made is that those of us who urge caution are failing to be strong and that, by doing so, we are somehow appeasing a tyrant. That is the shallowest argument of all. Strength does not lie simply in military might. Strength lies in having an unanswerable case. It lies in making the right moral choices. It lies in maintaining the pressure, and it lies in securing the fullest possible international agreement.

[Mr. Smith]

That is where our efforts should now be directed, but I fear that we may be cutting short those efforts by the timetable that is now upon us.

Kali Mountford *rose—*

Mr. Smith: Let us not forget what we are talking about. We are talking about going to war. We are talking about thousands—possibly hundreds of thousands—of innocent lives being lost. We are talking about casualties almost inevitably among our own forces. We are talking about instability across the whole middle east. We are talking about making the achievement of a solution to the Israel/Palestine question infinitely more difficult. We are talking about the alienation of moderate Muslim opinion across the world. One does not undertake such things lightly. One must have the clearest possible reasons for doing them, and I do not believe that those reasons are there.

This may be the last chance before our forces are committed to military action that the House has to make our view known. It grieves me that I am seeking to amend a motion tabled by my Government—a Government whom I applaud and support. However, these are serious times and the House must make a serious judgment. We must say here today in this Chamber that now is not the time, that the case has yet to be fully made and that war, with all its consequences, cannot be the present answer.

Kali Mountford: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. For the ease of the debate and so that interventions are taken for debate to take place across the Floor of the House will you clarify that, when interventions are taken, time is added to the time allowed for the speeches?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I can confirm what the hon. Lady says. Taking up to two interventions provides an additional two minutes for the speaker.

1.54 pm

Mr. Michael Moore (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): In the previous debate on this topic, the Liberal Democrats tabled an amendment to the Government motion. We have done so again today and it sets out our party's position. There is no question but that we share the doubts expressed in the amendment tabled by the right hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) and in his speech. We will support him and others in the Lobby. On the assumption that the amendment is not passed, we will vote against the Government's motion.

We welcome the opportunity that this debate provides to discuss the critical issues facing the country. After three months and repeated requests for a debate, it has been a long time coming. However, it comes at a key moment in the development of the international situation.

We must send out an absolutely clear message. Saddam Hussein must be disarmed and his evil regime with it. Nobody disputes that. The question for us is how we go about that. Throughout the process, we have supported the United Nations and urged our Government and the United States of America to work through it. The international community is taking on Saddam Hussein because he defies international law, so it is absolutely essential that, as we tackle him, we follow the United Nations route; otherwise we will undermine the very principles and institutions in whose name we act.

It has not always been clear that that the United States of America has recognised that requirement. Even in the past 24 hours, the United States President has restated his belief that a second resolution against Iraq is not required before military action can begin. That is a lonely view in the world but, sadly, an important one.

We acknowledge the United Kingdom's role in persuading the United States Administration to pursue their case via the United Nations in the first place. However, all of us must be concerned about the threats made to members of the Security Council if they ignore America's will, and concerned that, if they do, the United States will go its own way.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East) *rose—*

Mr. Moore: In similar vein, the Prime Minister has introduced the concept of an "unreasonable veto". This, too, is a dangerous notion. Will it allow other permanent members of the United Nations Security Council to disregard a future use of the British veto? This pick-and-mix approach to international diplomacy is bad for Britain and it is worse still for the international community.

There is no doubt that the possibility of military action has been the catalyst for the return of the weapons inspectors and for the co-operation received from the Iraqi regime so far as it goes. However, there must be a difference between getting the military forces ready and using them. Much of the anxiety in the public's mind at present is because the United States' and the United Kingdom's rhetoric suggests that, once the build-up is complete, the military will go into action. Many fear that there is an unstoppable momentum towards war that is accentuated by the attempt to force the pace with a new draft resolution. Never mind the United States Administration's ambivalence about the role of the UN and even the need for a second resolution. We must have a credible threat of force, but not a certain threat of force; otherwise the international order has everything to lose and Saddam Hussein has nothing to gain except by pre-emptive action of his own.

Kali Mountford: I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way, but is his point not inconsistent? How can there be a credible threat to Iraq if we make it clear at the outset that the threat is not credible because we are not prepared to use it? Is that not an inconsistent position?

Mr. Moore: That is not what I was saying. If the hon. Lady will bear with me and listen to the rest of my case, I hope that that will become absolutely clear to her.

International law is clear that war can only ever be justified as a last resort. In upholding it, we must show conclusively that that is so and that we will go to war only if all other diplomatic and political options have been exhausted. That is far from being the case at this point.

The current action against Saddam is justified by resolution 1441. The resolution was a supreme effort of international diplomacy that took eight weeks of patient negotiation. It was unanimously agreed and was all the stronger for that. It put a clear onus on Saddam, marked out the fact that this was his final opportunity, and gave a warning in respect of further material breaches and the serious consequences that would flow from them. Saddam Hussein must know that that involves the real possibility of military action, but we do not believe that the current resolution that was drafted and put before the United Nations is sufficient to justify any such development.

The weapons inspectors are the key to dealing with Saddam. They have got clear instructions; indeed, they could not be more specific. So far, the outcomes have been mixed, co-operation has been patchy and the inspectors have not been helped by the slow build-up in their resources and numbers, but can anybody doubt their seriousness, purpose or independence? It is their judgment that is crucial in this debate. Overnight, we have seen the release of new information—an important development that would suggest that the regime is co-operating with them—but we face an early test this weekend regarding the al-Samoud missile system and Iraq's willingness to dismantle it. Overall, this is a finely judged case, but in the circumstances, we must surely listen to the chief inspector when he says:

> "Eight years of inspections, four of no inspections, then 11 weeks and call it a day? It's a little short".

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Does the hon. Gentleman not realise that this is a case not so much of the al-Samoud missiles, which are the delivery system, as of the nerve and biological agents that could be delivered? Those agents could be delivered by all sorts of other means, including manned aircraft and many others. Merely to focus on one particular aspect of the offensive capability of the Iraqi regime is wholly naïve.

Mr. Moore: I appeal to the hon. Gentleman to listen carefully to what I am saying. I was not saying that the requirement was the only one with which Saddam must comply, but I pointed out that it was an important test of his willingness to comply. It is for the chief inspector and his colleagues to judge this matter. The chief inspector has said that he should be able to reach that judgment within months—not hours or days, but months. He must be given sufficient time.

Angus Robertson: Is the hon. Gentleman aware of the interview given by Dr. Hans Blix to *Die Zeit* newspaper? In the interview, which will be published tomorrow, he appeals again to be allowed a number of months to complete his task. Should not the international community listen to his advice and give him some months to complete that task?

Mr. Moore: Alas, I am not as well connected with the editorial desks of foreign newspapers as the hon. Gentleman, but I will take his word for it. His intervention reinforces the point that I was making: the inspection regime needs a number of months to carry out its work and we should not be short-circuiting it at this point.

Prior to the passing of resolution 1441, we relied on containment and deterrents to look after Saddam.

Phil Hope (Corby): It is hard to understand the Liberal position. First, we heard the hon. Gentleman's party leader saying at the "stop the war" demonstration that he did not support the war, but the Liberal Democrats' amendment says that they would support war if it were sanctioned by a resolution of the United Nations Security Council. What is their position?

Secondly, is it not the case that, if the United Nations passes a second resolution, the Liberal Democrats would support military action against Iraq within weeks, not months, which contradicts what he has just said?

Mr. Moore: May I suggest that the hon. Gentleman not listen to what the spin doctors from Millbank, or wherever they are now located, say about what my right hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Skye and Inverness, West (Mr. Kennedy) has said. He said not that he was opposed to the war, but that we were in favour of resolving the situation through the United Nations and that war must be the last resort after all other options had been exhausted. That is a world away from the hon. Gentleman's characterisation.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Moore: I am sorry, but I have given way numerous times and I intend to continue.

At this point, the weapons inspectors are still in Iraq and are still saying that they have a worthwhile job to do. In response to the draft resolution tabled by the British and American Governments, the French have offered an alternative, supported by Germany and Russia. It talks about needing a clear programme of action, reinforced inspections and timelines for inspection and assessment. The Foreign Secretary drew attention to the contrast between Iraq and South Africa, but surely one of the key differences is that, in South Africa, the very points that the French memorandum sets out—a clear programme and timelines for inspection—were contained in the inspection regime. We must not dismiss that out of hand, as the Government appear to have done.

If we are to proceed to war, we must be a lot clearer about what the objectives might be. There is currently an enormous lack of clarity. It is not clear whether war would be only for disarmament purposes or for regime change. The Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary have both referred to regime change in previous contributions. Those mixed messages do not instil confidence in the international community—

Mr. Bercow: Will the hon. Gentleman allow me to intervene on the subject of mixed messages?

Mr. Moore: Tempted as I am to draw attention to the mixed messages of the hon. Gentleman's party—some Opposition Members are signed up to the amendment while others are not, and Front Benchers who talked

[Mr. Moore]

previously about not needing a second resolution now favour one—it would be as well to leave the matter to one side.

Apart from the objectives, we must also reflect on the consequences of any action. The most important starting point will be the humanitarian aspects of the situation in Iraq and in neighbouring countries. As yet, it is not at all clear what humanitarian preparations the Government or international bodies are preparing for. In the context of the situation in Afghanistan, where the President has complained about lack of follow-up to the conflict that occurred there a couple of years ago, that issue is very worrying.

We must also not lose sight of the dangers in the middle east conflict and its potential to spill over in what is already a very sensitive and difficult time, as the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Richard Burden) made clear. As the right hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury put it, the prospect of upsetting and putting at risk the support of moderate Muslim opinion throughout the world is very serious and we must not overlook it. There are many things that we must sort out. In doing so, we must be clear what we are setting out to do.

Mr. Straw: Will the hon. Gentleman tell the House how many Muslims he thinks Saddam Hussein has killed?

Mr. Moore: With due respect to the Foreign Secretary, that is not the point at issue—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is on his feet responding to the intervention.

Mr. Moore: It is beyond doubt that Saddam Hussein's evil régime has murdered thousands of his fellow citizens. That is not the point. The point at issue is the consequence of any action in the middle east that is not supported by international resolutions. The Foreign Secretary must think very carefully about that.

Many things have got to be sorted out. In sorting them out, we must be clear about what we are setting out to do and how we will deal with the consequences. We are far from having reached that position at this point. It is important that, in due course, if there is to be a further resolution, we must have a debate in this House and a vote when UK armed forces are to be committed. At the key moment, when another UN resolution has been passed, that is absolutely vital. This debate cannot suffice.

We believe that the decision by the British, Americans and Spanish to table a new resolution at the United Nations is premature. All of us want to see the Iraqi regime disarmed and Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction destroyed.

Dr. Julian Lewis: That is like feeding the crocodiles.

Mr. Moore: Under the existing resolution, the weapons inspectors are carrying out a clear mandate to inspect and to report to the Security Council. They must be given sufficient time to carry out and to complete their task. War can only be a last resort once all other political and diplomatic options have been exhausted. We have not reached that point. The case for war has not been made.

2.10 pm

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): I will not repeat what the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary said so eloquently yesterday and today, but I want to put on record that I support my Government—not out of loyalty, although that is not a bad reason, but because I think that they are right, and I want to add a few points.

First, supporting the Government today does not mean that one is in favour of war. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh, yes it does."] It does not mean that, as the media and—I was about to say idiots, but I had better not—Liberal Democrat Members say. War can be avoided by one simple act—Saddam Hussein complying with the resolutions of the United Nations. All the pressure—not just our pressure, but the pressure from everywhere—should be on Saddam Hussein, not on Blair and Bush. The pressure should be on Saddam Hussein to comply with the resolutions. I am no fan of President Bush, but the hyperbole of the attacks and the comparisons that he has suffered is incredible. That does no one's cause any good. The United Kingdom and United States Governments are working through the United Nations. We have heard that the weapons inspectors have found non-compliance on anthrax, on nerve agents and on long-range missiles. The evidence is now overwhelming, and we should be supporting the Government.

I do not doubt the sincerity of the majority of those who oppose Government policy, but I agree with the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) that the Liberals and, I would add, the Scottish National party, are attempting to use this issue—an issue of life and death—for party political purposes. As I said yesterday, that is irresponsible opportunism. They should be aware that Saddam Hussein is cleverly exploiting everything that they do, including my ex-right hon. Friend's patsy interview with him on television. I saw the marches that some of my colleagues took part in. They were reported with joy and glee on Iraqi television and they gave great succour to the dictator. I saw no placards on those marches saying, "Saddam must go". I saw no mention of the 2 million dead in the two wars, the Kurds who were gassed, the Iraqis who were exiled, or the hundreds of children who starve each day now because of Saddam Hussein's manipulation of the sanctions. Yet each day that passes without action to disarm Saddam Hussein means that more of those children will die and more members of the opposition will be persecuted. My colleagues should remember that there are consequences of inaction, as well as of action.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): If the right hon. Gentleman reads the record, he will know that both sides of the House have condemned Saddam Hussein for years. Surely he understands that those of us who marched, and were proud to march, did so because we believe that when advisers to the Security Council—experts—say that they want more time and that they might be able to achieve disarmament if they had it, that is a road to disarmament by peace that must be preferable to a road to disarmament by war.

Mr. Foulkes: The hon. Gentleman and those who support him are not just naïve; they are being duped. They are also inconsistent, and I shall point to another inconsistency. Members on the Opposition Benches and others who oppose the deployment of troops now urge us to give more time to the inspectors, but the inspectors would not be there had we not deployed the troops, and we would not have deployed the troops if we had taken the advice of some Opposition Members. That credible deployment of force needs to be maintained and intensified to make Saddam Hussein realise and understand that we are serious.

In conclusion, I have repeatedly asked critics of Government policy—I have asked them here, I have asked those with whom I have appeared on the media, I have asked people in my constituency who come to see me—what credible way they propose to disarm a brutal dictator. I get no reply and no credible alternative. I therefore believe that we should support the Government. We are not here just as people to do the bidding of everyone who writes to us; we are here to make our own judgment about what is right and what is wrong. I think that the Government are right and that, as there is no credible alternative, we as elected representatives have a responsibility to go back to our constituencies to explain the Government's policy, to bring people along with us, to support the Government and to get rid of a brutal dictator.

2.16 pm

Mr. Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe): I am as strong a supporter of the Atlantic alliance as anyone in this House. I believe that the continued maintenance of that alliance is absolutely vital to our security, to that of other European nations and to that of the United States itself. I have no hesitation, in the right circumstances, in facing up to my responsibility to vote for the use of military force in the defence and support of vital national and international interests, so long as it is plain that it is a necessary last resort and all other means of proceeding have been satisfactorily exhausted. So I begin—obviously, I trust—from no anti-American, left-wing, peacenik position in approaching the problem.

Today's debate is the time to put down a marker to say that the other approaches—the diplomatic, deterrent policy and the use of threat in order to get compliance—have not yet been exhausted. I find myself attracted to the motion tabled in the name of the right hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), in that if we ask ourselves today whether the case for war has yet been established, the House should say that it has not and that there is still a case for giving more time to other, peaceful alternatives for enforcing our objectives.

Dr. Julian Lewis: How much more time should Saddam Hussein be given?

Mr. Clarke: We should take as much time as is necessary to achieve disarmament, and we should resort to warfare once it is plain that all other methods are exhausted.

Dr. Lewis: Another 12 years?

Mr. Clarke: We have had 12 years, in two or three of which people have done nothing at all. We have had 11 weeks of the present policy and we must judge whether a few weeks more are required.

Let me make clear the origin of my doubts about the very persuasive case that the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary sometimes put. I cannot rid myself of doubts that the course to war upon which we are now embarked was decided on many months ago, primarily in Washington, and there has been a fairly remorseless unfolding of events since that time. I am not alone in having heard and met American politicians of great distinction who gave the impression that a change of regime in Iraq was determined upon long ago and that the use of military force in a pre-emptive strike was justified in order to achieve that. I believe that in most cases the motives have been worthy and they genuinely believe that they are ridding themselves of an evil regime. I do not believe the conspiracy theorists. One can go on to hear theories about the installation of democracy in the Arab world, unfinished business from a previous Administration, and a reaction to the understandable state of political opinion in the United States of America in the aftermath of 11 September.

If war happens in the next few weeks—that is a genuine possibility—hon. Members must ask themselves whether it is legitimate to believe that such action had already been determined and had been remorselessly unfolding for many months. Many people believe that. It is why middle England and those of moderate political opinions have so many doubts. To many of my constituents, the answer to the questions, "Did Washington determine such action many months ago?" and "Could the President seek re-election without war and the removal of Iraq's president?" is as obvious as the reply to "Does the emperor have clothes?" The Government must respond to that formidable case.

However, I praise the Government for their actions: first, they put themselves in the classic Churchillian position, followed by every subsequent Government, of being America's closest ally in a great diplomatic crisis to gain the maximum possible influence over the exercise of power. I trust that any Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary of this country would have done that. Secondly, they went to the United Nations and led it towards the path of diplomacy and peaceful coercion, which, I trust, the House would prefer if it achieved the desired effect. The result was resolution 1441, for which I voted. It plainly paves the way to war, if necessary, in setting out the conditions for endeavouring to put together an international coalition that would enforce the United Nations' will when all other means had been exhausted.

The resolution turns on the question whether a material breach has occurred. Although other concerns cannot be brushed aside, the revolting nature of the Iraqi regime and its cruelty, much though we deplore it, is not a legal basis for war. We must concentrate on whether there are weapons of mass destruction, whether disarmament can be induced and, if not, whether force will be used to effect it.

The Government introduce other matters to strengthen their claim. Even today, the Prime Minister asked us to listen to the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd). I shall do that, doubtless with a sense of shock and shared anxiety about the Iraqi regime's outrageous behaviour. The word "attitude" has also been used today, as though the Iraqi regime's attitude to disarmament is a new and exciting concept.

[Mr. Clarke]

However, the question that we must ask is whether a material breach has occurred. To me, that means considering whether demonstrable evidence exists to show that biological and chemical weapons are held in conditions and circumstances in which they pose a current threat to neighbours or to us. There is no evidence of links with al-Qaeda and I do not believe that Iraq poses a threat to New York or London. To claim that is to insult our intelligence. However, I wish to know whether demonstrable evidence exists of sufficient quantities of weapons to pose a threat. I doubt that.

I am glad to say that Iraq's army is degraded and in a weaker position than in 1991. I do not believe Saddam Hussein; he probably has material around Iraq that he has not disclosed and we need to pursue that rigorously. However, is it in a condition to be deployed as a threat to anybody? That has not yet been demonstrated and we should not go to war until it has.

Use of threat and reverting to the policies of international diplomacy and deterrence that we used in the cold war have been successful. Every speaker so far has conceded that coercion has moved Saddam. That shows that the policy is working. It does not mean that we have reached the stage of abandoning deterrence, coercion and threat and deciding that the weather is unfortunately getting warmer in Iraq, that 250,000 people, including a large part of the British Army, are there and either we must bring people home in the next few weeks or they must open fire.

Any war will be won easily. I am glad that if we go to war, it will not take long. However, we should consider alternatives because of the consequences of war. How many terrorists will we recruit in the greater, long-standing battle against international terrorism? It will be far harder to win. What will we do to the stability of Saudi Arabia, Pakistan or Egypt? What sort of leadership will replace that which might be deposed? The Government never address those questions satisfactorily, as my right hon. Friend the shadow Foreign Secretary said. However, they will have to live with the answers.

The next time a large bomb explodes in a western city, or an Arab or Muslim regime topples and is replaced by extremists, the Government must consider the extent to which the policy contributed to it. That is why hon. Members should pause and why, unless evidence is produced for a breach and a material threat, my judgment today is that we should not go to war. I therefore support the amendment that the right hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury tabled.

2.25 pm

Mr. Peter Kilfoyle (Liverpool, Walton): It may surprise some hon. Members, even Labour Members, to know that my instincts are those of a party loyalist. The Foreign Secretary laughs, but I suggest that he examine the record. I have long taken an interest in the subject, and although my view has been consistent, I, like the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), have noticed the Foreign Secretary's inconsistency and the various attempts to shift the goalposts. I therefore support the amendment tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) and 113 others who joined us.

When the Foreign Secretary opened the debate, he gave the impression that we would have the opportunity later to hold a substantive vote on whether this country commits troops to action in Iraq. At the very least, the Government could get their act together. My right hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton, North and Bellshill (Dr. Reid), the appointed chairman of the Labour party, made it clear on "Today" this morning that the Government will go ahead without a substantive vote. He said that that was in accordance with a tradition that was hundreds of years old.

Mr. Straw: I also heard the interview to which my hon. Friend refers. My right hon. Friend the chairman of the Labour party made it clear, as on other occasions, that a substantive vote would take place in the exact terms that I set out earlier. It is our hope and intention that that happens before any military action occurs. That is in the Government's interest as well as that of the House. Let me also give a separate undertaking that the result of the proceedings on the second resolution will be the subject of a debate and a vote in the House on a substantive motion.

Mr. Kilfoyle: I do not want to disagree with the Foreign Secretary, but my understanding, from sitting in the studio and listening, was that the party chairman made an unequivocal statement. I accept the Foreign Secretary's view, but I should like to dispose of the myth that having a substantive debate before troops are committed somehow prejudices their security. If we have not already signalled a firm intention to attack Iraq, I do not know what we have done. The President of the United States has to go to Congress under the war powers Act. Surely the House should also be allowed to express an opinion.

The Foreign Secretary said two things in answer to the question, "Why Iraq?" He subdivided them into two further points. First, he claimed that Iraq posed an exceptional danger, and he gave defiance of the United Nations as the second reason. Many arguments have been presented about defying the UN. Indeed, the Foreign Secretary mentioned UN resolutions that referred to all countries in the middle east, including Israel, and specifically to making that region a nuclear-free zone.

Although there are differences of opinion, the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe presented very well the case against a thoroughly emasculated Iraq posing an exceptional danger. Like him, I anticipate that the overwhelming force in place to deal with Iraq is of such a nature that a campaign would, hopefully, be relatively short and sharp. What we cannot guarantee, however, is the amount of collateral damage that would ensue— apart from the wholly undesirable political outcomes, of course.

The Foreign Secretary asked the rhetorical question, "Why now?" People who think that it is a matter of us running out of patience misunderstand the mechanics of what is going on. The decision was made not in Downing street or the Foreign Office, but in the White House. We are all Philadelphia lawyers now and know all about the fascinating weapons of mass destruction, but anyone with the most rudimentary knowledge of American military doctrine since Colin Powell and the first Gulf war knows that we are missing the obvious. It has taken until now, and it is still not finalised, to mobilise and deploy the troops and units needed to hold a campaign that accords with an American military doctrine that is nearly coming to a conclusion. Oddly, hon. Members will have noticed from today's new reports that space has been allocated in the middle east for only seven of the 70-odd British planes. The hard reality is that it will be an American military campaign.

The reasons for the campaign are complex. It is not just a matter of oil or of the President avenging daddy's unfinished business; the ideological hawks in the US Administration have set out their stall for many years. They have set out, transparently and consistently, the different hopes and aims to which they aspire. I mentioned the undesirable outcomes. We must not forget, as our Prime Minister confirmed at the Dispatch Box when his Back Benchers heckled him, that North Korea will be next. We can write the script: Iran, Syria, Libya. People in Iran must be worried, and we do not know where it will end. That is not conjecture; the objectives of the new pax Americana have been set out clearly and unequivocally.

We should leave it to Hans Blix and el-Baradei to make the definitive statement on weapons of mass destruction and let the United Nations decide whether a material breach has taken place. There are two prerequisites for British public opinion on that.

Phil Hope: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Kilfoyle: No, I will not.

The first prerequisite is that a United Nations resolution is essential. It must be based on credible evidence, and that will not be provided by the political imperatives of the US or UK Governments, or anyone else for that matter. I recommend that people read Senator Riegle's report, published by his Senate Committee, on where the biological weapons originated. It is a matter of congressional record and anyone can get a copy. There were 73 separate consignments, including everything from botulinum toxin to other horrors, such as anthrax. Those were exported to Saddam by the United States. None of us is lily white. I know that that does not help to deal with the problem, but it ill behoves people to stand up as purer than Caesar's wife on the issue.

I urge hon. Members on both sides of the House to consider the fact that it is extremely unlikely that we will be afforded an opportunity to debate the problem substantively. I hear what the Foreign Secretary said, but I also heard what the Labour party chairman said. I wage that it will be extremely problematic for Members of this House to connect with public opinion in our constituencies, parties, the nation at large and internationally, and to express our views. We can do that now only by accepting the amendment. It rules nothing out; it asks only that we consider that the case is not yet proven. That gives all concerned the leeway to make their case. Hon. Members should not miss out on the opportunity to reconnect with the overwhelming consensus of the British people.

2.35 pm

Mr. Michael Portillo (Kensington and Chelsea): I draw attention to my registered interest.

I begin with the connection between Iraq and al-Qaeda. During the weekend following 11 September 2001, I was at a dinner party in Islington. While the corpses were still being taken out the wreckage of the World Trade Centre, the majority of people at that party were convinced that America had it coming. They thought that in the preceding years, the United States had arrogantly thrown its weight about in the world. My view is the opposite. The background to 9/11 was a decade in which the west had failed to show fixity of purpose and had neglected to offer deterrence to its enemies. The United States, in particular, had repeatedly come under attack from extremists without offering any effective response.

In the 1990s, there was the first attack on the World Trade Centre. That was followed by the bombing of American barracks in Saudi Arabia, the bombs at American embassies in east Africa, and then the attack on the US warship Cole. Those outrages represented a classic escalation. In retrospect, each inadequate response to each outrage showed a lack of determination that was taken as a sign of weakness, and that emboldened our enemies.

Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): What is the connection between the incidents that the right hon. Gentleman describes and the activities of the Iraqi Government?

Mr. Portillo: The hon. Lady should have waited for my next paragraph.

In parallel, the west was failing to respond to the escalation of activities by Saddam. He failed to co-operate with United Nations inspectors immediately after the Gulf war. There were further atrocities against his people and violations of the no-fly zone. He harassed the inspectors until they were forced to leave. The west again made no adequate response to any of those things. If there is a criticism of the Prime Minister, it is that he, in common with others, did not seek to take effective action in 1998 and 1999, but that does not make him wrong today.

Mr. Tony Banks (West Ham): That is a bit rich coming from a member of a Government who supported Saddam Hussein.

Mr. Portillo: I am explaining the history of the west's lack of response. Of course that includes the Government of whom I was a member, but I am analysing the important point at which we now stand.

Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Portillo: Let me make some progress.

During the 1990s and beyond, Russia and France undermined the sanctions regime. They advertised to Saddam the infirmity of purpose of the west. Both Saddam and al-Qaeda, separately, could take comfort from the clear evidence that the west was not willing to take firm action. That is the connection between al-

[Mr. Portillo]

Qaeda and Saddam. I think it reasonable that after 11 September 2001 the United States reviewed its security and the failure of deterrence. It concluded that if we continued to let Saddam to get away with things and to go his own way, our vulnerability would increase.

The world has its fair share of wicked leaders and terrorists, and they will do whatever they can get away with. They listen to what we say but, more to the point, they watch what we do. As the Prime Minister rightly says, if the civilised world is not prepared to make its words stick now, its determination will always be doubted because political will is crucial.

Paul Flynn: Does the right hon. Gentleman recall a question that sought to persuade the Government to beef up the International Atomic Energy Agency inspections of Iraq's nuclear weapons programme? Does he also recall the answer in which the Government said that they had full confidence that Iraq, as a signatory of the non-proliferation treaty, would abide by its international obligations and not work on a nuclear weapons programme? According to the response, the Government had no intention of doing what the question asked, which was to increase the weapons inspections. That answer was given in the House on 19 April 1990 by the Government of whom the right hon. Gentleman was a prominent member and of whose record he seems so proud.

Mr. Portillo: I think I have covered that point. I must admit that, in my view, Members who persist in saying "We have been wrong over a period of 12 or 13 years, and we must therefore be wrong to try and put our mistakes right now" are on very weak ground.

In an important sense, Saddam and Bin Laden are co-belligerents. They share a hatred of the west, and a belief in the efficacy of terror. Let me add that if Britain tried to stand aside—here I disagree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke)—that would not spare us from the terror. A display of weakness will bring more terror, not less; and I think it is a dangerous myth to believe that terrorism is in some way beyond deterrence .

The Prime Minister's task has been made more difficult—I admit this—because America has not been willing to say much about the middle east peace process. I think that the United States is strictly correct to reject any link between Iraq and the regional peace process, but there are many indirect links. Certainly, I believe it might have been easier for the Government to try to establish direct connections between Iraq and the Palestine Liberation Organisation than to try to establish them between Iraq and al-Qaeda. It is clear that Saddam is the hero of the Palestinian suicide bombers.

Many today have focused on the dangers to the region if there is a conflict. Of course there are dangers, but I say that if Iraq is disarmed there are opportunities too. The United States will then engage in the middle east peace process; but it will do so with an unambiguous hostility to terrorism. A new Palestinian leadership will then understand that terrorism will not work, and that therefore political engagement may.

Prime Minister Sharon may be ruthless in war, but he would also be ruthless in peace. The peace will require Israel to give up land, positions and settlements, and Mr. Sharon is the man to force such an outcome on the Israelis.

As the Prime Minister said yesterday, Iraq is a potentially rich country. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes said today, it is a country with a middle class and educated people. If economic and political freedoms are returned to Iraq, that can have a powerful effect on a region in which those liberties are largely absent. Perhaps Iran too will flip towards the moderates.

This crisis has cost the west dearly in terms of the damage to its institutions. New institutions may be required. I am a great supporter of NATO, but it is damaged, and in any case it is geographically very limited. I believe that we should look for a new organisation, not to replace NATO but to stand alongside it. The aim of that organisation would be to counter terrorism, and its focus would be global. The United States, Britain and Australia would certainly be founder members of the new organisation; perhaps its headquarters would be in Prague or Madrid. Whatever the precise form of that new organisation, I believe that its time has come.

2.43 pm

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): Last August, at the invitation of the hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Johnson), I wrote an article in *The Spectator* setting out my reservations about a possible war on Iraq. Six months later, I stand by every one of the arguments I advanced then. They included my concerns about the effect on Muslim opinion; about the need for any action to take place under United Nations authority; about the apparent double standards involved in enforcing UN resolutions on Iraq while neglecting those on Israel and the Palestinians—although I recognise that the resolutions on Iraq are mandatory, while those on Israel are not; about the danger of Iraq's spreading any such war, with the consequent perils of a middle east in turmoil and serious economic consequences; about the hazards of war—including the certainty of civilian casualties; and about the role played in such a conflict by the most unappetising United States Administration I have ever known. I repeat that I said that then and believe it still.

If tonight's vote were a vote of confidence in George W. Bush—appointed by the United States Supreme Court rather than being elected by the American people—I would be the first into the No Lobby. Under Bush the United States is a bad world citizen—bad on global warming, bad on the International Criminal Court, and bad on steel tariffs. What we are debating today, however, is not a vote of confidence or otherwise in Bush, or even a vote about my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister—although I support and trust my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. The issue at stake in this debate, and in whatever action follows from it, is the United Nations as the only upholder of world order, however faulty and inadequate the United Nations may be.

In my *Spectator* article I emphasised the primacy of the United Nations, a primacy stated in clause IV of the Labour party constitution. As it happens, it was included in that constitution on the initiative of one Anthony Wedgwood Benn, who at that time was a staunch supporter of the United Nations rather than the toady to Saddam Hussein that he has since become.

The fact is that the United Nations has passed a series of mandatory resolutions on Iraq following that country's serial aggressions and violations of human rights, and Iraq has violated every one. Since I expressed my concerns last summer the Security Council has passed resolution 1441. I must say that the constant moving of the goal posts is a sign of the inadequacy of some of the arguments being advanced. First, Members said "Let us have a resolution"; we got a resolution. Then some Members said "Let us have a second resolution"; a second resolution has been tabled. Now there is a motion on the Order Paper referring not just to a second resolution but to lots of other conditions, including a debate in the House before military action. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has conceded that as well. At what point do we have a consistent position? At what point do we lay down conditions and say that those conditions must be met?

Resolution 1441 reiterates all the previous resolutions since 1990, and lays down a process for its implementation together with a statement of the consequences if it is not obeyed by Saddam Hussein. The resolution could not be clearer; I assume that all Members have read it. While a further resolution may be regarded as desirable—and my right hon. Friends are attempting to obtain one—it is certainly not indispensable. Resolution 1441 lays down all the necessary conditions.

Mr. Salmond *rose*—

Mr. Kaufman: What happens if resolution 1441 is not implemented? Yesterday my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister set out the consequences for world order—

Mr. Salmond *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The right hon. Gentleman is obviously not going to give way.

Mr. Kaufman: As I was saying, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister set out the consequences for world order if resolution 1441 is turned into a flouted expression of unfulfilled requirements. What he said was incontrovertible. If Saddam can get away with the games he is playing, stringing out the process until it is vitiated and nullified, the consequences for world order will be catastrophic. I cannot understand my colleagues who argue that, given a little or a lot more time, Saddam will suddenly display a change of heart. It is what Hugh Dalton used to call the doctrine of unripe time, and it is the basis of the amendment.

Yet there is a further consequence. I have expressed in clear terms my distaste for the present United States Administration. Only with immense difficulty and effort has my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister persuaded Bush and his cronies to take the United Nations route. The House should have no doubt that if that UN route fails on this issue, the Bush Administration will wash their hands of the UN altogether and go it alone whenever they believe that their national interests are at stake.

Neither we nor any other ally will be able to influence Bush otherwise. That may be a despairing argument for voting for the Government motion tonight, but it is realistic and, I believe, incontrovertible. Moreover, if the role of the United Nations is set aside, we have no hope whatever of solving the agonising Israeli-Palestinian confrontation. Even now, it is possible for our Prime Minister to persuade Bush to participate in the initiatives necessary to obtain peace in the middle east. Success in this issue may persuade Bush that there could be success in that issue too. However, I do not believe that a middle east peace process would be possible if the United States retreated into self-interested isolationism, which is only too prevalent in the White House and the Pentagon. Every hon. Member will search her or his conscience in deciding how to vote tonight. I have searched mine and, as I said, all my colleagues will have done so. Even though all our hearts are heavy, I have no doubt that it is right to vote with the Government tonight.

2.50 pm

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): I am sure that the article by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) was excellent. I hope that he was suitably paid—perhaps there will be another commission shortly.

The Chamber is a marvellous place, and is at its best in a debate such as this one. I listened to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), whom I proudly supported when he stood for the leadership of my party. I also listened to the Foreign Secretary. Strange to say, I find myself in great disagreement with my right hon. and learned Friend, but in total agreement with what the Foreign Secretary said today and what the Prime Minister said yesterday. This is the second debate on Iraq that I have listened to in two days. Yesterday, I sat in Church house, Westminster as a member of the General Synod of the Church of England and listened to a debate on Iraq.

Mr. Salmond: The hon. Gentleman would have been well duffed up in that debate.

Sir Patrick Cormack: The hon. Gentleman is using unparliamentary language about being duffed up. In fact, in a debate in which I did not take part, I listened to a series of speeches from good, well-intentioned men and women who, for the most part, were misguided and did not understand the realities of what they were talking about.

Mr. Salmond: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Patrick Cormack: No, I will not.

I listened in particular to three Church of England bishops who effectively paraphrased the words of St. Augustine—"Make us tough, but not yet." All of them underlined the appalling nature of the despicable regime in Iraq, but were not prepared to face up to the consequences, which the Prime Minister, as a national leader, has had the courage and calmness to do. I make no apology to any Opposition Member or anyone in the House for saying that I believe that the Prime Minister

[Sir Patrick Cormack]

has behaved in an exemplary fashion since 11 September in the field of foreign affairs. I cannot say the same for him in other fields.

Bob Spink (Castle Point): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Sir Patrick Cormack: No, I will not.

The Prime Minister has given a lead, although that has not been easy for him. We must all accept that his party has an honourable tradition of pacifism, so it cannot have been easy for him to make certain speeches before certain audiences. I remind Government Members who disagree with him that he has made one fundamental mistake in his six years in Downing street. He has relied too much on spin, which has undermined his credibility and made people less trusting of him. I believe that that is one factor in the unease of the nation as a whole. However, I wish to tell Government Members and people outside the House that in this particular area the Prime Minister has behaved with probity and great courage. He deserves support as a national leader of considerable renown.

Jeremy Corbyn: I am interested in the hon. Gentleman's praise for the Prime Minister's role in the issue since 11 September 2001. With all the effectiveness of Government machinery, spin doctors and publicity, why is there still a huge majority in the opinion polls against going to war? Why did the biggest ever demonstration in British history take place on 15 February, when a lot of ordinary people who had never been on a demonstration before marched through the streets of London because they do not believe that there would be a just war?

Sir Patrick Cormack: I have seen people march before on Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament demonstrations, including the Prime Minister in the past—*[Interruption.]* Perhaps not a million people, but the numbers approached that. The hon. Gentleman spoke about spin. I said that, paradoxically, that has helped to destroy the Prime Minister's credibility, which I greatly regret.

Mr. Marshall-Andrews *rose—*

Sir Patrick Cormack: I have limited time at my disposal, so I will not give way again.

I wish to say two things in particular. Yesterday, in the exchanges after the Prime Minister's admirable statement, I put it to him—the Foreign Secretary made this point this afternoon—that if we allow the international community to be set at naught by a tyrant whose evil, if not without parallel, has not been exceeded in the past half century or more, the United Nations will go the way of the League of Nations. At stake—this was implicit in the speech of my right hon. Friend the Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Mr. Portillo)—is the credibility of the international order in standing up uncompromisingly to evil. Like everyone else, I hope that we will not have a war, but action against Saddam Hussein will be wholly justified if he continues to flout the will of the international community.

In that context, let us remember that the weapons inspectors are not employed as weapons discoverers. They are there to inspect what Saddam Hussein declares. He has repeatedly made false declarations, and the evidence is before us. The Command Paper that the Government provided for every Member as background reading for this debate makes it plain that time after time this man has thumbed his nose at the international community and has wrought terrible havoc on his own people. I urge Liberal Members to go to the National Liberal Club and look at the portrait of Mr. Gladstone. They should remember those amazing speeches that he made during the Bulgarian atrocities in which he talked about clearing out the Turks

> "bag and baggage from the province they have desolated and profaned."

If anybody has desolated and profaned the province over which he rules it is Saddam Hussein.

We are now at a critical juncture in the history of this new century. If we allow this evil tyrant to get away with it, we will advance into the century with no credible international organisations and with our own credibility, and therefore the defence of our very people, at risk. I urge the House to reject the well-meaning amendment tabled by the right hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) and support the Government without any equivocation in the Lobby tonight.

2.58 pm

Mr. Bruce George (Walsall, South): The approach to war is dangerous for combatants and non-combatants, and poses enormous problems for ordinary Members of Parliament. We are buffeted by pressure and arguments on all sides but, at the end of the day, we are impelled to make a rational decision. I have looked at the resolution, and shall vote on it, and not one that may be made in future. There is nothing exceptional about that—I do not feel prejudiced, nor is my conscience undermined by decision to go into the Lobby with the Government and the official Opposition.

I have long believed that the US and the UK should go down the Security Council route. I have unequivocally supported all those who supported 1441, and I have strongly supported, at the United States Congress, as has the Defence Committee, a further resolution—not that it is necessary legally, but it is certainly necessary politically to gain endorsement and justification from a larger number of individuals and nations than have hitherto given support. The Defence Committee went to Washington and New York a couple of weeks ago. We met the Senate Armed Services Committee and senior people from the National Security Council, the Department of Defense and the State Department. There was hardly anybody whom we met, bar the commissionaire in the Watergate hotel, whom we did not press strongly for a second resolution. I am delighted that efforts are being made to achieve that.

Is Saddam co-operating fully with 1441 and the other 16 or 17 resolutions? Of course he is not. Dr. Blix and others have said that he is co-operating reluctantly with the process, but he is not co-operating in substance. It has been said endlessly, and I repeat, that UNMOVIC's role is not to search down holes or in caves but to verify whether Saddam Hussein has been compliant. Dr. Blix said that in his speech to the United Nations; and the Defence Committee was privileged to listen to him privately for one hour and five minutes the day before he made his presentation and, I am sure, before he had written it.

During his formal presentation, Dr. Blix said:

> "The declaration submitted by Iraq on 7 December, despite its large volume, missed the opportunity to provide the fresh material and evidence needed to respond to the open questions."

He continued:

> "Although I can understand that it may not be easy for Iraq in all cases to provide the evidence needed, it is not the task of the inspectors to find it.
>
> Iraq must squarely tackle this task and avoid belittling the questions."

So the inspectors are seeking assurances, which up to now have not been provided.

The example of the al-Samoud missile is well worth considering. There are three variations of it, two in existence and one on a drawing board. It is obvious from what Dr. Blix has seen that Iraq is in material breach in relation to the missile, which in 13 out of the 40 tests has shown that it is capable of flying farther than the distance laid down for it by the United Nations.

If one considers each of the flagrant breaches, the obfuscations, the untruths and all the evidence that has been provided, one reaches the inescapable conclusion that Saddam Hussein has hidden, is hiding and is not compliant. One asks how much longer should one search. Yes, weeks more—there must be flexibility—but if anyone argues that Dr. Blix should be given 10 or 12 months to complete the job, I am afraid they are barking.

Mr. Salmond *rose—*

Mr. Bruce George: I give way to someone who falls into that category.

Mr. Salmond: Surely the logic of the argument that the right hon. Gentleman has just spelled out is that if the arms inspectors—Dr. Blix and his colleagues—ask for more time, they should be given it.

Mr. George: As I tried to explain earlier, there is a great deal of flexibility in the system. The Prime Minister has succeeded in persuading the United States to go down the Security Council route. I fear that there will be an opportunity for Dr. Blix to search further and longer, but it must not be for an indefinite period.

Bob Spink *rose—*

Mr. George: The hon. Gentleman has only been in the Chamber for half an hour, and has already intervened once. I have no intention of giving way to him.

There are many hon. Members who are not persuaded by the evidence so far presented, and I respect their views. It would be much easier for Members of Parliament and our Prime Minister to succumb to domestic and international pressure, but when I asked the Prime Minister a rather convoluted question before the Liaison Committee, about what factors he would take into account before he made a decision, he said:

> "is it right and is it do-able"

He believes, and others believe, that the route he is taking is right.

If we look at the Prime Minister's record so far, it is clear that he faced a lot of opposition to the UK intervening in Sierra Leone. He was right. There was a lot of opposition in all parts of the House to intervention in Macedonia. He was right. On Kosovo, there was even more opposition. He was right. On Afghanistan, he was right. Therefore I am prepared to give his judgment further endorsement. I have heard no reason why his perspective should be trashed, as many have suggested.

I approach war, if it is to take place, with trepidation. It is not something to which anyone looks forward. The more one speaks to military personnel, the clearer it becomes that war must be undertaken as a last resort. I hope very much that there will be a second resolution and that pressure will be put on Saddam Hussein. I, like many others, have said over the months that the only way to put pressure on him so that war will be superfluous is to let him see that the various countries of the world are so united that he has no option. Ironically, the greater the pressure, the less likely he is to resist.

There was an amazing demonstration a week ago; it was extremely impressive. I have read a number of biographies of Keir Hardie. There was a massive anti-war demonstration on 2 August 1914, organised by the Independent Labour party. On 3 August 1914 overwhelming support was given in this place by the parliamentary Labour party to the British expeditionary force. One of the very few who opposed the Labour party was the great hero of the Labour party, Ramsay MacDonald. The following day war was declared.

Although one must pay serious attention to public opinion, ultimately—this sounds an appalling argument, using Burke, who was not a democrat—we owe our constituents our judgment. I have spoken to so many people, been to so many meetings and read so much documentation, and my own view is that Saddam Hussein is not to be trusted. I hope that there will be a second resolution, and I hope that the pressure on him will be so enormous that there will be no need to go to war. That is what I yearn for.

3.7 pm

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Hearing my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir Patrick Cormack) is an exhilarating experience. He is like a bottle of 1970 port, which improves with maturity. Today he showed, as he always does, sound judgment. He brings to these debates an engaging Barchester view. We get a report from Church House, and it is not irreverent, as mine would be—all gas and gaiters. He is serious in his criticism of the Synod of the Church of England and says that it is seriously misguided, as it is, and as are so many of those who have signed the amendment tabled by the right hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury.

I was saddened by the amendment and by the fallacious arguments adduced by the right hon. Gentleman. First, he said that Her Majesty's

[Mr. John Wilkinson]

Government were not giving Iraq time, as though 12 years since the end of the Gulf were not time enough. One should recall that the ceasefire at the end of the Gulf war was conditional on the full implementation by Iraq of UN resolutions. Secondly, the right hon. Gentleman said that perhaps there was not total co-operation, but possibly 70 per cent.—a figure challenged by the Foreign Secretary, and rightly so. There is virtually no evidence of any significant co-operation with the arms inspectors or of compliance with UN resolution 1441. The right hon. Gentleman then said that the Government were anxious that his amendment might give comfort to Saddam Hussein. Nothing gives greater comfort to Saddam Hussein than the infirmity of purpose and the divisions that we have seen in the House of Commons.

Fourthly, the right hon. Gentleman said that Saddam Hussein believed that caution was appeasement and that this was an utterly wrong belief on the part of the President of Iraq. It is perplexing, naïve, simplistic and highly dangerous to think, as the right hon. Gentleman does, that Saddam Hussein is open to moral persuasion. Strength is the only thing that he understands. The right hon. Gentleman might think that strength lies not only in military might, but Saddam Hussein and his ilk most certainly do not agree.

The notion of peaceful coercion, as advanced by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), is a thoroughly dangerous illusion. It is a contradiction in terms. The earlier sedentary intervention by my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) put it very well: it is like feeding the crocodiles. That was his comment to the Liberal spokesman, and it was highly pertinent. If we wish to deter the dangerous process of weapons proliferation, and particularly the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the way to do it is to deal effectively with Saddam Hussein and to do it fast. Time is not on our side; that is why he is trying to string us along. The faster military action is taken, the better. We all know that it will be much harder for the allied forces in the summer season. We cannot keep them marching up and down the frontiers of Iraq, and there comes a time when enough is enough. That time is approaching fast. If effective action is taken, it is much less likely that the dictator who runs Korea will maintain his weapons programme, and other potential proliferators such as the Iranians and the Libyans will be deterred, too.

Unity of purpose is absolutely crucial, however. We learned that when facing down the dictators during the cold war. I find it so sad that the allies who brought succour to the beleaguered people of West Berlin in 1948—the United States, the United Kingdom and France—should not be wholly together and that France should be diverging its purposes today. I recall, too, as will many other hon. Members, the deployment by the Soviets of SS20 ballistic missiles. We faced down that crisis in the face of public opposition and opposition in some quarters of the House, especially in the Labour ranks. We did so, and there was unity of purpose in the alliance, not least on the part of the federal German Government, who were courageous then, but today seem frankly to be on the other side. That grieves me.

It is also interesting to note that those with the firmness of purpose that we seek are those who have suffered most from dictatorship. It is not we western Europeans who are showing total resolution—this Government are, to their credit—but the central and eastern Europeans: the Poles, the Czechs, the Bulgarians and others. The Poles remember what happened to their people at the time of Solidarity when martial law was imposed by Jaruzelski. The Czechs remember the Soviet tanks rolling into Prague in '68. The Hungarians remember what happened to Imre Nagy in 1956. It is sad that the Liberal party has become so wayward today.

Saddam Hussein knows that those who are not against him are for him. It is therefore crucial for the future of our alliance and the security of our continent that the European members of the alliance as a whole should get behind the United States as we are, see that resolution 1441 is fully implemented—and fast—and that Saddam Hussein is seen down.

3.14 pm

Mr. George Galloway (Glasgow, Kelvin): How extraordinary that my right hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) should pray in aid of this war what happened in Britain in 1914. That war was one that neither side wanted to fight, but because they had both turned up for the show, they thought that they had to go through with it. Yes, my right hon. Friend is right: despite Keir Hardie, the first world war was fought and there are a lot of white crosses in France and the low countries to prove it—an anthem for doomed youth that killed the flower of European civilisation.

We were told here that this was not a resolution for war, and that it was the last push for peace. Well, listening to the consensus between the two Front Benches, it sounded awfully like war to me. I do not know what it did for the enemy, but it didn't half frighten me. It is entirely possible that the teenage scribblers who made that spin earlier this week on the Prime Minister's behalf that today's resolution was about peace, not war, have not read George Orwell's "1984". After all, the same teenage scribblers told us last week on the Prime Minister's behalf that this was going to be a six-day war, drawing on the illusion of the apparent triumph of the Israeli armies over the Arabs in 1967. They entirely missed the point that, on the day that the six-day war ended, the 35-year war began. That is precisely the point that the supporters of this amendment—which merely asks us to conclude that the case for war has not yet been proven—are making. However short and sharp this war is—I place on record that I do not believe that it will be either short or sharp—its consequences, its reverberations and its seismic impact will disfigure life in this country and around the world for as long as the Members here present are still with us.

This is a defining moment. For the first time in many years, Parliament has an opportunity truly to shape world events. I have spent the last months talking virtually daily to American broadcasters and journalists, and I can tell the House that if this Parliament sends the message tonight that the British people are not with this adventure, it will have a decisive impact on opinion in the United States of America. We are always told that it is too early to vote on war until it is too late. This is our last opportunity meaningfully to affect the course of these great events, and hon. Members are fooling themselves if they do not acknowledge that. We all know what the public want. Every Member knows what their constituents would like to read about them in the newspapers tomorrow. Every Member on the Labour Benches knows what the members of their constituency party would like to read about them tomorrow. Let me quote our leader:

> "The people are the masters. We are the servants of the people. We will never forget that, and if ever we do, the people will very soon show that what the electorate gives, the electorate can take away."

Those words were spoken by our Prime Minister when that new dawn broke in 1997.

This debate is about one man, and it is not the man they want us to think it is about. This is about George W. Bush. *[Interruption.]* I know that they do not like to hear this. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) said, this is the most distasteful American Administration that he has seen in his long lifetime. This is an American presidency that people on the Labour Benches would not have been seen dead with. This is an Administration who made Texas the execution chamber of the world, who broke all the international treaties, who walked away from every international effort held dear by Labour Members. *[Interruption.]* They don't like it up 'em because they know that what I am saying is the truth. They are standing against Nelson Mandela, Archbishop Tutu, Thabo Mbeki and with George Bush, Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz and Richard Perle. That is the bottom line.

This matter can be resolved by the man prayed in aid by the Foreign Secretary eight times in the course of his address—Dr. Hans Blix. The Foreign Secretary may not know it, but in the German press tomorrow, Dr. Blix will ask for exactly what our amendment this evening asks. It is no good pretending to be with the UN and Hans Blix and then slapping him in the face when he asks for more time to complete the job that he has already begun and which is bearing fruit.

There is no doubt that the United States Administration would like to go forward into this war. There is no doubt in Labour Members' minds and hearts, however much they protest, that that born-again, right-wing, Bible-belting, fundamentalist Republican Administration in the United States want war, but they cannot have their war without the support of Great Britain The vast majority of people in Great Britain are against the war. We know that to be true: we are asking Parliament to reflect it. We have a great opportunity this evening and I hope that my hon. Friends will not throw it away.

3.22 pm

Mr. John Gummer (Suffolk, Coastal): There comes a time in one's life when one finds oneself in peculiar company. The feeling is probably mutual, and others will be as embarrassed as I, but that should lead people to listen carefully to the group that has come together to point out something that should be self-evident—that the case for military action against Iraq is yet unproven. First, it is unproven to the British people. They are not convinced, and my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) has been assiduous in pressing the Prime Minister to convince the British people. He has failed so far to do so.

Dr. Julian Lewis: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Gummer: No. I really will not. Secondly, the wider world has not been convinced. Of course, we could be right to go to war even if neither of those groups were convinced, except that there has to be life after war. That is the problem. If we go to war in circumstances in which neither our own people nor the wider world are convinced, we will not be seen for what we believe ourselves to be, which is merely the handmaid of the United Nations and the enforcer of peace in circumstances in which there was no alternative.

The alternative is the issue. There can be no just war unless it is the only possibility. That is the number one explanation of the basis on which a nation may go to war. It defends itself because it can do nothing else. It goes to the aid of someone else because that person is being attacked. However, it must have an absolute assurance that it could not do anything else. That is why it is right to suggest that the case for military action against Iraq is as yet unproven.

Hans Blix believes that he can make great gains if he is given time. Of course, he cannot have a veto on the matter. I do not support those who suggest that he can go on asking for more time for as long as he likes. However, it is not unreasonable when a man has had 11 weeks in this stage of the process to give him some more time. People argue that Saddam Hussein has had enough time, but I am not asking for time for him: I am asking for time for Hans Blix, which is rather different.

We are now in a situation in which the western world—to some extent, the whole world—has devoted large resources to press, to squeeze and to demand of Saddam Hussein. We have not yet gone as far as we could, short of war. Much of what is being done could be enlarged, short of war, inexorably to press Saddam Hussein so that he knows that it is not the preamble to a gradual reduction of pressure, but the slow and certain steps that will lead in the end to war.

Jim Knight: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gummer: No, I will not. The issue for us is whether we should, at this moment, lose sight of the important and necessary precondition for a just war by taking action before it is utterly clear to the world that it is the only possible route.

I turn now to the comments of my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes. There is no Member of Parliament who does not know that this war is war by timetable, and the timetable was laid down before the United States had any intention of going to the United Nations. I speak as one who has been a supporter of strong military action. After all, I supported the Cruise and Pershing missiles, and other strong nuclear weapons, when the Prime Minister was a member of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. I do not, therefore, accept any suggestion that I am being weak in these circumstances. The truth is that it must be seen by the world that when, or if, we invade Saddam Hussein's Iraq, we do so not because of some prearranged

[Mr. Gummer]

timetable, connected with ulterior motives, but because we and the world are convinced that there is no alternative. That is the message that should be given to those who argue the case from moral grounds.

I would have a great deal of sympathy for the Prime Minister if he said, "I am a politician. I do not listen to clergymen and others on political issues. I am the politician, and I can therefore make those decisions." It is a serious matter that almost without exception those for whom morality is at the centre of their vocation do not believe that the conditions for the just war are yet fulfilled. I would hope that a Prime Minister who believes in the moral case would at least hesitate in his timing when he finds himself opposed by those who are not themselves against war, but who know better what the conditions of the just war are. Those conditions are not yet fulfilled.

One of the problems that beset us is the fact that some people mistake impatience for necessity. Of course we are impatient to get rid of this horrific man, to destroy this regime which has destroyed so many others, to rid the world of a despicable dictator. But we do ourselves wrong if we do not choose the moment when the case for war has been made to those who afterwards must make us able to make the peace.

3.29 pm

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): I speak as someone who supported military action by our Labour Government in Kosovo and Afghanistan, and before that supported military action in the Gulf war to expel Iraq from Kuwait. My only criticism is that the Americans and British at that time did not finish the job, because my understanding is that regime change then would have been permissible under international law.

I have to say however that, sadly, I am simply not convinced that all-out military action in Iraq can be justified at this time and on the scale envisaged. I do not doubt for a minute the sincerity and morality of my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary, or those who support them. I share their concerns about weapons of mass destruction, about the vile and murderous Iraqi regime, about terrorism and about the need to uphold the United Nations. And I recognise, as we all must, that every alternative course of action before the House today is likely to result in protracted misery and a large number of deaths for the people of Iraq. The Government argue that these concerns justify virtually immediate military action, and that they would be resolved by that military action. I find those claims less and less convincing.

In relation to weapons of mass destruction, I do not believe that the Government have made a case that the existing policy of containment, backed up by increased coercion and inspection, is bound to fail.

I do not believe that the Government have made the case that, after 12 years of not protecting the Iraqi people from their vile and oppressive regime, it is now a moral imperative that we do it within the next few weeks. In any case, we are saying that regime change is not one of our objectives.

I do not believe that we have made the case that there is any connection between the current Iraqi regime and al-Qaeda.

In relation to upholding the authority and reputation of the United Nations, I ask whether anything could undermine the authority of the United Nations more than the United States announcing in advance that unless the United Nations agrees with its policy the United States will ignore the United Nations. The United States cannot claim to be the sheriff executing a warrant that its court has not granted it.

Even less convincing are the claims of the United States about the enforcement of international obligations, when we consider its failure to implement Kyoto, join the International Criminal Court or obey the World Trade Organisation. It is tending to behave rather like a maverick state. A small maverick state is a bit of a nuisance. It is a real problem for the rest of the world if the only remaining super-power turns maverick. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was wise and sensible to recognise the danger of that prospect and to try to reduce it by reining in the activities of the United States and getting it to go along the United Nations route. He deserves great credit for what he has achieved. But there is a danger of following the example of the Israeli Labour party, which joined the Sharon coalition to restrain him and ended up by getting nothing but the blame at the end of the process.

It may be that the United States is strong enough to shrug off any consequences of the actions it intends to take. Britain may not be in as strong a position.

If there is a war, it is likely to be quick. It may not be, but it is likely to be. Even if there is a quick win, what will the result be? I am sure that the Iraqi people—those who survive—will welcome the overthrow of the current regime, but we have no answers to the question of how Iraq will be governed, who will govern it and whether the internal struggles that might result will spill over into neighbouring states in a way that might be a threat to international peace and security. I am sure that the ruling elites in the neighbouring states will welcome the overthrow of Saddam, but what of their peoples? They will see double standards: action to uphold UN resolutions on Iraq, but no action to uphold UN resolutions on Israel and Palestine. Many will regard that as anti-Islam. From my personal knowledge of the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary, I know that there is not one jot of truth in that view in terms of British Government policy; however, I cannot necessarily say the same for the United States.

People in the middle east recognise that the current Administration in the United States are in power partly because of the support of Christian fundamentalists, some of whom publicly believe that the borders of Israel should be extended to take in all the land of the Palestinians. That leaves millions of Muslims angry, and moderate Muslims in despair, because they feel let down by nation states and the United Nations. As we know, an additional minority will resort to terrorism. Military action against Iraq will be a principal recruiting sergeant for terrorism, and al-Qaeda will be delighted if the United States and Britain go to war.

There are also wider consequences: the threat to the fragile world economy, and a boost to the right-wing United States unilateralists, who think that the new world order should consist of them issuing the orders. The rest of the world will, in future, be waiting nervously to see who will be the next target for such treatment.

Dr. Julian Lewis: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dobson: No. Meanwhile, nothing will be done to strengthen the United Nations' ability to act as the United Nations. Nothing will be done to counter terrorism, to contain the spread of weapons of mass destruction, or—most important of all—to give the UN the power to undermine and remove tyrannous regimes, which is currently beyond its competence.

With all that in mind, I do not believe that there is a case for immediate military action on the scale envisaged. It will inevitably lead to the loss of life of, and permanent physical and mental injury to, British troops and innocent Iraqi people. That cannot be justified at this time, and certainly not without the explicit prior consent of the United Nations and this House of Commons. Even then, I, for one, would be doubtful of the consequences.

3.37 pm

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): I should make it clear at the outset that my hon. Friends and I will support the Government in the Division Lobby this evening. The Government have said that this motion is not a vote for war, but we are under no illusion about the fact that it is a further step along a route that might end in war. We do not support such a motion lightly, therefore, because we are well aware of the consequences that might flow from it. Indeed, all right hon. and hon. Members will be deeply conscious of the fact that thousands of servicemen are on their way to the Gulf, and we know what the consequences for them may be. I remark parenthetically that among those going to the Gulf are the two Irish regiments: the Royal Irish Regiment and the Irish Guards. Consequently, well in excess of 1,000 people from Northern Ireland—and, indeed, a not insignificant number from the Republic of Ireland—will shortly be deployed in the Gulf.

Time is pressing, and I want to make just a few short and simple points. We have no doubt about the nature of the regime in Iraq. I was amazed at the comment by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Kelvin (Mr. Galloway), who referred to Texas as the execution chamber of the world. Does he know nothing about Iraq? Does he know nothing about what has happened in Baghdad in the past 30 years? That was an appalling statement for him to make, and he needs to look at the regime that he has befriended a little more clearly.

We have no doubt about the threat, about the wars that have been started, or about the weapons of mass destruction that have been accumulated, and which continue to be there. There is also no doubt about what the United Nations requires. There are United Nations resolutions that require Saddam Hussein to disarm. There has certainly been a failure to comply. There was a material breach before 1441, and there is a material breach now.

What should we do? That is the question. It is only the credible threat of force that has achieved the little progress that there has been, and that has made Saddam Hussein permit the admission of inspectors. That comes after the failure of earlier UN resolutions. All the resolutions in the 1990s failed. The UN and the world community allowed themselves to be bluffed and manoeuvred out of Iraq. Against that background, 1441 had to be clear, and backed up by a credible threat of force. That credible threat has to be maintained.

The paradox is that, in order to obtain compliance with UN resolutions, there has to be the threat of force. Unless Saddam Hussein complies, it is inevitable that that force will have to be used. The time involved may be long or short, but hon. Members who have supported the UN and its resolutions, including 1441, must be aware that, as a consequence, they must support the credible use of force, right down to the point of its use. If they fail to do so, they will weaken the UN gravely.

The UN has been weakened badly enough by the failures of the 1990s. It has again set its hand to trying to carry through its will in this matter, and it must succeed. If not, enormous damage will be done to the possibility that the UN can be credible in the future, and that will have implications for world peace. The paradox is that those who want peace and a UN that succeeds in the world must therefore support the Government, right down to the use of force if that becomes necessary.

I appreciate that some people find that difficult to live with. Some of those who are reluctant to go down the route that I have described are well meaning, and others are engaged in wishful thinking. We have seen some evidence of that in the debate.

Other people are influenced by less noble motives. I have been distressed by the degree of anti-Americanism that has been expressed in the debate, and the personal hostility to the President. I consider that wholly misplaced. I have been appalled at some of the comments about President Bush, and at the false caricature of him that has been presented. I base that opinion not only on the fleeting personal acquaintance that I have had with him, but on what he has said and done over the past couple of years, which I have looked at closely.

The record is clear, especially in the period since 11 September. The US has moved slowly, deliberately and proportionately. That is the evidence of the past year and a half. I have listened to the caricatures of President Bush that have been presented, and I think that hon. Members should get away from the propaganda—coming from elements in the American Democrat party—that they have swallowed. They should look at things a little more clearly.

People have been concerned about what will happen in Iraq and the region if force has to be used. However, we must realise that the region is highly unstable. That is another of the lessons of 11 September: it brought home to us just how unstable the region is. We need to think about the causes of that instability, and about how we can resolve or do something to improve the situation there.

This is a complex issue, and I cannot go far into it in the couple of minutes remaining to me, but we need to ask ourselves what we can do about it. If there were no oil in the region, there would be a series of failed states there. The region has failed to deal with the challenge of modernisation.

[Mr. David Trimble]

I emphasise that I am talking about the middle east region as a whole and the Arab states there, not about Islam. A distinction must be drawn between Islam and what is happening in the middle east in respect of a particular and virulent strand of that religion. That strand is a distortion of Islam.

We need to ask why modernisation has failed. Saddam grew out of the Ba'ath socialist party, although he is, in fact, a crude anti-Semitic nationalist. Why have such people obtained and retained power? How do we change that?

I am not just talking about regime change, but asking how we change the culture in the middle east and the orientation of those states because, until we do that, we will not achieve stability. Just talking about the problem in Israel and Palestine is not terribly helpful. That problem cannot be dealt with in isolation. It is part of the instability generally, and dealing with that instability generally will make it easier to deal with Israel and Palestine; but we cannot deal with that in isolation.

The issue this evening is whether we support the Government in what they are doing—whether we want the UN resolutions to be enforced. That is the challenge. The resolutions have got to be complied with or enforced—if not complied with, then enforced—and that has to be done as and when we can to maintain the threat, and it may have to be done soon.

3.45 pm

Dr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh): Most people would agree that war can be justified only when all other options have been exhausted, and it is my view that we have not reached that point. There is still an alternative to war: the weapons inspection process, set in place by UN Security Council resolution 1441 last November.

Dr. Blix made the point—as did the Liberal Democrat spokesman earlier—that there have been eight years of inspections since 1991, followed by a four-year gap, and that there have now been inspections for just so many weeks. As Dr. Blix says, with characteristic understatement, to call it a day after just 13 weeks is a little short. It is indeed; I would go further and say that it is wrong.

During his statement to the House earlier this month on contingency preparations, I suggested to the Secretary of State for Defence that the threat to world security from Iraq is less while the weapons inspectors are in place. In many ways, my views have been strengthened by the reports of Dr. Blix and Dr. el-Baradei.

In essence, as the House is aware, Dr. Blix is largely positive about what he calls Iraq's co-operation on process, but he has identified shortcomings in Iraq's co-operation on substance. In that respect, the tone of his report of 14 February was significantly more optimistic than that of 27 January. As Dr. Blix told *Time* magazine, if the reality changes, he has to register that to reflect the potential opportunity for progress that has opened up.

The truth is that the weapons inspections process has far from outlived its usefulness. Weapons inspections are still a viable alternative to military action, and the process should be pursued until either it is concluded successfully or it is clear that the inspections cannot usefully continue.

As an aside, I would make a point in response to the argument that inspections have taken place for 12 years. After all, it is legitimate to ask what has happened during those 12 years. Has Iraq attacked, or threatened to attack, its neighbours or the wider world? When we talk about those 12 years, we should not pretend that they were 12 years of total failure. From an international viewpoint, there was the effective containment of Saddam Hussein, and containment in those circumstances is not necessarily a bad policy.

I do not want the House to misunderstand me; it is clear that Saddam Hussein is brutal dictator. I am not advocating that the status quo should exist in perpetuity, and we must deal with Iraq's weapons of mass destruction.

Mr. Salmond: I very much agree with the point that the right hon. Gentleman is making, but, if I remember correctly, President Clinton made exactly the same point about the success of the arms inspections at last October's Labour party conference, and many members of the current Cabinet were nodding vigorously behind him.

Dr. Strang: We are in broad agreement that, certainly, the inspections process should not be concluded at this point.

Turning to the future, I am not in a position to assess the strength of opposition that the Iraqi regime can mount against the military might of the US, supported by Britain and any other states that might fight alongside us. But regardless of the intensity and duration of a war in Iraq, it would not be surprising if sustaining a new regime within a framework acceptable to the victors was far more demanding in terms of resources and what could be achieved politically. Reports of the plans for Iraq after military action show the scale of what we have in mind.

Neither would I want to guess what support there is for Saddam Hussein in Iraq—possibly the vast majority will welcome his overthrow—but it is certainly true that many people in the wider world will deeply resent a military attack, especially if it is not explicitly authorised by the UN. A leading figure in the international Muslim community who was visiting Edinburgh last year told me that an attack on Iraq will be seen by many Muslims throughout the world as an attack on a second Muslim country after Afghanistan. It would certainly not be a surprise if the new regime in Iraq were a target for Muslim radicals throughout the world.

More broadly, without a second resolution we can be confident that war on Iraq would be detrimental to the international coalition against terrorism that has been built up since 11 September 2001. Some states that are now co-operating would reduce or even cease their involvement. Some individuals who are currently co-operating with the police and the security services, or who have the potential to do so, would be discouraged from doing so. As has been pointed out, a bloody war in Iraq could be a factor in encouraging more young Muslims to adopt a misguided and radical approach and to support and participate in terrorist acts.

What are the options before us? We can all agree that the most desirable outcome is full Iraqi co-operation with weapons inspectors and the peaceful dismantling of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. That would be a victory for the United Nations and for the stance taken by the United States and our Prime Minister. A second scenario is military action that is not endorsed by the United Nations. Some may say that resolution 1441 gives authority for military action, and if Iraq is in breach, any resulting military action can be described as being authorised by the UN. However, France, China and Russia made it clear when that resolution was passed that they did not consider their support for the resolution as constituting endorsement of future military action. Given the views of those three states, the realpolitik is that an attack on Iraq will be seen by the world as authorised by the international community only if it is backed by a further resolution from the United Nations. If military action is clearly endorsed by the UN, I imagine that most Labour Members will go along with it. While many people worldwide would resent the attack, explicit authorisation by the UN would reduce the scale of opposition.

Phil Hope: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Dr. Strang: I am sorry, but I would rather not because of the time remaining.

A second resolution would demonstrate unequivocally to Iraq and the wider world that any military action was based on international agreement and was properly authorised by the only institution in the world that has the authority to do so: the United Nations.

I respect the motives of my right hon. Friends, and I do not question the seriousness of the issues about which the Foreign Secretary spoke this afternoon. However, to register my concern that the US and British Governments are, on the face of it, rushing to war too quickly, and to make it clear that military action without further explicit UN support is unacceptable, I intend to vote for the amendment of my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith).

3.52 pm

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): This may be the last opportunity to vote on a substantive motion before British forces are committed to war. If so, those of us who disagree with a war policy will find it much more difficult to express our views. It is therefore important that we take advantage of this debate to do so.

The right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) has spoken about anti-Americanism, which troubles me, too. I am disturbed by the fact that I cannot support the American position on this matter. I have always attached huge importance to the relationship with the United States. I have long-standing and close relations with that country. I am bound to say, however, that I believe it to be wrong on this matter. I understand the American position, which is not crude or unworthy of respect. It is not about oil or about completing what a previous President left undone; in fact, I think that he was right to stop the Gulf war when he did in 1991. This is different.

Since 11 September, the United States has developed a different sense of vulnerability. In the context of that sense of vulnerability, it has developed the philosophy of a pre-emptive strike against those who may pose a threat to its security. I understand that. I happen to think that it is wrong, but it is not an unworthy attitude. At the same time, I also have a great deal of respect and understanding for the position of the Prime Minister. In that regard, I agree with much that my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir Patrick Cormack) said. It is right that we should stand by our allies; after all, we expect them to stand by us. However, we need to keep in mind the fact that the United States is the one country capable of taking unilateral action. It is therefore all the more important that we should bind the United States into the multinational organisations that try to regulate the world.

War is wrong. I want to explain my reasons for saying that in four brief ways. First, a Security Council resolution is highly desirable, but it does not make what otherwise is wrong, right. It may provide legal cover, to use the phraseology of my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram), but that is not sufficient.

Secondly, I am deeply troubled by the morality of what we are about to do. Here I find myself adopting the language—although perhaps less eloquently—of my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer). As we were reminded by the right hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), war involves injury and death—maybe of thousands—and the devastation of a country. We really must not do that unless all other policy options are closed. Above all, we must not do that unless we can properly invoke the doctrine of self-defence. I accept that the doctrine of self-defence has to be given an enlarged meaning: one does not wait until one is attacked. However, one must be able to say that the risk to one's own country, to the country of one's friends and allies, or to the world is imminent and grave. In all conscience, I do not think that we can say that about Iraq. The policy of deterrence has worked these past 12 years and I believe that it will continue to work in future. I am therefore not satisfied as to the morality of our action.

Simon Hughes: I agree with the right hon. and learned Member's last point. Does he agree that a risk that is clearly imminent and grave is the terrorist risk, which is most likely to be precipitated by precipitate action by us?

Mr. Hogg: I entirely agree; that is my third point. The consequences of any war are likely to be grave. They include the risk of increased terrorism, to which the hon. Gentleman draws attention. They also include: turmoil in the middle east; the fact that Islamic opinion throughout the world will be deeply affronted; and the certainty that we will be involved in, and preoccupied with, the affairs and administration of Iraq for years to come. Those are the predictable consequences of what we are about to do; the unpredictable consequences are probably just as grave. The risks are disproportionately great when one considers any possible benefits of conflict.

Hugh Bayley (City of York): The right hon. Gentleman talks about the risks of terrorism. What

[Hugh Bayley]

would be his strategy for dealing with the risk that the Iraqi regime could pass dangerous chemical or biological agents not, perhaps, to al-Qaeda, but to secular Islamic extremists?

Mr. Hogg: I would pursue a vigorous policy of inspection, but I would also make it plain that, if there were any evidence of the risk that the hon. Gentleman mentions, Saddam Hussein would be the subject of attack because the principle of self-defence would properly be invoked—as it was when military action was taken in Afghanistan.

Lastly, it is very dangerous to take a democratic country to war unless the population gives its wholehearted assent. I do not believe that that assent has been given. We shall be taking this country to war when the country does not support war. That is a perilous venture.

For all the reasons that I have outlined, I am against war. I shall vote for the amendment and I shall vote against the Government's position. I very much hope that many other right hon. and hon. Members will do so as well.

3.59 pm

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): In 1991, I stood at the Opposition Dispatch Box and described what I had seen on the mountains of Iran and Iraq when the Kurds fled from the bombardment of Saddam Hussein. I am afraid that people have very short memories. The scenes were appalling and typical of the attacks made by the Iraqi regime on its own people. The victims include Arabs as well as Kurds. They also include Assyrians, Turkomans and the Shi'as in the south of the country who were forced to flee from the marshes into Iran.

I have spent the past two days travelling and I have come back for this debate so that I can tell the House what I have seen and heard. As the House knows, I have continually argued the case over the years for indicting the regime for war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. I am grateful to 201 of my colleagues on both sides of the House who supported my proposal. I believe that the regime should be removed and that it could have been removed by using international law and indictment. It is a great regret to me that this country, which could have led the way, did not do so. After two years of our making the case and providing evidence from the victims of the regime, the Attorney-General felt that there was not sufficient evidence. I do not know how much evidence one needs, because it abounds. Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have the evidence, and the Kurds captured documents from the torture centre that they eventually liberated. Thousands of their citizens died there.

On my latest visit, I opened the first genocide museum in Iraq. It was snowing and quite dark on that day and people had come from all over the area. Their relatives had died in that torture chamber. Inside the museum were photographs that the Kurds had taken. The images were of skulls and shreds of clothing, and of the type of thing that one sees in genocide museums elsewhere in the world. I have been to similar museums in Rwanda and Cambodia, and I have seen the holocaust exhibition in London, but I am afraid that, on this occasion, I just cried. I do not think that I have ever cried in public before, but I did so because the regime's victims were all around me. One old woman came up to me with a piece of plastic and pushed it into my hand. I unwrapped it and saw three photographs. They were of her husband and two sons who had died in that torture centre.

People had written things on the cell walls. Sometimes the writing was in blood and sometimes it was just marks to cross off the days of the week. Inside one cell is a statue of a Peshmerga, whose face looks upward towards a grill through which the light comes. I was told that that Peshmerga had died in that cell and that he was always looking towards the light, because he hoped that, one day, he would be out in the daylight again.

The victims were all around me, and I have been involved for 25 years—including before I became a politician—with the Iraqi opposition. For those 25 years, I have heard the tales of Saddam Hussein's regime and its repression of the Kurds and other minorities. People seem to think that that all came to an end in 1991, but that is a big mistake. Repression, torture and ethnic cleansing have continued throughout the time since then.

On my latest visit, I met some of the victims of torture who had, in the past few months, come out of the Abu Ghraib prison in Baghdad under the so-called amnesty. One man told me stories that I hardly like to repeat, but we at Indict have taken victims' statements over the past seven years. This victim was a youngish man who said that he had been in prison for eight years. He said that almost every day, people were executed at that prison—not one person, but hundreds. When there was an attack on Uday Hussein's life some time ago, 2,000 prisoners in the prison were executed on the same day. That is the reality of Saddam's Iraq. When I hear people calling for more time, I say "Who will speak up for those victims?"

I shall recount only two stories told by the same man. He told me that a university professor gave birth at the Abu Ghraib prison while he was there. Apparently, because of the very poor diet of thin soup and bread, she did not have enough milk to feed the baby when it was born. She begged the guards for milk, but they refused to give it and the baby died. She held that baby in her arms for three days and would not give up the body. At the end of the three days, because the temperature in the prison was very hot—some 60° C—the body began to smell. They took the woman and her dead baby away. I asked the former prisoner what happened to her and he said that she was killed.

The man then talked about a young boy aged 15 who had done something or other and was in the prison, and fainted during one of the torture sessions—he was beaten so hard that he fainted. The guards pinned him up to the frame of a window and crucified him on the window frame while he was still alive. When he came to, he was crying out for water, but nobody would give him water. One of the other prisoners threw water in his face, but that prisoner was himself taken away and beaten.

Ethnic cleansing goes on all the time. I visited a UN camp where there were hundreds of recent victims of ethnic cleansing who had been kicked out of Kirkuk. The men, women and little children in the camp had been told that they had 24 hours to get out of Kirkuk because they would not agree that they were not Kurds.

but Arabs, as part of Arabisation. In other countries, we have taken action against people responsible for ethnic cleansing, so I say to my colleagues, please, who is to help the victims of Saddam Hussein's regime unless we do?

I believe in regime change. I say that without hesitation, and I will support the Government tonight because I think that they are doing a brave thing.

4.7 pm

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): No one would doubt the sincerity and long-standing commitment of the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) to the Kurdish people. I only wish that I could believe that many of those who are planning military action have the same sincere concern about the hopes and aspirations of the Kurdish people. Although I oppose military action, as I am about to outline, I hope that the question of Turkish deployment in the Kurdish areas is well understood by the people who are planning military action, as well as the consequences that might follow.

There is one point on which I agree with the hon. Member for Glasgow, Kelvin (Mr. Galloway) and one on which I disagree with him strongly. The point of agreement is that, without any question, people should understand that this debate is going to be the crucial one as far as war is concerned. The shadow Foreign Secretary said—perhaps this admission would not have been made by the Foreign Secretary—that the resolution before the United Nations and the Government motion are cover resolutions. That is how he described them. I took that to mean that although they do not mention war or military action—even the new UK resolution at the Security Council does not do that and the Government's motion certainly does not do so—if they were passed at the Security Council and here, they would be taken as a green light for military action. No one who votes or does not vote tonight should be under any illusions that this is the opportunity to slow down the process if people want to do that. If that opportunity is not taken, it ain't going to come again.

There is another reason for that which we should understand as well. The procedures of this place do not always allow for the sort of vote that we are fortunate to have this evening. Not for the first time in his fairly short time as Speaker, our Speaker has taken an unusual course in selecting a genuine all-party amendment that gives hon. Members a chance to vote on an issue of principle that goes across the parties. I am proud to speak for my party and for Plaid Cymru in supporting and co-sponsoring the amendment tabled by the right hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith). That type of amendment will not necessarily be allowed to emerge again under our procedures, so let us make no mistake—this is the opportunity for hon. Members who wish to do so to vote to slow up the march to war.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Kelvin said some fairly savage things about President Bush. I do not agree. I can understand that view in terms of the policy of the American Administration, but I tend to look at the matter slightly differently. I see that the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) is looking puzzled. He is probably the only Member who was a Member of Parliament when Barry Goldwater ran for President of the United States in 1964. He ran under the argument that America could win a pre-emptive war against the Soviet Union if it was strong enough in nuclear weapons. His slogan was, "In your heart, you know he's right". The Democrat reply was, "In your guts, you know he's nuts". Thankfully for all of us, the Democrats were successful in that election. I am not arguing that that is President Bush's position, but when I listen to Donald Rumsfeld, Richard Perle and other people who are central to that Administration, the words of the Democrat party in 1964 are very meaningful to me—in my guts I think they are nuts. They are trying to apply a management school theory about dominating companies and markets to international politics. They argue that America must exert its power in every sphere of influence, regardless of any consequences. That argument, which would have been regarded as extremism only a few years ago, now holds sway in key parts of the American Administration.

I differ with the hon. Member for Glasgow, Kelvin on the reason why that argument is central to the Administration. It is due not to a deep-laid plot by George W. Bush, but to the consequences of 11 September and the trauma and fear that has gripped the American people since then. This is not anti-Americanism. America is a country that was founded out of the intellectual strength of the Scottish enlightenment. *[Laughter.]* I hear some laughs. Hon. Members on both sides of the House should understand where the American constitution and its checks and balances came from. America understands it. The founding fathers would be birling in their graves, to use a Scottish phrase, if they could see what is being done in the name of America and the American constitution in terms of the pre-emptive, aggressive policy that is emanating from the American Administration. It is possible for that policy to become central to the Administration only in an atmosphere of fear.

That is where the Prime Minister is heavily culpable. As the right hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury told the Prime Minister yesterday in a telling intervention, it is the job of a candid friend to tell his friend the truth in times of crisis. That is particularly so in this case given that the friend, America, is gripped in the trauma of the aftermath of 11 September, 18 months ago. The fact that the Prime Minister has failed to do that is his central culpability, because he was in a position to put the brakes on that sort of policy, and he still is in such a position. Unfortunately, however, he has exchanged that position of influence to become a prisoner of the policies that emanate from some of the extreme people in the American Administration. There is no doubt that the Prime Minister is no longer in charge of these events and that events are controlling him. To return to the "Newsnight" interview that I mentioned earlier in an exchange with the Foreign Secretary, the Prime Minister was specific in front of a studio audience about there being one set of circumstances, and one only, in which he would argue for the use of force.

That was if the weapons inspectors said that their process had ended. According to the transcript, the Prime Minister said that if the majority of the Security Council adopted a second resolution and it was blocked by one country's unreasonable veto, he would consider

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the use of force. It is significant that neither the Prime Minister yesterday nor the Foreign Secretary today was prepared to stand even on that position. The Prime Minister is no longer in control of events; they are controlling him.

Let us consider morality. The Prime Minister is a religious man and I respect that. It does him great credit. I have nothing like his record of church going or observance. However, I, too, have faith and conviction. I believe that if an immoral and unjust war takes place, with thousands of casualties and the spilling of innocent blood, the person responsible for arguing for it will answer one day to a much higher authority than the House of Commons.

4.15 pm

Mr. Roger Godsiff (Birmingham, Sparkbrook and Small Heath): All hon. Members know that Saddam Hussein is an evil man. He is a brutal dictator who has committed genocide and used poison gas against his people. He launched a war against Iran that resulted in more than 1 million people being killed. He invaded Kuwait and, when he left, caused an environmental disaster by torching the oilfields. I have no doubt that he has weapons of mass destruction and I fully accept that he has not complied with United Nations resolutions. With the rest of the civilised world, I believe that the Iraqi people would be well rid of such a person.

However, do my comments explain the reasons for America and the United Kingdom making a pre-emptive strike? I regret to say that I am not convinced. I fully support working through the UN, although I can envisage circumstances in which the USA, the United Kingdom or any other country took unilateral action, for example, if they perceived their national interest to be under threat. After 9/11, the civilised world united in its determination to combat and root out international terrorism. We rightly identified al-Qaeda as the main proponent and rightly took action against the Taliban in Afghanistan because they were harbouring that organisation.

Since our action in Afghanistan, we have realised that we failed to obliterate al-Qaeda, and America appears to have lost the plot. Instead of pursuing terrorists, who live in the shadows and kill indiscriminately in the shopping malls of Tel Aviv and the bars of Bali, we are seeking a change of Government in Iraq on the basis that Saddam Hussein is an evil man who will not comply fully with UN resolutions. That is an unconvincing justification for a dangerous course of action.

President Bush referred to Iraq, North Korea and Iran as the axis of evil. What will we do about North Korea, which is ruled by an equally ruthless dictator and also has weapons of mass destruction? Everybody knows that the Chinese will not allow the Americans to interfere in North Korea's affairs. What will we do about Iran?

As I have said previously, 50 per cent. of the electorate in my constituency are Muslims. My support for the American ethos and my belief that, overall, America has been more a force for good than evil in the world does not always win me great support among my Muslim constituents. However, I must tell my many friends in America that I believe that they are about to make a disastrous mistake. With great respect to them, I do not believe that they understand the Islamic world. The current American Administration does not appreciate the consequences in the Muslim world of a pre-emptive strike on Iraq. If America, supported by the United Kingdom, launches a pre-emptive strike against Iraq, Saddam Hussein will overnight become a hero—a martyr—of the Muslim world despite the fact that he is not a hero now because he runs a secularist rather than a fundamentalist regime.

What will be the consequences in adjoining countries? We need to remember that bin Laden comes from the Saudi royal family. He left Saudi Arabia to form the al-Qaeda organisation because he believed that the house of Saud was giving America too much support by allowing it to have bases in a country that is home to the great places of worship for all Muslims. What will happen if a regime change takes place in Iraq and the house of Saud comes under attack from within its own country? Will America commit itself to stationing a large number of troops, for however many years, in Iraq and Saudi Arabia? If so, what will that do to opinion in the Muslim world? What will happen to the Mubarak regime in Egypt? I accept that it is not a pleasant regime, but it is pro-western and greatly vulnerable to attack from within. What will happen to that country?

I strongly support the war against international terrorism, but America, Britain and the rest of the western world would be well advised to give more attention to why international terrorists emerge. They do not suddenly come out of the sky. International terrorists are born in the squalid, teeming refugee camps of Gaza, the west bank and along the Azad-Kashmir border. Young people living in those camps are without a country, a job, a future or any hope. They are vulnerable recruits for those people who say, "You will get your reward in the next world. Just join us in the jihad against America and the west." They will join having been told that America pursues double standards and that, when convenient, will use UN resolutions to justify a pre-emptive strike against Iraq. They will also be told that when, I regret to say, it suits America and other countries in the west, a blind eye is turned to UN resolutions on the building of settlements by the Israeli Government all over the west bank and on India not carrying out a plebiscite to allow the people of Kashmir to determine their own future.

I am not by nature a rebel. It gives me no pleasure to say that I cannot support my Government in the Lobby tonight. I am proud of the enormous amount that they have achieved since coming to power. I do not support or have any love for Saddam Hussein. I want the man to go and to go soon. But—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman's time is up.

4.23 pm

John Barrett (Edinburgh, West): Politicians are often accused of being out of touch with the electorate, but I have never felt so much at one with the ordinary man and woman on the street as I felt when we marched together as part of the 1 million who took to the streets on 15 February. Many had been moved to participate in a march for the first time in their lives. Others, like myself, who had been on many marches for a variety of reasons over many years, noticed something very different with that march. It was not only the sheer volume of people who took to the streets or the fact they came from all walks of life, but the strength of their plea to be heard. They wanted the Government to listen to their views. To see a young mother from my constituency with her young child summed up for me how the protest had moved individuals in a way that I had never witnessed before.

This House must show that it is listening to the people of Britain: listening to their concerns, their fears and their hope that a peaceful solution can be found rather than our engaging in war. A war with Iraq could well escalate into a much wider regional conflict, and will surely result in increased terrorist activities in this country, in the United States and elsewhere in the world.

Many who were on the march, and many in the House, believe that the case for war has not yet been proved, that the inspectors should be given more time, and that all other options have not been exhausted. War must always be a last resort. Today's debate may be our last chance to register our concerns in the House before military action starts, and I want to record my view that the Prime Minister and George Bush are wrong. The Prime Minister may well believe absolutely in what he says, but he has not convinced me, he has not convinced many other Members of Parliament, and he has not convinced the vast majority of people out there in the country.

I have been contacted by hundreds of constituents by post, e-mail and telephone. To a man and to a woman, they say that they do not believe a case has been made for going to war. I have no doubt that Saddam Hussein must be disarmed and I would not absolutely rule out the use of force, but, after four years without weapons inspectors, to say that after 11 weeks we must call it a day and go to war is wrong. Hans Blix and the inspectors should have all the time they need. The UN Security Council is not united. One reason is that the pace is being forced by the British and American Governments. Strong-arm tactics and financial inducements will not strengthen any second resolution; they will weaken it.

George Bush has made clear that if there is no second resolution, he will take action anyway. That has left many feeling that the decision has already been made, and that what is happening now is just covering up for the fact that the final troop deployments are not yet in place. Negotiations with Turkey are in their final stages, and today we have heard of RAF jets stuck in Cyprus. The final pieces of the military jigsaw are not yet in place, but they will be in a few weeks, and that is when many expect military action to start.

While other nations are pushing for peace and putting their energy into trying to make the inspections work, what we are seeing from our Government is a push for war, not a push for peace. Recently we have heard much about the moral case for war and the suffering of the Iraqi people—the number who have died over the years during which Saddam has been in power—but the moral case is seriously weakened by the fact that Iraq has obtained deadly pathogens from France, the United States and Germany, including anthrax, gas gangrene and west Nile fever.

What happens when the war is over? Who is in the frame for any future administration? Included in the list of potential leading lights in the regime to follow the toppling of Saddam Hussein are people who would make the Butcher of Baghdad look good. According to an article in the *Sunday Herald*, they include General Nizar Al-Khazraji, who is suspected of leading the chemical attack that killed 5,000 Kurds in Halabja in 1988, and who is alleged by some eyewitnesses to have kicked a Kurdish child to death during the height of Iraqi repression in that year.

The danger of any military action spreading throughout the region is another reason to avoid all-out war if at all possible. If Saddam can involve other countries in any conflict, he will; and the double standards that have been applied to Israel will become even more obvious as the Israeli Government continue actions that, were they taking place in Iraq, would have justified military action for many.

There has been talk of Saddam Hussein's going into exile, but if he went into exile in, say, Sudan, would that not be used as a legitimate reason to take action against that country for harbouring him and, possibly, terrorists? The hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) made a very emotional speech. I agree that if Saddam is toppled he should go on trial, not into a life of luxury.

Saddam's past history has been cited as a reason for taking action now, but many countries—some of which are now our strongest allies—have been at war with us in the past. While a recent past record is important, it is not reason enough to go to war. The war on Iraq is also constantly linked to the war on terrorism. I ask, where is the link? Where is the evidence?

Before we go to war, any Government should have the support of the people and the support of their representatives. Today they will see what their representatives think, but tomorrow we should be aware that the people outside are still not convinced.

4.29 pm

Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): For me, one of the most powerful passages in the United Nations charter is not in the detail of any of its chapters but in its opening preamble:

> "We the peoples of the United Nations determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind".

The preamble did not seek a pretext for other wars, and did not seek to justify a little ritual slaughter when the mood took us. It was a declaration by the international community at the end of the second world war that we had to pursue a path where the avoidance of war and its human consequences had to be a global priority.

Against that background, I regard today's motion and the war rhetoric surrounding it as a low point in contemporary British politics. They mark the disconnection of the House from the society we claim to represent. The realities of the wider world are clear—the case for a war against Iraq remains unproven. I shall therefore vote for the amendment, and against the motion. We should look at the sorry state of our current Parliament. Increasingly, we appear to have a Government who are looking for a pretext for war, rather than its avoidance. We appear to produce

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dossiers of mass deception, whose claims are dismissed as risible almost as soon as they are released. We have the embarrassment of a Prime Minister whose arguments chase from one discredited case to another in the search for something that will convince the public of the case for a war in which they do not believe. If anything slightly relieves the pain for Labour it is the condition of the shadow Cabinet, whose members appear to have given up the will to live and believe that they can only be redeemed if they offer to bomb earlier and more often. That is not, however, the position of the overwhelming majority of the British public.

I have just returned from a visit to the United States and Canada, where I was part of a citizens weapons inspectorate. We went to the Edgewood research base just outside Washington, where we attempted to ask its personnel for rights of access to inspect the site and for an account of the weapons of mass destruction that they were working on. They openly acknowledged working on anthrax, plague, botulinum, ricin and cholera. If such weapons were found in Iraq, they would immediately become the basis on which President Bush would declare war.

Dr. Julian Lewis *rose—*

Alan Simpson: I shall join everyone else in saying no to the offer.

All those weapons are illegal under current chemical and biological warfare conventions. That is a measure of discrepancies, if not hypocrisy, in our approach to the role and rights of inspections as a way of stabilising and securing international confidence in the removal of weapons of mass destruction. That site also manufactures non-lethal biochemical weapons, which Defence Secretary Rumsfeld referred to in his testimony to Congress on 5 February, when he acknowledged the US intention to use such weapons in any war on Iraq. Those weapons, too, are illegal under current conventions. Perhaps the most frightening thing for me was not the stark openness of that work but the attitude of the pro-war protesters who followed the inspectors round. Their banners and slogans said much about the popular culture created largely at the behest of the American Administration and the American press. "We tried to give peace a chance and got 9/11," said one. Another said, "Give war a chance." Perhaps the most frightening of all said, "Today Iraq, tomorrow France."

Those were measures of the visceral feelings of gung-ho militarism that characterise the debate taking place in the USA. We ought to think carefully before wandering even partially down that path. Those are President Bush's people, who stood up following the last report of the weapons inspectors and said that the objections made by a succession of countries that did not accept that a convincing case had been made for war were not objections in principle, but the objections of countries holding out for a bigger bribe. It is clear that the US view of the UN is that it is simply a body to be bought or bypassed.

Our view must identify with the 30 million people worldwide who say no, war is not the answer, nor is it acceptable. It is not justified in the current circumstances and it would be a horrendous gift to one group and one group only: al-Qaeda. From the evidence of the past 50 years, we know that containment works and inspection works. That is the basis on which the United Nations has worked at its best. We ought not to dismiss the value of that work.

In relation to Iraq, have we found weapons of mass destruction that threaten to destroy the west? No. Have we had any threat from Iraq to destroy the west? No. In those circumstances, we should listen to our other allies in the United Nations—to Germany, France, Russia and perhaps to China—and to the inspectors. Their claims for more time, rather than more troops, are the voices that we should hear. We need inspections, not invasions.

The west and the UK must find the courage to speak out in favour of the peaceful settlement of international conflict and tension, rather than the presumption that we can drift into a war that would do nothing but scar the entire century. We owe a duty to our children and our society to find the courage to ally ourselves with those whose voices urge a peaceful solution to the issue, not a descent into warmongering.

4.37 pm

Tony Baldry (Banbury): Understandably, we have heard a great deal this afternoon about the military campaign. In the few minutes available to me, I shall say a few words about the humanitarian campaign. In a statement to the House a few days ago, the Prime Minister said that there needs to be

"a humanitarian plan that is every bit as viable and well worked out as a military plan."—[*Official Report*, 3 February 2003; Vol. 399, c. 36.]

The Economist recently observed that many aspects of war hanging over Iraq are unpredictable, but one is not—the unusual vulnerability of the civilian population. There are two reasons for that. First, about 60 per cent. of the population, or 16 million people, are 100 per cent. dependent on central Government for basic needs. They survive only because the Government of Iraq provides them with a food ration each month. Secondly, after two wars, decades of mismanagement and 12 years of exacting sanctions, there is no fat to rely on.

It is therefore essential not to see the military campaign and the humanitarian campaign in two separate boxes. As both Kosovo and Afghanistan have recently shown us, it cannot simply be a matter of fighting a military campaign, then announcing "end ex" and starting a humanitarian campaign the next day. Those planning military action must think about the humanitarian consequences of that action, not least how to minimise the impact of conflict on civilians. I emphasise that that is particularly important in Iraq, where huge numbers of people live in abject poverty, many families are clinging on by their fingertips, and 60 per cent. of the population is dependent on the UN oil for food programme.

Any attack on Iraq is bound to involve aerial bombing to take out military infrastructure. How confident can we be that military commanders will seek not to bomb hospitals, residential areas and vital energy sources? Targeting must take account of the vulnerability of the existing infrastructure and the weaknesses of the sanitation and water systems, for example. Every indication is that people in Iraq are just about scraping along, but any sustained disruption of sewerage systems or clean water supplies will almost certainly speedily result in disease, illness and death in large numbers in the civilian population. We have to ensure that everyone involved—the military in particular—thinks through the consequences for the men, women and children on the ground.

There are undoubtedly optimistic scenarios of what might happen, involving a short, well-targeted bombing campaign on key objectives, followed by a dash by coalition forces to seize Baghdad and Basra, the collapse of Iraqi resistance, the surrender of Iraqi troops and speedy regime change. It might be like that. It is to be hoped that any fighting—if, in due course, it comes to fighting—will be the shortest necessary to achieve the desired objectives. But history is littered with optimistic assessments that it would all be over in a matter of weeks by generals and politicians who then found themselves dug in for months or years. Military planners and humanitarian advisers have to plan for all scenarios, not just the most optimistic. I reiterate that any scenario will impact on a civilian population that is in poor shape anyway, and that any disruption of the oil-for-food programme will leave many people without the basic necessities of life. It is right that we should be cautious, because it was not easy to persuade the US military in Afghanistan to have regard to humanitarian considerations. Nine million people there were having to be fed by the World Food Programme before any military campaign began.

It is also important to reflect that this is all happening at a time when there are enormous strains on the international humanitarian system. When the Secretary of State for International Development recently gave evidence on the humanitarian crisis in southern Africa to the Select Committee, she expressed her concern that the scale of humanitarian feeding operations around the world was reaching such a level that she questioned whether the system could cope. Her concerns echoed identical points raised with the Committee only a little while ago by James Morris, the head of the UN World Food Programme. Yesterday, the Prime Minister of Ethiopia gave evidence to the Select Committee. He made it clear that, notwithstanding recent generous commitments of food aid to Ethiopia—including those from the United Kingdom—unless further substantial amounts were provided by June, there would be a serious humanitarian situation in the Horn of Africa.

So there are already monumental food aid requirements in the Horn of Africa, throughout southern Africa and in Afghanistan. It would, therefore, be difficult for the international community to take on a further substantial food programme. There are problems with the funding of the World Food Programme, with the supply of food, and with the capacity of institutions logistically to continue to manage a massive and ever-expanding programme. The political will to do so will also be much more difficult to achieve if the international community is divided. It will be difficult to get co-ordinated European Union action on humanitarian relief when some of the larger EU member states are at considerable variance with others as to the appropriate way forward on Iraq. Countries such as France and Germany do not want to be seen to be preparing for the humanitarian campaign in a conflict to which they are opposed. If there is a conflict, it is essential that the oil-for-food programme continues to operate in the short and medium term.

What thought are our military commanders and political planners giving to the issue of refugees? In the last Gulf conflict, there were an estimated 1.8 million displaced people in Iraq, out of a population of just over 26 million. Unlike in Afghanistan, most people in Iraq live in urban centres. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees estimates that there could be 900,000 refugees—100,000 in need of immediate assistance—and probably a further 500,000 displaced people in camps on the borders. It is impossible to predict just how many refugees there might be, because there are so many different potential scenarios. The UNHCR and the international community must plan for a range of possibilities and a range of numbers.

In addition to refugees, there will also be large numbers of internally displaced people in Iraq. This prompts another important question. In Afghanistan, the UN Secretary-General appointed Mr. Brahimi as his personal representative. The co-ordination of the humanitarian effort in Afghanistan is clearly under the auspices of the UN and senior UN agencies answerable to an experienced co-ordinator appointed by and answerable to the UN Secretary-General. What is going to happen in Iraq? After any conflict, will the humanitarian effort be co-ordinated by the UN? Numerous, unattributable, press briefings would tend to suggest that the intention is for the President of the United States to appoint a senior general to run Iraq, post-conflict. That would be a mistake. Afghanistan has shown how difficult it is for humanitarian relief agencies to relate to and work with the military, when the military act in any other role than as clearly designated and approved UN peacekeepers—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order.

4.45 pm

Mr. John Hume (Foyle): This is a time to do a lot of thinking about the future. Our generation is living through the biggest revolution in the history of the world—the technological, telecommunications and transport revolution. As a result, our world is a much smaller place than the world of the past. Therefore, we should recognise that we are in a stronger position to shape that world. As we enter this new century, our primary objective should be to make it the first century in the history of the world in which there is no war and no conflict.

Let us not forget that the victims of every war are the innocent civilians. Some 10 million were killed in the first world war and 40 million in the second world war. If innocent civilians are killed in a war against Iraq, their families will say, "Hussein is right and the terrorists are right. Those really are our enemies." We should be using our energies to create a peaceful and just world. If we use as much energy to do that as we would to fight a war, we would succeed far more quickly.

I ask Americans to remember the philosophies of their founding fathers. The ancestors of the present-day United States were driven from all their former countries by conflict, persecution, starvation and

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injustice. They decided that they did not want such things to happen in their new land—and we should remember the size of that land and how many states it has. What was their philosophy? It is one that the world needs again today and it is summed up on the American cent as "e pluribus unum". It is also writ large on the grave of Abraham Lincoln and it means that from many, we are one. The essence of our unity is respect for diversity. That is a message of real peace for the world, and I know that because of where I come from. We need respect for diversity and difference, because all conflict, no matter where it is, is about difference, be it of religion, race or nationality. The answer to difference is to respect it, because it is an accident of birth. We must get that message out.

Europe learned that lesson a while later than the United States. Who could have forecast, 50 years ago, during the worst century in the history of world, with two world wars—and 10 million killed in the first and 40 million killed in the second—that the peoples involved would gather together in a united Europe? But they have, and that is the best example in the history of the world of conflict resolution. Therefore, we should study how they did it and send that message to the world. The first principle of the European Union is exactly the same as that of the founding fathers of the United States—respect for difference and diversity—and it is backed up by institutions that respect difference and diversity, including the Council of Ministers, the Commission and the Parliament.

In the European Parliament, they work together in their common interests on areas of agreement rather than disagreement, on socio-economic development. They spill their sweat together, not their blood, and break down the barriers of centuries. That is a philosophy for the world. In today's smaller world, instead of sending soldiers, bombs and guns to kill human beings, we should send that philosophy. Because of the enormous influence of the United States and Britain in that smaller world, we could make a huge impact on it and create the first century in which there is no war and no conflict. If we used our energies to do that instead of in creating war, we would succeed far more quickly.

4.50 pm

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): I profoundly disagree with what the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) has just said. To suggest that the lesson of the second world war is that one should not go to war is to fly in the face of the real lesson of that war, which is that when faced with dictators one should deal with them sooner rather than later.

What we face is, as always, the problem of democracies when dealing with dictators. I subscribe to the paradox of freedom. The paradox of freedom, sometimes called the paradox of tolerance, is that one must tolerate all but the intolerant, because if one persists in tolerating the intolerant, then the tolerant will disappear, because the conditions for toleration will cease to exist.

Let me say on the question of weapons of mass destruction the following: Iraq has declared that it produced about 8,500 litres of anthrax, which it states it unilaterally destroyed in the summer of 1991. Iraq has provided little evidence for this production and no convincing evidence for its destruction. There are strong indications that Iraq produced more anthrax than it declared, and that at least some of this was retained after the declared destruction date. It might still exist. Either it should be found and be destroyed under UNMOVIC supervision, or else convincing evidence should be produced to show that it was, indeed, destroyed in 1991.

Those are not my words. They are the words of Dr. Blix in his report to the Security Council as recently as 27 January this year. They did not come from a dissertation. They did not come from a student thesis. They did not even come from a Government dossier. They are fact.

I was rather sad about the refusal by the hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Alan Simpson), who I am sorry to see has already vacated his place, to let me intervene when he was talking about the presence in north America of a biological plant, a plant that he said produces and deals with substances that are banned under the 1972 biological weapons convention. He compared that to the situation in Iraq. I have interesting news for hon. Members. There is a plant like that in this country. It is called Porton Down. Under the provisions of the 1972 biological weapons convention it does what such plants are allowed to do, which is to work on minuscule amounts of toxic substances in order to develop antidotes to them.

Llew Smith: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the United States refuses to allow international inspectors into some of its chemical plants, and is therefore breaking the chemical weapons convention?

Dr. Lewis: I am not aware that the United States is breaking any such convention. I should be very happy to hear specifics from the hon. Gentleman.

What I can say is that it is wholly inappropriate and irresponsible to take a legal, permitted ability of countries that have signed the BW convention, which is to carry out research on small amounts of deadly weapons in order to develop antidotes, and compare it with what Saddam Hussein has done, which is to produce huge quantities of such weapons, use them, lie about them and, even when forced to admit that he had them all along, fail to account properly for what he did with them.

I am surprised by some of the remarks that are made by people who profess to support resolution 1441. In a debate like this I would have expected resolution 1441 to be quoted time and again. I do not think that it has been quoted at all, so I shall briefly quote it now. The resolution decides that Iraq

> "has been and remains in material breach of its obligations under relevant resolutions"

and provides the

> "final opportunity to comply"—

not the pre-final, not the pre-pre-final, not the opportunity before the opportunity before the opportunity before the opportunity that might one day, in 12 years' time, be the final opportunity, but the

"final opportunity to comply".

Mr. Salmond: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Lewis: No, I will not. I am very happy to give way to people who have given way to me.

Mr. Salmond: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Lewis: No. The resolution requires

"that Iraq cooperate immediately, unconditionally, and actively with UNMOVIC and the IAEA".

What is meant by active co-operation? It is a recognition that there is no prospect whatsoever of inspectors detecting the quantities of chemical and biological weapons that Saddam had to admit were manufactured unless he actively helps them to find them. There is no prospect of more time enabling greater discoveries.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Lewis: No. The question is whether Saddam will actively assist the inspectors in finding his unaccounted stocks, and the answer to that is clearly in the negative. That is why Saddam is in breach, and why we have to look very carefully at the recommendation that we should continue to give more time. The comparison is made between 11 weeks now and 12 years in the past. The fact is that during every conflict in which this country has engaged, one could have heard arguments analogous to those that we have heard today. Plenty of people argued that it was wrong to take action against the Nazis, until it became so late that the action that had to be taken proved much more costly than that which could have been taken earlier. Had such action been taken earlier, it would have been denounced as unwarranted and pre-emptive.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby) *rose—*

Dr. Lewis: It must be said that in subsequent conflicts and confrontations, many of the very same people who are arguing against action now were arguing against it then. Those who said, in advance of the action that was eventually taken against the Hitlerite regime, that no action was justified get a bad press, because they are now regarded as having had no reasonable arguments. Let me assure you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that if we could revisit the debates that took place in this House in the 1930s, we would hear arguments for appeasement just as sophisticated as those put forward today. Those arguments were wrong then, and they are wrong now. It will be a grave mistake if people think that the cause of peace is served by always avoiding conflict. Sometimes, the only way to bring about peace is to face up to the need for conflict, and this is one of those occasions.

4.58 pm

Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): We are now in a phoney peace. War drums are rolling, and I approach the next few weeks with a deep sense of foreboding, but also with a great deal of respect for those in my party and in the House generally—experts, former diplomats—who come to a different conclusion, including even my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Kelvin (Mr. Galloway), who made a passionate speech but offered not a scintilla of criticism of Saddam Hussein.

It is clear to me that the threat of force has indeed produced some results. The concessions made by Saddam Hussein just before the publication of Dr. Blix's report were predictable and, indeed, predicted. The fear is that a series of future benchmarks would equally lead to some grudging and minimal concessions, just before such reports were made. It is clear that force is the only language that Saddam Hussein understands, but there are many uncertainties. Different judgments will be made about the very grave cost-benefit analysis that has been made. I therefore view with respect those who take a different view. I am much less happy with those on either side of the argument who have absolutist convictions.

How did we get to this point? First, the pressure on Saddam Hussein did not begin on 8 November last year. He was defeated after he invaded Kuwait. There was a ceasefire resolution. He remains in breach of that resolution. Over the period of the 1990s, Saddam Hussein prevaricated, concealed, lied and obstructed the work of the inspectors.

I pose two critical questions. Why not give Saddam Hussein more time? Why act now?

The obvious retort to the first question is, time for what? If Dr. Blix asks for more time when he appears before the Security Council, in my judgment he should be given it. However, inspections will have limited relevance without proactive co-operation from the regime.

This is not a treasure hunt. The test is whether the Saddam Hussein regime is co-operating with the weapons inspectors. Resolution 1441 was wholly unambiguous. It required a complete declaration. Clearly, there were major gaps in the dossier produced on 8 December. Failure to comply and co-operate fully would be a further material breach.

There have been 12 years of diplomacy. It is 12 years to the day since Saddam Hussein ordered his troops to retreat from Kuwait. There have been years of inspection and sanctions. How long can that go on? Resolution 1441 talked of

"immediate, unconditional and active co-operation".

Do any colleagues in the House believe that what has happened over the four months since 1441 was passed amounts to

"immediate, unconditional and active co-operation"?

The second question that I posed was, why now? Clearly there is valid concern about extending the doctrine of pre-emptive self-defence. Its implications for international law are potentially very dangerous indeed. The US has been only too ready to push the doctrine to the limits. There has not been sufficient debate on the subject, but we have to accept that weapons of mass destruction pose new challenges that current international law does not meet.

Mr. Salmond: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Donald Anderson: No.

[Donald Anderson]

If Saddam Hussein were to obtain nuclear capacity—and he came fairly close to doing so—and then invaded Kuwait, he could, from an almost impregnable position, challenge the international community to dislodge him. North Korea is relatively invulnerable now, for similar reasons. Equally, Saddam Hussein's hostility to the west means that there is a very serious danger that, at some time, he could pass chemical and biological weapons to terrorist networks.

Would any war be a just war? As a Christian, I welcome the contributions from the archbishops. It is right that they should draw our attention to just war principles, but that invites questions about their role. Those principles are there to make us think morally, but they have certain ambiguities. The archbishops acknowledge that those who must make the decisions have access to information that better enables them to answer questions such as, "Have all other options been exhausted? Will a war be effective?" In the final analysis, we are dealing not with absolutes but with judgments, based on the available facts, including intelligence facts.

Is war inevitable in the next few weeks? We have left Saddam Hussein a number of exit doors, and thus far he has refused to use them. The tempo of Dr. Blix is increasing. He has demanded that the missiles be destroyed. How will Saddam Hussein respond to that test? What has happened to the 1.5 tonnes of VX agents, the 3,000 tonnes of precursor chemicals and the more than 30,000 special munitions? We know that the Iraqis are normally punctilious in their record keeping. If they have destroyed those munitions, fine, there must be records and evidence, but none has been produced in the past four months.

As for the scientists, the human factor is the weak link. Of course there is an aura of extreme intimidation of those scientists. If there is nothing to hide, why has Saddam Hussein gone to such trouble to prevent the scientists from being interviewed openly?

How should we operate in the next few weeks? We have to realise what is at stake: of course, it is the credibility of the UN, which has given a final opportunity. There can be no debate about the word "final". What should happen? Clearly, we have to focus on disarmament, not on regime change. We have to maintain maximum pressure, and not be forced by a military timetable.

Finally, my view is that the Prime Minister took a strategic decision to stand alongside President Bush, and that has had positive effects. It was a courageous decision. It has given my right hon. Friend unique leverage, which should now be used to ensure that diplomatic options are pursued to an end. War is truly the last resort, but after 12 years, that "final opportunity" cannot go on indefinitely.

5.6 pm

Patrick Mercer (Newark): I should like to pay tribute not only to the right hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) whom I follow in the debate, but to the enormously powerful speech made by the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd), who is sadly no longer with us. *[Interruption.]* Anyone who could doubt the moral elements of those remarks would clearly be challenged to make a more arresting or clearer case for what has been going on in Iraq at the moment.

During the last Gulf war, I, as usual, was stuck in Northern Ireland, but I saw many of my colleagues disappear to fight in the Gulf, with a spring in their step and with a light heart. They felt that they were going to be involved in a cause that was supported by the nation and a war that was justified and had moral, religious and political backing. Most of them, of course, had not seen battle before, but when they came back they were a different generation. Very few of them were killed in action. Some were killed, sadly, by the American air force, and a very few were killed by the enemy.

I am conscious of the fact that I am in the company of my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham and Mid-Kent (Hugh Robertson), who was actually there, but I do not think that any of them who had killed a fellow man approached life in the same way again. *[Interruption.]* I hear the word "good" coming from the Labour Benches—quite right. Any hon. Member who has seen the pictures that have been shown recently of the killing on the Basra road cannot doubt what the consequences of war are.

I can clearly recall teaching a young naval officer at the staff college who had had the miserable opportunity of firing eight missiles into Iraqi gunboats. He freely admitted that the first one was challenging. There was a sense of elation when his missile struck home, and every member of the crew was killed. When he got back to his ship, the reaction began to set in. By the time that he was flying against his sixth, seventh and even eighth target, he was heartily sick of the whole prospect.

No hon. Member wants war, and the House needs to remember that, if we go to war, some of our young men and women will not come back, and probably tens of thousands of our enemies—I use the term advisedly—will die in this war. Some of them will be guilty, some innocent.

To that end, after much thought and much soul searching, despite the Government's wholly inconsistent arguments, I have come to believe that war has got to be credibly threatened, that the forces have got to be put in place, and that nothing except a cohesive and unified approach to war may allow peace to prevail.

I referred to the inconsistent arguments. Where has the argument about terrorism gone? Until a few weeks ago, it was one of the linchpins of the Government's case. Today, interestingly, no Front-Bench Member mentioned it. One or two speeches have referred to terrorism, and it is interesting to note that, without doubt, the events of 11 September have caused America to think in the way she is thinking at the moment. Let us think about this: although Australia helped in the campaign in Afghanistan, what really impelled that country to stand firmly behind the United Kingdom and the United States were the events in Bali.

So far this country has remained relatively untouched by such terrorism. I ask the House to remember exactly what happened 10 days or so ago. There was a major alert. For the first time in 10 years, light tanks were seen at Heathrow airport, troops were patrolling fly lines, and it was clear that there was a severe threat. Let us bear in mind the fact that, so far, in this country, only one policeman has been killed in the war on terrorism.

The House is naïve, however, if it does not remember that our intelligence agencies cannot give us the clear and unequivocal evidence necessary.

I do not believe that Saddam Hussein poses an imminent threat to his neighbours, to surrounding countries or to British possessions overseas. I am convinced, however—I may be alone in saying this—that he is behind much of the terrorist activity that goes on throughout the world. I believe, as I have said previously, that the House is unnecessarily hung up on the name bin Laden. I would not for one moment try to suggest that there is a direct connection between 11 September and Baghdad. Let us look again, however, at the evidence that Mr. Powell produced of the link between Baghdad and other terrorist groups that are active inside this country. Let us read between the lines and see exactly what the intention of this tyrant with his weapons of mass destruction is. It cannot be stated openly, and I have challenged the Government on several occasions to prove the link. They have so far been unsuccessful, but I beg the House to understand that this threat is imminent and it is one that we have not yet experienced, despite this nation's understanding of the campaigns of the IRA and other terrorist organisations.

I end on this note: if we are to avoid war, we must try to be unified in our credible threat of force. The regime with which we are dealing is an evil one, which is bent on destruction. I fear that we must accept that, as we pursue this course, we will be more and more vulnerable to the sort of terrorism that I have mentioned. We must not be cowed or bullied, however, and we must stand up to terrorists as well as tyrants; only by being unified can we succeed.

5.14 pm

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): Like others who are waiting to be called to speak, I have listened to every speech and have tried to understand the way in which people have been reading between the lines. Although the sentiments of many hon. Members who spoke to the amendment are compatible with my own, I differ from them in my understanding of what the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary have said.

Some hon. Members have had virulent words to say about George Bush but not about Saddam Hussein. I understand their fears and concerns—perhaps not those to do with George Bush, but certainly those to do with people around him, such as Donald Rumsfeld and Paul Wolfowitz. Some mornings, I have got up and thought, "My God. We're going to war today." There is tension because we could, at any time, find ourselves dragged into a war.

I shall vote for the motion this evening. I have been asked to take note of the Command Paper, which is a factual and straightforward document. It reminds us that the story began in 1991—in particular with paragraphs 7 to 14 of part C of resolution 687. Had that resolution been followed at the time, the Government of Iraq would have reported in full on its weapons of mass destruction.

Mr. Mike Wood (Batley and Spen): Would my hon. Friend confirm that resolution 687 also calls for the creation of a weapons-of-mass-destruction-free zone in the middle east, which would entail the end of Israel's nuclear arsenal?

Mr. Griffiths: Of course I will confirm that. Having read the resolution, I am not surprised by my hon. Friend's point. However, it was Saddam Hussein who launched an unprovoked attack on Kuwait, so the world community was justified in wanting to see his weapons of mass destruction destroyed. Under resolution 687, the UN Secretary-General and the Security Council were given 45 days to set up a special commission, and a further 120 days to lay out the process of verification of the report made by Saddam Hussein. We know that by 1999, after a great deal of harassment, the inspectors decided that they could not carry on with their work and withdrew.

In the meantime, there was the no-fly zone policy, which provided for containment. It seemed to me that Saddam Hussein was quite happy with that. It left him, his family and his collaborators in power, living a life of wealth and luxury that the vast majority of his citizens could not even begin to dream about; and it meant that he was able to terrorise and kill people as he pleased, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) graphically described. Thousands died every year in a state that did not comply with a United Nations resolution that could have solved the problem. The resolution could also have solved other problems in the wider middle east, by creating a nuclear-free zone. I think that all of us would like to see that.

At the outset of this debate, the Foreign Secretary reassuringly said that there would be another vote in this House at, or around, the time that the second resolution was being put to the United Nations. I also got a clear feeling that there would be a vote before we went to war. I will support the motion tonight, but there should be a second United Nations resolution and a vote in this House to keep the pressure on Saddam Hussein. There is a possibility of sorting out this terrible démarche peacefully. However, there are moments when my heart begins to stop because of the actions of, in particular, the people around George Bush, who would lead us into a war.

Several speakers have deliberately overlooked a crucial point: the inspectors still have an important role in reporting to the United Nations about the credibility or otherwise of their efforts in Iraq. Yesterday, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said:

> "If Saddam is willing genuinely to co-operate, the inspectors should have up to July, and beyond July—as much time as they want."—[*Official Report*, 25 February 2003; Vol. 400, c. 125.]

With those words echoing in my mind, I am happy to support the Government in the knowledge that we shall have further opportunities to debate the issue. If Dr. Blix reports that he is receiving co-operation from Saddam Hussein's regime, he will be given the time that he needs to carry out the inspections and to reveal the weapons of mass destruction. We can be thankful that the issue has been pushed to this point.

Like many people, I believe that the consequences of any war are incredibly difficult to judge. I have been involved in encouraging efforts to find a resolution to the Christian-Muslim conflict in Indonesia, where people are deeply fearful that a war in Iraq could result

[Mr. Griffiths]

in a total upset of the work being done to try to maintain good relations between Muslims and Christians in that country. The Government of Indonesia believe that it would be extremely difficult to control extremists and prevent them from getting the upper hand there. We already have the experience of the Bali bombing.

There is a tremendous amount at stake in the debate and the votes that follow it. However, from what my right hon. Friends the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister have said—particularly from what the Prime Minister said yesterday—I believe that the inspectors will have the time to resolve the problem peacefully. In that context, I am very happy to support the Government tonight.

5.22 pm

Mrs. Patsy Calton (Cheadle): The Prime Minister's position last July when he first talked of supporting President Bush in regime change in Iraq was followed by an apparent failure to recognise the growing public disquiet at what is effectively a headlong rush to a pre-emptive strike on Iraq. The world does not feel a safer place than it did last July.

I am disgusted—I know that my constituents are, too—by the propagandist manoeuvrings to which we as a people and as a Parliament have been subject. It does not matter how often the Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for Defence and the Foreign Secretary mouth the words "weapons of mass destruction", "anthrax" and "VX"; so far, none has been found and no intent to use them has been displayed.

Yesterday, I asked the House of Commons Library for a briefing note. While the Prime Minister continues to speak of weapons of mass destruction, it is important that we examine the scientific evidence for the likelihood of their being there. The Library says that

> "it is impossible to completely prevent the deterioration of chemicals regardless of the environmental and storage precautions taken."

Dr. Julian Lewis: What about anthrax?

Mrs. Calton: I shall be coming to anthrax in a moment.

The Library briefing continues:

> "Thus water contamination can be a problem, even if the available water is very small. Fluctuating temperatures that cause condensation can cause a problem."

Various obstacles were encountered in ensuring the stability of chemical and biological agents and preventing their deterioration even when the United States, the Soviet Union and the United Kingdom had their own chemical and biological weapons programmes. In some instances, the addition of a stabiliser to a nerve agent or other chemical agents to prevent decomposition or deterioration can lengthen their lifetime.

> "The British Government alleged in its dossier on Iraq's WMD programmes that Iraq had the knowledge and capability to add stabiliser, although there are question marks as to whether Iraq actually succeeded in deploying such a capability."

Those are not my words, but those of the Library.

Undoubtedly, by the time of the Gulf war in early 1991, Iraq had developed advanced chemical and biological weapons programmes, but few sources believe that Iraq continued to produce such weapons during the 1990s while the UN inspection process was under way, even though the existence of an offensive biological weapons programme came to light only in 1995. Therefore, between 1991 and 1998, Iraq would have been dependent on existing stocks produced prior to 1991, which would have deteriorated to a greater or lesser extent, depending on the nature of the agent in question. Thus the main question mark over Iraq's current capability centres on whether it resumed the production of chemical and biological weapons following the departure of the United Nations Special Commission in December 1998.

Glen Rangwala, an Iraq analyst at Cambridge university, has compiled views on Iraq's alleged weapons of mass destruction capabilities. His website examines the claims for each of the various weapons and makes very interesting reading. He says:

> "If Iraq had a stockpile of chemical and biological weapons in 1998, it must consist of items produced prior to 1991. Not even the British government claims that Iraq was engaged in the active production of chemical or biological weapons in the period of weapons inspections (1991 to 1998)".

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): Will the hon. Lady tell us whether the person whose work she is quoting is a scientist or a political academic whose main interest is the politics of the west bank?

Mrs. Calton: I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention. I understand that the academic in question has a scientific background, but I would be very happy to ensure that she gets the full details of the information that I have. It would certainly be very surprising if he were simply an analyst without any scientific background.

Glen Rangwala goes on to deal with anthrax. I asked the Library about anthrax because the Government have always indicated that anthrax is measured in litres and I was interested in that point. It seems that Iraq has almost always deployed anthrax as wet anthrax. In those circumstances, it is extremely unlikely that that anthrax is still a weapons-grade material. There have been arguments about the storage of anthrax, which is why we need weapons inspectors to examine the situation. A report published on 9 September 2002 states:

> "wet anthrax from . . . the 1989–90 period—if stored properly—would still be infectious."

None the less, it would have to be stored properly, and the suggestion that it can be moved around is very difficult to support.

The document goes on to deal with sarin and cyclosarin, and says that both those chemicals would have deteriorated rapidly. US experts have considered chemical warfare agents that are less than 50 per cent. pure to be militarily ineffective. Indeed, the CIA has said that it is extremely unlikely that those materials are more than 18 per cent. pure.

I understand that my time is short, so I shall make my point. We are talking about weapons of mass destruction that involve chemical and biological agents. The weapons inspectors must be in there to see whether indeed those materials still exist. If they do not exist, and everything has been produced since 1998, then yes, there is an issue, but it is not clear that there is an issue in terms of weapons of mass destruction. Until we are absolutely certain about the way forward—about whether we are talking about old deteriorated weapons of mass destruction or ones that have been made more recently—we should certainly not be going to war.

5.30 pm

Mr. Mohammad Sarwar (Glasgow, Govan): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this very important debate.

It is important to re-emphasise that those of us who are opposed to war in this House and across our nation are not friends of Saddam Hussein. We were against him when he invaded Iran, we opposed him when he invaded Kuwait and we spoke out against him when he used chemical weapons against his own people. Unfortunately, the UK and US Governments supported and armed him in the 1980s. I am surprised that no apology was forthcoming from Conservative Front Benchers for supporting Saddam Hussein when he used chemical weapons against his own people. The American Administration is extremely well informed about Iraq's weaponry. As *The Scotsman* pointed out last Friday, Donald Rumsfeld probably still has the receipts. Like many opponents of military action, I am proud to say that we have been friends of the Iraqi people over two decades of Saddam's rule and we remain their friends today. We are concerned about the tens of thousands of lives at risk through an attack on Iraq. That is the real moral issue that we must all face.

The overwhelming majority of people in Britain support us in sharing that sceptical view. In my constituency, my party membership is unanimously opposed to war, including the former Member of Parliament for Govan and Cabinet Minister Bruce Millan. Among the general public, people from all walks of life are openly talking about opposition to war, including Govan's most famous son, Sir Alex Ferguson. Given that we have seen more than 70,000 people gather in Glasgow alongside 1 million in London to demonstrate their opposition to war, I must ask my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench if they are listening to the people of Scotland and of Britain. I have not found anyone outside this House—no one among the real people whom we seek to represent—who is in favour of war. People here and around the world are clearly against war. There is no groundswell of support for military action.

The 52 African Governments expressed their opposition at their recent summit. If Al Gore had been elected President by the Supreme Court Judges instead of George W. Bush, we would have an American Administration opposed to war. Our own policy on Iraq demonstrates that the Government are not at the heart of Europe, but in the heart of President George Bush. The policies of our key European allies, led by President Chirac and Chancellor Schröder, are more in line with British opinion than my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister.

The French President expressed that clearly when he said,

"there is no reason . . . to change our logic, which is the logic of peace and switch to a logic of war".

I do not doubt my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's good intentions but I disagree profoundly with his support for President Bush. I am suspicious of the genuine motive for the American position. Saddam Hussein is as great a monster today as he was 20 years ago. The only difference is that he was our monster then.

Iraq has the largest oil reserves in the world today. The American Administration is brimming with oil interests. Almost every key member, from President Bush downwards, has been heavily involved in the oil industry. The United States should not try to buy support in the United Nations Security Council. The 15 nations should be given enough objective evidence to reach a fair and independent assessment of the situation in Iraq.

The international coalition is being built with bribery and by bullying smaller nations such as Chile and Cameroon. That starkly contrasts with the joining of forces to repel Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. The business press always gives the bottom line on what is really happening. Yesterday, the *Financial Times* reported that America was preparing to pay a high price for support in its bargaining with Turkey. The *Financial Times* stated that

"this time America's allies are waiting to be bought off",

and that the cost would be dear in "hard cash" and "IOUs".

It is sad to see America's loyal ally, Turkey, "haggling furiously". From a first US offer of $2 billion to $3 billion and an initial Turkish demand for $92 billion, it appears that a settlement of $16 billion has been reached. Is that any way to pull a stable international coalition together? Dr. Mahathir bin Mohamad, the Prime Minister of Malaysia, puts matters more starkly. He believes that it is

"no longer a war against terrorism, it is in fact a war to dominate the world".

I recently spoke to Americans who opposed military action. They made it clear that their biggest problem is not President Bush but my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. If he did not support United States policy, any backing for war would collapse across the Atlantic. Those who argue that President Bush would go to war alone, without our Prime Minister's support, are wrong. President Bush needs Prime Minister Blair to sell the war in the United States. That is shown in the efforts to prove a tenuous link between al-Qaeda and Saddam, based on the presence of an al-Qaeda group in northern Iraq. It is disappointing that the fair-minded Colin Powell could present that to the United Nations as evidence.

W[illegible]l know that al-Qaeda terrorists operate in Britain, the United States and many other nations. Clearly, that does [illegible] mean that our Government or any other support al-Qaeda. The claim has no credibility. Saddam and Osama bin Laden are implacable opponents. They oppose each other as much as President Bush opposes them both. We should not look for a spurious link to terrorism as an excuse for war against Iraq.

The UN weapons inspectors are in Iraq for a reason. The international community sent Dr. Blix and the skilled inspectors to do a job. They should be allowed the time that they need to complete it.

[Mr. Mohammad Sarwar]

I end with a quote from the leader comment in *The Guardian* today:

> "To go to war now would be to act without the freely given consent of the vast majority of nations; without the support of key allies; without a legally unambiguous mandate; without just cause, and against the wishes of the people of the west and the Muslim world."

I shall vote for the amendment.

5.39 pm

Bob Spink (Castle Point): Like the hon. Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Connarty), I spent last week in Iraq. We visited the Iraqi Parliament, refugees and hospitals. The Iraqi Kurds asked us to speak for them when we returned. They support the Prime Minister's moral policy but they asked us to raise some key questions.

The first is that Turkish troops must, at all costs, be kept out of Iraqi Kurdish territories unless the Kurds invite them, which is extremely unlikely. Their incursion would be dangerous, destabilising and unnecessary. Secondly, the Kurdish people need more specific protection during the run-up to, and during the prosecution of any war. For instance, they need gas masks. Thirdly, we must keep the period of interim military governance of Iraq very short and hand over to Iraqi Opposition leaders as soon as Saddam's murderous and evil regime falls.

Jeremy Corbyn: I am aware that the hon. Gentleman was in Kurdistan last week. Did he get any sense of the fact that an agreement had been reached with Turkey to leave the Kurdish autonomous region alone, or is the opposite the case and the 20,000 Turkish troops on the border are poised to invade when the Americans invade from the south?

Bob Spink: The hon. Gentleman puts his finger on an important point. The Prime Minister of Iraqi Kurdistan is fearful that Turkish troops will go into Kurdistan, which he thinks will be extremely damaging and destabilising. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising that.

The fourth key issue is that we need to keep supplies of food and medicine going into Iraqi Kurdistan during any conflict period to help the millions who depend on them. In particular, we must continue aid immediately after any conflict finishes. Fifthly, we must get the oil-for-food money flowing properly under UN resolution 986 and stop the hold ups and possible corruption of that programme. Sixthly, we must assist Iraq post-Saddam to establish a federal state that is based on a parliamentary democracy with an autonomous Kurdish region. The Kurdish people do not now seek independence. Instead, they want to operate within a federal Iraq, with the oil reserves managed at a federal level and shared equitably between the regions. Finally, they hope that our Government will encourage the Turkish authorities to allow the 150 international journalists who are on the border in Turkey to pass into north Iraq so that they can see what is going on. That is in keeping with European standards and Turkey is holding them up.

We visited a refugee camp of 50,000 internally displaced people where thousands of families were still living in mud huts and tents. We met a family that had been thrown out of their home in Kirkuk by Saddam only two weeks earlier under his Arabisation ethnic cleansing programme. They suffered the sort of abuses that the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) so eloquently outlined. Anyone who thinks that Saddam is safe in his box should have been with me to hear the tale of that family and to see the horrendous harm and devastation reaped on them by Saddam.

We also visited the Salahaddin university, which is close to Saddam's front-line army, and held meetings with lecturers and many English-speaking students. When we asked the students whether they thought that Saddam had chemical weapons and would use them, they stood up and shouted, "Of course." They thought it naïve of me even to ask. They said that some of them had not slept for five nights because they were worried that Saddam would retaliate by using chemicals against them. People were trying to make improvised gas masks from plastic bags and electrical insulation tape.

The students were in no doubt that Saddam has weapons of mass destruction and, given half the chance, would use them on the Kurds again, causing the unimaginably terrible consequences that they experienced before. They wanted our protection, but in a show of hands voted unanimously for Saddam's regime to be removed as quickly and cleanly as possible for their safety. They were entirely in step with the other Iraqi Kurds that we met. Other questions that we put to a formal vote to the students, who are the future of Iraq, revealed that they think that war to remove Saddam is justified because, on balance, it would save thousands of innocent lives. However, they need our protection during such a war.

We visited the Freedom hospital in Arbil, which has cut its operations to only 25 per cent. in preparation for the expected war casualties. We saw doctors and nurses standing by empty beds, waiting. The hospital is stockpiling medicines and surgical equipment as part of a co-ordinated plan to deal with the casualties of that war. Its staff know that casualties will be forthcoming, and accept that.

Mr. Salmond: The hon. Gentleman's personal experience of Kurdistan is very telling, but he will have observed that the amendment is supported by the hon. Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Connarty), who accompanied him on his visit.

Bob Spink: The hon. Member for Falkirk, East will speak for himself, but I can tell the hon. Gentleman that when he accompanied me to Iraq he opposed the Prime Minister's action while I was in favour of it, and that he seemed to change his mind on the basis of what he encountered during the visit.

Along with many others, those at the Freedom hospital provided evidence that the UN resolution 986 oil for food money had not been flowing through properly. We met Prime Minister Nechirwan Barzani, and sent a plea for help from him to our Prime Minister in the form of a videotape. We delivered it to the Prime Minister yesterday. We spoke at the Parliament, and listened carefully to messages from the democratically elected representatives of the Iraqi Kurds. I have now delivered most of those messages.

It was clear to us that the people of Iraqi Kurdistan are battle-hardened and battle-ready. They want to remove Saddam's evil dictatorship, which has slaughtered so many of them; but they need to be reassured that if a conflict is initiated they will be given protection, because at present they feel rather like sitting ducks. They suspect that Saddam will try to throw chemical weapons at them as soon as he knows that war is inevitable, and they want us to do the job properly this time.

As is the case with many other Members, this is the most difficult issue with which I have had to deal during my time as a parliamentarian, but the bottom line as regards morality is absolutely clear to me. If taking action would save more lives than doing nothing—as the Iraqi Kurds themselves believe—we must have the moral courage to take action.

5.47 pm

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Manchester, Central): The most impressive speech I have heard so far was made by my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd), although my conclusions are very different from hers. She spoke very movingly about the real issues, and the hon. Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink) spoke in similar vein.

We must be clear about what is being proposed by both the Americans and the British through United Nations action. It is not regime change; it is the removal of weapons of mass destruction. There is a world of difference. This is not simply a narrow legal point: it is a very important technical and moral point, and it ultimately concerns where we will leave the world at the end of it all. If we are to talk of the need for regime change, we must bear in mind that there are many regimes in the world that we shall have to ask the United States and our own Government to investigate. Sadly, cruelty and barbarity are not the preserve of the odious Iraqi regime.

Let me explain why my conclusions are different from those of my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley. We know that during the last Gulf war some 100,000 people died as a direct or indirect consequence of military action. I believe that any military intervention driving all the way to Baghdad will cost more lives, both directly and indirectly. The aid agencies—the non-governmental organisations—are extremely concerned about the fragility of the infrastructure, which suggests that the death toll post-conflict, even with a military structure designed to bring in humanitarian aid, will be far higher than the death toll in Afghanistan, for instance, or the death toll in the aftermath of the last Gulf war. There is therefore a moral case for dealing with Saddam's brutality against his own people, and it cannot be wiped out by saying that going to war is the easy and obvious solution.

Mr. Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West and Penistone): Does my hon. Friend agree that in recent regime changes, such as those in Chile and Nicaragua, bad regimes have been replaced with worse regimes?

Mr. Lloyd: My hon. Friend makes a good point. It is important that those who advocate regime change examine the consequences.

Exactly what is the evidence for the threat that Iraq now poses to the rest of the world? Not many years ago, the Foreign Office and Downing street, now briefing on the need for action, were briefing Ministers—I do not think that I am breaching the Official Secrets Act—on the success of weapons inspections and our ability through containment and deterrence to maintain downward pressure on Saddam and Baghdad. I appreciate that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, who is currently on the Front Bench, is not going to respond to the debate, but perhaps she will pass on my concerns. We need to know when and why that advice changed, as that is fundamental to the reasons why we are threatening to go to war against Iraq. Frankly, there is no evidence for urgent action to prevent the proliferation of terrorist groups. Proliferation is less likely to occur in Iraq than in Russia, where the security of nuclear supplies is grossly inadequate. Our own Government and other Governments—the Americans are an honourable exception—have done almost nothing about the security of Russian nuclear supplies.

If we are serious about non-proliferation, let us start with Russia, and provide it with assistance. Or we could look at North Korea, which has been a proliferator and has a programme to create weapons of mass destruction and the technology to deliver them. The United States rightly drew the conclusion that military action would be the wrong way to resolve the situation in North Korea. It is important that we learn those lessons, as the House has got to know why we are taking one route in respect of North Korea and another in respect of Iraq. Some of my hon. Friends mocked when one of our colleagues talked about that the probability that military action would make the world more unstable and terrorism more likely. However, I well remember, even if they do not, that during the invasion of Kuwait pictures of Saddam were held up by dispossessed Palestinians. I condemn their actions, but we would be foolish and naïve not to realise that any invasion of Iraq will act as a recruiting ground for global terrorism. We ignore that at our peril.

At the moment, military action would be inhuman and cannot be justified as the moral war that a number of Members, particularly Opposition Members, have discussed. It would make the world less stable for our own citizens and other people. We must therefore examine very carefully the lurch to war. Can inspection and containment work? In the early 1990s, weapons inspections were successful, and resulted in the destruction of weapons. It is important that we give the inspectors the opportunity to carry out the work that we have asked them to undertake, and that we do not curtail it artificially. If we do so, the suspicion of people around the world that this war was pre-ordained, perhaps even pre-ordered, will be confirmed, and it will be impossible to convince the Arab world and people throughout the world that there was ever any intention to resolve the issue by anything other than military action.

This country has far too much to lose to be bounced into a war at the request of another nation, even at the request of such a strong and good ally as the United States. I strongly urge our Government and the world community to maintain the pressure on Saddam, to maintain the threat of military action, and to maintain

[Mr. Lloyd]

the inspection regime. However, a lurch to war would be at the cost of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis and potentially of many of our own citizens, and of a world that would be massively less stable in the future.

Mr. Galloway: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Although I am second to none in my admiration for my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, is it not extraordinary that no Minister from either the Ministry of Defence or the Foreign and Commonwealth Office is on the Front Bench to listen to this truncated debate, in order properly to reply when they sum up?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): The hon. Gentleman has expressed his feeling, but he knows that the occupant of the Chair is not responsible for who is present in the Chamber and who would answer a debate.

5.56 pm

Mr. Robert Walter (North Dorset): That was an excellent point of order. I hope that somebody is scurrying along the Corridors to find a Minister.

Whatever is said in the debate, one thing is clear in my mind: if the time comes for British troops to go into action, they must have our full and unequivocal support. The debate today is about whether that time has come. It is not, as a number of hon. Members have said, about the integrity of the President of the United States of America. It is about the integrity of British foreign policy.

The commitment of British lives to the defence of our nation and to the halting of blatant atrocities is in our history. The campaign in Afghanistan to seek out al-Qaeda, its leader Osama bin Laden and the Taliban regime that nurtured them, was a justified cause. But there is unfinished business in that country still. We have liberated the poppy farmers and the drug smugglers who now supply 90 per cent. of the heroin on our streets.

This debate is about Iraq. There is no doubt that Saddam Hussein is an evil dictator with scant regard for human rights. There is no doubt that in the past he has used chemical weapons against his own people. We know from the run-up to the last Gulf war that he sought an albeit crude delivery mechanism for his weapons. It is clear that, along with at least 10 other dubious regimes in the world, he would like to possess nuclear weapons.

Despite the Prime Minister's claims of "linkage", there is no evidence that Saddam has assisted al-Qaeda. There are Governments with whom we have good relations who have given much greater comfort to those evil terrorists. We await the evidence of the weapons inspectors that Saddam has weapons of mass destruction. If he possesses them, the evidence is clear that the range of any of his delivery mechanisms would be a threat to his near neighbours, most of whom seem totally unconvinced of the need for the war at the present time.

Opinion polls seem to suggest that the British people are unconvinced of the need for war. The letters, e-mails and lobbying from my constituents show me that there is severe disquiet in Dorset, as elsewhere, about this venture. In 1939 the case for war was clear and the people were in support. Hitler was an evil expansionist dictator who had to be restrained and defeated. In 1982 the decision to remove Argentine troops by force from the Falklands had the support of the British people. In 1990 the invasion of Kuwait was a clear act of aggression that had to be rectified by the use of force, and the British people agreed. There is, at this time, no clear act of aggression, and no invasion of another nation's territory. The British people—in fact, the peoples of the democratic, civilised world—remain unconvinced that we cannot rectify breaches of UN resolutions by peaceful means.

Mr. Wilkinson: Is my hon. Friend suggesting that we should go to war by opinion poll? That is really what his argument implies. How can he exclude the strong support that the President of the United States has for the action that he proposes?

Mr. Walter: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his intervention. I would never suggest that we should go to war by opinion poll. I do suggest, however, that the actions of the Government should have the consent of the people before they are enacted.

I want to move on to a more important point, which is that one quarter of the British Army has now been committed to the Gulf region for a war. They are the sons, daughters, husbands and wives of loyal, patriotic British people—parents and partners who have just pride in their loved ones who are going off to war. Like most Members of the House, I am too young to have known war, but, for the first time, I am one of those parents who will see one of their children enter the theatre of war. Along with tens of thousands of other British parents, I have seen a child of mine leave these shores to fight a war in a far-off land. My daughter is one of the small band of Army surgeons who are already in the Gulf for a war that now seems unstoppable.

It may be the nature of our modern democracy, but I, as the elected representative of 75,000 citizens, find it inconceivable that I will not have the chance to vote for or against this war. I am no pacifist, but I have spent my entire life believing in the politics of peace. I would love to see the removal of Saddam Hussein for the sake of the Iraqi people, but I would also like to see a host of other regimes disappear—in Burma, North Korea, Libya, Saudi Arabia and Zimbabwe, to name just a few. In justifying this form of pre-emptive action, parallels are being drawn with Nazi Germany. They are spurious. I will support an attack on Iraq if Saddam Hussein is shown to possess offensive weapons of mass destruction that pose a threat to the civilised world. Such support will not be given lightly, and must be bolstered by an affirmative resolution both at the United Nations and in the House of Commons.

I have signed and will support the amendment tabled in the name of the right hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith). It sends a clear message to the Government that we are not yet convinced that the time has come to commit the lives of British troops, or to wreak death on the innocent people of Iraq in pursuit of their leader. I hesitate to say that, however, having listened to the speech of the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd), which was echoed by my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink).

The hon. Lady's speech was eloquent and detailed in its account of the torture, abuse and murder conducted by the regime. I have so far been unconvinced by the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary, George Bush or others on the Government Front Bench—*[Laughter.]* However, if the hon. Lady had been on the Front Bench for the last six months, I might not be supporting the amendment this evening. I am also not convinced that the time has come to risk political turmoil in the Arab world, or to risk reprisals here at home from fundamentalist terrorists of whatever hue. Whatever the mandate of our troops in the field, if the decision is taken to go to war, every one of those British service men and women will deserve our full and unequivocal support.

6.4 pm

Mr. Tom Clarke (Coatbridge and Chryston): After five hours of debate, it is difficult to make a point that has not already been raised. Nevertheless, that gives one the opportunity to reflect on the debate, and it is in that spirit that I say that I had intended to declare my support for the amendment tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), and nothing I have heard in the debate has persuaded me that I should change my mind.

My right hon. Friend made the fundamental point that he sought to persuade the House that the case for military action is, as yet, unproven. I believe that to be the case. However—and other hon. Members who will support the amendment tonight may disagree—I cannot pretend that I have not been impressed by my colleagues on the Front Bench, including the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary. Some hon. Members have gone over the top in their criticisms of the role that my right hon. Friends have played.

I am not regarded as a critic of the United States, and I do not take the view that our Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary have simply responded to everything that the United States has said. Indeed, whatever criticisms I might have, I believe that when the history of this period is written, it may well record that—far from the picture painted by, I am sorry to say, the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond), for example—our Prime Minister had a great influence towards caution and stability on the part of the United States. Without him, Bush would not have gone to the United Nations at all.

That said, we are entitled to consider the consequences of a unilateral declaration of war. In common with the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), I take the view that some in the US Administration had already determined their position some time ago. I regret that whatever the arguments and the force of public opinion—and whatever the views expressed in this House—some in Washington seem determined to take unilateral action, and that could be very costly indeed.

Already we see problems in international organisations that I firmly support. I regret the unease in NATO, the disagreements within the European Union and, above all, the questions of credibility that have been placed at the door of the United Nations. I am sorry that, even during this debate, several hon. Members have said that if we do not respond to unilateral action, we will be following the route of the League of Nations. That organisation was destroyed because people failed to give it the kind of support that the United Nations is entitled to expect, not least from this House today.

On some of my visits abroad, I have seen evidence of the carnage that hon. Members on both sides of the House have mentioned in their speeches. I have visited Kurdistan on two occasions. I do not necessarily reach the same conclusions as the hon. Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink), and my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Connarty) tells me that he intends to support the amendment. When I visited Iran in the late 1980s, I saw the evidence of people suffering from the use of chemical weapons by Saddam Hussein. But in view of that, is it not all the more necessary that we should confirm the importance of the United Nations and its agencies in seeking a response to these problems?

More recently I visited Rwanda with some of my hon. Friends, including my hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Ms King). We saw there the aftermath of sheer genocide, a million people dying out of a population of 9 million, and we saw people now trying to deal with what took place.

I do not want to weaken the United Nations' influence in circumstances like that. I want to strengthen it, but I do not believe that it would be strengthened by unilateral action. It is right that my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury should give the lead tonight by inviting the House to express that view.

I am concerned about humanitarian considerations. That is why I am very keen to hear what Dr. Hans Blix eventually has to say. I do not believe that we should rush to judgment, nor do I believe that the British people feel that we should do so. If those of us who supported the Government's actions on Afghanistan on humanitarian grounds, and who supported the Government's actions on Kosovo on humanitarian grounds, take the view that there are grave concerns about the humanitarian consequences of war with Iraq, that seems to me entirely logical, a position shared by virtually all the aid agencies and non-governmental organisations, including CAFOD, and one to be taken seriously.

We want to avoid refugees. We want to avoid carnage. We want, if we can, to avoid war. That may not be possible, but I believe that it is right and that it strengthens the role of those who desperately search for peace to support my right hon. Friend's amendment, in the hope that we are addressing the concerns, not just of our own people, but of an increasingly disenchanted world.

6.12 pm

Mr. Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland): On 15 February some 1,000 of my constituents took to the streets to protest against the possibility of this country going to war in Iraq. To hon. Members who perhaps represent more compact areas, with perhaps more of a tradition of militant demonstration, that may not sound like much, but I am told that the 700 people who marched through the streets of Lerwick provided a sight that had never been seen before in the northern isles.

[Mr. Alistair Carmichael]

Those demonstrating ranged from the 700 marching in Lerwick, through people demonstrating on the steps of St. Magnus cathedral in Kirkwall, to a dozen or so parents and children demonstrating in the very small island of North Ronaldsay. The people who took to the streets to demonstrate were not wild-eyed extremists. Most of them were first-time protesters. Some were pacifists, but many were not. For the large part, they were teachers, crofters, fishermen, housewives, children—a whole range of people in the isles who wanted to make their view known. That view was that the case had not been made for war.

The reason I bring this up at this stage is that I think that the advent of these mass demonstrations—400,000 last year supporting the Countryside Alliance, 1 million against war in Iraq—is part of an ongoing process of disengagement from the party political process which we are part of here, as people find another way to express their views—views which they hope may influence the course of events.

The Government cannot be allowed to ignore the fact that they have not persuaded the public of the case for war. They must understand that the consequence of entering a war supported by the British Government but not by the British people will be to see an acceleration of that process of disengagement between people and politics. It would be a grotesque irony if we went [illegible] war in order to bring democracy to Iraq and in so doing dealt a fatal blow to the democratic institutions of our own country.

Much has been said during the debate about the despotism and loathsome record of Saddam Hussein. I was immensely impressed by the contribution of the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd), in particular. I, too, recall a friend from university days. He was an Iraqi student studying at Glasgow university, and he wept bitter tears as he told me in 1983 of the terrible things that Saddam Hussein was doing to his people, and of how desperate he was to make those in the west aware of the situation. However, nothing happened, because it suited this country and its foreign policy for nothing to happen. Then, we were quite happy for Saddam Hussein to be engaged in a war with Iran. Against that background, I am unable to say that I would never countenance going to war against Iraq; however, I cannot say that I am prepared for such action to be taken at the moment. The implications of war in Iraq will reach far beyond the boundaries of that country. Every bomb that is dropped on Iraq will be like a stone dropped into water: it will create ripples that spread far and wide.

In his speech today, the Foreign Secretary spoke at some length about 12 years of UN resolutions on Iraq. He also said a little about the double standards applied by the international community to the situation in Israel and Palestine, but he did not say much about UN resolutions there. I remind the House that it is 36 years since the first such resolution—242, which called on Israel to relinquish control of territories occupied in the war of 1967—was passed. Last year, five Security Council resolutions were passed relating to Israel and Palestine: 1397, 1402, 1403, 1405 and 1435. Resolution 1397

> "Demands immediate cessation of all acts of violence, including all acts of terror, provocation, incitement and destruction".

Yet as recently as last Sunday, six Palestinians were killed and 20 were injured during an Israeli raid in Gaza.

Mrs. Ellman: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Carmichael: I am sorry, but I do not have the time. The Government will have to explain why we are prepared to value some UN resolutions so much more highly than others. I am sad to say that the Foreign Secretary's words this afternoon had a rather hollow ring, and I am afraid that they will be greeted with anger and disbelief throughout the Arab world.

I want to say a few brief words about the United Nations. The UN is essential in order to put some moral legitimacy behind this issue, but such legitimacy is diminished every time that the US takes a bullying or bribing step. I want our Government to do much more when the US makes statements such as George Bush's reference to the UN's "so-called" weapons inspectors. Why does our Prime Minister not contradict him and stand up for the UN when he says such things? I also fail to see how a Government who purport to be committed to the UN as a means of resolving this issue can countenance introducing a resolution while Dr. Blix is still asking for more time. As my hon. Friend the Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Moore) said, the implication is that the United Kingdom and the United States want to go to war before Dr. Blix has done his job.

If the Government are going to persuade me at all, the spinning has got to stop—there can be no more dodgy dossiers. The stakes are exceptionally high, and if we are to put the lives of our troops at risk, we must do better. The troops deserve better, the public deserve better and this House deserves better, and until we get it the Government will not have my support.

6.19 pm

Ms Oona King (Bethnal Green and Bow): Nothing can weigh more heavily on a democratically elected politician than the decision to go to war. That is why, when I was called into the Whips' Office and asked if I would vote with the Government to take military action if Iraq failed to disarm, I said no. I said that I could not vote with the Government. My reasoning was that Iraq had not had enough time to comply with the UN and that, if Saddam Hussein were given further time, he might disarm.

That conversation took place on 17 February 1998—exactly five years ago. Was I right? Obviously not. What happened in the intervening five years? Saddam Hussein rebuilt his chemical processors. He constructed a missile test stand, as we have heard, to test weapons with four times the power of the al-Samoud missiles. He imported hundreds of missile engines, as Hans Blix confirmed in his report to the UN last month. He tried to buy enriched uranium to build a nuclear bomb. He continued his policies of repression, which, according to conservative estimates, have caused the deaths of

100,000 civilians, most of them Muslim. He has continued to flout the authority of the UN, and has made a mockery of international law.

In 1991, UN resolution 687 gave Saddam Hussein 15 days to disarm—a fortnight. Twelve years on, no one can deny that the only shred of progress that has been made is the result of the immediate and credible threat of force. Do we therefore give Saddam Hussein more time? Five years after pleading for that course of action, I recognise its futility.

The UN inspectors should be supported in their mission, but it is clear that Saddam Hussein is not co-operating. He continues to play games, declaring this week that he would never destroy his al-Samoud missiles so that he can do just that next week or the week after and thereby claim compliance. However, the games that Saddam Hussein is playing are not really the issue. Everyone agrees that he has not co-operated fully; what we disagree about is the international community's response.

There are five main reasons why people oppose military action to disarm Saddam Hussein. First, on balance, they believe that loss of life will be greater if there is military action than if we stay with the status quo. Other hon. Members have outlined eloquently the bloody cost of the status quo. Suffice it to say that inaction can sometimes cause as much loss of life as action. Secondly, people think that Saddam Hussein should be given more time. Five years ago, I agreed with that, but now I do not. Thirdly, people want a second UN resolution—so do I. Fourthly, people think that the Government are pursuing, and pushing for, action against Iraq only because of what George W. Bush wants. I shall return to that point. Fifthly, people think that regime change is not an acceptable objective. They are right, but I want regime change—in Washington.

People have spoken about anti-Americanism. They wonder why some people are sickened by George W. Bush. I shall explain why I am sickened by him. His double standards sicken me. The fact that he surrounds himself with religious fundamentalists sickens me. The fact that he is in the pocket of the oil industry sickens me. Above all, the fact that he bankrolls Ariel Sharon to continue the slaughter of Palestinians sickens me.

Israel can flout all the UN resolutions in the world, invade its neighbours' territories, develop weapons of mass destruction, and it does not even get a ticking off from George W. Bush. However, the question is not the extent to which George W. Bush is reprehensible; it is whether he is responsible for British Government policy.

I was going to say that the problem I have with that theory is that George W. Bush was not elected when the Government first tabled a resolution on this subject, but he was never elected. So I shall rephrase it and say that George W. Bush was not President when this Government first tabled a resolution that was very similar to the one considered today. George W. Bush was not President when Britain was at the forefront of efforts in the UN to disarm Saddam Hussein.

The present Leader of the House of Commons, my right hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), was Foreign Secretary when the debate was held on 17 February 1998. He said that

> "the House can be proud that, throughout the present crisis, Britain has taken the lead in drafting work at the UN."—[*Official Report*, 17 February 1998; Vol. 306, c. 899.]

We were taking the lead when George W. Bush was still playing with his oil wells, so the question is this: if we decide on a course of action, does that course of action become invalid because someone who sickens us agrees with us?

On a lighter note, I had to ask myself the same question during the debate on hunting, when the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) gave an impassioned speech to ban hunting. I almost became pro-hunting, but not quite. The point is that, on a question of conscience, all Members must vote on the basis on what they believe to be right, not on what anyone else believes to be right. That is what I and most other hon. Members will do. I agree with the text that we shall vote on today:

> "That this House . . . calls upon Iraq to recognise this as its final opportunity to comply with its disarmament obligations."

That is what I believe in; that is what I will vote for.

Turning to related concerns—Afghanistan—Britain is working flat out to shore up that tortured country. Where are the Americans? Why have they not upheld their promise not to walk away from the people of Afghanistan? Is it because there is no oil in that country? What of post-war Iraq? Will the Foreign Secretary confirm that the Government favour a UN Administration, not an American oligarchy? What of the middle east? The Government must make further progress on the middle east.

Will the Foreign Secretary assure me that Britain will look at securing a UN resolution, forcing Israel back to its 1967 borders and, in the long term, securing a viable Palestinian state? Will he further assure me that if such a resolution faced an unreasonable veto by a Security Council member—for example, America—Britain would still take action outside the UN, if necessary, to secure justice for Palestinians?

Finally, I want to mention the extremely difficult situation facing Muslims in this country and in my constituency. Ever since the events of 11 September, Muslims have been under suspicion purely on account of their faith. Most Muslims and, indeed, most Asians have reported increased antagonism. That is because the war on terror means something different to everyone. It is spreading its tentacles in a confused and insidious manner. It has become a war on asylum seekers, refugees and, by extension, various ethnic minorities. At its most extreme and stupid, it has become a war on men with beards. It is disgraceful that it is being allowed to drift in that way, and I know that several Members agree.

Let us be clear what this should be about: it is about disarming rogue states with weapons of mass destruction and preventing a future scenario—not a past one—where terrorist networks get hold of weapons of mass destruction, such as anthrax and VX nerve gas, from a rogue states such as Iraq, and deploy them in another country such as Britain.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. The hon. Lady has had her time.

6.27 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): I am delighted to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, even at the tail end of the debate.

[Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown]

Judging from the 200-odd letters that I have received in my constituency, it is clear that the British people do not believe that a case for war has yet been made. I appeal to the Government to expand on this matter in the media, so that my constituents and others can be convinced of that cause.

UN resolution 1441 must be upheld in one way or another, although the UN's credibility would be hugely strengthened if a further resolution could be obtained, even if it is passed by just a majority of the members of the Security Council, not unanimously. It is clear that Saddam Hussein is one of the biggest tyrants that the world has ever seen, and that he is continuing to try to acquire weapons of mass destruction. As recently as last March, he tried to acquire rocket motors to have rockets with a far greater launch capability.

It is also clear that, in the 12 years since the Gulf war, some 360,000 children have been killed in Iraq as a result of Saddam Hussein's activities. That man has to be stopped; his weapons of mass destruction have to be removed one way or another, and he has to be convinced that the UN and world consortium is tightening the ratchet around him and that he will not be allowed to get away with it.

In the minute that I have left, I should like to talk about the aftermath of the war. If the case of the British Government is that we are relieving the suffering of the Iraqi people, we must surely also strenuously ensure that, in the aftermath of war, the humanitarian and oil-for-food aid is quickly disseminated among the Iraqi people, so that their long-held suffering can be ended as soon as possible.

The stability of the middle east will be of paramount importance after the war, particularly given its neighbour, Iran, which has a large air force and a navy. It is essential that a strongly based interim Government are put in place quickly after the war.

Finally, it is essential that the UN resolutions on the Israel-Palestine situation are rigorously enforced and upheld; otherwise, the base for terrorism in Palestine from Hamas and other extremist Islamic organisations will remain, and there will still be a launch pad for terrorism from that part of the world.

6.30 pm

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): Today's debate has been important for the House of Commons. It has been a tribute to the skills, knowledge and passions contained in the House.

In the last few hours, nearly 40 Members have spoken. I think that all of us are decent people wrestling with a profound dilemma that will shape the world for decades. As I scour the names added to the amendment of the right hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), I assure him and all those who have signed it that I do so with complete respect, and that is not just because he is my pair—not yet invoked, given the current parliamentary imbalance. He and his co-signatories have an honest and cogent position, which nobody has the right to deride.

In summing up this debate, I hope that, in return, the House will accept that I in no way represent the slightly nasty caricature used to label us by the hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Alan Simpson), which was uncharacteristic on his part: keen-to-bomb Tories. That is far from our position. I have lived and breathed the events of the middle east for nearly 20 years. I have tried to learn its history and to travel to all corners of the middle east. I have met many of its rulers and its people and have explored its culture and society.

Let me therefore try to address the arguments that have been put primarily by those who support the amendment, which was signed by well over 100 people today. Let me say at the outset that the core argument of the right hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury was that if the amendment were rejected, that would be seen as signifying war. As in so much of what we are discussing, however, an equal and opposite argument exists. The obverse of what he says is that, if the amendment were accepted, that could be seen as signifying a weakening of resolve.

I shall approach the arguments of the right hon. Gentleman's supporters in three areas, which I hope will sum up the whole of tonight's debate. In viewing the prospect of war, we must examine and assess the reasons for it, the authority for it and its repercussions. The reasons have been discussed in depth. Many believe that the prospect of war and the reasons for it are unproven, that it is unnecessary, and that we should leave Saddam Hussein be. I used to believe that containment would suffice. I thought for a long time that Saddam Hussein was a bit like Marshall Tito in Yugoslavia—a bad but not necessarily mad man who confined his nastiness to his own country, and who should therefore be tolerated, even though it was distasteful to do so. I have come to believe, however, that Saddam's possession of biological and chemical weapons in particular pose a genuine and serious risk, to the point at which a single glass of anthrax left on the London tube could kill all the people who went on the march in London last Saturday. If a capability of that sort were ever to get into the wrong hands, it would unleash danger in the world the like of which we have never been called on to contend with previously.

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire) *rose—*

Mr. Duncan: The hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I do not give way.

We must appreciate that we are in new territory. It is difficult to carry public opinion when the threat is intangible and when we do not see a conventional reason for war or conflict—as we did in the Falklands or Kuwait, when tanks or planes had gone into another country. We have to assess whether the risk of doing nothing is, as we believe it to be, greater than the risk of doing something.

We are in a whole new realm of moral calculation, the like of which we have not had to face before. We may be required to act without those conventionally accepted reasons for doing so. On the Conservative Benches, we admit that the Government, the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister—and all who sit on Labour Benches and, indeed, on our Benches—are in a very difficult position. If the Government are to fulfil their duty as the guardian of their own and other people's security, they will, instead of being popular by following, have to risk being unpopular by leading.

Let me turn to the second element that has dominated today's debate, which is the question of the authority that may lie—and, in our view, does lie—behind any decision that has now to be taken. In addressing this vexed moral calculation, the world—and almost everyone in this House—has vested that authority in the United Nations. As has been rehearsed here today, the United Nations has produced a series of resolutions over many years. In arriving at resolution 1441, we are at the 17th or 18th resolution. We have vested authority in the United Nations, and resolution 1441 calls for Saddam Hussein to disarm immediately or face serious consequences.

Mr. Barry Gardiner (Brent, North): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that signatories to the amendment must be prepared to answer this question: what trigger would justify military action? They have signally failed to do that this afternoon.

Mr. Duncan: That is a question that they have to ask but on which the United Nations, in which we have vested authority, must adjudicate.

Some hon. Members have said that we must give the inspectors more time; but they have turned on its head the requirement of resolution 1441. The resolution does not say that the inspectors have to go and find the proverbial needle in a haystack. The inspectors are there to have laid before them all the armaments that Saddam Hussein possesses so that they can then destroy them. By inverting the onus of obligation, as some contributors have done, they have perverted the basis of the authority of UN resolution 1441.

Mr. Salmond *rose*—

Mr. Duncan: Again, the hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I do not give way.

I say to those contributors that there is yet a chance for peace. Saddam Hussein is the one man in the world who can yet guarantee that there is no conflict.

Let me canter through the rest of my points about authority. We would like to see a second resolution. It is a political requirement and we would like to see it if we can. We do not believe that it is legally necessary but—if, in this new moral calculation, we are to draw people in a democracy behind the action that may be taken—it is essential to achieve that second resolution. I wish the Foreign Secretary and his counterparts well in trying to secure it. I hope too that the Arab League may yet continue in its efforts to persuade Saddam Hussein to leave Baghdad so that we can be spared conflict.

To all those who have signed today's amendment, I say this forcibly: if we are to go down the UN route, it is important to stick with the UN route. I would argue that people in the European Union or NATO—or even in this House—do not have the authority to second-guess or dilute resolutions that the United Nations has already passed.

Forty Members have spoken in this debate and, although it will be invidious to single anybody out, I will. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) argued for time. He was perplexed about Hans Blix and asked about attitude. That was a Blix word. Hans Blix has said that the attitude of Saddam Hussein matters much more than time, although the resolution uses the word "immediate". The right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) gave a powerful synopsis and summary of the dangers that face the broader region. Once again, the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd), who was heard in absolute silence, made an emotional appeal that no one can have failed to have been moved by.

However, I cannot have any respect for the position that the Liberal Democrats have taken today. One day the leader of the Liberal Democrats is a UN supporter and then he says that it does not have any power. One day he says that Saddam is a threat and then he says that there is no proof. He is anti-war, pro-war, multilateral and unilateral. He is friend of America and then he does not really like America. He is pro-sanctions and against sanctions. He says that we should listen to the inspectors and then give Saddam more time. Then he is pro a second resolution.

Mr. Paul Marsden *rose*—

Mr. Duncan: The leader of the Liberal Democrats is rather like the hon. Gentleman. He is premature. Does the hon. Gentleman stand by the words uttered by those on his Front Bench that, when the leader of the Liberal Democrats went to the march in London that Saturday, he never said no to war?

Mr. Marsden: I am proud of my leader. At the very time that the Government are heading into war, why cannot the Tory party even table any kind of amendment? It is an utter irrelevance to the whole debate.

Mr. Duncan: The secondary socialist has moved to a true left-wing party, but I say to the hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Moore) and to his leader, who deny that he never said no to war, that I made a grave error on that day. I came out of Green Park tube and found myself in the middle of the demonstration. While beating a hasty retreat, I fell upon a discarded poster. It says, "Lib Dems Say No". *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Andrew Stunell (Hazel Grove): I think that the hon. Gentleman will live to regret this intervention. Our party has said from the beginning that our position is that we are pro the United Nations. We are not saying that we are against military conflict in every situation. Let us be clear about it—the position of our party is absolutely clear.

Mr. Duncan: You may not think it, Mr. Speaker, but the Conservative party research department is ever resourceful. I found the Liberal Democrats' poster for the following week. As hon. Members can see, it says "Lib Dems Say Yes". *[Laughter.]* This shows the wonderful and glorious ambivalence of the Liberal Democrats. Let me say to them—which is it?

Mr. Moore: The hon. Gentleman has made the point before that people are entitled to take a principled position on this issue. Some members of our party—as, indeed, some members of the Conservative party—are

[Mr. Moore]

opposed to war. The position that we have taken throughout in the House of Commons and that my right hon. Friend the leader of the Liberal Democrats made clear on the march is that we are in favour of the United Nations process. We are not against war in all circumstances. War must be a last resort.

Mr. Duncan: It is so nice to get from the Liberal Democrats a definite maybe. Such is the hon. Gentleman's position on the fence post—it is like that of his leader—that it will soon have to be surgically removed. *[Interruption.]* I would love more time.

The third and perhaps the most important issue to which I want to devote attention and which I know that the Minister will consider are the repercussions of anything that might happen. The repercussions might affect the whole region. As has been said, they include the potential fall of the al-Sauds and the Hashemites. There is a danger that some approaches to societies in the middle east show insufficient understanding of their thinking. We need to see the middle east peace process immediately revived so that we can be, if I might coin a phrase, tough on terrorism and tough on the causes of terrorism. We need to see humanitarian aid with massive resources and logistical support. We need to know what will follow and we hope that the optimistic scenario discussed today, given that there is an intelligent and educated middle class, oil revenues and a broadly secular society, will give hope to that country.

But I have no time. I must leave it to the Minister. All I say to the House today—I hope that everybody is listening—is that whereas we could have pursued narrow party advantage, this matter is too serious for us to do so. We will not do so, and in the interests of global security and anything that might need to be done under the authority of the United Nations, we will give this Government our unstinting support.

6.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mike O'Brien): This has been a fine debate with a number of excellent speeches. Indeed, in many ways, it has been a very passionate debate, as should be the case given that we are dealing with the issue of whether this country is to takefurther action and what sort of action it should be, with the need to go back to the UN with a second resolution and with the need to ensure that we express the views of people throughout the country who rightly want to know that this House is reflecting their concerns. Today, in this debate, the House has reflected views and concerns across the country.

I thank hon. Members for their contributions. In particular, I thank the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) for what I thought was an excellent performance. We especially enjoyed his yes/no interlude, which illustrated something with which Labour Members are just as familiar as Opposition Members. I should also like to thank a number of my right hon. and hon. Friends—my right hon. Friends the Members for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), for Walsall, South (Mr. George) and for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes), and my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths). I give particular thanks to my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd), who made a powerful speech. I also thank my hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Ms King); I thought that she was getting a bit wobbly at one point, but she convinced me that she was not. I thank all hon. Members for their support today.

On the Opposition Benches, I acknowledge the very robust performance from the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) that we expect of him.

I also congratulate the hon. Member for Glasgow, Kelvin (Mr. Galloway) on his oratorical flourish. I praise him only because I know that it will irritate him greatly to be praised from the Labour Front Bench—and even though I disagreed with the content of his speech.

The motion before the House is not an endorsement of military action by UK forces. No decision has yet been taken to deploy British forces in action. The motion supports the UN route to disarmament. Let me be clear: the Government will put any decision on military action to the House, subject in terms of timing only to the safety of our forces. It is in our interests as a Government to ensure that the House has the chance to vote before hostilities. We will also want a full opportunity to debate and vote on the outcome of proceedings at the UN on the second resolution, so there is an opportunity for another vote.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. O'Brien: If I may proceed for a moment, I shall give way shortly.

The body of evidence that Saddam Hussein possesses a fearsome range of weapons of mass destruction is substantial. The evidence comes from the UN reports, from Dr. Blix, from our own intelligence and indeed from Saddam Hussein himself, who last night, oddly, admitted that the Iraqis had found a biological bomb and wanted to show us. Let us be clear: Saddam Hussein has weapons of mass destruction and he is a threat to his people, his neighbours and ultimately the middle east and the wider world. The UN Security Council is in no doubt about that. That is why its resolution 1441 gave Saddam Hussein a final opportunity to comply with a string of legally binding obligations imposed on him over the past 12 years. Nearly four months later, Saddam Hussein has not taken that final opportunity. I cannot put the matter more crisply than Dr. Blix. He has reported that Iraq

> "appears not to have come to a genuine acceptance . . . of the disarmament which was demanded of it".

Indeed, Dr. Blix said today that at the moment it is not even clear whether the Iraqis really want to co-operate. My right hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) said that Saddam Hussein had co-operated by 70 per cent. Well, Dr. Blix disagrees. My right hon. Friend accepts that the declaration provided by Saddam Hussein is inadequate. Indeed, the UN resolution requires it to be a full and final declaration of all the weapons of mass destruction held by Saddam Hussein in order to allow the inspectors to audit that declaration. If that declaration is not full and if it is not final, there has been no co-operation at all.

because the only co-operation has been not on substance but on process. Saddam has shown throughout the past 12 years that he will continue to co-operate on issues of procedure, but he does not co-operate on the substance of disarmament. That is where we must not allow him to play games with Members of this House, with this country or with the United Nations.

Dr. Nick Palmer (Broxtowe): I will not support the amendment because I do not believe that we and our service men can teeter on the brink month after month while Saddam plays games with us. However, I share with Members who put their names to the amendment the belief that war should be the last resort. Will the Minister confirm that if Dr. Blix says that Saddam, at the last moment, is co-operating fully, Britain will put war on hold and that it will be the last resort for us?

Mr. O'Brien: We have always been totally clear that if there is full and complete co-operation as required by 1441, there will not be a case for military action.

The report from UNMOVIC and the International Atomic Energy Agency, which we have all seen, demonstrates that Saddam has no intention of co-operating fully and proactively in the way that is required by resolution 1441. Iraq is seeking to deceive the Security Council. There is no semblance of wholehearted co-operation—nothing like voluntary and active disarmament and nothing that suggests a regime that has a clear conscience and has nothing to hide. Those who advocate more time must face up to the fact that there is a limit to what the inspectors can do in circumstances where there is not a complete and full declaration. They cannot audit something that is not full and complete—that simply does not make sense.

Tony Wright (Cannock Chase): Is it not the case, though, that if the UN process was to work, the crisis was to be resolved and Saddam was to be disarmed, it would be a triumph and a vindication for the Prime Minister and the British Government, but it would be a humiliation and a failure for the American President, because it would subvert the whole strategy of regime change that has been put in place? Is not that why, whatever we say and do today, there is going to be war?

Mr. O'Brien: That is a complete and utter misreading of the situation. Has my hon. Friend not read the speech given by the President in Cincinnati last year, in which he made it very clear that if Saddam disarms and the nature of the regime changes, that will satisfy him? If my hon. Friend thinks that the Americans are determined on this course whatever, he has not listened to what they have so plainly said. Our position and that of the Americans is that if Saddam complies with 1441—and he must comply fully and completely—the case for military action falls.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): We all want to avoid war, but did my hon. Friend read the leader comment in *The Times* on Monday last week, which reported that a female broadcaster in Baghdad, who was alleged to have said a few words about Saddam's wife, was arrested, tortured and hanged? Her tongue was cut out from the corpse and sent to her family. Does not that example show that if war leads to liberation, it will be a tremendous relief to the overwhelming majority of people in Iraq?

Mr. O'Brien: If we have to undertake military action and American and British troops are committed and have to go into Baghdad, I suspect that the Iraqi people will be the first to cheer seeing the back of Saddam Hussein.

The inspectors' role is not to act as detectives but to act as auditors to verify the declaration. They cannot fulfil their mandate without Iraqi co-operation. They are not detectives who are looking for clues or a needle in a haystack the size of Iraq. They are auditors, who audit the Iraqi declaration. Given that it is neither full nor complete—no one seriously disputes that—all the time in the world will not enable the inspectors to do that. Regardless of numbers, the job is impossible. We can give them all the time in the world, but without the complete declaration, the exercise is pointless. Resolution 1441 is explicit about the need for complete co-operation.

Mr. Salmond: The Minister must know that both sets of inspectors are asking for more time. Are the conditions that the Prime Minister outlined on 6 February being fulfilled? He said that the inspectors must see that the process is finished, and that the Security Council must pass a further resolution by majority. He also referred to an "unreasonable veto". Will the Government support force only in those circumstances or have they changed their mind since the Prime Minister made that statement?

Mr. O'Brien: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary dealt with that point in his opening speech.

Mr. Salmond: The Prime Minister clearly said that he would support the use of force under precise conditions: the inspectors must decide that they can do nothing further and a further resolution has to be passed by a majority. He said that force would also be used if the resolution was subject to an "unreasonable veto". Does that remain the Prime Minister's position?

Mr. O'Brien: We have clearly set out our position. I, too, saw the interview and I do not believe that the hon. Gentleman's recollections are correct. Perhaps we can go through that later.

The threat that Saddam poses is clear. His people, his neighbours and his region have lived in fear of him for years. The UN Security Council has passed resolution 1441 and offered him a final opportunity to comply with legally binding obligations. He has not taken that opportunity and he appears to have no intention of doing so. In those circumstances, there is a limit to what the inspectors can achieve. They cannot fulfil their mandate without Iraqi co-operation.

We have proposed a two-part strategy. First, we, Spain and the US tabled a draft resolution on Monday in New York. Secondly, it will not be put to the vote immediately. It is therefore not too late for Saddam Hussein to comply, but he must do so if military action is to be avoided. There is still time for Iraq to make the right choice, but the onus is on Saddam to co-operate on matters of substance.

[Mr. O'Brien]

My right hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) said that we cannot trust Saddam Hussein. We need to send Saddam a clear message that he must comply in full with resolution 1441 now—not in 120 days, not in four months and not in one year, but now. That is the real route to peace. Saddam Hussein needs a clear message tonight. If we fail to provide that, we will send the wrong message: that UN resolutions can be ignored. We intend to send the right message: that UN resolutions will be enforced; that international law will be complied with; and that other dictators should not pursue weapons of mass destruction because the international community will intervene.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 199, Noes 393.

Division No. 96] **[6:59 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Austin, John
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Battle, John
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, rh A. J.
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Bruce, Malcolm
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Caton, Martin
Challen, Colin
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clarke, rh Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cryer, Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, rh Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Edwards, Huw
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Ewing, Annabelle
Farrelly, Paul
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Galloway, George
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Godsiff, Roger
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Gummer, rh John
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harvey, Nick
Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hume, John *(Foyle)*
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Lamb, Norman
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leigh, Edward
Lepper, David
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McCafferty, Chris
McDonnell, John
McGrady, Eddie
McKechin, Ann
McNamara, Kevin
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallon, Seamus
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury & Atcham)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Mole, Chris
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Julie
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Diana
Owen, Albert
Page, Richard
Perham, Linda
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Pollard, Kerry
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Steen, Anthony
Stevenson, George
Stinchcombe, Paul
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Stunell, Andrew
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Walter, Robert
Wareing, Robert N.
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Weir, Michael
White, Brian
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wishart, Pete
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Douglas Hogg and
Mr. Tony Lloyd

NOES

Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Amess, David
Ancram, rh Michael
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Arbuthnot, rh James
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Baldry, Tony
Barron, rh Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, rh Margaret
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Bell, Stuart
Bellingham, Henry
Benn, Hilary
Bercow, John
Blackman, Liz
Blair, rh Tony
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, rh David
Blunt, Crispin
Boateng, rh Paul
Borrow, David
Boswell, Tim

Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, rh Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bryant, Chris
Burnham, Andy
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Byers, rh Stephen
Caborn, rh Richard
Cairns, David
Cameron, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Cash, William
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Collins, Tim
Colman, Tony
Conway, Derek
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Corston, Jean
Cran, James *(Beverley)*
Cranston, hon. Ross
Cruddas, Jon
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, rh Alistair
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Dorrell, rh Stephen
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flight, Howard
Flint, Caroline
Flook, Adrian
Follett, Barbara
Forth, rh Eric
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Fox, Dr. Liam
Francois, Mark
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
Garnier, Edward
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gilroy, Linda
Goggins, Paul
Goodman, Paul
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hague, rh William
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hammond, Philip
Hanson, David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Healey, John
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hendry, Charles
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, rh Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Howard, rh Michael
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hunter, Andrew
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Ingram, rh Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkin, Bernard
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jowell, rh Tessa
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kelly, Ruth *(Bolton W)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lammy, David
Lansley, Andrew
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Leslie, Christopher
Letwin, rh Oliver
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell, rh Mrs Helen
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Linton, Martin
Loughton, Tim
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIntosh, Miss Anne
McIsaac, Shona
Mackay, rh Andrew
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mandelson, rh Peter
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maude, rh Francis
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Meacher, rh Michael
Mercer, Patrick
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Milburn, rh Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Morris, rh Estelle
Moss, Malcolm
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, rh Paul *(Torfaen)*
Norman, Archie
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Paterson, Owen
Pearson, Ian
Picking, Anne
Pickles, Eric
Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Portillo, rh Michael
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prescott, rh John
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Redwood, rh John
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruffley, David
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Selous, Andrew
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Shepherd, Richard
Sheridan, Jim

HOUSE OF COMMONS PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES (HANSARD) ● 2002-03

CHADWYCK-HEALEY Vol. 400 (Part 1) cols. 367 - 556 24 February - 7 March 2003

Short, rh Clare
Simmonds, Mark
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh John
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Squire, Rachel
Stanley, rh Sir John
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Straw, rh Jack
Streeter, Gary
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Tredinnick, David
Trimble, rh David
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Viggers, Peter
Ward, Claire
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Whittingdale, John
Wicks, Malcolm
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wills, Michael
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Jim Fitzpatrick and
Joan Ryan

Question accordingly negatived.

7.13 pm

Main Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 434, Noes 124.

Division No. 97] **[7:13 pm**

AYES

Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Amess, David
Ancram, rh Michael
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Arbuthnot, rh James
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Barron, rh Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Bell, Stuart
Bellingham, Henry
Benn, Hilary
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blackman, Liz
Blair, rh Tony
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, rh David
Blunt, Crispin
Boateng, rh Paul
Borrow, David
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, rh Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bryant, Chris
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Byers, rh Stephen
Caborn, rh Richard
Cairns, David
Cameron, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Cash, William
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clelland, David
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Collins, Tim
Colman, Tony
Conway, Derek
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Corston, Jean
Cran, James *(Beverley)*
Cranston, hon. Ross
Cruddas, Jon
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curry, rh David
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, rh Alistair
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Donohoe, Brian H.
Dorrell, rh Stephen
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley)*
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flight, Howard
Flint, Caroline
Flook, Adrian
Follett, Barbara
Forth, rh Eric
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Fox, Dr. Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
Garnier, Edward
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gilroy, Linda
Goggins, Paul
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Gummer, rh John
Hague, rh William
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hammond, Philip
Hanson, David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Healey, John
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hendry, Charles
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, rh Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howard, rh Michael
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*

Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hunter, Andrew
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Ingram, rh Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkin, Bernard
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jowell, rh Tessa
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kelly, Ruth *(Bolton W)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lammy, David
Lansley, Andrew
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Leigh, Edward
Leslie, Christopher
Letwin, rh Oliver
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell, rh Mrs Helen
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Linton, Martin
Loughton, Tim
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIntosh, Miss Anne
McIsaac, Shona
Mackay, rh Andrew
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
McWalter, Tony
Mandelson, rh Peter
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Martlew, Eric
Mates, Michael
Maude, rh Francis
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Meacher, rh Michael
Mercer, Patrick
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Milburn, rh Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Morris, rh Estelle
Moss, Malcolm
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, rh Paul *(Torfaen)*
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Norman, Archie
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Paterson, Owen
Pearson, Ian
Picking, Anne
Pickles, Eric
Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Portillo, rh Michael
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prescott, rh John
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Randall, John
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Redwood, rh John
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruffley, David
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Selous, Andrew
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Shepherd, Richard
Sheridan, Jim
Short, rh Clare
Simmonds, Mark
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh John
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Squire, Rachel
Stanley, rh Sir John
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steen, Anthony
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Straw, rh Jack
Streeter, Gary
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Tredinnick, David
Trickett, Jon
Trimble, rh David
Taylor, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Ward, Claire
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Whittingdale, John
Wicks, Malcolm
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Wills, Michael
Wilshire, David
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Jim Fitzpatrick and
Joan Ryan

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Baker, Norman
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Beith, rh A. J.
Best, Harold
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Bruce, Malcolm
Burden, Richard
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Caton, Martin
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Cohen, Harry
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cotter, Brian
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cryer, Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davis, rh Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Doughty, Sue
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Ewing, Annabelle

Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Galloway, George
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harvey, Nick
Heath, David
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hume, John *(Foyle)*
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Lamb, Norman
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McCafferty, Chris
McDonnell, John
McGrady, Eddie
McNamara, Kevin
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallon, Seamus
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury & Atcham)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Julie
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
Opik, Lembit
Owen, Albert
Perham, Linda
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Stevenson, George
Stunell, Andrew
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N.
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Weir, Michael
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wishart, Pete
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Worthington, Tony
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Douglas Hogg and
Mr. Tony Lloyd

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House takes note of Command Paper Cm 5769 on Iraq; reaffirms its endorsement of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1441, as expressed in its Resolution of 25th November 2002; supports the Government's continuing efforts in the United Nations to disarm Iraq of its weapons of mass destruction; and calls upon Iraq to recognise this as its final opportunity to comply with its disarmament obligations.

PETITIONS

Fireworks

7.28 pm

Mr. Gordon Marsden (Blackpool, South): I present the petition of some 1,900 constituents in Blackpool, South who are supporters of restrictions on the sale and use of fireworks. I am delighted to do so and to give the petition—and the Bill sponsored this Friday by my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton, South (Mr. Tynan)—my strong support.

The petition states:

To the House of Commons

The Petition of the residents of Blackpool South declares that fireworks can cause unacceptable distress and disturbance if discharged on inappropriate days and at inappropriate times.

The Petitioners therefore request that this House of Commons urge the Government to conduct an urgent review of fireworks legislation and, in particular, to legislate (1) to restrict the times of the year fireworks can be bought, (2) to restrict the times of day that fireworks can be set off and (3) to license all vendors of fireworks to meet strict safety criteria and to give trading standards the power to revoke the licence of any vendors caught selling fireworks to under-age children.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Murder Sentence

7.30 pm

Mr. Mark Todd (South Derbyshire): I wish to present a petition signed by over 13,000 residents of Burton upon Trent, South Derbyshire and other areas concerning the sentence passed on the murderer David Bond, who killed Debbie Buxton in my constituency in 1993. I am joined in this by my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Dr. Palmer), who represents another victim of the same murderer.

The petition reads:

The petition of residents of Burton upon Trent and South Derbyshire declares that the sentence of murder David Bond has been reduced from a minimum 40 years to a minimum 25 years.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Home Office to further review the case and reimpose the original sentence of 40 years immediately.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Fireworks

7.31 pm

John Robertson (Glasgow, Anniesland): I am delighted to present a petition calling for the urgent review of existing fireworks legislation, a petition signed by over 3,758 of my constituents.

The petition is timely, as it comes just before—on Friday—my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton, South (Mr. Tynan) introducing his private Member's Bill on the subject. My hon. Friend has today delivered to Downing Street an 80,000-strong petition. It

Declares that the existing legislation on fireworks is in need of urgent review.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to bring forward legislative proposals to require all public firework displays to be controlled by licensed pyrotechnicians; to restrict the times of year that fireworks can be purchased; to restrict the time of day that fireworks can be used; to license all vendors of fireworks to meet strict safety criteria; and to revoke the licence of any vendor found selling fireworks to under-age children.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

European Developments

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Dan Norris.]*

7.32 pm

Mr. David Atkinson (Bournemouth, East): On 1 May next year, 10 countries will join the European Union. Anticipating this enlargement, the Laeken Declaration established the EU convention to come forward with proposals for reform. It would also recommend a wider agenda for the intergovernmental conference to agree in a revised treaty. It is this wider agenda on the future of Europe that has prompted this debate.

The debate is timely, because the convention has just published a draft treaty establishing a constitution for Europe which would give legal effect to a set of rights as defined in the EU charter of fundamental rights. This confirms fears that the outcome of the IGC will threaten the primacy of Europe's largest and oldest intergovernmental and inter-parliamentary institution, the Council of Europe, and in particular one of its principal assets: the European convention on human rights and the Court in Strasbourg.

To defend all that the Council of Europe continues to achieve and to ensure that the enlarging European Union will not threaten or undermine its future is the purpose of this debate. I initiate it as a member of the British delegation in the Parliamentary Assembly for the past 23 years, as the current leader of the Conservative delegation, and as chairman of the European Democratic Group, the Conservative centre-right group in the Assembly.

I am encouraged that the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Mr. Davis), who is the leader of the Socialist Group in the Assembly, the hon. Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd), who is the leader of the British delegation, and the hon. Member for Gordon (Malcolm Bruce), who leads the Liberal delegation, also hope to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

It is a sad fact of life that, owing to the lack of resources provided for it, the Council of Europe is comparatively unrecognised by the public and is frequently confused with the European Parliament. Let it be recalled that it was established in 1949 by people of vision and courage committed to a Europe of justice and equality, freedom and peace, based on democracy, human rights and the rule of law. It is the forum within which our continent's disputes are resolved through dialogue and debate. In his Zurich speech of 1946, Winston Churchill foresaw it as

> "a European group which could give a . . . common citizenship to the distracted peoples of this turbulent and mighty continent".

None of us who were present in Strasbourg in July 1989 will forget the historic moment when Mikhail Gorbachev described the Council of Europe as "the Common European Home" that Russia would one day join. Since then, 20 countries of the former Soviet empire in Europe have joined—a process that I had the privilege to preside over for four years as chairman of the committee responsible for non-member states, in addition to being the first rapporteur for the accession of Russia.

When European Union officials and members of the European Parliament say that the forthcoming enlargement of the Union will reunite Europe, they are wrong. Europe has already been reunited in the Council of Europe, which today comprises 44 member states. The principal message that I want to convey to the House is that the forthcoming intergovernmental conference must avoid the creation of a second common home at the expense of ours. It should avoid the EU charter of fundamental rights competing with the European convention on human rights, and the Luxembourg Court clashing with the Strasbourg Court. It should prevent the broad legal framework that already exists for Europe, based on our 185 conventions, from competing with double standards imposed by the European Union. It should recognise the unique work by practical politicians ourselves in monitoring commitments entered into by member states upon accession as invaluable in establishing the acquis upon which these countries are judged by the European Union. It should respect the work of the Venice Commission, of the European Youth Centre Budapest, of the North-South Centre in Lisbon, and of all the instruments established under the European cultural convention, which effectively replaces 1,000 bilateral treaties. It should also avoid duplicating the outstanding work of our Congress of Local and Regional Authorities in promoting local democracy and transfrontier co-operation. It should, in short, avoid decisions that will threaten the primacy of the work of the Council of Europe and undermine the assets that we have been developing for more than half a century.

During the past year, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe has been seeking to address these concerns by introducing well prepared recommendations, resolutions and orders to ensure that our organisation becomes a natural partner to the expanding European Union, and not its rival: to ensure that it co-operates with it, rather than competes with it. The organisation's secretary-general, Walter Schwimmer, has submitted a memorandum to the EU convention along similar lines. Common to our representations has been urging the European Union to accede to the European convention on human rights, which would eliminate risk of the divergence in case law for the protection of human rights in Europe that we fear. In addition, we urge that a third Council of Europe summit of heads of state and Governments take place before commencement of the intergovernmental conference, so that it can take account of what the EU convention proposes, thereby avoiding decisions being taken that might introduce new divides.

Recently, my hon. Friends the Members for Chipping Barnet (Sir Sydney Chapman) and for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson), the noble Baronesses Knight and Hooper and I submitted our own representations to the EU Convention. We appreciated the assistance of my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory), who is also a member. In our paper, we point out that the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe is the only inter-parliamentary Assembly exclusive to Europe, and that it will soon be representative of every European national Parliament. Thus our Assembly is the true democratic dimension of Europe. It can make up the so-called "democratic deficit" that, it is suggested, exists because national Parliaments are not represented in the European Union. That we represent non-EU member states should be considered an asset rather than an impediment when it comes to promoting a continental ideal.

[Mr. David Atkinson]

In that context, I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart), who also represents us on the EU Convention. She took a personal interest in the assembly of the Western European Union in Paris. In her address to the last part-session in December, she recognised the need to maintain and develop mechanisms for inter-parliamentary scrutiny of the EU.

All of us were encouraged by the address from the Minister for Europe at last month's Strasbourg part-session, especially when he said that the Council of Europe would continue to play a vital role a common European forum, and that the place of the European Court of Human Rights in the European human rights architecture must not be undermined. However, we recall that his predecessor, the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Keith Vaz), told the House that the EU charter of fundamental rights would be of no more legal significance than a copy of the *Beano*. In fact, that charter has now emerged as article 6 of the draft of the treaty establishing a constitution for Europe.

We fear that, in the casino of consensus and compromise that EU summits inevitably become, the forthcoming intergovernmental conference will decide that the Council of Europe is expendable, and that it will be allowed to wither on the vine as the EU, with all its considerable resources, takes on ever more of what we do best. I therefore urge the Minister to assure the House that the role and the work of the Council of Europe will remain pre-eminent throughout the continent until the nations of Europe can agree to the single, confederal institution that Winston Churchill saw would be a "United States of Europe", to which all of us should, eventually, belong.

7.42 pm

Mr. Terry Davis (Birmingham, Hodge Hill): I congratulate the hon. Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) on taking the initiative to arrange this debate. I also want to thank him for his work as leader of the Conservative group in the Council of Europe Assembly. On behalf of the Socialist group in the Assembly—Labour members from this country and the nearly 200 socialist representatives from the 44 member countries in the Council of Europe—I should like to emphasise to my hon. Friend the Minister the fact that socialist group members would agree completely with everything that the hon. Gentleman said in his opening remarks.

It would be a tragedy if the development of the EU were allowed to damage what has been achieved in Europe by the Council of Europe and the Assembly over the past 50 years. I thank my hon. Friend the Minister for attending the January part-session, when he attended a meeting of the socialist group. He understands the robust discussion going on in that group, but all our members agree that it would be a great mistake to allow the Council of Europe to be damaged. I therefore urge my hon. Friend to take on board the very serious point that the hon. Member for Bournemouth, East made about avoiding rivalry, competition and conflict to emerge between two courts.

It would be terrible if establishing a legally binding charter of fundamental human rights in the EU were to lead to any conflict in the decisions reached by the European Court of Justice and the European Court of Human Rights. We all look to the Government to ensure that that does not happen.

7.43 pm

Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): I add my congratulations to the hon. Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) for bringing this matter to the House. Those hon. Members who are members of the parliamentary delegation to the Council of Europe have already debated the issues, but it is important to put on record in the House of Commons the importance of getting the development right. We support EU enlargement, and its consequences, including the development of a European constitution, are desirable and welcome.

I am a spokesman for a party that is strongly pro-Europe. It may appear surprising, therefore, that I welcome the fact that constitutions both define and limit powers. It is appropriate that the process of defining the EU's powers should also limit them. There will be more than 20 countries—once one or two more have acceded to the Council of Europe—that will not join the EU, so it is extremely important that the positive work done by the Council continues.

The Minister has heard me say before that the ECHR—of which members of the Council of Europe have every reason to be inordinately proud, given what it has done for more than 50 years and continues to achieve—is the basis of human rights law in Europe. A competitive court would undermine and devalue that, and it is not necessary.

The specific point that I make to the Minister is that the suggestion that the EU should accede to the ECHR, which has been resisted in some quarters, has a lot to commend it for the very simple reason that it would put EU institutions on exactly the same basis as national institutions in relation to human rights.

It is odd that, as things stand now, citizens in the Council of Europe states—indeed, in the United Kingdom—may take Government or public institutions to court for human rights abuses under the ECHR, but they have no such redress if those abuses are carried out by EU agencies. That anomaly cannot be tolerated, and adopting the charter of fundamental rights into the constitution does not solve that.

Indeed, as has been said already, that anomaly creates an unnecessary and undesirable complication, so I urge the Minister to take that point seriously; he has heard it made in many quarters, and I honestly believe that that would be the way to ensure that EU enlargement and the work of the Council of Europe continue together in a constructive, rather than conflicting, mode.

7.46 pm

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Manchester, Central): I, too, thank the hon. Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson), who is our hon. Friend in this context because, in the spirit of the relationship between the members of the British delegation, he has invited all three parties represented in the Chamber tonight to take part in this short debate.

Of course the issues raised are fundamentally important. The point has been made already, but it is well worth reiterating, that Europe beyond any boundary that the EU is likely to have for the foreseeable future still contains a considerable landmass and population. Those people are represented in the Council of Europe, so it has a primacy not only in its longevity, but in its extent. It is important to remember that, because the Council of Europe plays the role of guarantor of democratic standards and human rights.

That role may be taken for granted in a country such as ours, but it has been fundamentally important in the reconstruction of constitutional Governments in parts of Europe that, until relatively recently, did not have that opportunity. So I certainly pay tribute to the hon. Member for Bournemouth, East and, indeed, to my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Mr. Davis) for their role in precisely that integration process.

We have a friend and supporter in the Minister. Perhaps to my shame, he did something that I did not do when I was a Minister: he took the trouble to visit the Parliamentary Assembly recently. His visit was very well received, not only by the British delegation, but by members throughout the Assembly. However, we look to him to take on board those reasonable requests. Hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber would want to support all the points that the hon. Member for Bournemouth, East made.

Again, I emphasise that there need be no conflict between the Strasbourg and Luxembourg courts, but it is vital that institutional furniture is rearranged to ensure that no such conflict is built in, because the argument used against the incorporation of the EU into convention territory was that it would automatically force a conflict between the Luxembourg and Strasbourg courts. We need the convention to sort that out and to make sure that that possibility does not arise.

Again, I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Bournemouth, East for his efforts tonight.

7.49 pm

The Minister for Europe (Mr. Denis MacShane): What a pleasure to have four contributions in a short Adjournment debate, as well as some time for me to reply. I, too, pay tribute to the sterling quality—indeed, the euro quality—of the members of the British parliamentary delegation to the Council of Europe.

We have heard the speech of the hon. Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson), and a short and pointed contribution from my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Mr. Davis), whom I saw presiding over the most heterogeneous group of parliamentarians debating Iraqi issues. I assure you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that even the finest training in your Chair might not prepare you for the majesty with which he brought all of those different points of view together.

The hon. Member for Bournemouth, East referred to the EU as a casino of consensus and compromise. I am not a great expert on casinos, and I did not know that they were the location of consensus and compromise, but it is not the worst thing in Europe that we find ways of coming together, as the hon. Member for Gordon (Malcolm Bruce) and my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd) pointed out. There is a British esprit de corps in the delegation, and it was a pleasure to attend and speak to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and to read out part of the speech of my opposite number, the Minister for European affairs of the Republic of France. In these interesting times, it is not the worst thing in the world that I can speak for France—reading her speech word for word—and it does not seem to cause great upset or outrage.

Hon. Members have rightly made the point that the Council of Europe is our oldest European parliamentary association or assembly. I keep insisting, as I have done all my life, as a strong supporter of the European Union, that there is much more to Europe than the EU. Perhaps because two of my children were born in Switzerland, I am conscious that Europe's oldest confederal state may have a part to play. The Council of Europe, with its 44 members, representing 850 million European citizens, remains an important part of the architecture of European institutions. It is not well known enough and its work does not get the publicity that it deserves. If I may, I commend to all hon. Members Lord Judd's excellent article in *The House* magazine on Chechnya. His involvement stems from his membership of the Council of Europe—I am not commenting on the Chechnyan issue, but his article is well worth reading and reflecting on.

That is exactly the role of the Council of Europe: it allows parliamentarians from all its 44 member countries to winnow their way into the most difficult and complex situations in a fashion that the European Union, which is a consensual and compromise-based institution, and national Governments, which must have distinct bilateral relationships with different countries, cannot do. I therefore regard its work as having the highest importance. As long as I am the Minister responsible for it, it is assured of my strongest ministerial backing. It is certainly no penance, as Minister for Europe, to make the occasional foray into that great European capital of Strasbourg.

The two organisations, the EU and the Council of Europe, have distinct roles, but they are mutually reinforcing on human rights and other issues. Undoubtedly, the Council of Europe's institution-building programmes have assisted former communist countries to prepare for EU membership. We should note the remarkable achievement, in barely more than a decade, whereby countries in which democracy, freedom of expression and respect for minorities were hardly known under their dictatorship systems are now being welcomed into membership of the European Parliament.

Malcolm Bruce: Will the Minister also acknowledge, as it has certainly struck me, that we have something to learn from the new democracies, which sometimes find new and better ways of doing things than the old democracies? It is a two-way process.

Mr. MacShane: One of the great pleasures that I have found since joining the Government is that we always have something to learn. I believe that our country has as much to learn from Europe, as we have to contribute occasionally to the process of European construction.

The hon. Member for Bournemouth, East mentioned some examples, but let us also note that the European Union and the Council of Europe can co-operate, for instance, in joint financing of key programmes for countries such as Russia, Albania, and Ukraine. We

[Mr. MacShane]

now face the discussion in the Convention on the Future of Europe, which will touch on aspects of the role and work of the Council of Europe. The Convention is important. It will allow us to come to some agreement on how to make the European Union better able to cope with its new members.

The Convention is a unique creature. Its membership allows for broader discussion and consultation than has ever been possible in the European Union before. Its task is difficult: to pave the way for the EU of the future.

Mr. Richard Bacon (South Norfolk): Unlike other hon. Members present, I am not an expert on the Council of Europe. I am more interested in the Convention, which is exceptionally important. The Minister mentioned the huge amount of discussions, but according to the Government, those discussions have been ignored by the praesidium in the drafting of articles. When will there be an opportunity to debate this issue more fully on the Floor of the House?

Mr. MacShane: There will be a lengthy Westminster Hall debate on the issue next Wednesday, and I invite the hon. Member to take part. We have had a debate on the Convention on the Future of Europe in the past couple of weeks, and I am open for any private meetings that hon. Members want. We should note that 1,000 amendments have now been tabled to the draft that the praesidium presented, so there is plenty of work to be done. If the EU is a casino of compromise and consensus, my goodness, I do not envy the Convention's work. It will be the biggest compositing meeting of any political institution in history.

We have to get things right. Europe cannot continue with uncertainty over how to bring in 10 new members. None of us wants a European Union in which—to pick countries out of the air—Malta, Estonia or Luxembourg can exercise a veto on future development. We need to get the relationships right in dealing with human rights and other issues dealt with by the European Court of Human Rights.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Hull, North): Is the real problem the prospect of having two sets of laws—one for the rich countries and another for the poorer countries? Once the poorer countries are in that situation, all the problems of abuses of human rights will appear again because they do not have the bolster of what is already present and accepted in the major countries.

Mr. MacShane: The hon. Gentleman is right. The European Court of Human Rights is a beacon. All countries in Europe—those in the EU, those coming into the EU and those who will be outside the EU for some time—will have to consider their legal systems in order to bring them up to the common standards that we all want to see in democracies.

I shall take no more interventions in the brief time remaining—although it has been a pleasure in an Adjournment debate to have a real debate and to answer questions, especially those posed by hon. Members who spoke earlier.

The Government support the values and principles set out in the charter, as a political declaration. However, as we have said for some time, we would have serious legal and practical problems if the declaration were incorporated into a constitutional treaty without appropriate clarifications and safeguards. Such points have been well made by British delegates to the Convention. Other countries will have similar problems in working out whether their constitutional rules in a number of areas will be subordinate to any charter of fundamental rights that was incorporated into a constitutional treaty. I do not want to pre-empt that process; the discussion will continue. It could, indeed, continue at the third Council of Europe summit, to which the hon. Member for Bournemouth, East referred. The idea will be discussed at the Council of Europe ministerial meeting in May, and I am not against it.

Since I have been a Minister, the principal request that I have from countries all over the world and from other institutions is for my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to attend this or that event. At times, I feel that I have to defend him, so that he can spend a little time in the House of Commons and occasionally get on with the domestic business of running the United Kingdom. Therefore, I am not entirely sure that I am able from the Dispatch Box to commit my right hon. Friend to attending a Heads of Government summit. However, the request will be considered.

There is also the issue of whether the European Union should accede to the European convention on human rights. There is a good case for that but, as I explained at the Parliamentary Assembly in January when I quoted directly from the French Government, both the British and French Governments and other European Governments are concerned about the impact that such accession would have on the competencies of the Union and on the position of individual member states in relation to protocols, reservations and the ability to derogate. Those of us who are aware of the issue of asylum seekers know that it is a live one—not just in the press and public life, but in our constituency advice bureaux and surgeries. It is another issue that we need to examine.

We also need to consider how we can accelerate and make more effective the huge logjam of cases before the European Court of Human Rights. Justice delayed is justice denied. I have had very good talks with the president and the British judge on the court in Strasbourg. However, we must get the matter right, and do not need the simple and intellectually and politically attractive demand of EU accession to the European convention on human rights to result in a nightmare of legal confusion. These difficult and complex questions will have to be worked out in the EU Convention. I assure hon. Members of my continued interest and involvement in them.

The Council of Europe plays an important role. I respected it before and I have respected the work of the hon. Members and colleagues who serve on it. I am happy to support its future work as long as I hold this—

The motion having been made after Seven o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at two minutes past Eight o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 27 February 2003

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

TREASURY

The Chancellor of the Exchequer was asked—

Voluntary Sector

1. **Mr. Andrew Miller** (Ellesmere Port and Neston): If he will make a statement on the money allocated in the spending review 2002 for the voluntary sector. [99461]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gordon Brown): The Home Secretary and I plan to publish a paper on future policies for the voluntary sector. In addition to matching £400 million in gift aid with money for the active community unit and £125 million for the futurebuilders fund, the spending review gave priority to, and targeted extra resources on, voluntary sector participation in sure start, children's services, IT centres, community economic regeneration and the new deal. We also plan to introduce proposals to encourage gap year voluntary service by young people.

Mr. Miller: I thank my right hon. Friend for his comments about sure start, which has been amazingly successful in my constituency, affecting 788 families. It is an example of the charitable and voluntary sectors and the Government working together. I urge him to do three things in respect of that superb project: to provide more investment; to join me in urging all parties to support it; and to consider allowing greater local flexibility, so that boundaries, which are rigid at the moment, could be bent a little to provide help to families who need it but who just happen to live across a boundary.

Mr. Brown: I know that my hon. Friend has a sure start scheme in his constituency that has had capital funding and helped 770 children in the area. We are very pleased that as a result of the engagement of the voluntary sector in every sure start project—it now runs 10 per cent. of the projects as the lead manager—we have managed to increase sure start child care and early-years budgets from £973 million last year to £1.5 billion by 2005–6. We are determined to improve provision in every area of the country where sure start projects are needed. The best way forward is to engage the voluntary sector, but that would not be possible if there were a 20 per cent. cut in public spending.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Given that the Government promised an extra £50 million for specialist palliative care, including additional support for voluntary sector hospices, and that that commitment was underlined by the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Salford (Ms Blears), as recently as 21 October last year, how does the Chancellor explain the fact, which infuriates the hard-working hospice movement, that it has so far received only 8 per cent. of the money first promised two and a half years ago?

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman knows that the funding has been made available from the Treasury. Arrangements with individual hospices must be addressed locally, based on the view of local palliative care services. We are determined to put extra money into the hospice movement to help it, but I repeat that that would not be possible if the Flight plan for a 20 per cent. cut in public services were introduced.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): North-west Leicestershire is fortunate in having a flourishing and independent voluntary sector. What plans does the Chancellor have to encourage greater corporate support for the voluntary sector and, in particular, for individual businesses to be able to give financial backing to those in their local community?

Mr. Brown: The Chief Secretary has been leading the way from the Treasury in trying to engage the corporate sector in several new initiatives that would increase the amount of money available for, and the numbers of people engaged in, voluntary, community and charitable work. It would be welcomed on both sides of the House if we could increase the amount of corporate giving and corporate engagement in some of our voluntary and community projects. I look forward to publishing with the Home Secretary proposals on how we can move the process forward in the next few years. I remind my hon. Friend that gift aid is available for companies as well as for individuals, that it is the most generous system of tax relief for charities that has been made available in this country, and that it surpasses what is available in most other countries. I hope that the £400 million that we are now devoting to gift aid will increase over the next few years, from increases in both corporate and individual giving. I hope that we will have all-party support for that.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien (Eddisbury): Given the pressure that the Chancellor has put on the funds of the voluntary sector, with the decline in charities' income—such as that experienced by hospices—from his removal of the advance corporation tax dividend credit and the imminent imposition of his jobs tax through the increase in the national insurance levy, can he find the resources to refund the £500 million per year of irrecoverable VAT to charities? If he can, we will back him every step of the way and fully co-operate on the issue during the passage of the forthcoming Finance Bill.

Mr. Brown: I find it amazing that the Conservative party, which raised VAT and then put it on fuel, is now claiming that these measures have harmed charities. On help for charities, we have the best regime for individual and corporate giving, with tax reliefs higher than they ever were under the Conservatives, and an active community unit budget that has been increased massively. At the same time, the futurebuilders programme, led by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary, is putting £125 million extra into charities. None of the problems of charities could be solved if the Flight plan cut 20 per cent. from their expenditure.

International Debt Relief

2. **Mr. Parmjit Dhanda** (Gloucester): What plans he has to extend the scope of international debt relief. [99463]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gordon Brown): With your permission, Mr. Speaker, I shall answer this question together with Questions 14 and 16.

I am pleased to announce that, following the G7 meeting in Paris last weekend, all G7 members have agreed to examined how, in the short term, we can do more to help countries where, because of the decline in commodity prices and for other reasons, they have yet to achieve a sustainable exit from debt from our debt relief programmes. We shall also examine how, in the longer run, we can together provide a new international finance facility, so that instead of poor countries having to pay higher debt interest payments, they will have additional resources to invest in tackling illiteracy and disease.

I have been grateful for all-party support for these initiatives. We hope to make further progress on all these matters at the International Monetary Fund and World Bank meetings in April this year.

Mr. Dhanda: On behalf of trade justice campaigners in Gloucester and around the country, may I sincerely congratulate my right hon. Friend the Chancellor on providing 100 per cent. debt relief to 26 developing countries? At the same time, however, does he share my concerns about the activities of private companies, of which those of Nestlé in Ethiopia offer one example? Such companies are pursuing litigation against heavily indebted poor countries, which often hampers our efforts to provide debt relief.

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to my hon. Friend and I thank him for the work that he does in his constituency to promote the debt relief campaign and the pursuit of the millennium development goals.

I gather that Nestlé is now settling the issue with Ethiopia. I met the Prime Minister of Ethiopia only two days ago, and I promised him, on the issue of debt relief, that I and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development would try to find a means at the international meetings in April to do more to help his country with the debt relief programme that he wants to carry out. In the longer term, the issue is less what we do on debt relief than how much more resources, tied to reform, we can put into education and health programmes for countries such as Ethiopia and others. That is why the international finance facility, a British initiative gaining support among other countries, is so important. It is the long-term means by which we can guarantee that, instead of the poorest countries having to rely on debt relief, they will receive additional resources.

Mr. Speaker: I call Phyllis Starkey.

Hon. Members: Where is she?

Mr. Speaker: Not here. I call Helen Jackson.

Hon. Members: Where is she?

Mr. Speaker: Order. Will the Chancellor investigate whether Phyllis Starkey and Helen Jackson were notified? I call Sir Patrick Cormack.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): He is always here.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): May I add my thanks and congratulations to the Chancellor? What steps are being taken to ensure that corrupt and tyrannical regimes are not the beneficiaries of what he is doing?

Mr. Brown: The whole House appreciates the hon. Gentleman's work in respect of Commonwealth countries. If we are to provide additional help for health, education and anti-poverty programmes, we must have a guarantee that the money will go not to corrupt elites, wasteful military expenditure and prestige projects by bureaucracies, but to the people. That is why the IMF's poverty reduction strategy programmes are so important, and why the initiatives that we have taken on transparency for fiscal and monetary policies in the highly indebted countries are important. The hon. Gentleman will be interested to learn that we are offering help to those countries to build up their capacity to run transparent financial policies, and thereby ensuring that everything possible is done to prevent the corruption to which he referred.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): Does my right hon. Friend the Chancellor recall the UN development programme head who stated that the reason for 11 September was not Islam but the failure of Governments? Will my right hon. Friend continue to articulate the view that the world's long-term stability lies in easing the deep resentments in many developing countries? Will he work with the trade justice campaign and other campaigns to ensure that trade barriers are reduced, that the common agricultural policy is reformed, and that the World Trade Organisation fulfils its remit in respect of people in developing countries?

Mr. Brown: My hon. Friend is Chairman of the Select Committee on the Treasury and he is absolutely right: a world that is divided between people who have plenty and those who are denied basic necessities can be neither just nor stable. That is why it is so important that we move forward to build a better relationship between developed and developing countries. As well as the actions that I have set out—on corruption and on providing extra aid resources—that better relationship includes the opening up of trade. Therefore, I appreciate what the hon. Gentleman says. One of the biggest boosts to tackling poverty in the poorest countries will be progress at the WTO talks in Mexico in September.

National Insurance

3. **Mr. James Gray** (North Wiltshire): What estimate he has made of the effect on employment of the national insurance rises due in April. [99464]

The Paymaster General (Dawn Primarolo): In line with long-established practice, the Government do not forecast employment. However, estimates by independent analysts show that the impact on employment from an increase in national insurance contributions is likely to be close to nil.

Mr. Gray: Perhaps it is just as well that the Paymaster General does not predict the effects on employment. May I remind her of the words that the Government used in a press release that tried to justify the climate change levy after the 2000 Budget? They said:

> "The lower National Insurance Contributions will act to promote employment opportunities".

Does she accept that the opposite also applies and that higher national insurance contributions will act to the detriment of employment opportunities, so that this is in a very real sense a tax on jobs?

Dawn Primarolo: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman welcomes the fact that the reform of national insurance for the low paid removes the barrier that existed for so many people in taking jobs and being employed in the economy. He will remember that he put out a press release calling for more funds to be made available to the national health service. The national insurance rise that provides for that money is supported by people such as Anthony Goldstone, who says that business can benefit from it. If we are to have a first-class health service, we must pay for it. The national insurance rise is the best way to do so and will save money for business, which is currently losing about £11 billion a year in sickness days. It will ensure a healthier work force as well as a more just nation.

Mrs. Ann Cryer (Keighley): Does my right hon. Friend remember that when we introduced the national minimum wage the comments made by Conservative Members were very similar to those that we are hearing this morning about the increases in national insurance contributions? I remind my right hon. Friend that we were told that unemployment would go up by hundreds of thousands and that it would be the end of civilisation as we knew it. I do not think that any Conservative Member would criticise the national minimum wage today.

Dawn Primarolo: My hon. Friend is right. The right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) forecast repeatedly over a number of years that the introduction of the national minimum wage would lose 2 million jobs. In fact, since the election of this Government, there have been more than 1.5 million new jobs in the economy, unemployment is at its lowest rate and employment is at its highest rate. When we compare that with the record of the previous Government—2 million jobs lost, 1 million of which were in manufacturing, and 1.4 million disappearing from the economy—we can see the effect of their proposal for a 20 per cent. cut in public expenditure. That would have a real impact on employment, not the national insurance—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. May I say to the Minister that her answers are getting overlong and bordering on matters that are outside her responsibilities?

Sir Michael Spicer (West Worcestershire): Does the Paymaster General accept that, typically, low-taxed economies are dynamic and high-taxed economies are static?

Dawn Primarolo: To be brief, I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman. I am glad that he supports this Government, who, according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, have created one of the lowest tax environments in the world, certainly lower than any of our European competitors, and the soundest economy of our European partners. What is more, we are paying for a national health service that this nation wants to be the best health service in the world, so that his constituents will get the treatment that they need.

Miss Anne Begg (Aberdeen, South): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that all the money raised by the national insurance rises will be invested in the national health service and that the largest proportion of money will go towards employing extra staff, extra nurses and extra doctors, thereby helping employment?

Dawn Primarolo: I can confirm that the rises in national insurance have led to approximately £40 billion more for the national health service. They have meant more nurses, more doctors and more patients being treated, including Conservative Members' constituents, who would not be treated if the Conservative party cut public expenditure by 20 per cent. under the Flight plan.

Sir Peter Tapsell (Louth and Horncastle): Why is the Chancellor tightening his fiscal stance by increasing national insurance contributions when the growth rate is declining? Does he expect the Bank of England to accommodate his spending plans through further reductions in interest rates? What is the point of pursuing conflicting fiscal and monetary policies?

Dawn Primarolo: We are increasing public expenditure at a time when it is vital to do that; the Conservative party wants to cut it.

Mr. George Stevenson (Stoke-on-Trent, South): Is my right hon. Friend aware that she has the full support of Labour Members for the increases that will take place in April to ensure that we have a properly funded national health service that is financed through taxation?

I remind her that, in my constituency, expenditure on the health service has more than doubled in the past five years. We will get a new hospital, and the primary care trust's budget has increased by 30 per cent. in real terms. The new hospital will stimulate employment in the constituency—the Opposition often forget that point.

Dawn Primarolo: My hon. Friend is right. There are 20,000 more nurses, 7,500 more consultants, 2,000 new GPs and 60 new hospitals. Those developments create jobs and services in our constituencies. The Conservative party would cut all that through the Flight plan.

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): May I invite the Paymaster General to return to the real world for a moment? Will she confirm that the tax on jobs and pay, which comes into force 38 days from today, will cost a typical family £440 a year? Will she also confirm that, at the same time, massive council tax increases—even greater than the huge rises forecast in the pre-Budget report—will take effect? Is it any wonder that the Health Secretary recently said that there would be

> "one hell of a lather about taxes rising",

and that many people would conclude that the Government's approach "actually . . . isn't working"? Does the Paymaster General agree with the Health Secretary's comments?

Dawn Primarolo: The right hon. and learned Gentleman should return to the real world in his constituency, where he calls for more expenditure on health. He needs to tell hon. Members where he would find the extra money. He should explain to the House and his constituents why he supports the Flight plan, which would cut public expenditure by 20 per cent.

Mr. Howard: The Paymaster General and the Chancellor can dissemble all they like about our policies, but we will tell the truth about theirs. Has the Paymaster General forgotten the Labour party's 1997 election manifesto? It stated:

> "The level of public spending is no longer the best measure of the effectiveness of government action".

The sad truth is that the Government's failure to reform public services has left the Chancellor with no option but to levy increasingly higher taxes. Are not the Government locked in a vicious cycle of ever higher taxes and ever failing public services?

Dawn Primarolo: The right hon. and learned Gentleman has selective amnesia. He does not remember that he has called for more GPs in his constituency. He says one thing to his constituents about wanting more money and another in the House, where he proposes the Flight plan and 20 per cent. cuts. The Government's record on employment, job creation and funding the NHS and public services forms such a contrast to the economic policies of the Government of whom he was a member. They had the highest unemployment, lost the most jobs and had the highest interest rates.

Travel Insurance

4. **Tony Cunningham** (Workington): If he will make a statement on his forthcoming report on travel insurance regulation. [99465]

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Ruth Kelly): I presume that my hon. Friend is asking about the recent consultation on whether travel insurance sold as part of a package with a holiday should be regulated by the Financial Services Authority. The Government are currently analysing the responses to the consultation on "Regulating Insurance Mediation". The consultation closed on 31 January. I will make an announcement on the outcomes of that consultation, including whether or not travel insurance sold with a holiday should be included in the scope of FSA regulation, in the second quarter of the year.

Tony Cunningham: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Given that in 2001 the financial ombudsman said that one in eight of all insurance complaints related to travel insurance, and that last year complaints about travel insurance increased by 14 per cent., does my hon. Friend agree that we need to regulate to protect the consumer buying travel insurance, wherever it is bought from?

Ruth Kelly: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments. There has been an intense debate on this subject with those respondents who have come back to the consultation with diametrically opposite views. Many bodies are in favour of FSA regulation; many are against. We have to strike the right balance between, for example, the perceived benefits of creating a level playing field for firms selling the same product and the evidence that my hon. Friend puts before the House today against the perceived regulatory costs placed on travel agents, for whom travel insurance forms a very small part of turnover. I shall certainly take into account my hon. Friend's evidence when making the decision, which I shall announce in due course.

Economic Growth

5. **Mr. Andrew Rosindell** (Romford): What changes there have been to his projections for economic growth since (a) the 2002 Budget and (b) the 2002 pre-Budget report; and if he will make a statement. [99466]

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Paul Boateng): UK gross domestic product grew by 1.6 per cent. in 2002, as projected in the pre-Budget report, and we will update our forecasts for the UK and world economies in the forthcoming Budget as normal.

Mr. Rosindell: I thank the Minister for that reply, but does he accept that the reality is that the Chancellor got his figures wrong and that sustainable growth in this country is not compatible with high taxes? Bearing that in mind, will he now reverse the irresponsible increases, particularly in national insurance, that will come into force in April?

Mr. Boateng: We will do no such thing. Those increases fund a health service that is delivering to the hon. Gentleman's constituents, and that is widely supported on this side of the House, even if it is undermined by Opposition Members.

Mr. Jim Cousins (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): Predicting growth is particularly difficult at present. Hon. Members on both sides of the House should recognise that. Many factors are affecting spending in the shops across the world. May I ask for an assurance that the Government's spending plans will be maintained, because if they are not, growth in this country could be put at risk?

Mr. Boateng: My hon. Friend, who studies these matters in great detail and whose contribution to the Treasury Committee is much appreciated, is absolutely right about the uncertainty in the time in which we live. One thing we can be certain about, however, is that our projections for public finances are based on reasonable and cautious assumptions, with built-in margins for the very uncertainty and shocks to which my hon. Friend rightly draws our attention. They are and remain fully affordable. That includes our proposals for the NHS and the increase in national insurance contributions that funds them.

Matthew Taylor (Truro and St. Austell): Is it not extraordinary that, important as the voluntary sector and overseas aid undoubtedly are, the Chancellor ducks responding on the rather more fundamental issues of tax rises and the fall in economic growth currently taking place in this country? Can the shadow Secretary [HON. MEMBERS: "Shadow?"] I am sorry. Can the Chief Secretary, the Chancellor's shadow, explain—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I appeal to the House for calm. The Liberal Democrat spokesman should be heard.

Matthew Taylor: Can the right hon. Gentleman explain why the Government seek to continue to blame world recession for problems where Britain is clearly doing worse, with investment now falling faster than in any other OECD country, with the exception of Iceland? Are the Government now pinning their reputation on beating Iceland?

Mr. Boateng: The shadow Chancellor from Truro is, I fear, in a bit of a muddle, and not for the first time. The fact remains that GDP growth in the United Kingdom was higher than that of any of our major EU partners and competitors in the last two years, and it is predicted to remain so in the next.

Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): Will my right hon. Friend give an assurance that he has no plans to change our published growth rates from pounds to euros? I note that the French growth rate last year was 1.2 per cent. in real terms, and the British growth rate was 1.6 per cent., but that the growth rate in euros was much greater in France due to currency fluctuations. Will my right hon. Friend assure me that the House will look at the real growth rates and continue to underline the success of our economy compared with those of our economic neighbours?

Mr. Boateng: My hon. Friend, who represents the interests of Croydon so very well, will understand if I do not go down the euro path, but I can assure him that we have done better than France in terms of growth over the past two years and that we are predicted to do so in the next.

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): Has the Chief Secretary forgotten that barely two weeks ago the Chancellor was boasting, on the Frost programme, that his November forecast for growth had been exceeded? Will the Chief Secretary acknowledge that yesterday's figures show that even that boast, based on the Chancellor's downgraded forecast of barely two months ago, was false? How many profit warnings does the Chief Secretary think the Chancellor can survive?

Mr. Boateng: The amnesia is on the side of the right hon. and learned Gentleman. He seems to have forgotten that, at the last time of global downturn, inflation peaked at almost 10 per cent. and he faced interest rates that had doubled for four years. That is the Conservative record; ours is one of sustained growth and stability. That is something of which we are proud and which the Conservatives should be applauding.

Fuel Tax

6. **Dr. Alan Whitehead** (Southampton, Test): What effect on fuel tax revenues will result from changes that he has made in the taxation of green fuels. [99467]

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (John Healey): The Government are committed to using duty incentives to promote increased use of alternative and green fuels to improve the environmental performance of road transport. In the next financial year, the wide range of existing duty incentives to use green fuels will be worth approximately £1.4 billion.

Dr. Whitehead: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer, which demonstrates the Government's commitment to encouraging the development of alternative fuels. Does he accept that tax signals need to be stable and long term to assist that development? Does he intend to relate reductions to the need and opportunity for development, such as the tremendous opportunities for the development of biofuels as blends to existing fuels at the pumps?

John Healey: My hon. Friend, who is knowledgeable about these matters, makes an important point. At each stage since we introduced measures on duty discounts for fuels, we have both weighed the evidence available to us and signalled in good time the changes that we plan to bring in—the very point that my hon. Friend makes. We have done that both with the new cut on biodiesel that we introduced in July last year and in the pre-Budget report, when we announced ahead of time our intention to introduce a 20p per litre cut on bioethanol.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): Is the Minister aware of the experimental station near Selby, which was looking into making biofuels from willow produced by many farms in the Vale of York and which, regrettably, closed, despite the measures that the Government introduced? Looking ahead to the coming year, what representations has the Minister received about the extension of the lower rate of duty to biofuels? That would obviously be beneficial to the farming community, but how would he square it with the long-term interests of the oil companies in this country?

John Healey: We have received a wide range of representations and I have held meetings with a wide range of interest groups on our policies for biofuels, as the hon. Lady would no doubt have anticipated. On her point about farmers, we have set our discount duty rate at 20p per litre for biodiesel and announced our plans for bioethanol. Although the Government recognise the wider importance of the biofuel industry and the diversification potential for farming, the principal policy purpose of the biofuel duty cuts is to improve the climate change performance and to reduce climate change gases in this country. We believe that the cuts that we are proposing are sufficient to recognise the environmental benefits that we shall gain while providing good value for public money.

International Finance Facility

7. **Mr. Ernie Ross** (Dundee, West): What assessment he has made of the impact of his proposed international finance facility on education in developing countries. [99468]

11. **Kali Mountford** (Colne Vall[illegible] What talks he has had with the European Uni[illegible]n the proposed international finance facility. [99472]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gordon Brown): The international finance facility is designed to provide additional funds, and it is estimated that at least $10 billion will be needed for education alone to meet the 2015 development target that every child across the world will have access to primary school education by that date. I have discussed those proposals with a number of European Union Finance Ministers. At the G7 meeting at the weekend, we decided that further work should be done on a joint approach to the facility. The European group of Finance Ministers, ECOFIN, will consider this issue at the meeting in March.

Mr. Ross: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on that initiative. It was fairly obvious to many involved in international development that we were unlikely to meet our development goal targets under existing arrangements. Once again, my right hon. Friend has demonstrated his commitment to helping to alleviate illiteracy, poverty and underdevelopment. Does he agree that getting every child into school is part of that programme and that, unless we can get that message across and deliver that, all the work that we are doing on debt is liable to run into the sand?

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that. He has taken up those issues in Scotland and in his constituency, working with Churches and faith organisations, and he is absolutely right. I was sorry that the shadow Chancellor from Truro said that it was wrong that I should be answering these questions today because half of Africa's children do not go to school. The development aid for Africa has fallen from $30 per head to only $18 per head over the last period of years. This is the first period in which international aid will rise to enable more young people to go to school, but there are still 115 million children who will not be going to school this week, or any week, as a result of the failure to fund education properly, and it cannot be done unless there is a breakthrough in long-term funding for countries to develop their education systems. That is why we need international support from America, France, Germany and other European countries to build that finance facility, and I hope that there will be all-party support not just for that initiative, but for the importance of publicising it and gaining support around the world.

Kali Mountford: My right hon. Friend has been congratulated by me already on that marvellous initiative, but will he press on his colleagues at the ECOFIN meeting in March the fact that economic development is the best route to peace and prosperity? In these troubled times, we all ought to be aware of that. Will he ensure that his partners will share with him the long-term commitment that is needed to make sure that the peace that we all strive for can come from economic growth?

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that. She, too, has been active in those issues, and the important thing that she is saying is that the poverty that exists around the world and the lack of access to education and health offends not only our basic values that there should be dignity for every individual, but the national security interests of every country. That is why, for all those reasons—enlightened self-interest, as well as altruism—it is necessary to make a breakthrough on those issues. I believe that, over the next few months, working with our partners, we can make progress, and I am grateful to hon. Members on both sides of the House for their support.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I welcome the facility and the move for primary education, but is there not a possibility that—just as congestion charges may cause congestion elsewhere—if we do not have a plan to lead on to secondary and tertiary education, we will short-change those young people? The experience in Malawi recently is that Chancellor university has not the facilities even to provide up-to-date education to provide leadership in that country.

Mr. Brown: I agree that simply to spend money on primary education, not on secondary and tertiary education, will not be sufficient, but the key to this issue lies not only in developing new systems with the capacity to deliver education, but in money. It is true that we are setting down conditions about the use of aid, transparency, avoiding corruption and opening up to trade and investment, but at the end of the day we must face up to the fact that if we are to solve those problems in the poorest countries, or to help them to solve their problems, we must provide additional aid. That is why using private as well as public funding to do so is the way forward, and I believe that we can move the international community on this project over the next few months.

National Insurance

8. **Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham): What estimate he has made of the effect of the national insurance rises due in April on (a) individuals, (b) corporate profitability and (c) voluntary organisations. [99469]

The Paymaster General (Dawn Primarolo): Employees, employers and the self-employed will pay an additional 1 per cent. of their earnings above the national insurance threshold following the increases in contributions due from April, which will raise revenue to pay for the national health service additional funding. For employers, it is estimated that the changes will increase pay costs by an average of 0.7 per cent. next year. All employers, including those in the voluntary sector, have an interest in an efficient and effective national health service and one that is properly funded.

Tim Loughton: Will the Paymaster General take more seriously than the Chancellor the impact of her jobs tax on hospices? Does she acknowledge that they stand to suffer a shortfall of more than £2 million because of her jobs tax at a time when their share of NHS funding is shrinking? In the case of many children's hospices in particular, that share is at zero. In addition, will she acknowledge the impact that that is having on many voluntary organisations, such as the Alzheimer's Society, in relation to their professional staff, and that those costs come on top of the significant extra training standards costs arising from the Care Standards Act 2000? How would she advise those essential voluntary organisations to make up the revenue shortfall from her jobs tax? Alternatively, what front-line services should they cut?

Dawn Primarolo: The hon. Gentleman and the whole House would want to pay tribute to the work that is done particularly by the hospice movement. He will also know that, as a result of the national insurance rises, some £40 billion extra will be available for spending by the national health service, as my right hon. Friend the Chancellor said, on care in the community and to assist specifically with palliative care. I find it breathtaking that Conservative Members continue to ask for more money while advancing proposals either for cuts in public expenditure or for an imposition of charges and the use of private medical insurance.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have said to the Paymaster General that she has been verging over the boundaries of her responsibilities. I repeat that little message.

Mr. George Mudie (Leeds, East): I think that the Paymaster General is being a little unfair to the Conservatives about their opposition to national insurance charges and the subsequent expenditure on the health service. To let the House judge whether that is so, will she conduct an exercise to see the effect on the health service of a 20 per cent. cut, and another exercise to see the financial effect on the typical family, as quoted by the shadow Chancellor, of having to meet medical costs through private insurance?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I do not think that the right hon. Lady should answer that question.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): Will the Paymaster General look again at my hon. Friend's plea on behalf of the voluntary sector? It is her Government's policy—one that I support—that health and social services should have a much closer working relationship. In the voluntary sector, those services are delivered by organisations such as Age Concern and many mental health charities. We know that local authority social services are cutting contracts to the core because they can now only afford to commission statutory packages of support. The additional national insurance charge will add to that. [HON. MEMBERS: "Question."] Here comes the question: what will she do about the reduction in services in the community that do not have the hallmark of a Government target behind them?

Dawn Primarolo: I pay tribute to the hon. Lady's work in this area, as I know that she has been very involved. I am sure that she would join me in congratulating the Government on the complete reform, including additions through gift aid, and the support to charities and the voluntary sector. On her specific point, I am sure that she will welcome the £125 million futurebuilders scheme, involving the voluntary and community sector, to address the questions that she poses in the House today. I am sure that she is sad that, after years of being in government, she had to wait for the election of a Labour Government to deal with that issue.

John Robertson (Glasgow, Anniesland): My right hon. Friend will be aware of the high unemployment rate among my constituents—double the national average. In addition, the number of people on benefit is well above average. They require help to get back into work and many of them are disabled. What will she do to ensure that the 1 per cent. burden on earnings will not be a disincentive to getting those people back into employment?

Dawn Primarolo: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that question. I know that he will join me in congratulating the Government on, I think, halving unemployment in Glasgow since 1997. I remind him of the reforms—the new deal, the national minimum wage, the welfare-to-work improvements and the investment in the national health service—that we have introduced to tackle health inequality, from which communities such as his suffer. A national insurance rise based on the Beveridge principles is the right, just and best way forward.

Euro

9. **Norman Lamb** (North Norfolk): If he will make a statement on the work being undertaken on the background studies associated with the five economic tests for UK entry into the euro. [99470]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gordon Brown): As I reported to the Treasury Committee this morning, 18 studies are being undertaken, including four that I announced in detail this morning, as part of our technical and preliminary work for our assessment of the euro tests.

Norman Lamb: I thank the Chancellor for that answer and I had the great pleasure of listening to his evidence in the Treasury Committee over the past two hours on the studies and background tests. Is it not the case, however, that while the Prime Minister remains passionate about joining the euro, the Chancellor remains deeply sceptical about the economic case? No matter how many background studies we have—I do not know whether there will be more than the 18 already in place—they will not be sufficient to paper over the yawning chasm between the two men.

Mr. Brown: There are those, like the Liberals, who would join the euro as a matter of principle without looking at the economic tests. There are those, represented by the shadow Chancellor, who would never join under any circumstances. There are those, like me, who believe that we should join the euro in principle but must get the national economic interest assessed properly by the five economic tests that we have laid down. It is precisely on that basis that I gave evidence to the Select Committee this morning to set out that the Prime Minister and I both believe in the principle of the euro, but that we must get it right economically for Britain.

Hugh Bayley (City of York): One of the five tests is on whether joining the euro would create conditions to encourage investment in Britain. When the Treasury looks at the studies that are being undertaken, will it take account of the consequences on inward investment of not joining the euro as well as the consequences of joining it?

Mr. Brown: Absolutely. One of the five tests is what effect being part of the euro will have on investment. Clearly, we have to consider both sides of the debate. Our studies are yielding a great deal of information about what motivates inward investment and what is happening to investment as a whole. Although I cannot tell my hon. Friend the results of an assessment that has not yet been completed, I am sure that he will be interested in the full and detailed results as they affect the economy as a whole and the inward investors that he mentions.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): When making the assessment, is the Chancellor going to agree with those private sector forecasters who think that the irresponsible housing boom under the Government will be followed by a housing bust in many areas, showing that we have not converged with the continent and should not accept a one-interest-rate-fits-all policy?

Mr. Brown: Those issues are part of one of the studies that is being undertaken. The right hon. Gentleman should wait to see the results of that study on both housing itself and its implications for the rest of the economy. Again, detailed work, which I am sure he would agree is necessary, is being done, but I am not going to take any lectures on the housing market from a member of a Government who put inflation at 10 per cent. and interest rates at 15 per cent., and who caused such unnecessary damage to millions of home owners in this country.

Mr. Nigel Beard (Bexleyheath and Crayford): If the five tests are satisfied, what is the likely timetable before the United Kingdom joins the European monetary union?

Mr. Brown: That matter will be addressed in the assessment that I will bring before the House after we have completed our work. If the answer is yes, we would move for a vote in Parliament on the issues and hold a referendum in the country. The people would make the final decision. If the answer is no, then I would set out the details of what will happen then.

Adam Price (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): Is the Chancellor aware of the Swedish proposal on the creation of a buffer fund to protect employment in the event of that country's entry into the euro? Does he see any merit in the idea of a stabilisation fund for the UK, and does he accept that there would be savings if another study were commissioned? Will he agree to meet representatives of the TUC, which has developed detailed proposals for this country based on the Swedish model?

Mr. Brown: I do not know of the TUC's detailed proposals, but obviously if it wants to put them to me, I shall look at them. The hon. Gentleman is talking about a proposal that is similar not only to the Swedish proposal but to practice in Finland. Of course, we will look at all those details, because that is part of the assessment that we are carrying out.

Caroline Flint (Don Valley): It is absolutely right that the people of Britain should have the final say. The Leader of the Opposition is on the record as saying:

> "I am for keeping the Pound. If you want a leader who may one day vote to abolish the Pound, I am simply not your man."

Does my right hon. Friend believe that the Opposition are willing to wait that long?

Mr. Brown: The issue on the single currency is this—those who would rule it out on principle are saying that even if it were in the national economic interest to join they would not do so because of dogma, which is clearly the wrong position for our country.

Mr. Howard Flight (Arundel and South Downs): Yesterday, in a speech to CBI London, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury advised that in addition to the Chancellor's five existing tests, the Government's decision on the euro would depend on the European Union reforming its labour and capital markets further. Does the Chancellor seriously believe that, whatever labour and capital reforms he wants, they will be in place by June so that he can assess whether their aims have been achieved? Does he have the Prime Minister's agreement on the new additional test that the Chief Secretary announced in public yesterday?

Mr. Brown: Once again, the hon. Gentleman should do his research.

Mr. Flight: I was there.

Mr. Brown: The shadow Chief Secretary should do his research. To be there is not necessarily to interpret things correctly, as we have found with him on previous occasions. If he looked at the second test, he would see that it is about flexibility and is asking whether there is sufficient flexibility in economies to cope with shocks. That is exactly what the Chief Secretary was talking about yesterday. We will take lectures from the shadow Chief Secretary once he has sorted out the problem of publishing his report on 20 per cent. cuts in public spending.

Friendly Society Savings

10. **Mr. Mark Lazarowicz** (Edinburgh, North and Leith): What his policy is on the taxation of friendly society savings products. [99471]

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Ruth Kelly): The Government recognise the contribution of friendly societies in encouraging regular savings, particularly among the less well-off, and want a thriving friendly society sector in future. The Sandler report recommended a change to the tax rules that, if adopted, would affect some of the insurance policies sold by friendly societies, particularly their tax-exempt savings products. As announced in the pre-Budget report, we are considering that recommendation as part of the Budget process.

Mr. Lazarowicz: I thank my hon. Friend for her answer. When considering the proposals, will she bear in mind the fact that the abolition of tax-exempt savings products could well result in the devastation of the friendly society movement? The Association of Friendly Societies has estimated that some 50 per cent. of their members could close to new business if the proposals proceed. As my hon. Friend rightly pointed out the importance of the friendly society movement in encouraging people on low incomes to save, I hope that she will realise the consequences of implementing the proposals as they stand.

Ruth Kelly: I know of my hon. Friend's deep interest in those issues. Of course, we are fully aware of the representations and concerns about possible implications that are regularly raised by the Association of Friendly Societies and other interested parties. However, as I said, we want to see a thriving sector in future. If my hon. Friend looks at the pre-Budget report, he will note that when designing the child trust fund another method of encouraging savings, the open market option, was preferred to licensed providers precisely because it would allow institutions such as friendly societies to offer an alternative, distinctive channel of distribution and encourage saving among the less wealthy.

Business Environment

13. **Mr. Mark Field** (Cities of London and Westminster): What discussions he has had in advance of the Budget with the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on the effect of his microeconomic policies on the business environment. [99474]

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Paul Boateng): The Chancellor and other Treasury Ministers regularly meet ministerial colleagues across Government in advance of the Budget statement. Treasury Ministers and officials have also been conducting a programme of regional visits to listen to the views of businesses throughout the country.

Mr. Field: May I respectfully suggest to the Minister that in those discussions special attention is paid to the financial burden of our increasingly inflexible labour laws on small businesses in particular? Does he agree that one of the reasons that unemployment has been so low in this country over the past 10 years compared with Germany, for example, is the fact that we have had flexible labour laws, and that that competitive advantage of the UK is fast being undermined?

Mr. Boateng: I know that the hon. Gentleman follows these matters closely, and I well recall his contributions on the matter in the Committee that considered last year's Finance Bill, but he might usefully follow the speeches of his right hon. and learned Friend the shadow Chancellor, who, as recently as last month, was opining:

> "Our labour market is still more flexible than that in other EU countries."

We intend that that should continue to be the case.

Mr. Kelvin Hopkins (Luton, North): Does my right hon. Friend recall that last week Mr. Adair Turner, no less, suggested that labour market flexibility had gone far enough, and that it was not the way forward for the future if we want a high investment, high growth economy?

Mr. Boateng: We need to make sure that we get the balance right. We make no apology, however, for introducing measures dealing with fairness at work. We make no apology for introducing the minimum wage. All those contribute to a high wage, high skill economy in which we maximise the productivity of all employees and managers.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): Does the Minister accept that the micro-economic effects of an increase in employers national insurance must be to reduce employment, cut wages or increase prices? Which of those three does he expect to happen?

Mr. Boateng: I am afraid I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's simplistic analysis. He should tell us how he would explain not only to his hon. Friends on the Liberal Democrat Benches, but to all the readers of "Focus"—a diminishing band, I am happy to say—how the improvements in the health service are to be paid for without the increase in national insurance contributions.

Welfare Services

15. **Mr. Jim Cunningham** (Coventry, South): If he will make a statement on the consequences of the changes to VAT charges for welfare services provided by state-regulated private welfare agencies. [99476]

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (John Healey): From 31 January, all state-regulated private welfare agencies have been able to exempt their welfare services, including home care, from VAT. That means that 60,000 sick, elderly and disabled people will no longer have to pay VAT on their home care costs. Those least able to look after themselves should find it easier to remain independent and to remain in their own home.

Mr. Cunningham: Has my hon. Friend any plans to extend the exemption from VAT to welfare companies?

John Healey: The VAT exemption applies to state-regulated welfare agencies that provide commercially delivered services. It covers home care agencies, foster agencies and adoption agencies. It puts them on the same VAT-exempt footing as public agencies and charities have always been. It has been widely welcomed because of that. When we announced that, the chairman of the United Kingdom Homecare Association said:

> "This exemption will make services more affordable for more people."

He went on to say that the chosen route of a simple exemption

> "will be straightforward for providers to implement and readily understood by care users."

Small Businesses

17. **Mr. Andrew Mitchell** (Sutton Coldfield): What discussions he has had in advance of the Budget with the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry regarding new taxes and regulations affecting small businesses. [99478]

The Paymaster General (Dawn Primarolo): The Chancellor regularly meets my right hon. Friend, at which time he discusses a full range of relevant issues, including the Government's success in reducing corporation tax on companies and introducing such reforms as the research and development tax credit and improvements to the capital gains tax regime.

Mr. Mitchell: When those Ministers meet, why do they not hang their heads in shame at the dreadful effect of their policies? On tax, have they not put £37 billion on businesses? On regulations, have there not been 3,866 every year under this rotten Government?

Dawn Primarolo: I do not know where the hon. Gentleman has been, but this Government have cut small business tax and cut corporation tax. We have reformed capital gains tax so that we have the most competitive system and introduced research and development tax credits. As the Organisation for Economic Development and Co-operation has pointed out, we have an entrepreneurial base and the best environment of any economy.

Business of the House

12.30 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Will the Leader of the House please give us the business for next week?

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 3 MARCH—Motion to approve the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 (Continuance in force of Sections 21 to 23) Order 2003, followed by debate on the Intelligence and Security Committee report on the terrorist bombings in Bali on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

TUESDAY 4 MARCH—Conclusion of remaining stages of the Communications Bill.

WEDNESDAY 5 MARCH—Progress on remaining stages of the Local Government Bill.

THURSDAY 6 MARCH—Debate to mark international women's day on a motion for the Adjournment of the House. I suspect that the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) will take an acute interest in that debate.

FRIDAY 7 MARCH—Private Members' Bills.

The provisional business for the following week will include:

MONDAY 10 MARCH—Conclusion of remaining stages of the Local Government Bill.

TUESDAY 11 MARCH—Estimates [2nd Allotted Day]. Subject to be confirmed by the Liaison Committee.

At 7 pm the House will be asked to agree all outstanding estimates.

WEDNESDAY 12 MARCH—Proceedings on the Consolidated Fund (No. 2) Bill, followed by debate on Welsh Affairs on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

THURSDAY 13 MARCH—The day will include a debate on flood and coastal defence policy on a motion for the Adjournment of the House that was delayed from today.

FRIDAY 14 MARCH—Private Members' Bills.

I should also like to inform the House that the business in Westminster Hall for March will be:

THURSDAY 6 MARCH—A debate on weekend voting and increasing voter turnout.

THURSDAY 13 MARCH—A debate on the report from the Treasury Committee on the financial regulation of public limited companies.

THURSDAY 20 MARCH—A debate on the convention on the future of Europe.

THURSDAY 27 MARCH—A cross-cutting question session on older people, followed by a debate on the joint report of the Defence, Foreign Affairs, International Development and Trade and Industry Committees on strategic export controls.

Mr. Forth: As ever, I am grateful to the Leader of the House for giving us the news, as far as it goes. However, why is there still complete silence from the Government on the Budget date? When will we hear the Budget day? One has to ask whether the Chancellor is Exchequer is so ashamed of what will be in his Budget that, in the spirit of Jo Moore, he will have to bury bad news under a war? Is that what is up? If it is not, surely it is time the Government and the Leader of the House came clean about what is going on and what is in the Chancellor's mind. When will we be told the Budget day? Not only do we in the House have to know, but everyone outside who is vitally interested in what is in the Budget should have time to prepare, to make representations to us and to be ready for the announcement. Please may we hear today when the Budget will be?

On 24 February, the Leader of the House was asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) whether the Prime Minister would attend the debate on Iraq, which we held yesterday, so that he could listen to Members of Parliament and, not least, to Government Back Benchers. Rather to my astonishment, the Leader of the House said that the Prime Minister

> "may have more important things to do over six hours than simply to sit in this place."—[*Official Report*, 24 February 2003; Vol. 400, c. 25.]

Do we now have a definitive statement about the Prime Minister's attitude to the House of Commons? Do we now, at last, have on the record what we have always suspected—that the Prime Minister does not see it as any part of his role to participate in the debate and to listen to his Back Benchers? I hope that the Leader will tell us that the Prime Minister will have another opportunity to come and listen to his own Back Benchers.

When we debated reform of the House of Lords, the Lord Chancellor told us that the genius that would give us the answers to the problems of Lords reform was the Joint Committee. The Leader said that he hoped that the Joint Committee would take up the matter and provide solutions that this House, sadly, had not been able to provide. I now hear—although I can scarce believe it—that the Joint Committee may be about to commit hara-kiri very shortly, by crashing itself on the rubble of the Government's policies on Lords reform. What will the Leader do, and what will he bring to the House, if the Joint Committee no longer exists by Easter? Given the emphasis that the Government have placed on the work of the Joint Committee, we need to know how its work will continue if it decides that it no longer has anything relevant to offer?

On 24 February, a reply was given to parliamentary question 637, which had been tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin). He had asked the Prime Minister which Minister had given final approval for the publication of the dodgy dossier. Well, the question actually calls it the

> "UK dossier on Iraq of September 2002."

The answer given to my hon. Friend was:

> "This was a Government document cleared in the normal way."—[*Official Report*, 24 February 2003; Vol. 400, c. 254W.]

Mr. Speaker, I am sure that you will agree that was not a full or satisfactory answer. My hon. Friend has tabled another question:

> "To ask the Prime Minister, what the procedure was for approving and publishing the dossier entitled Iraq—Its Infrastructure of Concealment, Deception and Intimidation; and which minister had ultimate responsibility for its contents."

If the Leader cannot answer that question today, will he provide an opportunity—urgently—for the House to pursue this matter, so that we may ask, yet again, on whose authority this crucial document, on which the Government place so much emphasis in their policy on Iraq, was published? We are surely entitled to know. Was it the Prime Minister? Was it the Foreign Secretary? Or was it Alastair Campbell? At the very least, we must be told what is going on.

Yesterday, the Foreign Secretary said that

> "we are not seeking"

a mandate for military action

> "today, because the Government have not yet got to that point. If we do reach that point, we will come back and seek a vote, through a debate in this House, on a substantive motion."—[*Official Report*, 26 February 2003; Vol. 400, c. 270.]

On Radio 4 this morning, I was astonished to hear the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, no less—she had presumably been put up by the Government to speak on their behalf—waffle when asked by John Humphrys the specific question:

> "Will there be an explicit prior vote before military action?"

She said:

> "We will try to keep in touch with the Commons."

She then said:

> "There is no precedent for explicit prior votes."

She went on to make references to Churchill and Thatcher, which I found flattering and reassuring. She then said:

> "We must give no prior notice to the enemy,"

and referred to troops in action and so on.

There is a key question on which we need clarification—and if we cannot get that clarification, we will need a re-run of the debate so that we can find out the answer. What is the Government's view on this matter? We have the Foreign Secretary saying one thing one day and the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs saying something quite different the following day. Is there a Government view on this crucial matter? If so, what is it?

Mr. Cook: Let me deal with the last point first, as it a matter of the gravest concern.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Speak up.

Mr. Cook: I am very sorry. I would not wish any hon. Member on the Opposition Benches to miss a word of what I say.

There is no doubt whatsoever about where the Government stand on this question. I have in front of me the transcript of what was said by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. The right hon. Gentleman did not quote the continuation of what she said, which was:

> "We will continue to consult with the House of Commons."

This Government have a good record in coming back to the House repeatedly on questions to do with Iraq or any other security issues. I also have in front of me what my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary said yesterday.

Mr. Forth: I have just quoted from it.

Mr. Cook: I merely anticipated that this was a matter most likely to be raised by the right hon. Gentleman and, as always, I was correct. In terms of predicting the points that he will raise, I am happy to tell the House that we usually are correct. What the Foreign Secretary said yesterday was:

> "It is as much in the Government's interest as it is in the paramount interest of the House that we should do that"—

that is, come to the House with a substantive motion—

> "before the start of any hostilities."—[*Official Report*, 26 February 2003; Vol. 400, c. 265.]

That could not be clearer, and I hope that it will give reassurance to the House. It is certainly our intention that we shall come back to the House and that the House will have further opportunities to vote on any second resolution that may emerge from the Security Council or on the need for military action by the Government.

I do not think that it assists the right hon. Gentleman in what I understand to be the support of the Opposition for the Government's strategy constantly to snipe from the sidelines.

Mr. Forth: Aw!

Mr. Cook: The right hon. Gentleman has to make up his mind. Does his party support the Government's strategy or is it trying to score party political points at every possible opportunity?

On the issue of the Budget, we have just had one hour of questions to the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Mr. Bercow: Too short.

Mr. Cook: It could quite possibly be too short. We shall look again at whether we can have two hours rather than one. The point remains, however, that in the course of that full hour with the Chancellor not a single Member raised the question of the date of the Budget, from which I draw the conclusion that those Members who are most interested in Treasury matters have a more mature approach to this than the right hon. Gentleman. I also recall that the Opposition undertook to send to the Chancellor their full statement on how they were going to achieve their 20 per cent. cut in public spending. I reminded the right hon. Gentleman of that when he last asked this question. I shall do a deal with him. When the Opposition convince us that they have a credible plan for cutting public spending by 20 per cent., we shall certainly make sure that there is a Budget for them to grouse about.

On the issue of the Prime Minister's attendance at the debates on Iraq, he has made a full statement on the matter and has answered questions for more than an hour in this place. It was absolutely right that he should do so, and he was keen to do so. He also addressed the House at Prime Minister's questions, as is normally the case. In addition, just before the last recess, he took two hours with the Liaison Committee, and their deliberations were predominantly on Iraq. There can be no suggestion whatever that the Prime Minister has in any way ducked his responsibility to brief the House and to face scrutiny in the House on the question of Iraq.

My response on Monday was to the proposal that he should stay here for the full six hours of the debate. Let me say to the right hon. Gentleman that, if we are honest about this, neither he nor I sat here for the full six hours. Indeed, I believe that I am right in saying that the Leader of the Opposition did not do so either. We fully understand why the Leader of the Opposition might have been busy in the course of those six hours, and we would very much welcome a full account of just how many of his Back Benchers he had to stroke during that time.

The right hon. Gentleman suggested that the Joint Committee on House of Lords reform might be about to commit hara-kiri. The prospect of Lord Howe or the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) committing hara-kiri is too awful to contemplate, and I am therefore happy to assure the right hon. Gentleman that he is mistaken on this matter. The Committee will meet again in four weeks' time, and may then consider producing a report. We shall wait and see what the outcome is, and I suggest that it might be premature for the Government to offer a view in anticipation of that.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): There is a widespread view in all parts of the House that we need an urgent debate on the so-called special relationship between Britain and the United States and, specifically, the Bush Administration. That relationship seems to have become a one-way street, by contrast with previous such relationships. We all know that the healthiest relationships are two-way. May I draw to the attention of the right hon. Gentleman, in case he did not note them—and I am sorry that the Prime Minister did not hear them—the powerful concerns expressed yesterday by the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe? He said:

> "I am not alone in having heard and met American politicians of great distinction who gave the impression that a change of regime in Iraq was determined upon long ago and that the use of military force in a pre-emptive strike was justified in order to achieve that."—[*Official Report*, 26 February 2003; Vol. 400, c. 294.]

Does the Leader of the House recognise that a pre-emptive strike in the interests of regime change is a dangerous new doctrine that, if applied elsewhere in the world, would cause complete international chaos? Does he not see an apparent contradiction between the views of the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe and what the Prime Minister told the House on Tuesday in answer to my right hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Skye and Inverness, West (Mr. Kennedy)? He said:

> "The argument about regime change has not changed. I have always said that the purpose of any action has got to be the disarmament of Iraq of weapons of mass destruction." —[*Official Report*, 25 February 2003; Vol. 400, c. 130.]

Yesterday, in answer to an intervention, the Foreign Secretary made a similar point. He said that:

> "the focus of 1441 is not regime change per se, but the disarmament of Saddam's weapons of mass destruction."—[*Official Report*, 26 February 2003; Vol. 400, c. 272.]

I am sure that, as a former Foreign Secretary, the Leader of the House read the text of last night's address by President Bush with care. It was all about regime change: it spelled it out in awful detail. It would seem that President Bush is bent on a course that is completely at odds with the proposals put to us, and the reassurances given by the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary.

I wonder, too, whether the debate I have requested might give us an opportunity to examine carefully the reliability of US intelligence sources. Given the extraordinary mistaken identity case of Mr. Derek Bond, the Leader of the House might care to speculate whether the FBI is now mistaking either the Archbishop of Canterbury or him for Osama bin Laden in disguise.

Mr. Cook: I am not sure that I followed that last sentence, but I am sure the whole House will feel for Derek Bond after his ordeal. I understand that he is considering what legal remedies are available to him, but it would not be appropriate for us to comment on that.

The Government's policy on Saddam is absolutely clear. The Government are responsible for their position and not for any other position—their position being that force must be only a last resort, but must be available if a last resort is needed.

I think the question that the hon. Gentleman's party will have to face some day is this: in the event that the inspectors do report that they are not receiving adequate co-operation, and in the event that that is followed by a second Security Council resolution, will the Liberal Democrats remain willing to support the position they appeared to take last autumn when resolution 1441 was passed—that the will and authority of the United Nations must be upheld, even if that requires the use of force as a last resort? That is our position; it is perfectly clear, and we would welcome similar clarity from the hon. Gentleman's party.

I personally found much to welcome in what President Bush said yesterday about the middle east peace process. I hope that after the Iraq crisis is resolved substantial priority will be given to making progress in the middle east, based on the two important requirements mentioned by President Bush yesterday—the creation of a viable and independent Palestinian state, and an end to all settlement construction.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): May I raise the question of the dossier—dodgy or otherwise, but deemed sufficiently important to be praised by general Colin Powell in his worldwide television broadcast? Yesterday I asked the Foreign Secretary:

> "As a question of fact and before my right hon. Friend leaves the subject of documents, did the dossier that owed so much to that Californian student have the authority of Peter Ricketts and the Joint Intelligence Committee? Did the Joint Intelligence Committee authorise that dossier?"—[*Official Report*, 26 February 2003; Vol. 400, c. 266.]

My right hon. Friend replied that Peter Ricketts had not been there for two years, but the Library supplied me with a document that confirmed that he was certainly

[Mr. Tam Dalyell]

there in September 2002—and confirmed, before I mentioned it, that he was still responsible for the Joint Intelligence Committee.

Be that as it may, let me now ask a direct question. Was this document authorised by John Scarlett and other members of the Joint Intelligence Committee? Did it have their imprimatur?

Mr. Bercow: Yes or no? Now!

Mr. Cook: It is terribly kind of the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) to back up my hon. Friend, but I am not a member of the Joint Intelligence Committee. I no longer see its papers, nor would I expect to do so. I have the highest personal regard for both John Scarlett and Peter Ricketts, with whom I have worked in the past and who are men of integrity and intelligence. I am not in a position to say one way or the other whether the document was cleared by the committee, but I shall draw my hon. Friend's question to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and invite him, if he can, to add to what he said in the House yesterday.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth (East Surrey): The Leader of the House will be aware that the Secretary of State for Transport this morning unveiled a consultation paper on aviation and airport development. It is based on the discredited "predict and provide" approach to planning and, incidentally, threatens massive and unsustainable environmental damage to my constituency and to the area surrounding Gatwick airport. Will the Leader of the House promise an early opportunity for the House to debate this important consultation paper, so that all opinions can be aired?

Mr. Cook: As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, the initial consultation document did not include Gatwick and the surrounding area because an undertaking was given to the residents of Gatwick some time ago that we would not return to the expansion of Gatwick. The courts ruled against the Government on that question, which is why we have been obliged to reissue the consultation document with the inclusion of Gatwick. However, I do not anticipate that the final policy judgments will be made by the courts that gave that ruling; they will be made within the Government, and will be subject to all the various considerations, including previous commitments given to the hon. Gentleman's constituents, and to those living around Gatwick.

It is very important that we look at this issue in the round, and that we achieve a strategic perspective on where future aviation provision should be. I fully endorse what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport said this morning on the radio. The one thing that must unite all the communities affected by the consultation is that we need to reach a decision—as quickly as we reasonably can, and consistent with that consultation—and remove the blight that may otherwise affect many of those areas.

Mr. Parmjit Dhanda (Gloucester): Bearing in mind the fact that some £80 million of European Union money and a further £10 million of British Government money has gone into Palestine and the occupied territories in the past 12 months to help humanitarian projects, is it not time that we considered an urgent statement in the House on whether some of that money has effectively been destroyed by military incursions by the Israeli military, and whether, as a result, we need to approach the Israeli Government to get compensation for the European Union and the British Government?

Mr. Cook: I am not sure that compensation would offer a fruitful avenue of dialogue. However, we certainly have maintained considerable dialogue with the Israeli Government, through the European Union and bilaterally, on the importance of responding to the humanitarian position in the Palestinian territories, and of assisting the Palestinian Authority in the economic development of its people. All Members of the House must be acutely concerned at the very serious and mounting evidence of the humanitarian crisis in the Palestinian territories. It cannot assist the peace process if the people of Palestine find that their own lives are becoming increasingly difficult in economic terms, and if there is increasing evidence of malnutrition among their children. We are more likely to achieve progress towards peace if the local people themselves can see that progress is being made on the ground in terms of their quality of life.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. I should remind the House that questions to the Leader of the House should relate to the business that has been announced for the next fortnight. Some of the questions are straying much wider than that, so I offer that reminder on this occasion.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): I wonder whether, despite the very busy schedule that the Leader of the House has announced, he can find a little time for a debate entitled "Government websites and their role in the democratic process". In 2000, the Prime Minister came to my constituency and announced that the Government would resurface the A30 between Honiton and Exeter—an issue that I have raised in three separate parliamentary debates, exchanged correspondence on and tabled written questions about. I recently received a letter from the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson). He informed me that I must scan the Highways Agency website, apparently at random, in order to find out as and when the Government decide to answer this question. That is unacceptable, and I have told him so. I hope that the Leader of the House is as concerned as I am that the random scanning of Government websites is now part of our democratic process.

Mr. Cook: May I first thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for your ruling to the House, which, if observed, would indeed be a procedural innovation on Thursdays? I should like, if I may, to look at the detail of what the hon. Lady says, but I would plainly want

Members of the House to have a full and helpful reply. Sometimes Government websites can themselves be a source of great information and assistance—

Mr. Forth: No, never!

Mr. Cook: I am not quite sure with what authority and personal experience of websites the right hon. Gentleman expresses his view, but I shall certainly try to ensure that the hon. Lady receives as full a reply as possible.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): Did not yesterday's debate again demonstrate that all those who say that the House of Commons is no longer important are talking nonsense and have been proved wrong? Is it not important that, during future debates on the same subject, we avoid giving the wrong signals to the bloody tyrant in Baghdad about our determination, as part of the international community, that disarmament must take place or he must face the consequences?

Mr. Cook: It is very important that Saddam Hussein fully understand that all who took part in yesterday's debate, however they may have voted at the end of it, want him to comply with his obligations under the United Nations Security Council; indeed, there would be a very substantial body of support in the House for making sure that the authority of the United Nations is upheld.

I agree with my hon. Friend about yesterday's debate demonstrating to the world outside the importance of Parliament as the crucible in which the major issues of the nation, and the major challenges of international affairs, are fought out. Although not every article that appeared in this morning's papers would necessarily have been written by the Government Information and Communications Service, it is worth noting that those acres of comment and editorial were possible only because we moved the vote forward to seven o'clock in the evening.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): I ask the Leader of the House to have a look at column 257 of yesterday's *Hansard*, where the Prime Minister says:

> "What is more, people should go to university based on their merit, whatever their class or background."—[*Official Report*, 26 February 2003; Vol. 400, c. 257.]

The right hon. Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Clarke) said a few days ago:

> "I approve of the actions of Bristol university and others who are trying to attract students who have potential to learn."

He appears to be completely out of control: he is a bull in a china shop, and is still fighting the class war. Will the Leader of the House have a word with him and ensure that he talks to the Prime Minister, so that the Government have a coherent policy on this very important issue?

Mr. Cook: Of course, it is very important that the Government have a coherent policy, and I can assure the hon. Gentleman that all members of the Government are united in our determination to ensure that we widen access to university for people of all social classes. There is an issue that does need to be addressed. On entry to the top universities in Britain, it is interesting to note that 7 per cent. of entrants came from the state school population, and 39 per cent. came from independent schools. I do not believe that the relative balance between entry from independent schools and from state schools actually matches—

Mr. Forth: Merit?

Mr. Cook: I do not believe that the small proportion of the population who go to independent schools actually account for 40 to 50 per cent. of the merit of our young population. That is why we have said that it is very important that we widen access and ensure that people are admitted on merit, but admitted fairly on merit.

I should also point out to the hon. Member for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham) that this Government have widened access to universities for all social classes. Whether in terms of independent schools or state schools, access has increased under this Government. It is not this Government but his party that is proposing that entry to university be capped for everybody.

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington): I express to my right hon. Friend my regret that today's business was not adjusted to allow for an oral statement on the runway capacity consultation paper that was published today. Can we adjust the business of the House over the next fortnight accordingly? The House was given an undertaking that the new document would contain information on Gatwick, which it does. However, we were also told that it would be updated to include, for example, information from the royal commission on environmental pollution—the Government's own commission—which identified the air pollution risk to my constituents and others. We also believed that the new material would take into account the terrorist threat of surface-to-air missile attacks on aircraft, particularly on those landing and taking off at Heathrow, which would have an impact on the entire capital. However, today's document takes neither of those issues into account. May I ask for a statement in the House within the next fortnight, or, failing that, a commitment to a statement in June, at the end of the consultation period?

Mr. Cook: I know the enormous importance of the issue to my hon. Friend's constituents and I fully understand the close interest that he therefore takes in the matter. That will not be the last word from the Government on the subject. We will publish further papers and documents in which some of those matters can be covered. As I said earlier, it is important for those in all the areas affected by the consultation process that we should move to a decision—consistent with the consultation process that we have extended—and for that reason it would not have been welcome in those communities if we had delayed the White Paper for further work of the kind to which my hon. Friend referred.

I wish to clarify the figures that I mentioned earlier. Some 7 per cent. of the school population attend independent schools, but those pupils make up 39 per cent. of entry to the top universities. I am all in favour

[Mr. Cook]

of ensuring that entry to university is based on merit, but I am not sure that the vast difference between those two percentages reflects merit and no other consideration.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): I would like to bring to the attention of the Leader of the House early day motion 561.

[That this House notes that community pharmacists offer their local communities convenient access to NHS services; recognises their role in reducing the burden on local general practitioners; notes the recommendations of the Office of Fair Trading that pharmaceutical dispensing should be made open to free market competition; is concerned that supermarkets would use their market power to undermine and eliminate small local pharmacies and thereby effect a net loss of NHS provision; and urges Her Majesty's Government not to accept this recommendation of the OFT.]

The motion urges the Government not to accept the recommendation from the Office of Fair Trading that pharmaceutical dispensing should be made open to free-market competition. Deregulation would be disadvantageous to those who are already disadvantaged in our society. Will the Leader of the House arrange for the report to be debated in the House before the Government act on it?

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman will understand that the report from the director general of the OFT is not a Government report. It is now with us and we are considering it. The Department of Trade and Industry will make its response in the fullness of time. I would just point out that all Members, including Ministers, fully value the importance of the pharmaceutical industry and the service that it provides to local communities. We must ensure that that is fully reflected in any judgment that we reach on the report.

Mr. Jim Marshall (Leicester, South): My right hon. Friend will recall that a few weeks ago I raised with him the consequences of the implementation of section 55 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002. He will also recall that some days ago the High Court decided that section 55 infringed the human rights of asylum seekers. My understanding is that the Home Office is likely to appeal against that decision, and that the appeal will probably be heard the week after next. In view of that timetable, will my right hon. Friend arrange an urgent debate on section 55 specifically so that the House may give its view on its operation and advise the Home Secretary whether to pursue the appeal procedure?

Mr. Cook: I am not able to offer a debate within the next two weeks in view of the business that I have already announced. I can see difficulties ahead if I changed that business, given that it has already been announced and covers areas of considerable interest to many right hon. and hon. Members. However, it would also be difficult for the House to have a debate on a matter that is very much before the courts, in this case the Appeal Court. In the event that the Appeal Court upholds the existing ruling, consultation will have to take place on the Government's intentions, but in the meantime the matter is before the courts. As soon as judgment has been reached, I am sure that the Home Secretary will wish to make the Government's position clear to the House.

Mr. Andrew Mackay (Bracknell): Uncharacteristically, the Leader of the House did not answer all the questions posed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth). I ask the Leader of the House again just which Minister or official cleared the dodgy dossier. As this now looks like a cover-up, can he ensure that a statement is made next week by the Minister concerned?

Mr. Cook: I understand that the paper was not issued as a Command Paper and, therefore, the process of ministerial accountability for White Papers would not necessarily apply. The right hon. Gentleman heard me respond to the shadow Leader of the House and my central point remains true—if the Opposition wish to support the Government strategy and to be identified with the firm position being taken by the Prime Minister, they must resist the opportunity to try to score political points at every twist and turn.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): May I bring the Leader of the House back to the question of the changed hours? They are causing many problems, and not only for Members of Parliament. Many staff are anxious about the future of their employment and I understand that it is difficult to find Members to serve on Committees. As a northern MP, I now have only Monday mornings free for school parties. I have encouraged schools to visit to watch debates and to look round. It is part of our democracy to visit the House, but the present arrangements are causing difficulties because they mean that Northern MPs have to give up visits in their constituencies on Monday mornings. May we have an urgent debate on the hours and how they are working, or not working? After all, we should not be trying to accommodate newspaper editors. This House is more important than they are.

Mr. Cook: I am not in favour of accommodating newspaper editors in any way, but I am in favour of accommodating our constituents, who have every right to be informed about what happens in this place. As a result of the vote yesterday taking place at 7 o'clock, they had a much fuller account of what happened here than they would have had if we had divided at 10 o'clock. Although I can well understand why that argument might not necessarily appeal to all my colleagues on the Front Bench, I had hoped that it would appeal to my hon. Friend.

On the question of access for schools, I am fully seized of the importance of reaching out and making contact with schools. For that very reason, the Modernisation Committee is considering how we may improve access to the House and ensure that we strengthen our education service and reach out to schools around Britain. However, it is a matter of fact that the overwhelming preponderance of schools that visit this place have a relative geographic proximity to it, and there are other ways in which we can provide a parliamentary link to schools at some distance, which would be of great value to all regions of Britain.

Mr. Bercow: May we please have an urgent debate, in Government time, on the Government's plans for a massive increase in house building across the south of England? Given that the Milton Keynes south Midlands study envisages a further 59,000 houses in the Aylesbury vale area between now and 2031 and that there is an estimated associated cost for infrastructure of £8.5 billion—there seems little prospect that we shall meet that cost—does the Leader of the House understand that my constituents are concerned about air pollution, traffic congestion, pressure on school places and access to medical facilities, and that they need to have their concerns urgently addressed and allayed?

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman is quite correct that any house building must be accompanied by an appropriate level of public service and physical infrastructure to ensure that the quality of life marches in step with the increase in housing volume. I fully understand the importance of that. It is also important that we minimise the pressure on greenfield sites, which is why I am proud that the Government have achieved their target of 60 per cent. development of residential accommodation on brownfield sites. Having said that, we face acute demand for additional housing in the south-east and that is one reason why we face a substantial rise in house prices in the area, which I am sure will be of concern to many of the hon. Gentleman's constituents who are looking for a new home for the first time. We cannot hope to address that concern if we do not provide substantial numbers of additional homes for those who want to live in the south-east.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): Has the Leader of the House had an opportunity to read the report of the Commission for Health Improvement on the Government's private finance initiative flagship, the Cumberland infirmary, which is a document as critical and coruscating as I have ever seen? Has he noted that it reports raw sewage bubbling out of scrub sinks, doors hanging off, and more leaks than Cardiff city centre on St. David's day? Will he find time in the next 14 days for a Government statement on the future of the PFI policy, which is seriously and fundamentally flawed? It damages patients' and public confidence in the NHS. Finally, will he recall—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That is sufficient. There is too much embellishment of questions.

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend is correct that the picture painted in the report is very serious and I understand that the chief executive of the health trust has departed its service, partly as a result of the report. It focused on the way in which the PFI was managed. Before my hon. Friend erects a general case of principle based on this matter, I note that the same body has also produced reports on the PFI projects at Durham and Dartford, which were very positive in their conclusions and stated that those projects worked well. That should be set against the report on the Cumberland project.

Dr. John Pugh (Southport): During the recess, a resident from my area was shot dead by terrorists in Saudi Arabia. Two years ago, another constituent was maimed in a similar outrage. British subjects are currently languishing in Saudi jails, having been tortured and deprived of sleep. Will the Leader of the House ensure that the Foreign Secretary makes a statement on the Floor of the House about the security of British citizens in Saudi Arabia and the threat of terrorism there?

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that our advice about travel to Saudi Arabia and elsewhere is constantly updated and kept under review. I am familiar with the background to a number of cases involving British citizens detained in Saudi Arabia because, sadly, they go back for more than two years. I assure the hon. Gentleman and the House that the Government—through local embassies, and through Ministers—repeatedly express concern about UK citizens involved in such cases, and that we seek to achieve a proper system to ensure that those people can be brought to trial or released.

Mr. Tony Colman (Putney): May I draw the attention of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House to early-day motion 667 on the demise of wide-based share option schemes in the UK as a result of the new accounting regulations to be agreed shortly?

[That this House notes the great benefits to employees and employers of broad-based employee shares schemes which have been promoted by this and previous Governments and from which millions of UK employees have benefited to the extent of over £35 billion; registers its grave concerns over the impact on such schemes of the International Accounting Standards Board and the Accounting Standards Board proposals on accounting for share-based payments; notes the calls by the TUC, ProShare and others that broad-based schemes should be excluded from this new accounting charge; calls on the Government to add its voice to the calls for such an exclusion; and further calls upon the International Accounting Standards Board and the Accounting Standards Board to draft wording which, while abiding by the general principle of the proposed standard, would exclude broad-based schemes from an accounting charge.]

That change would adversely affect millions of constituents, and is also worrying the TUC, the Confederation of British Industry and National Association of Pension Funds. Does he agree that an early debate is needed so that the House can express its own concerns before the accounting standards come into force later in March?

Mr. Cook: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his detailed early-day motion, although I have not yet had time to read it fully and to the end. The Government fully understand the benefits of employee share schemes. We would not want to do anything that made it impossible to maintain those benefits or schemes. I am sure that the matter that my hon. Friend has raised will be explored fully by the Treasury, with an understanding of the points that he has made.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): The Leader of the House will know that the US is holding a number of UK citizens at Guantanamo bay.

[Mr. Douglas Hogg]

It is suggested that they are terrorists. I know nothing about the truth or otherwise of that, but may we have an early statement or debate so that the Government can say what is being done to get the status and future of the people defined properly? Surely they should have the full protection of the law. Surely they should be either charged or released. They have been held for 18 months or so. That cannot be right.

Mr. Cook: I have great sympathy with the right hon. and learned Gentleman's general point. I assure him that our consuls in the US have paid a number of visits to those British citizens, and that the issue has been raised repeatedly with the US Administration. Plainly, we will continue to take a close interest in the welfare and legal rights of British citizens there.

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): Now that France has threatened to use its veto on a second UN resolution on Iraq, will my right hon. Friend ensure that there is a debate in the next fortnight to consider France's business interests in Iraq? Those interests go back to the 1975 French-Iraqi nuclear co-operation treaty signed by Jacques Chirac, when he was Prime Minister, and Saddam Hussein. The treaty marked the beginning of the supply of French equipment to Iraq to build up a nuclear arsenal in exchange for extensive support for French business commitments.

Mr. Cook: The Government's position is that there should be a second resolution. We are actively seeking to promote a second resolution, with support from close European partners such as Spain. I am not entirely confident that pursuing the argument outlined by my hon. Friend would assist in the process of building consensus around the resolution. However, I assure her that we will do all we can to achieve common ground with France in a way that enables the resolution to proceed.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): The Leader of the House announced that, next week, a day each will be spent on the respective Report stages of the Local Government Bill and the Communications Bill. That means that the Report stages of those Bills will have been examined on the Floor of the House for two days each, at least. I was not a member of the Standing Committees examining those Bills, but I was a member of the Committee scrutinising the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill. Is the right hon. Gentleman concerned that only a small proportion of that Bill's clauses and schedules were examined in Committee? Will he assure the House that at least two days will be spent on the Report stages of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill?

Mr. Cook: We will, of course, carefully consider the volume of amendments tabled on Report, and the progress made in Committee. However, the hon. Gentleman is correct; there will have been two days for the Report stages of both the Local Government Bill and the Communications Bill. With respect, I suggest that that demonstrates that the Government are committed to ensuring that legislation gets adequate time for scrutiny on the Floor of the House.

Miss Anne Begg (Aberdeen, South): The long-awaited Energy White Paper was published on Monday. Will my right hon. Friend provide an opportunity in the coming weeks to debate the issues raised in the White Paper, and the implications for constituencies such as mine?

Mr. Cook: I am very aware of the House's strong interests in energy matters. The White Paper to which my hon. Friend refers is very important. It sets out a perspective for reducing carbon gases, meeting our commitment to halt and reverse global warming, and making sure that we tackle other issues such as fuel poverty, which is a matter of concern in all constituencies. I am sure that it will be important for the House to consider these matters at some stage. I shall certainly bear the matter in mind for the future.

Mr. Nigel Dodds (Belfast, North): The Prime Minister is having discussions today with the Prime Minister of the Irish Republic. More discussions are scheduled to take place between them and parties in Northern Ireland on Monday next. Will the Leader of the House ensure that there is an early statement from the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on those discussions? Current negotiations with IRA-Sinn Fein on a list of concessions in return for things that the IRA should have done years ago should also be covered. Those concessions are causing great concern for people in Northern Ireland. May we have an early debate on those matters, so that the views of those people can be heard by the Government?

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman is right to say that intensive discussions are under way to see how we can restore momentum to the Northern Ireland peace process. I hope that that will command the support of all hon. Members. It is very important that we try to keep that process going. In that context, I do not know how helpful it is to describe any proposal on the table as a concession to one side or the other. There has to be compromise on all sides, especially by the paramilitaries, whether loyalist or republican. There must be real acts of completion if we are to restore the necessary momentum to the peace process. Plainly, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will make sure that the House is informed. The House will accept that my right hon. Friend has taken a close interest in the peace process, and that he has honourably sought to keep the House informed about its progress. If progress is made, I am sure that the House will be the first to be informed.

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): Has my right hon. Friend followed the increasingly vitriolic campaign waged by extreme right-wing newspapers against some of our leading universities that are trying to improve their admissions procedures by basing entry on merit? Has my right hon. Friend seen this week's statement from the group Universities UK, criticising some schools in the Headmasters Conference for applying exceptional pressure on universities—and especially on Bristol and Edinburgh universities—and will he find time for a debate in the next two weeks on the subject. The issues need to be considered on the basis of fact and evidence, and not of myth and hysteria.

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend makes a fair point, and articulates a real concern expressed by a number of universities. It is to Bristol university's credit that it has responsibly made sure that it is the academic staff and tutors who make admission decisions, based on merit. The university has made genuine attempts to make sure that the population basis of Britain is more fairly reflected, and that admission is open and accessible to all schools.

Apparently, one factor in admissions is whether people from state schools are applying to certain universities. Some universities seem to be rather poor at attracting applications from state schools. That matter is in their hands, and they could remedy it. Also, some universities seem to have a bias in the acceptance that follows applications. It is interesting that some figures show that even among pupils with comparable A-level results there is a higher success rate for those from independent schools than for those from state schools. Those do not in any way trench on the importance of admitting students on the basis of merit, but they reflect issues that universities could put right. Those universities that have tackled them and put them right deserve to be praised not pressurised.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): While we are rightly focusing on Iraq, may I nevertheless ask for a further debate on Zimbabwe? That would enable me to raise the case of the family of my constituent Hilary Parsons, whose son and daughter-in-law have been forced off their farm at Karoi, whose daughter-in-law and grandchildren were attacked by a mob of 30 so-called war veterans when they returned to see if the remaining animals were all right, who were told that an official of the Zimbabwe Football Association, one Temba Mliswa, now owns the farm—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must not give the contents of the speech that he would make if such a debate were to be granted. I think that the Leader of the House may have got the point.

Mr. Cook: I welcome the fact that regularly on a Thursday hon. Members raise their concerns about Zimbabwe, because it is very important that the Government of Zimbabwe should be under no illusion about the depth and breadth of feeling on the issue in this House. I fully agree with the hon. Gentleman that the appalling things taking place in Zimbabwe are wholly deplored on both sides of the House, in particular the forcible land settlement of people who have contacts with the regime at the expense of people who previously owned and farmed that land. That is not only wholly unacceptable, but partly contributes to the appalling malnutrition and food shortages in Zimbabwe.

Jim Sheridan (West Renfrewshire): My right hon. Friend will be aware of the welcome boost given to the British shipbuilding industry by the recent announcement on the building of aircraft carriers. It is to be hoped that other independent yards such as Fergusons in Port Glasgow will also benefit from that. May I ask him to make time for an important debate about industries such as electronics that have a major impact on local economies but where thousands of people are losing their jobs not through their own fault but because employers are choosing to take advantage of the low wage economies in eastern Europe?

Mr. Cook: I welcome my hon. Friend's remarks about the stimulus to the shipbuilding industry that has resulted from Government decisions. I understand his concerns about the electronics industry. Representing as I do a constituency where many thousands of people work in the electronics industry, I am well aware of the pressures that it faces and the troubled times for those who work in it.

I understand my hon. Friend's point about transfers to lower-wage economies, but the only way in which we can be confident that we can beat that trend and ensure that we have secure employment in our own country is to continue to improve the skills of our people and to invest in education so that we can provide higher added value than any cheaper-wage economy. The signs are, from the overall employment figures, that we are succeeding in that, and I am pleased to say that there are now almost 1.5 million more people at work than there were in 1997 when we took office.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): May I bring the Leader of the House back to the question that my right hon. Friend the shadow Leader of the House asked about the delay in the announcement of the Budget, in reply to which all we got was a lot of party political knockabout? May I ask in a very straightforward manner what is really the reason for that delay?

Mr. Cook: I thought that I responded to the question in the terms in which it was put to me. I have never got the impression that the right hon. Gentleman would complain about party political knockabout. On the Budget, it is still February, which is early days as far as the Budget is concerned. [HON. MEMBERS: "What?"] Well, I think that I am correct in saying that it is still February. I am always acutely aware of when February ends, because 28 February is my birthday. [HON. MEMBERS: "Ah!"] It is a matter of great regret to me that we are having this exchange on 27 February, not 28 February. I can only assure the hon. Gentleman that the Budget normally takes place in the spring, and I have no reason to believe that it will be different this year.

Hugh Bayley (City of York): I wish my right hon. Friend many happy returns for tomorrow and thank him for so promptly reinstating the debate about flooding that we were to have had today.

It is now more than two years since the devastating floods hit York. The Environment Agency has been carrying out a major study of the Ouse catchment, the larger of the two rivers that flow through York, to enable it to predict more accurately the risk of flooding in future. Hundreds of householders in York whose houses were flooded two years ago are waiting for that study, because on it hangs the cost-effectiveness of improving flood defences that would protect them from further floods. Does the Leader of the House know

[Hugh Bayley]

whether the Environment Agency intends to publish that report before we have our debate on flooding in two weeks' time?

Mr. Cook: It was with regret that we had to postpone the debate on flood defences, but all hon. Members will understand that we had an important House matter to resolve today. I am very pleased that we have restored the debate to take place within the next two weeks. My hon. Friend's comments demonstrate that it will feature speeches of quality. I cannot say whether the report will be published by then, but I shall draw the Environment Agency's attention to my hon. Friend's request that it should be.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. May I make a particular appeal for brevity so that I can try to accommodate all hon. Members who are rising?

Mr. Michael Weir (Angus): May I take the Leader of the House back to the point made by the hon. Member for East Antrim (Mr. Beggs) on the pharmacy report? May we have an urgent debate on that report to Government? It not only threatens to undermine small town and rural pharmacies, but endangers moves by Scottish community pharmacies to create new services, especially in relation to chronic pain management. It is important that the matter is dealt with urgently to end the uncertainty.

Mr. Cook: I understand the great interest in that matter on the part of the industry and of the customers and communities that it serves. I am not sure whether it would necessarily be in the interests of a favourable outcome to have an urgent debate, but I shall certainly make sure that the Department of Trade and Industry is aware of the interest that has been expressed during today's and previous business questions. It is evident that there is considerable constituency interest in the matter. I am sure that when the Government have reached their view the House will wish to hear it and, if appropriate, to consider it further.

Mr. Russell Brown (Dumfries): Yesterday, in reply to a question on Iraq by my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew), the Prime Minister stated that

> "the House will have the opportunity to vote on this issue many times".—[*Official Report*, 26 February 2003; Vol. 400, c. 258.]

I am reassured by my right hon. Friend's response to the shadow Leader of the House, but can I ask him to give serious consideration to a further debate on Iraq on the day after the UN Security Council votes on the second resolution, even if it means debating the matter on a non-sitting day?

Mr. Cook: I can certainly assure my hon. Friend that we will keep the matter under close review and that we will want to give the earliest practical opportunity to the House to debate the outcome of any second resolution. I am not at present clear whether that will necessarily require the kind of emergency procedure that my hon. Friend suggests, but it is perfectly plain from the statements of the Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and myself that the Government want the House to have the opportunity to endorse a future second resolution in the Security Council as soon as possible. As the Foreign Secretary said, it is as much in the interests of the Government as of the House that that should be done before any military action.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): Will the Leader of the House find time in the next two weeks for the introduction of a Government Bill to amend the Human Tissue Act 1961? The Leader of the House may be aware that Alder Hey has expressed its profound apologies to the families, but I know from talking to the family support group at Addenbrookes hospital in my constituency that their distress would be at least partly mitigated by the knowledge that the Government are acting speedily to amend the 1961 Act, as the chief medical officer recommended in his report on Alder Hey two years ago.

Mr. Cook: I fully understand the enormous distress and anxiety that has been caused to constituents of the hon. Gentleman by the events to which he refers. He will be aware that the Government have committed themselves to ensuring that we carry through all the recommendations that have been put to us and which we have accepted. Where that requires legislation, we will provide it. My expectation is that he will see that legislation in the course of this Session.

Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Do not yesterday's proceedings prove the urgent need for a day's debate on the desirability of a British war powers Act? Yesterday showed that we are the crucible of the nation for debate but emphasised that we have no powers to decide whether to go to war. Such a decision is made by only two people: the Prime Minister and the Head of State, who lacks democratic accountability.

The arrangement worked well in the past because almost every time that we have gone to war, it has been with the wholehearted consent of the majority of the people of this nation. We have debated the subject many times, but on this occasion the more knowledge that people have about our plans to go to war, the greater their opposition.

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend understates the crucial role of the House of Commons in the matter. I said many months ago that it was inconceivable that a British Government would commit British troops to military action without the support of the House of Commons. That must remain the case. Ministers may make the decision, but they, including the Prime Minister, are accountable to this place. To be fair to the Prime Minister, we have made it plain throughout that we want to be accountable to this place and to carry it with us, and that the House of Commons will have an opportunity to vote on a substantive motion when the time comes.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): Will the Leader of House ensure that a statement is made next week to tackle the criticisms in the Public Administration Committee report on ombudsmen? It relates largely to a finding by the ombudsman in response to a criticism by me that, for the first time, the Government had not accepted the ombudsman's advice on access to official information. Perhaps a statement would help us to understand why the Government say so much about freedom of information but are secretive and hypocritical when it comes to the provision of information.

Mr. Cook: For the record, the Government introduced and are implementing the Freedom of Information Act 2000. The Conservative Government refused to introduce such a measure.

Mr. Iain Luke (Dundee, East): My right hon. Friend may not know about the unhappiness of hon. Members of all parties about the restrictions on the debate about the Scottish economy in the previous Scottish Grand Committee meeting, which was held on 18 February. The debate was restricted because of an inability to award extra time and the Divisions in the House. As Chair of the Modernisation Committee, will my right hon. Friend undertake to place on the agenda of its next meeting in the next two weeks a review of the workings of the Scottish Grand Committee and other Grand Committees to make them more relevant to the work of the House? Perhaps we could have a system along the lines of the cross-border institutions in Ireland, whereby Members of Parliament, Ministers, MSPs and Assembly Members could come together to discuss issues that straddle the devolved divide.

Mr. Cook: I am aware from the comments of members of the Scottish Grand Committee of the frustration caused by the loss of time through Divisions in the House. We can deal with that through Standing Orders, and with the power of the Chair to extend the length of Scottish Grand Committee's sittings to compensate for time lost in Divisions. I am willing to do that without necessarily going through the Modernisation Committee.

My hon. Friend raised a large question when he suggested full meetings in Committee of Members of this places and Members of other places such as the Scottish Parliament. I do not necessarily oppose such a proposal but not every Member for a Scottish constituency would wholeheartedly endorse it. I would want to know that there was consensus before proceeding further.

David Burnside (South Antrim): The Government have been constructive in presenting to the House information and intelligence to allow hon. Members to evaluate the threat that Saddam Hussein poses to world peace. The police and our intelligence services provide that information.

In the next seven to 14 days, the leadership of the Ulster Unionist party must decide whether to go back into an Executive with Sinn Fein. Will the Leader of the House ask the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State of Northern Ireland to give the House an evaluation of Colombia, Castlereagh, Stormontgate and the threat posed by republican terrorists? We cannot make a judgment without that intelligence information.

Mr. Cook: Any process that the Government undertake to restore momentum to the peace process must take account of our knowledge of the activities of those who are party to it. That is important, and I assure the hon. Gentleman that the Government are clear that if the peace process is to progress we need a definite commitment to acts of completion by paramilitary organisations on both sides. I am not sure whether it would be sensible to disclose in public intelligence information that may not be relevant to future criminal activities.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): May we have a statement next week on the administrative difficulties that may arise if the Budget is not presented next month or, as matters currently appear, it disappears completely?

Mr. Cook: I assure the hon. Gentleman that there is no risk of the Budget disappearing. The Government would never miss giving the House an opportunity to celebrate the fact that we have lower unemployment and lower inflation than ever existed under the Conservative Government, and a sounder economy and lower interest rates than they achieved.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): Again, the business statement did not mention the mental health Bill, which is eagerly anticipated by Conservative Members and the individuals and organisations throughout the country that provided more than 2,000 consultation responses to the draft measure. When can we expect the Bill? Will the final measure remove the obnoxious coercion provisions in the draft Bill? If the Bill will not be introduced soon, will the Leader of the House allow time for a debate on mental health? In the past, we have given time in Supply days to debate the state of mental health provision or its lack in many parts of the country. There are gaps in adolescent mental health provision and increasing waiting times for services.

Mr. Cook: Work on the mental health Bill continues carefully and with due process precisely because of the large volume of responses to the consultation process. As hon. Members know, I strongly argued that we should consult on draft legislation, try to find ways in which the public can comment on it and enter into debate with the most interested lobby and professional groups. That happened with the mental health Bill. It is right and proper to ensure adequate time to reflect on the responses and, as the hon. Gentleman suggests, try to accommodate them in a future text.

Hugh Robertson (Faversham and Mid-Kent): In a recent written answer, the Ministry of Defence disclosed that up to 10,400 of our service men and women who are currently deploying to the Gulf face cuts in their local overseas allowance of between 20 per cent. and 35 per cent. Early-day motion 779 deals with the matter.

[That this House recognises that 10,400 members of the armed forces deployed to the Gulf are in receipt of local overseas allowance; deplores the Ministry of Defence's decision to remove 20 per cent. of that allowance for single and married unaccompanied personnel after the first 17 days of any deployment and 35 per cent. of that allowance for married accompanied personnel if their spouse leaves their permanent duty

[Hugh Robertson]

station for more than 17 days; and urges the Ministry of Defence to ensure that no member of the armed forces loses out financially through service in the Gulf.]

Will the Leader of the House ensure that the Secretary of State for Defence makes an urgent statement in the House on the entire welfare package? That will be of interest to hon. Members of all parties. Does he agree that no member of our armed forces should lose out financially through service in the Gulf?

Mr. Cook: My hon. and right hon. Friends who are Defence Ministers are fully aware of the importance of maintaining morale and motivation in the forces. Welfare is an important part of that and my ministerial colleagues will give careful consideration to ensuring that the welfare of all members of the armed forces and their families is fully taken care of.

John Barrett (Edinburgh, West): When the Leader of the House considers the request for an early debate on the future of our pharmacies, which the hon. Member for Angus (Mr. Weir) mentioned earlier, will he bear it in mind that the Government gave a commitment to respond within 90 days of the publication of the Office of Fair Trading report and that we are already 40 days into that period?

Mr. Cook: Certainly, I will do so, but according to the hon. Gentleman's arithmetic, there are almost 50 days to go. I have no reason to believe that the Government will not meet the deadline.

Standards and Privileges

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That this House—

(i) approves the Third Report of the Committee on Standards and Privileges (House of Commons Paper No. 435); and

(ii) accordingly suspends Mr Michael Trend, Member for Windsor, from the service of the House for two weeks.—*[Mr. Heppell.]*

1.38 pm

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire): I commend to the House the motion to approve the Committee's third report, which was agreed unanimously on 12 February, and the related recommendation to suspend my hon. Friend the Member for Windsor (Mr. Trend) from the service of the House for two weeks.

On 13 February, when the report was published, my hon. Friend made a personal statement in which he accepted unreservedly the report's conclusions that he had been muddled and naive in his negligent understanding of the additional costs allowance. He apologised unreservedly to Mr. Speaker and to his constituents. Hon. Members will acknowledge the speed with which my hon. Friend came to the House to accept the report's conclusions and to apologise for his conduct, and the terms in which he did that.

The background to this case was a report in *The Mail on Sunday* on 15 December that my hon. Friend had returned to his house in Windsor while claiming an allowance intended to cover the cost of overnight stays in London. His reaction to the allegations was that they were wrong, and he immediately contacted the Department of Finance and Administration to confirm that his understanding was correct. While his discussions with the department did indeed confirm that he had never claimed additional costs allowance in respect of his London address, they revealed that he had seriously misunderstood the significance of identifying his main residence for this purpose.

Although my hon. Friend believed that his conduct had always been perfectly proper, he accepted that he had misunderstood the rules, and agreed to repay, without delay, the sum that he was told was due. That was done, in full, on 23 December.

The Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards subsequently received several complaints, one of which, from a constituent, formed the basis of the commissioner's investigation.

This is the first case investigated by the present commissioner to come before the House, though not before my Committee. I pay tribute to the care and thoroughness, exemplified by this case, with which he carries out his investigations, and to the clarity of his report, published as an appendix to ours.

The commissioner concluded that my hon. Friend had claimed additional costs allowance in breach of the rules. He did not, however, find that the evidence available was sufficient to substantiate the conclusion that my hon. Friend had deliberately set out to abuse the allowance. He concluded that the evidence was certainly sufficient to justify the view that my hon. Friend was, at the least, careless or negligent in relation to the claims that he made. He also considered that it was clear that, in failing to observe the relevant rules, he had misused the allowance and consequently breached the code of conduct.

The Committee agreed that my hon. Friend was not dishonest in his belief that he had the option to choose which of his places of residence to register as his main residence for the purpose of the additional costs allowance. We recognised, as did the commissioner, that since the matter came to light my hon. Friend had co-operated fully with all the inquiries and promptly repaid the sum he was told he owed the Department. However, my hon. Friend should have recognised that his claiming additional costs allowance in relation to his Windsor home meant that the taxpayer was meeting some of the core running costs of what was in reality his main residence. He should have realised that it was wrong to sign a certificate giving the home of his friend in London as his main residence, when he was staying there infrequently. Accordingly, the Committee agreed with the commissioner that my hon. Friend was negligent, and had breached the code of conduct by making improper use of the additional costs allowance and failing strictly to observe the rules relating to the allowance.

The Committee considered very carefully what would be an appropriate penalty to recommend to the House. The consequences for my hon. Friend of what he conceded in his evidence to us was

"a mistake, a serious mistake",

have already been severe, in bringing to an end his parliamentary career. However, we must recognise the impact of cases of improper use of allowances on public confidence in Members of Parliament and in Parliament as an institution. Of course, the sum involved in this case was very substantial.

The code of conduct requires Members to observe the highest standards in relation to payments or allowances made to them for public purposes, and Members are personally responsible for both the accuracy and the validity of their claims. Having weighed all these considerations, we recommended that my hon. Friend be suspended from the service of the House for two weeks.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): I do not want to speak about the hon. Member in question, but the subject of the right hon. Gentleman's remarks prompted me to table questions regarding the manner in which the Fees Office does or does not check submissions for the additional costs allowance. Is it not important that Members of Parliament submit documentary evidence, as in any other job? The present arrangements are loose and unsatisfactory, and do no credit to the House.

Sir George Young: I should like to respond to the hon. Gentleman by saying a final word about the system to which he refers.

We are guardians of the public purse, as well as of parliamentary standards. We were concerned that more than £90,000 had been incorrectly claimed, and that this matter did not come to light through the normal system of scrutiny. We therefore welcomed the steps that are being taken to strengthen confidence in the system for claiming additional costs allowance. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman joins us in that view. We recommend that these steps be completed as quickly as possible and that they then be brought to the attention of all hon. Members. That would usefully complement the increased emphasis that we wish to place on education and prevention.

We believe that, whatever the precise solutions adopted, public confidence in Members requires that the standards that the House imposes on itself be no less effective than those that it would expect of others responsible for the expenditure of public money. Our recommendations to the House reflect that view.

1.45 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): These are sad but necessary occasions. The House has rules, and it keeps them under review. The Committee has a difficult job to do, which on this occasion, as on all others, it has done conscientiously, fairly and impartially.

My hon. Friend the Member for Windsor (Mr. Trend), as my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young) said, apologised to the House promptly and fully for what he did, and has taken the appropriate action. It is now for the House to agree with what the Committee said and bring this matter to a conclusion.

1.46 pm

Mr. Mark Oaten (Winchester): I do not wish to detain the House on this issue. The hon. Member for Windsor (Mr. Trend) has made an apology, and there is a long-standing tradition that when an hon. Member does that, we accept it and draw a line. However, I wish to say a few words about the report, because hon. Members want speedy progress on the wider implications of its recommendations.

The atmosphere surrounding the whole question of sleaze has improved considerably in recent years. The change of commissioner is welcome. I congratulate the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young), the Chairman of the Committee, on the speed with which he handled the process and the way in which he did it. That has gone some way to restore confidence in Members of Parliament being able to regulate themselves. The jury remains out on that, but this is an important first step in showing that there can be confidence in the system that we have in the House.

It is extremely important that the Government pick up particular recommendations speedily so that, come the new financial year on 1 April, the proposed changes to how Members submit their claims for allowances are in place, and that they are clear and simple, with clear guidance, and include the principle of receipts for large amounts.

I also hope that the Leader of the House will agree to an early debate on the Committee's proposals, and those of the Wicks committee, which would strengthen some of the procedures for both the Committee's and the commissioner's activities. Those proposals include even stronger measures, and the sooner the House can debate them, the sooner we can build on the progress made so far on these issues.

Finally, there are inconsistencies in the punishments that can be imposed on different forms of democratically elected representatives, such as councillors and Members

[Mr. Mark Oaten]

of Parliament, across a range of different offices. The issue needs to be examined. In the past, local councillors could be surcharged and disqualified. When the House considers the recommendations of the Wicks report and the possibility of fining Members of Parliament, I urge the Leader of the House to remove the inconsistencies, so that similar punishments are available for all of us who hold elected office, at whatever level.

1.49 pm

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): It is generally accepted in the House that we should move quickly to resolve recommendations from the Committee on Standards and Privileges. That is why the Government changed the business for this week, so that we could consider its report urgently. I do not intend to detain the House with a lengthy speech.

First, I thank the Committee for its work and for its expedition in producing the report very quickly. I also congratulate the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, who has done a very thorough, clear and lucid job, establishing all the facts in a commendably brief period. It is right to record that he had co-operation from the Member concerned.

We fully accept the Committee's recommendation. We always do, and I hope that the House is about to endorse it unanimously. It is important that we show unity within the House in accepting recommendations that touch upon the integrity of the House and of every Member.

My hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (David Winnick) questioned the adequacy of the supervision of claims for additional costs allowance. Earlier this week, I attended a meeting of the Speaker's advisory panel, at which we discussed that matter. I understand that proposals will shortly come from the Fees Office to tighten up the system, especially, as regards the reference in the letter from Mr. Archie Cameron that was produced in the commissioner's report to the House, a requirement that Members should specify on their claim form the address of the property for which they are claiming. That could have prevented the difficulty that arose in this case. That might also apply to another of the commissioner's comments on that letter in relation to documentary corroboration of the finance for which the Member had claimed. Both would be welcome and necessary steps for tightening the system and I am confident that they will achieve substantial support in the House.

David Winnick: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for mentioning my previous intervention.

As I have said outside this place, I work on the assumption that the overwhelming majority of Members on both sides of the House are perfectly honest, but would not it be helpful if documentary evidence were provided for any claim above £10, £15 or £20? If we were claiming for electricity or telephone bills and the bills were not enclosed, the Fees Office could ask the Member concerned to send on the documentary evidence. Would that be wrong?

Mr. Cook: All those matters are for consideration, but perhaps I could focus on the major issue—the one that has prompted the report: the claim for mortgage interest payments, which is by far the largest claim under the additional costs allowance. It would be desirable if, as standard practice, documentary evidence of mortgage interest paid in the course of the year or the month was supplied in support of the additional costs allowance. That would certainly have met this particular case and would, I suspect, cover a very high proportion of all claims under the additional costs allowance.

Mr. Michael Weir (Angus): As a new Member, I do not want to say too much about this matter, but I was struck by the fact that when I rented a flat in London the Fees Office was unwilling to make the payments direct to the letting agent so as to avoid them going through my hands at all, yet it will do so for office costs. That seems inconsistent, yet it could be a way to avoid situations such as that which we are discussing.

Mr. Cook: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point. If we were to put that obligation on the Fees Office, we should have to face the staffing consequences, which might not be inconsiderable. Traditionally, we have approached such allowances on the basis that Members themselves are responsible and that they must also accept accountability for whatever they have instructed payment to be made. Furthermore, Members choose to resolve their accommodation in a variety of ways, including hotels, and it is entirely right for them to make those decisions. I am not sure that it would necessarily be consistent with that individual freedom to choose if there were a centralised payment system.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Hull, North): I take the point that my right hon. Friend has just made, but surely the Fees Office could make the payment if a Member opts for it to do so. He will recall the fights that occurred in the past even to get the Fees Office to pay our secretaries their salaries direct, without them having first to go through our personal accounts. Direct payment would be a much better way and overcome a major part of the problem.

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend tempts me to follow him in reminiscing about the situation in the 1970s, which would, I suspect, appal some new Members who are accustomed to the rather different secretarial and office cost allowances that prevail nowadays. All those things can be improved and no particular suggestion is being ruled out, but it is important to ensure that we tighten the system. That is in hand and meetings have already taken place to discuss what should be done and hon. Members will shortly receive further advice.

I am conscious that the House wants to progress to the substantive matters of the day so, finally, I shall respond to the points made by the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten) about the report of the Wicks committee. The House will be aware that both the House of Commons Commission and the Standards and Privileges Committee published responses to the Wicks report. I fully understand the importance of discussing those reports in the House and we will ensure that there will be a debate on them before the House rises for the Easter recess. I hope that the House can broadly endorse the recommendations.

I was gratified that the Wicks committee report, which was comprehensive, did not find that we needed to do much that was fundamental to our system for integrity and for maintaining our standards. However, where it has made useful suggestions for improvement, we should consider them with a fair wind to ensure that we convince not only the Wicks committee but the wider public whom we serve that all possible improvements are made to our system of integrity and enforcement of standards, which is so important to the health of democracy in our country.

Question put and agreed to.

Social Security

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Before we debate the first of the two motions, I remind the House that the two orders to be considered this afternoon, on social security benefits uprating and on guaranteed minimum pensions increase, are to be debated separately for up to one and a half hours each. Debate should therefore relate to the merits of each order and should not extend to wider matters of social security or pensions policy.

1.55 pm

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr. Andrew Smith): I beg to move,

That the draft Social Security Benefits Up-rating Order 2003, which was laid before this House on 5th February, be approved.

I am satisfied that the order is compatible with the European convention on human rights.

The order will uprate most benefits in the normal way. National insurance benefits will rise by the retail prices index—1.7 per cent for the relevant period—and income-related benefits will rise by the Rossi index, 1.3 per cent. They add up to about £2.25 billion of extra Government spending to help those in most need and to tackle poverty.

This year, as in every year since 1998, we are able to increase some benefits by more than inflation. That contrasts starkly with the 1980s and 1990s, when child benefit was frozen for three years and pensioners received only inflation level increases, even as social security spending spiralled out of control.

In 1997, we said that we would cut the costs of social and economic failure, and we have done so. Despite a turbulent world economy, the latest unemployment figures show a record number of people in jobs and the lowest unemployment rate of the major industrialised countries. Through our investment in the new deal and Jobcentre Plus we have tackled the legacy of mass unemployment that we inherited. Since 1997 there have been nearly 1.5 million more jobs, with savings of £5 billion on the cost of unemployment that can be invested in improving services and tackling poverty.

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): In his opening remarks, the Secretary of State said that national insurance benefits had been increased at least in line with inflation. He will know, however, that there is one national insurance benefit for which that is not true—contributory jobseeker's allowance. For some reason, it was raised not by headline inflation but by the Rossi index—1.3 per cent. and not 1.7 per cent.—so it is a real-terms cut in a benefit that, at £50 a week, is already low. Will the Secretary of State or the Minister who responds to the debate explain why that benefit has been cut in real terms by being linked to Rossi, when normally national insurance benefits are linked to the all-items retail prices index?

Mr. Smith: I could hazard an answer now, but it will probably be best if my right hon. Friend the Minister for Pensions responds in the wind up.

My general case is valid: we have increased benefits according to the normal indices and, indeed, we have been able to go beyond that due to our success in

[Mr. Smith]

tackling mass unemployment. As a result of savings from tackling benefit fraud, we are able to ensure that more money is available to invest in services, providing extra help where it is needed and enabling more people to fulfil their potential, as well as, of course, tackling poverty. We have reversed the generation-long trend of rising child poverty. We have reduced by a third the number of families living on less than £10,000 per year and we are getting more money to pensioners than ever before.

Our strategy has been to tackle the root causes of poverty and to ensure that families and pensioners have a decent income and that people of working age are better off in work. We are doing more to help families. Last year, we raised the standard rate of maternity allowance and statutory maternity pay by a record amount to £75. This year we shall go even further, increasing it by a third to £100 a week.

At the same time, we are increasing the period for maternity leave to 26 weeks, with the option of a further 26 weeks unpaid, allowing women to take a year off work after having a baby. We will provide help not just for mothers but for fathers. We are introducing statutory paternity pay and statutory adoption pay at £100 a week, plus the right to two weeks' paid paternity leave and 26 weeks' paid adoption leave. That package of support will help 750,000 parents to support and care for their children.

I can also announce further direct support for children. Child benefit will be increased by more than inflation for the third time by this Government, taking the cumulative real increase for the first child to £5 a week since 1997. In addition, all child allowances will be increased by more than inflation, benefiting some 1.3 million of the poorest families in our country. Under Labour, income support help for the poorest children has doubled.

We know that it is particularly hard for low-income families who are bringing up children with disabilities, so I can announce today substantial rises in support. The disabled child premium will increase by more than 16 per cent. to £41.30—nearly double its 1997 rate—and there will be additional help for poorer families bringing up the most severely disabled children: the enhanced disability premium will increase by nearly a half.

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): The additional help being given to disabled children is welcome, but can the right hon. Gentleman give the House any information about any campaign, conducted by himself or in conjunction with the Treasury, to ensure that, as has been promised in the past, those new benefits are properly publicised to the families and parents of disabled children—particularly where those new benefits are linked to, or passported by, other benefits—so that they are drawn positively to their attention to ensure that the benefits get to those who need them?

Mr. Smith: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for welcoming the measures, and I am happy to give him the assurance that, yes, I am very concerned indeed that people should get the benefits to which they are entitled, and I will examine anything that has not been done in response to a campaign that it would make sense to do. It is in all our interests that people get what they are entitled to, especially when we are talking about disabled children.

Together, the measures that we set out will help more than 87,000 families bringing up disabled children. Our tax and benefit measures, combined with our successful employment policies, are helping to get more parents into work, enabling us to make major inroads into child poverty.

We also continue to tackle the legacy of pensioner poverty that we inherited. For the third year running, the retirement pension will be uprated by more than inflation, with an increase of £100 a year from next April for single pensioners and £160 a year for couples. We will increase the basic state pension by at least 2.5 per cent. each year during the lifetime of this Parliament, reaffirming the basic state pension as the foundation of security in retirement.

We will, as in every year since its introduction, increase the minimum income guarantee in line with earnings, giving more help to the poorest pensioners. Indeed, as a result of that measure alone, the incomes of the poorest pensioners will have gone up by over a third since 1997. In conjunction with the winter fuel payments and free television licences, we are already spending £6 billion extra in real terms on pensioners this year.

Paul Flynn (Newport, West): The Government are to be congratulated on their policy on pensioners, which has delivered an increase that is probably greater than any increase that would have been made if the link to earnings had been restored, but is it not true that many of the poorest pensioners are not claiming income support for various reasons? We should be considering those people, of whom there is a very large number. For reasons of pride or because of a disorganised life, or whatever, they are losing out, as their incomes are well below the minimum income guarantee level.

Mr. Smith: I agree that very many of the poorest pensioners are benefiting by more than a restoration of the earnings link would have given them, so I would not accept that they are especially losing out. Of course, it remains a challenge to increase take-up to the level that we would like, and creating a dedicated Pension Service will be a big help.

The Pension Service is more effectively organised to be sensitive to pensioners, as it has a local arm, and I am sure that all hon. Members are beginning to see the benefits in their constituencies of the local surgeries that are being organised. I am glad to see that some Conservative Members are nodding.

Getting such entitlements through the Pension Service is a very good way of tackling the stigma that many people have felt, wrongly, in getting something from social security. The more clearly we bracket those entitlements with the pension and as things that come through the Pension Service, the more we will encourage take-up.

Mr. Michael Jabez Foster (Hastings and Rye): My right hon. Friend may be interested to know that, in my constituency, more than 3,000 people have applied for the minimum income guarantee—calling it something different has made a big difference. As he will know, couples now get £150 a week, plus all the other benefits, whereas if the Tory link had continued they would now get £105 a week. That is a massive difference.

Mr. Smith: I welcome my hon. Friend's remarks, and I am very pleased to hear that our measures are making a difference to poorer pensioners in his constituency, as they are across the country.

I shall try to speed up my remarks because I am aware that the debate is more truncated than some hon. Members would wish and that a number of hon. Members want to take part.

In addition to the extra spending that I have already announced, we will go further. From this October, the pension credit will not only guarantee a minimum income but reward those with modest savings and occupational pension incomes, providing, we estimate, an average gain of about £400 a year for half the pensioner households in Britain. Thanks to all our reforms, pensioner households will be more than £1,150 a year better off as a result, and the poorest third of pensioners will have gained £1,500 a year in real terms.

Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire): Although the Secretary of State has just said that take-up is supposed to be better with the Pension Service, is he not concerned by the predictions from his Department that the take-up of pension credit is expected to be only 67 per cent.?

Mr. Smith: I have said already that I am concerned that the take-up of the help to which people are entitled should be as high as possible. The figure to which the hon. Gentleman refers is not a prediction; it is an operating assumption. We have to plan the expenditure using an assumption. However, if he is asking whether I am aiming for that target, the answer is that I am not—I want to ensure that take-up is as high as possible.

I shall write to all right hon. and hon. Members next month to set out our plans to ensure that people take up the pension credit to which they are entitled. We will automatically transfer current MIG recipients on to the pension credit, establish a freephone number for applications and launch an information campaign. For the first time, people will be able to make claims over the phone without having to fill in complicated forms—that will be done for them. The forms will be sent to them, and all they need to do is sign them—so we are simplifying the process.

Those measures, combined with the state second pension, which will benefit some 18 million people, will help all pensioners. We are making a real difference to the living standards of all pensioners, but those measures will help the poorest pensioners most of all.

Hywel Williams (Caernarfon): I am slightly concerned that the Secretary of State seems to have jumped several generations, from talking about poverty among children to pensioners. Does he intend to address the income support available to younger people—those under 25—who are very clearly in poverty? I note from the table provided that the increase will be a whole 55p this year. Does he suggest that they perhaps buy a weekday copy of *The Guardian* with that money, as that is all they could manage to do with it?

Mr. Smith: I would not attempt to prescribe what people should spend their benefits on. I take the point that the hon. Gentleman makes about people's needs. As I said, the amounts are being uprated in the proper way and, as he will be aware, the Government have made a big drive to give more help to disabled people. We have advanced their rights in an unprecedented way by creating the Disability Rights Commission. Moreover, we have not only improved benefits in the way that I have already outlined but launched pilot schemes that will help would-be recipients of incapacity benefit to stay in work or move into jobs. We should never forget that up to 1 million disabled people say that they want to work, and too many barriers are in the way of that at the moment. This Government want to remove those barriers and enable disabled people to work, while at the same time providing security for those who are unable to work.

In drawing my remarks to a close, it is evident that the measures that I have described will benefit a large number of children, parents and pensioners. They carry forward our reform of the welfare state and our mission to tackle all forms of poverty. Through policy reform, getting record numbers into jobs and tackling fraud, we are able to target extra resources on children and pensioners who need help most. This order helps us to build a Britain that fulfils potential, opens up opportunity and tackles poverty, and I commend it to the House.

2.10 pm

Mr. David Willetts (Havant): We will not oppose the order, and we will certainly not make the mistake famously made by the Liberal Democrats a couple of years ago of trying to vote against any increase in benefits. That was almost as much of a cock-up as the one that we have had today, which means that we cannot have this debate on the scale for which Members on both sides of the House would have wished. Sadly, the uprating debate has shrunk from a full day to three hours. It is a great pity that we have only an hour and a half on this order. I appreciate that that was an accident, but I hope that we will revert to the old arrangements in future.

As we now have less time than we had hoped, I will have to set aside my extensive indictment of the Government's record on social security, powerful and compelling though the evidence was. I am sure that it will be recycled on another occasion. Instead, I shall make some brief remarks.

First, this is a melancholy occasion, as this uprating order marks the disappearance of a range of benefits from the responsibility of the Department for Work and Pensions as they become tax credits to be run by the Treasury. We understand that Whitehall's arrangements are always being changed, but this change may result in a poorer quality of policy making and decision making. In so far as there is accumulated expertise anywhere in Whitehall on the needs of poor people and how to run their benefits, it lies within the old Department of Social Security, which is now the DWP. I am surprised that

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Labour Members do not appear to agree with that, as it seems clear to me that the Inland Revenue rightly focuses on extracting income tax from the better-off. The idea that the Inland Revenue should send out giro cheques to millions of people, which will start in April, seems absurd.

We are told that the new arrangements will be seamless, but the reality is that an unemployed family will receive a child tax credit from the Inland Revenue to cover the costs of their children, while separately receiving from the DWP an unemployment benefit payment for the adult. That seems a far clumsier system than the one that it replaces. I hope that the two different Departments will co-ordinate their approach to one family, but it is a significant risk. As one Blairite adviser observed to me, the Chancellor of the Exchequer may not believe in contestability when it comes to health or education, but he certainly does when it comes to benefit systems, as we will now have two. I hope that the two systems can work successfully.

In the background to today's uprating is yet more means-testing. The benefits that we are uprating include further extensions of means-tested benefits as a proportion of the total social security budget. Rather than quote to the Secretary of State yet again the notorious commitment by the Chancellor to the Labour party conference 10 years ago to end the means test, I might go back further to an episode described in Alan Bullock's biography of Ernest Bevin, in which Bevin tried to persuade the tinplate workers of south Wales—*[Interruption.]* I knew that the Minister for Pensions would be interested when I mentioned Ernest Bevin. He tried to persuade those tinplate workers to join an occupational pension. He negotiated it with the employers, but his members rejected it. Bevin went to his council of the T&G in 1937 and said the following:

> "I think it is a tragedy for south Wales, but it appears that a large number of the men take the view that if they become party to a superannuation they are merely saving the Unemployment Assistance Board expenditure. When a large community develops a relief complex of this character it is not good for democracy."

He found that the scope of means-testing was such that he could not encourage his own members to build up funded pension saving. That is a powerful warning of the long-term effects of means-testing on its current scale.

James Purnell (Stalybridge and Hyde): As the hon. Gentleman is taking us on a trip down memory lane, will he confirm that he was an adviser on social security policy through almost the whole of the Thatcher Government? Does he therefore regret that they froze child benefit and froze pensions in real terms, and that the income of the bottom 10 per cent. of people fell in absolute terms—not in relative terms—by about 20 per cent.?

Mr. Willetts: We always have this exchange. I do not recognise the figure of a 20 per cent. fall in the real incomes of the poorest part of the population. I simply do not accept that.

What I want to talk about is what this Government are doing in uprating benefits. The problem of means-testing is not just its effects on behaviour but the problems of take-up to which reference has been made. It is a great disappointment that we still have no take-up figures for income-related benefits for any year later than 1999–2000. They should have been published at the latest by last September, when we were suddenly told that they could not be released until research had been concluded on how to

> "better identify people who are eligible for income-related benefits, especially pensioners."—[*Official Report*, 15 October 2002; Vol. 390, c. 645W.]

There is no reason why that research should delay the production of empirical evidence about the take-up of means-tested benefits. Nearly three years have passed since the period for which we require data, and the House would not be demanding unseemly haste of the Secretary of State in producing reliable figures for the take-up of means-tested benefits in 2000–01. The fact that we do not have figures for later than 1999–2000 is a disgrace.

Mr. Webb: Given that the Secretary of State said that next month he will announce a package of measures to improve take-up of pensioner benefits, is it a coincidence that the figures for which the hon. Gentleman asks are due to be published at the end of next month? Does he share my suspicion that the figures may not be very good?

Mr. Willetts: My suspicions are that the Secretary of State is waiting for something to sugar the pill of some figures that might show, sadly, that take-up is far lower than all of us, on both sides of the House, would want.

There is a lot of change going on, and it is a pity that we do not have a longer debate in which to examine it. Briefly, in relation to some of the changes in social security benefits that we are about to see as part of this uprating order, I hope that the wind-up will provide a little more information on three points. First, on the new arrangements for the payment of benefit coming into force in April, there are widespread concerns about the post office card account. Ministers have regularly offered assurances that, as a very minimum, information will be given on all forms of benefit payment—not just on commercial bank accounts but on the post office card account. People should therefore have a choice, including the possibility of continuing to collect their benefits at the post office through the post office card account. I want to quote from a letter, however, which was sent to someone living near my constituency, who has passed it on to me. That person is in receipt of child benefit. The letter, which is from the child benefit centre in Washington, simply states:

> "It has been decided to withdraw your order book method of payment for child benefit. Future payments will be made into a bank/building society. Please complete the enclosed form CH1702 with your bank/building society account details."

That is not compatible with the assurances that we have been given on the provision of information on post office card accounts to benefit claimants. The memorandum from the child benefit centre does not meet earlier ministerial assurances. I shall not detain the House by repeating those assurances, but the Secretary of State knows that they were given, and what is going on now is not compatible with them.

Andrew Selous: Does my hon. Friend share my concern that the script that the new Pension Service will use mentions the post office card account hardly at all and only at the very end, a fact that I and the Chairman of the Select Committee, the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Sir Archy Kirkwood), who is in the Chamber, duly noted when we visited the Pension Service centre in Burnley? Does my hon. Friend agree that that will cause great difficulties for many post offices, which will be forced to close as a result of losing that income?

Mr. Willetts: My hon. Friend is right. It is clear from the way in which leaflets are produced in post offices, the letter from the child benefit centre and the script that followed that Ministers are not delivering on the assurances that they gave on information about the post office card account. I hope that the Minister will cover that in his winding-up speech.

On the arrival of the Pension Service, I was surprised to hear the Secretary of State say that local meetings are taking place to give people practical advice. As a Member of Parliament who represents Havant on the south coast, I have received a letter saying that the Pension Service office in Wrexham will handle pension issues for my constituency. Apparently, I should write to it there and my constituents can phone it. I am not aware of any improvements in local advice; nor am I aware of the delivery of the promised face-to-face interviews.

There have been exchanges in the Select Committee on that and I also had an exchange on the television last year with the Minister's Parliamentary Private Secretary, who was introduced as a Government aide. As the Government's representative, the hon. Member for Wigan (Mr. Turner) said:

> "We have guaranteed that any pensioner who wants a face-to-face interview can have that and we're actually doubling the number of staff at the moment who have that face to face, the new Pension Service will have twice as many."

I hope that the Minister will repeat the assurance that his Parliamentary Private Secretary gave, so that we can guarantee that any pensioner who wants a face-to-face interview can have one. We realise that that does not mean every pensioner, because many will not want a face-to-face interview, but the interview should be available for those who want one.

We all know that the evidence given by the head of the Pension Service to the Select Committee and elsewhere is not compatible with the assurances, including those given by the hon. Member for Wigan. The head of the Pension Service said:

> "We are not building a model which is actually showing that anyone can just choose to have a home visit"

She also stated:

> "The local service is not designed to be a 'visiting on demand' service and we would expect such occasions to be rare."

Are we, or are we not, able to assure our constituents who want a face-to-face meeting that they will get one with someone who has the authority and expertise to give them proper advice?

I know that many hon. Members want to speak, so I shall be brief—*[Interruption.]* Are Labour Members telling me to keep going? Is that because my contribution is so compelling? I do not know how many hon. Members wish to speak—

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire): I do.

Mr. Willetts: My distinguished hon. Friend has much wisdom on the subject and I am sure that he will wind up with great skill.

On the Child Support Agency and the conversion of old cases to the new formula, on which we heard a statement some time ago, when is C-day, as it is called, and what are the arrangements? I am sure that all MPs are receiving inquiries from their constituents who are concerned to know when and how they are to be moved to the new formula. Advice that can be given on a more authoritative basis would be welcome.

I hope that the Minister will tackle those specific concerns and say a bit about the philosophy of a Government who are supposedly committed to welfare reform but who have, after six years in office, ended up with a situation in which well over half the British population are on means-tested benefits. The number of people on income support is higher than it was when they came to office, the number of people claiming incapacity benefit is higher than it was when they came to office and the household savings ratio is almost at a record low. That is not the society that we want. We want more funded savings and people to be less dependent on means-tested benefits. It is a tragedy that we are heading in the opposite direction.

2.25 pm

Vernon Coaker (Gedling): I want to raise two or three specific concerns that my constituents have brought to my attention. The order is exceptionally important, given that it accounts for billions of pounds on which many people depend. We need more than an hour and a half to consider such matters, because they are of fundamental importance to a huge number of people. Indeed, they affect thousands of people in every constituency.

I agree with the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts). I am keen to ensure that benefits paid by post office accounts are made properly available to people. A number of my constituents have raised the problems that they have encountered on trying to open such an account. They have almost been persuaded not to have one. Sub-postmasters have also mentioned that problem to me. Post offices throughout the country need to operate on a level playing field so that people have a proper choice when they decide how their benefits should be paid.

Andrew Selous: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the Post Office official to whom I recently spoke said that post offices stand to lose 41 per cent. of their income through the automated credit transfer process?

Vernon Coaker: I do not want to get into a debate about that. It is necessary for the Post Office to modernise. The Government's investment in computerisation, for instance, is welcome. Post offices need to diversify to build

[Vernon Coaker]

up other aspects of retailing and so on. However, alongside that modernisation, we need to accept that post offices cannot continue to be subsidised by the state to pay out benefits. In the process of change, people need to have a choice about how they want their benefits to be paid. That is the sensible approach and I hope that the Government take it.

The Minister knows that I am keen supporter of the pensioner premium part of income support. Although it was unpopular at the time, it has redirected huge resources to the poorest pensioners in society. As a Labour Government, we decided to do that rather than to uprate all pensions because that would have allowed all pensioners to receive an additional sum even if they did not need it. We chose to ensure that the poorest pensioners received significant increases in their income. Many pensioners in my constituency have received that significant increase and it has made a huge difference to their quality of life and standard of living. The Government are to be congratulated on that and I was pleased to defend their policy when that was not a popular thing to do. We can be proud of the outcome.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House have spoken about take-up. We need a bit more information from the Department about what is happening with that. Can my right hon. Friend the Minister for Pensions provide any further information, and say how successful or otherwise we are? I support the policy, but I know that some people who are entitled to the benefit are not able to claim it or are not aware of their entitlement. We need to continue to consider how we ensure that those people are made aware of their entitlement.

Annabelle Ewing (Perth): The hon. Gentleman was talking about the Labour Government's successes in dealing with pensioner poverty. How does that square with the fact that in Scotland one in four pensioners are still living in poverty, after nearly six years of a Labour Government?

Vernon Coaker: I was pointing to the fact we have made the decision to shift a significant amount of resources to the poorest group of pensioners through the pensioner premium in income support, which was an unpopular decision opposed by many in the House. However, we rode out that opposition because we wanted to introduce the change. Other measures have also been introduced, including the winter fuel payment. The Government have tried to address problems, but take-up is still an issue. When I talk to pensioners in my constituency, they are still confused about their entitlement and the forms to be filled in. We must continue to try to find ways of dealing with that, perhaps through the Pension Service.

Mr. Heald: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman has seen the Pensions Policy Institute paper that was published recently, but it shows that the income of pensioners as a percentage of national earnings is exactly the same now as it was in 1997. In fact, the gap between rich and poor has widened.

Vernon Coaker: I have not read that document, but if the hon. Gentleman talks to pensioners or looks at what is taking place, he will see that significant additional resources are going to poorer pensioners through the pensioner premium in income support. I supported that policy decision when the Government made it, and I still do.

As I said earlier, I support very much the Government's welfare to work programme, and I believe we should all do so. The best way out of poverty is for people to be supported into work. The Government have introduced a number of successful measures to deal with that. They have targeted improvements on various benefits. The Secretary of State mentioned child benefit, in which there have been incredible increases, especially in respect of the first child, making a significant difference. My right hon. Friend also talked about changes to the disability premium—we all support those welcome improvements.

Flicking through the Social Security Benefits Uprating Order 2003, one can see that it applies to hundreds of different benefits. A heart-rending, soul-searching parliamentary debate about whether some of those benefits are set at an appropriate level is long overdue. Some of the people I see are dependent on benefits and cannot work, for whatever reason. Sometimes I wonder how they can exist on the money that they receive. That is not so much a criticism as a plea for reflection. Can we pay benefits at a level that does not encourage people to stay on benefit, support a welfare- to-work policy, pursue an anti-poverty agenda, and command public support so that we are not criticised for making benefits too generous? The House and the country need to consider the serious question of whether the poverty line in our benefits system is appropriate. Are we being generous in our definition of poverty? Recently, the journalist Polly Toynbee lived on benefits. She could be ridiculed, as she knew that she would come off benefits and go back to her own world, but her experiences do provide an insight into poverty. She was moved by how little people who depend solely on benefits receive to support themselves. The House ought to have a debate on what is an appropriate poverty line in this country in the 21st century.

Finally, whatever the benefit, huge numbers of people come to our surgeries because they have difficulty finding their way through the forms and claiming their entitlement. Whatever system is set up, that is bound to be the case. It is therefore incumbent on us to ask ourselves whether the system is as good or simple as it could be, and what is the way forward. I welcome the Secretary of State's speech, which included good things about the disability premium. I congratulate the Government on that, but ask my right hon. Friend to take on board some of my remarks to see whether further improvements could be made, especially to take-up, which would help us to make our benefits system better still.

2.36 pm

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): It is always good to follow the hon. Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker), whose contributions are thoughtful and gratifyingly critical of the Government—in a supportive sort of way.

It is hard not to reflect on the fact that, in debating the order and tax credits, we are debating expenditure of £100 billion in 90 minutes, which is about £1 billion a minute. I appreciate that the circumstances in which that time limit was set are beyond our control, but will the Secretary of State make representations through the usual channels to find an alternative occasion, perhaps in Westminster Hall, so that we can have the debate that we might otherwise have had here? There are many wider issues that it is not in order to raise in relation to the motion. However, they do need to be addressed, and there is not an obvious forum in which to do so. I hope that the Minister for Pensions will provide an assurance that he will seek such a debate.

I shall not make some important points that I might otherwise have made. Comments by Members on both sides of the House about the move to automated credit transfer are important, and I should like to see a campaign of civil disobedience by pensioners up and down the land, and the ceremonial burning of letters from the Pension Service saying that they cannot receive their money in the way in which they used to receive it until there are cast-iron assurances about the post office network that, frankly, I do not believe will ever be forthcoming.

I shall not repeat my intervention on the Secretary of State about the level of the contributory jobseeker's allowance, but I hope that when the Minister responds he will explain why that benefit has been cut in real terms. As the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Hywel Williams) mentioned, it is a woefully small increase to a woefully small benefit. Perhaps the Minister can explain why people on contributory jobseeker's allowance who have paid contributions will experience a real-terms cut in April.

There are three topics that I would have liked to deal with at greater length, but I shall now merely headline them. First, we have previously visited the 25p age addition in the orders. I thank the Minister and the Secretary of State because, unlike the previous Secretary of State, they are willing to engage in the argument about whether age additions are a better strategy than means-testing. The previous Secretary of State simply did not engage in that argument, but written answers that I have recently received from the Minister have set out the Department's line, which was previously given only in the Lords, where these things are debated properly. I thank the Minister for editorialising his recent written answer to me, explaining the facts of the case and why I am wrong. That is a step in the right direction.

On the strategy of age additions, instead of the 25p in the orders, it should be a worthwhile sum. The Government line is that older pensioners may be poorer on average, but there is a big dispersion of incomes among older pensioners, which is clearly true. They take the top and the bottom of the distribution as evidence, and say that there is a big gap between those two numbers, but that is only saying that there are some relatively rich old pensioners, which I do not dispute. The Government do not report in their written answers to me the shape of the whole distribution. At the top, there is a minority of well-off pensioners, but most of the distribution is quite low, with a sharp increase at the end. Therefore, although some of the money does not go to those who need it most, much of the money goes to those who miss out under the Government strategy.

Neither strategy is perfect. Under our strategy, which I think is also the Conservative strategy and that of the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), we pay some money to the rich very elderly, but most of it goes to the relatively poor very elderly. Under the Government strategy, all the money goes to those who claim it who are by definition poor, but they miss out on a lot of very poor people, who do not get it at all.

The matter is not as clear cut as the Government like to pretend it is. Given that with the pension credit the presumption is 2.9 million recipient households out of 4.1 million entitled households—Government figures, not mine—that is a million who will not get a penny under the Government strategy, and probably two thirds of them would get all the money under the age addition strategy. I hope that the Government, particularly when they review wider pensions issues, will reflect on the 25p figure in the order and whether the reliance on means-testing can be reduced through an age addition strategy. I have never said that there is no place for means-testing; it is a question of balance.

Mr. Andrew Smith: In the interests of open debate on distributional issues, which the hon. Gentleman says he welcomes, does he accept that the cost of his strategy is not only that some older rich pensioners get money that they arguably do not need so much, but that younger poorer pensioners do not get money that they do need?

Mr. Webb: I accept that. However, the younger poorer pensioners below the income support line are typically not very far below the income support line, whereas the old poor pensioners who fail to claim their minimum income guarantee are typically a good deal further below the line. The recently retired generally tend to be better off. I accept that there are pros and cons to each strategy, but the distinctions are not nearly as clear cut as the Government like to pretend.

As an example, a recent written answer to me from the Minister of State stated that the pension credit was going ahead, but had the Government decided at the start of the year to put the whole net cost of the pension credit on the pension for the over-75s, the pension for the over-75s would have been £19 a week bigger. That was the sum cited in the Minister's written answer to me of 25 February. That is close to the MIG, so the question is whether, had we not followed that strategy, for the same expenditure we could have got everybody over 75 clear of the MIG, with vast gains in take-up and in administrative saving. I hope that the Government will keep an open mind on the issue.

As a final observation on the age addition issue, I note that the same Government who say that targeting by age is a bad idea because there are some rich old people have chosen to make TV licences free to all the over-75s. When the Chancellor announced that measure in his Budget speech, he justified it by saying that on average older pensioners are poorer. The Government cannot have it both ways, although they may try; there must be some consistency in their reasoning.

The second issue is the increase of £1.95 a week in the retirement pension, for which the regulations provide. That is £1.95 a week for people on full pensions. I draw to the attention of the Secretary of State women who do not get £1.95 a week increase—they do not get £1.95 a

[Mr. Webb]

week pension, because of the operation of the married women's stamp. I have invited the Secretary of State—I hope that he will respond to me shortly, though probably not today—to have an independent look at the position of those women who do not get the £1.95 under the regulations.

I want to put on record the way in which our thinking about the matter has moved on. In the past we have said that those women signed up for the system, but we dispute whether all of them knew what they were doing and whether they had proper information. The Government's line—or some parts of the Government's line—is, yes, the women knew what they were doing and it was all crystal clear, whereas Lord Rooker, when he was a pensions Minister, said that none of the information would have passed the plain English test. There has been some admission in the past that there was a problem.

I still believe that there was a problem, but we will never resolve it because the events took place a long time ago. Our argument now emphasises the fact that there was not a one-off decision by those women. It was an ongoing decision for the whole of their lives to remain on the married women's stamp. What might have been a correct decision when they made it may have become a wrong decision when the half-tests were scrapped, which the Secretary of State knows all about, the homes responsibilities protection was introduced, and the national insurance for the low paid was restructured. All those measures changed the balance of advantage of being on the reduced stamp as opposed to being on the full stamp.

The issue that we have not explored properly, which an independent inquiry could investigate with no prejudice and no obligation, is whether women knew about that, whether they had information, and whether they lost out through not being told about the changes. It ceases to be an argument about what happened in the 1960s and becomes an argument about whether women were told about the changes in the system that affected their choices and now affect the benefits that they draw when they retire.

The issue is not just a Lib-Dem whinge. We have tabled early-day motion 131 and the majority of signatories are Labour MPs—76 Labour Members have signed the motion. It is regrettable that the Conservatives have put a block on their Members signing, but 13 free-thinkers on the Conservative Back Benches have done so anyway. I hope that the Secretary of State will reflect on the matter. I stress that apart from 1 million stamps, virtually no public expenditure would be involved, so he would not be making a public expenditure commitment. It is a matter that unites hon. Members across the House.

I do not say that I have an angry woman in every constituency, but something approaching that. *[Interruption.]* Yes, we are working on it. There are members of our campaign organisation in more than 400 constituencies, and they have met hon. Members. Many hon. Members in all parts of the House have signed the early-day motion. Let us not make it a party matter. I welcome the support from all parts of the House. Let us have an independent look at the issue. I hope that the Secretary of State will respond positively.

The final issue is the complexity of the system, which has been touched on. I am a regular subscriber to the Child Poverty Action Group's handbook on welfare benefits, which runs to 1,300 pages. I received a rather worrying letter recently, inviting me to buy next year's edition, which will include the tax credits, and informing me that it will include an extra 300 or 500 pages—I do not remember which. The letter assured me that the handbook would not take up any extra space on my bookshelf because it would be printed on Bible paper. In other words, the system is so complicated that next year another 300 or 500 pages will be added to the guide to help people through it, and the guide is only a summary—it does not go into the law in any detail.

When the hon. Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) commented on the complexity of the system, I expected him to say that radical simplification is needed. I agree that we need to consider what would be adequate, but surely we are going down the wrong track.

Mr. Willetts: I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman about the extra complexity that will be added by the move to tax credits. Will he confirm that, in evidence to the Public Accounts Committee, the chairman of the Board of Inland Revenue said that the computer power needed to deliver the tax credit proposals was eight times that needed for self-assessment, and that the PAC has shown that the simple cost of the IT and administrative expenditure to install the new system is well over £1 billion? That is money that could have gone in benefits delivered by well-established systems. Instead, it is being spent on inventing a parallel system that will leave many of our constituents more confused than they are already.

Mr. Webb: Yes. I am aware of tax accountants who do tax every day, but when faced with a benefit form are bewildered by the entire process. However, we must come clean. We all voted for the Tax Credits Act 2002, so we all supported the principle. We have considerable reservations about its complexity and we may well have to revisit it. In admitting that, we should accept that there is great complexity in all the benefits. For example—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. I hope the hon. Gentleman will relate his remarks to the uprating of the benefits.

Mr. Webb: Indeed, Madam Deputy Speaker. I have a specific example involving income support and the rates being introduced this April. A constituent who came to speak to me about another matter had a letter from his local Jobcentre Plus about the rates of income support that he will get in April. I have a question about the order, to which I hope the Minister will respond.

The letter tells my constituent how much income support he will get now, and goes on to inform him that on 1 April he will get £8.40 because a change in child benefit is coming in. On 8 April he will get £11.77 a week because of a change in the money that he receives through other benefits. On 15 April he will get £11.50 a week because of a change to the severe disability allowance that his partner gets. On 29 April he will get £11.27 because there will be a change to the child benefit that his partner receives. That is four changes in a month.

I read the regulations last night, and it appears that not all the changes come in on the same day. Given that income support depends on all the other benefits that people are getting, my constituent will get four different rates of benefit and does not have a clue why. Can the Minister of State explain why the changes are being introduced on different days during April, and how many extra letters have to be sent out to tell people that for a week they will receive a different amount of money? That is symptomatic of the complexity of the whole approach.

Mr. Heald: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman recalls the draft Child Support (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2003 that we discussed recently in Committee. Does he agree that if we take account of the knock-on effects of the changes in this order and the complexity of the system on matters such as child support and benefit sanctions, we will end up facing an absolute empire?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Once again, we are going rather wide of the motion.

Mr. Webb: I am grateful, Madam Deputy Speaker. I shall wrap up my remarks, but I hope that I will receive some idea as to why the rates are changing on different dates in April and get some sense that the Government recognise that producing telephone directories of regulations and benefits is not the right approach to take.

The fact that we have not got proper time to debate the motion is the result of a cock-up rather than a conspiracy. I hope that we shall receive an assurance that we will have a chance to raise the wider issues that you, Madam Deputy Speaker, quite properly do not want us to consider now. However, the House should certainly have the time to consider them. Although we were right when we opposed similar regulations a few years ago, we will not oppose the motion today.

2.50 pm

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): I shall be brief so as to leave time for a proper response. I appreciate the narrowness of the terms of this debate but I shall make a few brief points that have not already been well brought out in the earlier contributions.

Can Ministers comment on the position of the increments to the retirement pension for those who have worked beyond their time or whose partners have worked beyond their time? There is a clear steer in the Green Paper that people should be encouraged to work beyond the statutory retirement age. However, as I understand it, there is still a disincentive—or apparent unevenness—in the treatment of the increments from the basic retirement pension because, to be fair to Ministers, they have been more generous with the basic pension. We need to establish the principle that the two elements should operate in parallel in the future.

My second point relates to the disregard of pension income in connection with incapacity benefit. The system has now been in operation for nearly two years and kicks in at £85 a week. I believe that there has, as yet, been no indication of any uprating of that figure. Clearly circumstances and the amounts paid vary over time, and Ministers might like to clarify the position on that.

My third point relates to work. We now have a new structure in which therapeutic work is deemed to have come to an end and there is now permitted work for a finite period. Beneath that, since the Social Security Act 1986 was implemented in 1988, there has always been the understanding that people who, for example, return to work after a period on benefit could work for a limited period and receive pay that would be disregarded. That initially kicked in at £15 a week but it is now £20 a week. If we relate that figure to the minimum wage, it is a morning's work and no more. However, there does not seem to be a change in the permitted level for any period of time and I flag up to the Minister that there is something of a black hole between the operation of that relief and the new permitted work regulations for people working more than 16 hours a week.

A final anomaly relates to the achievement of both Houses and Ministers in relation to the pension credit. Hospital downrating rules were amended to 13 weeks instead of the much shorter period that was in force previously and that will remove much of the sting of the operation of those rules in relation to pension credit. However, I ask Ministers to reflect on some of the associated benefits that have not been so amended. In particular, I think of the attendance allowance for older people that kicks in to affect the benefits available to those who care for them.

As I understand it, the attendance allowance is still withdrawn after four weeks in hospital. Therefore, although someone's pension credit is not deducted for a reasonable period when someone is in hospital—in fact, that person is likely to have left hospital—the last thing that he or she might think about is the attendance allowance. I flag up to Ministers a more general concern that results from the fact I have come across cases in my constituency work of the Department attempting to reclaim benefits that have been overpaid to people who are not fraudsters. Their behaviour may have been inadvertent or they may have been unwell, and problems might arise from that. I hope that Ministers will consider that issue, because the cost would be quite small in relation to the circumstances that I have mentioned. They could make a difference to smoothing the problem out.

In the spirit of getting on with the debate, I shall make only one further point that relates to the delivery of the benefits. It does not matter how much they are uprated if they are not functionally available to the people who need them. Points have been raised about the operation of the post office card account and about the take-up of benefits. I agree with those points, but I add one of my own that was touched on slightly in the remarks of the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) There needs to be a functional network of post offices in which benefits can be delivered. That applies even if that involves the use of basic bank accounts and more so if it involves the use of post office card accounts.

A written answer that I received the other day suggested that 12 million payments are still made at post offices every week. One of the problems is that that number of payments proceeds in parallel with—and in certain cases is preceded by—the closure of urban post offices.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will not continue for too long on that point.

Mr. Boswell: He will not, indeed, Madam Deputy Speaker. He is making the point that it does not matter how good the benefits are if, for example, my constituents in Tamar square in Daventry, who handed me a petition the other day, find that the post office from which they were going to collect their benefit is no longer open and that the post office to which they are now assigned has queues of an hour at the time of its greatest use.

2.56 pm

James Purnell (Stalybridge and Hyde): I shall make a few very brief points. The first relates to an issue that was considered in the Committee considering the State Pension Credit Act 2002. It involves the incomes disregard for the pension credit. I very much welcome the upratings that have been announced today, but we are trying to encourage older people to work at least until the age of 65 and perhaps beyond. Income starts to get clawed back if they earn only £5 to £10, and that figure may be too low. Have Ministers considered the position in Denmark? As I understand it, it is starting to disregard all income for those aged over its pension age. I can imagine that the expenditure implications may be high for this country, but is it not worth considering whether the disregard should be higher so that people can work beyond the age of 65 without losing too much of their pension credit?

The hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) referred to home responsibilities protection, so will my right hon. Friend the Minister for Pensions consider a discussion that we had in Standing Committee last year? Perhaps he could reply today or in writing and tell me whether today's statement will deal with the fact that people who care for foster children do not receive home responsibilities protection because they do not receive child benefit. As a consequence, they do not receive credits towards their basic state pension. That leaves them without the security in old age that they require. I know that Ministers said last year that they would consider that point, but several people in my constituency have raised the issue with me. I have spoken recently to foster carers in my constituency and they told me that they did not realise that that would be the consequence of their caring for foster children. That might act as a genuine disincentive, so will my right hon. Friend say something about that today or in future weeks?

I also want to return briefly to the speech of the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts). He said that he did not recognise the figures that I had quoted. I have written to him to say that those figures are from the Office for National Statistics. I first saw them in Nick Timmins' biography of the welfare state. I wonder which figures the hon. Gentleman does not recognise. Does he agree with the Office for National Statistics, because most people would agree that it is a fairly reliable source of information even though he has a good record of exposing some of its inaccuracies? However, on this issue, it is a fairly reliable source, so does he not recognise the figures in the publication on households on below average income or those of the ONS? Does he think that the figures are wrong? I would be interested to hear him apply his forensic skill to the figures to learn whether they are correct.

Means-testing underlies the Government's uprating announcement. The hon. Member for Havant and his colleague, the hon. Member for North-East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald), spoke about the problems of means-testing. Means-testing is a way of targeting the benefits that the Government give out. If we do not target benefits, the current distribution of income will remain as it is. Under the Government of whom the hon. Member for Havant was a member and served so well from 1979 to 1992, the income of the poorest 20 per cent. fell by 30 times, in relative terms, the income of the top 20 per cent. According to the latest publication, under this Government, the income of the bottom 20 per cent. is rising at the same rate as that of the top 20 per cent. In today's economy, rewards for skills and education are growing exponentially.

Mr. Heald: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman has seen the paper that was published very recently by the Pensions Policy Institute, but it shows that the gap between rich and poor is widening.

James Purnell: That point relates only to pensioners, if I am not mistaken. In response to my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker), the hon. Gentleman quoted figures to show that the value of pensions had stayed the same as a proportion of earnings. That is an achievement when compared with the Conservative Government's record. Under that Government, the amount fell, because the pension was tied to inflation. As earnings rise faster than inflation, this Government have managed to restore the overall amount of money that has been put into benefits and pensions. We are increasing it in line with earnings and in line with the overall economy—and we are targeting money at the poorest people. That is a significant improvement on the Conservative Government. Opposition Members may wish to acknowledge that; they may even wish to apologise.

At his party's most recent conference, the hon. Member for Havant said that his party had made some mistakes during its time in power. I wonder whether he thinks that it made some mistakes on benefits. The hon. Member for North-East Hertfordshire may wish to intervene again to clarify the position.

Mr. Heald *indicated dissent.*

James Purnell: I see that he does not want to.

Will the Minister tell us how today's announcement affects the goal of reducing child poverty by 50 per cent. by 2010? Has he considered the good work done by Holly Sutherland of the National Council for One Parent Families? How far will the announcement take us towards our goal of creating a fairer society—which would be in stark contrast to the record of the Conservative Government?

3.2 pm

Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire): It is sometimes futile to trade statistics across the Chamber, but I want to respond to comments made by the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (James Purnell). The figures for the number of working-age adults on less than 60 per cent. of the median household income have remained at about 6.6 million from 1994–95 to 2000–01, so there does not seem to have been much of a shift there.

In this uprating order, we have seen an increase in incapacity benefit from £70.95 to £72.15. I do not think that the number of people on incapacity benefit in this country is generally known; neither is it known that the number is steadily increasing. In fact, 2.38 million people are on incapacity benefit. That is a rise of 1.7 per cent. over the past year. Of those, 1,070,000 have been on incapacity benefit for the past five years.

The Select Committee has seen evidence that, in parts of the country with high unemployment, many general practitioners have perhaps been more willing to sign people on for incapacity benefit than has been case in other parts of the country. In their quest to get more people of working age into work, I suggest that the Government consider carefully the points of entry to entitlement for incapacity benefit.

I want to suggest another change to the Secretary of State. Will he consider changing the name of the benefit? Why not "capacity benefit"? "Incapacity" is a negative word that stresses what people cannot do. Changing the name may have the effect of setting the benefit in the light that I know the Government would want.

Mr. Andrew Smith: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that precisely that proposal is being consulted on in the Green Paper on pathways to work?

Andrew Selous: I hope that the proposal will receive a positive response. The present name is negative and unhelpful.

Jobseeker's allowance has increased to £54.65 from £53.95. I share the concern of the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb), who spoke for the Liberal Democrats, that there has been a less than real-terms increase for those on JSA who are under the age of 24. The JSA increase will no doubt be appreciated by the 207 people in my constituency who are now unemployed but who were not unemployed this time last year. It is worrying that three quarters of that increase in unemployment has come in the last quarter or so.

Disability living allowance has increased to £57.20—another small increase. I am worried by reports that I have had from a number of my constituents that disability living allowance and attendance allowance are being decided on without claimants having the opportunity to go before a doctor. In one very worrying case, the disability allowance of a constituent of mine was quite severely reduced on the authorisation of a GP who not only had not examined the claimant but had never even seen him. That decision has since been overturned. However, the case was worrying, and if increases are to mean anything in the uprating, I would ask the Secretary of State to consider it.

Time is short and the Minister for Pensions is keen to start the wind-up speech. However, I want to question the Secretary of State's claim that the basic state pension will remain as the cornerstone of our pension's policy. If the minimum income guarantee continues to be uprated by earnings while the basic state pension is uprated only according to prices, over a long period the basic state pension will wither away as a fundamental component of people's retirement income.

3.7 pm

Paul Flynn (Newport, West): I am grateful for the chance to contribute to this annual get-together of social security buffs. We are small in number and we talk a language that nobody on the outside seems to understand. Certainly, no journalists understand or appreciate it. After all, today's announcement affects only about 20 million people.

I repeat what I said in an earlier intervention and congratulate the Government on their splendid record in this field—especially in the area of the state pension. I also point out the shameful record of the Conservative party. My hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Mr. Foster) gave a striking example of that.

A school in my constituency has the splendid motto "Nid da lle gellir gwell"—which means that there is no good that cannot be improved on. In a helpful and constructive way, I want to suggest to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions and the Minister for Pensions that they can do even better.

It would not be right to allow this debate to go by without some reference to the earnings link. We owe that to the traditions of the House. I believe that I am the only MP in the Chamber who has to declare a financial interest in the basic state pension, of which I am a grateful recipient and have been for the past three years. As we know, the increase this year is above the level of prices; prices went up by 1.7 per cent. and the pension will go up by 2.5 per cent. That is fine. It shows up the meanness of the previous Administration, who for 17 years increased it by a lower level, which meant that there were salami cuts throughout that period. It is right that we should proclaim the achievements of this Government.

To take up a point that was made from the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman, the relative value of the pension is important. Pensioners want an assurance that they will not lose out relative to the rest of society. All those who campaign for pensioners seek such an assurance but, sadly, no party in the country is offering it at the moment. In spite of the large increases, it was a mistake that we did not go for the attractive and understandable policy of restoring the earnings link. I was disappointed to receive an answer from the Minister for Pensions on 24 July 2002 which revealed that the pension was a smaller proportion of average earnings at that time than at the time of the Labour Government's first uprating in April 1998. Although we have achieved a great deal, the tendency is to head for further reductions, because of the success of the Labour Government's economy. This is a generous policy, but it will end in reductions.

Can we afford it? The Government Actuary said last year that the surplus above the contingency fund in the national insurance fund was £18.4 billion, and we are told that that will rise to £20.2 billion in a year's time. This is the unneeded surplus, over and above all the money that is there to account for any unexpected increases in unemployment and so on. Then there is the £2 billion a year that is taken out of the national insurance fund to compensate employers for the green taxes. It might be quite reasonable to give them that compensation, but why on earth should it come out of the national insurance fund, which is made up of money paid in by working people to ensure that they have

[Paul Flynn]

benefits in their retirement? I therefore make the plea—not exactly for the first time in this House—that we should consider restoring the earnings link.

3.11 pm

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire): I was surprised when the hon. Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn) said that he had been receiving his state retirement pension for three years. He obviously keeps very fit through his constant surveillance of the Government on pensions issues. He used to tax me about those matters, but I see that he is now taxing his hon. Friend the Minister.

We have had an interesting debate that, although short, has concentrated on the key issue relating to the uprating statement: what it means for people in practice. We have had a lot of discussions about means-testing and take-up. It is easy for a Government to rely, as this Government so often do, on the effect of means-tested benefits to make them appear more generous than perhaps they really are. The gap between rich and poor has widened since 1997, and the amount that pensioners in the bottom fifth of the population are receiving has remained the same. The complacency that we heard in the Secretary of State's opening speech is misplaced.

We also have to look back at what the Labour party used to say about this, and judge it against its words. The Chancellor wrote a document called, "Getting Welfare to Work" in 1996, in which he stated:

> "Means-tested benefits are claimed by over 3.5 million people over the state retirement age—a third of all pensioners. Six hundred thousand do not receive income support to which they are entitled . . . and are amongst the poorest people in Britain."

Now, it is not one third but 60 per cent. who are on means-tested benefits. Now, it is not 600,000 not receiving income support but 770,000 pensioners not receiving the minimum income guarantee. Take-up has declined over the Labour years from 75 per cent. to 71 per cent. The Secretary of State admits that this downward slide is about to get worse, as his target for pension credit take-up is a miserable 67 per cent.

Mr. Andrew Smith: I made it very clear that that was not a target but a planning assumption. We want the highest possible take-up.

Mr. Heald: But that is what the right hon. Gentleman thinks will happen; 67 per cent. will mean 1.8 million people who cannot have the benefits about which he boasts. *[Interruption.]* He laughs, but the fact is that he brags about huge achievements on means-tested benefits while the poorest pensioners in the land do not receive the money. Even by 2006 his target is that 1 million people will still not be claiming the pension credit. Surely we can do better.

The debate has concentrated on how we might do better. We have looked at the balance between means-testing and take-up. The proposal that was made against the pension credit option, to give older pensioners—the over-75s—the uprating to which they were entitled, struck me as a measure that would ensure almost 100 per cent. take-up.

Mr. Smith: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Heald: I have not got time. I have only seven minutes.

Many hon. Members have mentioned the over-complication of the system. This is not a minor point. When considering the uprating of benefits, we have to be able to see what it means in all the nooks and crannies of the benefits system. Just a few years ago, the Department responsible for these matters was the social bank of the Government. It dispensed money to people in need. Now, these functions are spread all over the place. The Home Office deals with asylum support, but it has not even bothered to introduce measures to target fraud, which is bound to exist in any benefit system. The Treasury deals with tax credits, which has knock-on effects on the child support system. It is a mess. My hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) mentioned overpayments. One reason that people are overpaid is that they do not understand the system; it is too complicated.

In my last minute, I should like to return to the points raised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts)—I am sorry, my hon. Friend; he will be right hon. soon. First, on the post office card account, why is it, after all the assurances from the Government that there would be equal treatment of banks and building societies—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I have already ruled that that matter is outside the scope of the debate.

Mr. Heald: I am grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, because that means that I have time to mention the other issues, which are clearly within the scope of the debate.

Will the Pension Service be able to ensure, through local surgeries, that pensioners have the proper facilities that they need to find out about the benefits to which they are entitled under the uprating statement? We should like to hear more about that.

On the child support system, the question of the C-day is obviously relevant because of the benefit sanctions that will have an impact on the uprating statement. We should like to hear from the Minister when C-day will be. Finally, can he tell us his philosophy in about a minute and a half?

3.17 pm

The Minister for Pensions (Mr. Ian McCartney): Like the hon. Gentleman and other hon. Members on both sides of the House, I am disappointed that we have not been able to have a fuller debate. I have had to junk all the things that I wanted to say about the hon. Gentleman and his party; I shall have to keep that powder dry. The hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) had a smell, but he was not going to miss out either. I shall try to answer as many questions as possible, but I give the commitment that I will send an answer to every question that I have been asked, place a copy in the Library and ensure that a copy of each answer goes to the Chair of the Select Committee, who, I know, likes to monitor what is happening in the Department. I hope that that helps hon. Members.

On further debates, I welcome the opportunity from time to time to have debates in Westminster Hall. I have recently offered to take part in a debate on older people, along with other colleagues, on a cross-government basis. I hope that the Leader of the House will be able to give details soon. I would welcome a range of debates such as that. I am more than happy to debate these issues in whatever forum we can within the House, whether in Select Committee, Westminster Hall, here in formal debates or even in Adjournment debates.

What has this debate been about today? Judging by what has been said by Opposition Members, they have not quite got it yet. It might be worth while, in the short time available, to put on record that the estimated cost of uprating for 2003–04 is £2.25 billion additional income. There will be £1.25 billion extra for pensioners, £200 million extra for people with disabilities and their carers, £400 million extra for working-age people and £400 million extra for children. One would not think that there could be fuller evidence of the Government's commitment to tackle and eradicate child poverty, to introduce measures to tackle poverty in old age, and to give opportunity through work and work incentives for people to get into the labour market and, with our support, to deliver themselves out of poverty.

If the current Opposition had been on this side of the House today, the debate would have been reclassified as a debate on downrating. In all that he said, during the short time in which he said it, the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) once again failed to reassure the House and the British people that he does not support the proposed £100 billion cut across the public services, much of which would affect our Department.

The hon. Gentleman smiles, but his hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight), the shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury, has said that he has an opportunity to make cuts totalling 20 per cent. of public spending across the board of Government activity.

Andrew Selous: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. McCartney: Much as I love debating with the hon. Gentleman, I have little time left. I ask him simply to believe that that is what his hon. Friend said. I know it must be a shock to him that he must support such a ludicrous policy.

Mr. Willetts *rose—*

Mr. McCartney: Here comes another one.

Mr. Willetts: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. McCartney: I will at some stage.

Mr. Willetts: The Minister only has four minutes.

Mr. McCartney: I know that. The hon. Gentleman had much more time than me. What I have said is true, however: I can quote from *The Daily Telegraph*, the house magazine of the Conservative party.

We shall spend about £7.5 billion extra on pensions in 2003–04 as a result of measures that we have taken since 1997. Opposition Members say that this Government have not made a difference to the poorest pensioners, but that is entirely untrue. For example, under the last Tory uprating, an elderly gentleman aged between 60 and 74 would have received £68.80. This year, from 1 April, the same gentleman will receive £102.10, an extra £33 a week.

As for the extension of means-testing, what does it really mean? It enables the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats to disguise their policy of cutting the incomes of Britain's poorest pensioners. The Conservatives will make direct cuts because they simply do not like pension credit and want to get rid of it. The Liberal Democrats offer a choice. Those who are poor at 60 and want a Liberal Democrat Government should just hope they can reach 75, as they must face 15 years of penury before the Liberal Democrats will give them one extra penny.

To be fair to the hon. Member for Northavon, he admitted that today, for the first time. But we have been telling him for more than a year that his policy is not about lifting pensioners out of poverty, but dividing poor pensioners into two camps. His party will say to poor people under 75, "Go away. Do not disturb us". They will tell those over 75, "Don't worry, we will look after you." I would not put the hon. Gentleman in charge of a piggy bank, let alone the national insurance contributions system. It is a scandalous proposal, and I can guarantee that we will not adopt it.

Mr. Webb: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. McCartney: I would like to, but I have only three minutes left. I gave the hon. Gentleman a guarantee at the outset that I would be more than happy to discuss the matter at any time and in any place. He has committed himself to allowing poor pensioners under 75 no proper access to additional income.

Let us be quite clear about pension credit. The Tories and the Liberals continue to raise the issue of mass means-testing. They are trying to deter pensioners from claiming money that is rightfully theirs.

What the Opposition spokesmen have omitted to mention in the political debate is that pension credit is now going live. What is the process about which they complain? It involves a simple telephone call on a free telephone line. Claimants are asked for information only for the purpose of working out the claim. They are sent a form to sign to confirm the information that they have given. The claim is then dealt with directly by the Pensions Service. If the claimants are entitled to extra income, it will come their way, and the vast majority will have nothing more to do for five years. How could that possibly be portrayed as the old-fashioned weekly means test?

As a consequence of this change, the poorest pensioners will receive an average extra income of £400 a year—and at last the savings of those who are just above the minimum income guarantee level are being recognised. I ask hon. Members to support an order that will provide huge amounts of new income for many pensioners and others.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Social Security Benefits Up-rating Order 2003, which was laid before this House on 5th February, be approved.

Pensions

3.25 pm

The Minister for Pensions (Mr. Ian McCartney): I beg to move,

That the draft Guaranteed Minimum Pensions Increase Order 2003, which was laid before this House on 5th February, be approved.

The order imposes no new costs on business, and in my view its provisions are compatible with rights under the European convention on human rights.

This may well be a parliamentary first, in that orders such as this are usually included in the overall debate. I shall be honest with the House: I have just received a message from the Department relating to what I am to say. This is unusual in my case, but I shall stick to the brief that I have been given. I hope that hon. Members who have questions to ask will accept my assurance that I will write to them with technical answers.

A guaranteed minimum pensions increase order is laid every year to prevent a person's contracted-out pension from losing its value because of inflation. The orders were introduced in 1978, at the same time as the state earnings-related pension scheme. Employers who ran good occupational pensions for their employees could contract out of SERPS, provided that they promised to pay their staff pensions that were no less than the guaranteed minimum pension. In return, both employer and employee made reduced national insurance contributions.

The calculation of the GMP is laid down in legislation, and is roughly the same as the SERPS calculation. It is earnings-related, and based on a person's earnings over a maximum of 40 years. If those earnings were not increased in line with inflation, by the time the person retired his pension would be very low as inflation ate into the value of his past earnings. When a person retires, therefore, past earnings are increased to reflect the changes in their value. There is, however, a limit: the earnings are increased by the retail prices index capped at 3 per cent.

Mr. David Willetts (Havant): The Minister has explained that pensions contracted out as part of this formula involve a lower rebate. Will he explain why, in calculating that rebate, the Government Actuary assumes that the rate of return on indexed gilts will rise from 2 per cent. to 3.5 per cent., and will rise by 0.1 per cent. a year over the next 15 years?

Mr. McCartney: That is why we employ the Government Actuary: to make such judgments. What a silly question. Why would we pay the Government Actuary not to give us advice?

Let me be honest: one hopes that by the time the advice is given there has been a reshuffle. We should remember some of the things said from the Dispatch Box when the Conservatives were in power, for which they then blamed others. I take full responsibility for the information given by the Actuary, but I assume that he will have used his professional judgment.

The earnings figure used to calculate SERPS is also increased, but in line with average earnings, and is not subject to a cap. When a person retires who has a contracted-out, salary-based pension, his GMP is compared with his notional SERPS entitlement. *[Interruption.]* I hope that everybody is following me. If SERPS is higher, the difference between the two amounts is paid with his retirement pension. Thus the state makes up the possible shortfall between the level of inflation and the capped amount that the employer is expected to pay. Although GMPs ceased to accrue from 1997, residual rates still exist, so increase orders are still required.

This order is a routine measure to ensure that people's future pensions are not eroded by inflation. This protects the current system, but we are committed to ensuring that the legislation governing how pensions are run is proportionate to the required outcome, and to simplifying as far as possible the burdens placed on employers in this respect. In line with this intention, we announced in the recent Green Paper that we are working with the pensions industry to try to find a workable and affordable solution to the problems associated with the GMP's operation that have been brought to our attention.

I am pleased to say that, as part of our commitment to working with those who will need to operate the system, Department officials are holding meetings with experts in the pensions industry, as well as with those representing scheme members. Only last week, the Department ran a workshop to which those interested in occupational pensions—including the Consumers Association, the national association of pension fund managers and the TUC—were invited. The discussions were particularly fruitful, and indicated some possible ways forward. In addition, we have issued a detailed technical paper on GMPs to widen the debate to include those who cannot attend such meetings. Indeed, I have offered to meet them at their convenience, and I make a similar offer to hon. Members if, after this debate, they feel in need of further information on what I have said.

3.30 pm

Mr. David Willetts (Havant): I am grateful to the Minister for what was undoubtedly an entirely accurate, as well as a typically authoritative, account of this order. As the explanatory note points out, the order establishes the basis on which contracted-out occupational pensions have to offer the guaranteed minimum pension in order to be contracted out properly. As the explanatory note makes clear, the order covers contracted-out, defined benefit occupational pension schemes, so I hope that the Minister will be able to answer two questions.

First, he will know that, despite his respect for the professional advice of the Government Actuary, which I share, just about everyone in the actuarial profession believes that the value of the contracted-out rebates—currently about £11 billion to British industry—is no longer actuarially fair. They believe that the cost of providing the guaranteed minimum pension, the uprating of which we are debating, is no longer properly covered by the value of the contracting-out rebate. The general view among actuaries is that the value should be about £12.5 billion—in other words, that the current value is £1.5 billion short. This is a very important point, because it is one reason for the pensions crisis. I know that there are many such reasons, and that not all of them are under the control of Ministers, but the reduction in the contracted-out rebate, compared with the cost of offering contracted-out pensions, is one of the main ones.

I hope that the Minister will not shelter entirely behind the advice of the Government Actuary. Given that this issue is so important to our funded pensions, I hope that he will explain why the Government Actuary uses assumptions to calculate the value of the contracted-out rebate that are out of line with those used in the rest of the industry, and which are particularly out of line with those relating to returns on indexing gilts. That is not considered plausible, and I am afraid that the belief exists in the industry that that obscure assumption was one way in which the Government ensured that the cost of the contracting-out rebate was held down, and was therefore less than was actuarially fair.

That leads to my second concern. We need to know how many pension schemes are still contracted out and therefore covered by the terms of this order, how many are contracted in, and—even more significantly—how many are contracting back in, having been contracted out. The question is whether contracted-out schemes will be re-entering the state system. At the moment, probably the only thing that is keeping them contracted out is the sheer administrative hassle of contracting back in. I fear that one reason why companies are closing their schemes to new members is that by doing so the new alternative defined contribution pensions that they offer instead are often contracted back into the state system. So one reason for the widespread closure of pension schemes for new members—a development that is causing much concern—is that it is used as a mechanism for contracting back in.

The Government Actuary's report—one of the documents that is relevant to our debate—is very explicit. In paragraph 25, on page 10, the Government Actuary explicitly states that he does not know what is going on in respect of contracting out, partly because of the Government's problems with their NIRS2 computer system. He says:

> "The introduction of NIRS2 originally led to a lack of data showing numbers contracted out through different routes. I understand that data is now becoming available, but that it is currently being analysed and validated. Consequently there is, pending the completion of this validation exercise, still uncertainty about the numbers of people contracting-out."

So my second query concerns when we will know more about contracting out and contracting back in. That is a fundamental feature of the current crisis in our funded pensions, and I hope that the Minister will be able to address that issue. I am sure that in doing so he would be entirely in order, because the order clearly relates to the regime for contracted-out occupational pension schemes.

The order covers the incomes of millions of pensioners and I hope therefore that I may take this opportunity to confirm what my right hon. Friend the shadow Chancellor said in the Chamber earlier—that it is simply not the case that we are looking for a 20 per cent. reduction across the board in all public expenditure. Having taken that opportunity, I may also say that we will not, of course, oppose the motion, and certainly not in the light of the lucid explanation that we received from the Minister.

3.36 pm

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): I shall be similarly succinct. The hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) touched on the key issue. The Government Actuary's report on the order identifies £11 or £12 billion of public money that is spent on contracted-out rebates. However, when I tabled a written question to ask how many people were receiving those rebates, the Government could not tell me. It is breathtaking that £12 billion can be spent without anyone knowing who is receiving it, how many are receiving it and whether the amount is going up or down.

I hope that the Minister will flesh out what the report says on page 10, as quoted by the hon. Member for Havant, and give us some idea of when we will receive the information that is "now becoming available". What worries me most about the lack of that information is that we are in a short consultation period on the Green Paper on pensions, on which the future of the scheme will be based. Without the information, it will be policy-making in a vacuum. That cannot be acceptable. We will support the motion, but I hope that the Minister will tell us when the information, which we need urgently, will become available.

3.37 pm

Paul Flynn (Newport, West): I am always astonished by Conservative Front Benchers who present themselves as people with a record on pensions to be proud of. The appropriate response for the Opposition spokesman, especially as he played a major part in the Conservative Government, would be to repeat "mea culpa" for five minutes and then don sackcloth and heap ashes on his head, because their record is so abominable.

I praise the record of the Government, which is remarkable. Since 1997, the Government have achieved the greatest shift in the redistribution of wealth from the rich to the poor since 1945. It is called stealth socialism, and we are almost ashamed of it in case the *Daily Mail* finds out and attacks us for it. Despite the Government's good record, I have several concerns.

I wish to raise the possibility of restoring the Treasury supplement. That suggestion will cause panic among the civil servants, who will probably have to ring up somebody in retirement to find out what it was all about. The last successful Liberal politician, David Lloyd George, introduced it and—until it was abolished in the late 1980s—it was worth 18 per cent. in annual contribution from the taxpayer to the national insurance fund for pensions. That fine principle ensured redistribution.

I welcome many of the Government's changes, especially the pension credit, which undoes the great injustice suffered by those who made contributions for many years from small disposable incomes but found on retirement that they received no value from the contributions whatever. That move is of great benefit, but it is sad to see that the number of pensioners depending on means-testing will increase.

The prime factor in the fact that the very poorest pensioners do not claim income support is the stigma involved. Every hon. Member will know pensioners who take pride in the fact that they have never received a handout in their lives, or claimed benefit. They say that, in their retirement years, they will get what they paid in

[Paul Flynn]

for but that they will not fill in a form that offers what they regard as a handout. That has been a problem for many years, and it remains one now.

The house magazine for people of my generation is *Saga Magazine*. It was disappointing to read in an article by Paul Lewis that the Government assume that the take-up of pension credit will be only 67 per cent. That means that very many people will not get the benefit that they have missed before. We need to address that very important problem.

I am very proud of the Government's record on pensions, but we should reconsider restoring the link to make sure that the minimum income guarantee is the basic pension. It is affordable, and would give much satisfaction to the million or so poorest pensioners who do not claim income support.

3.41 pm

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire): I was not going to respond to this short debate until I heard the remarks of the hon. Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn). The means-testing to which he referred is important when it comes to uprating the guaranteed minimum pension, but the increases to that pension are under threat in a variety of ways.

The first threat comes from the means test, which erodes pension levels. The second is that the overall picture of pension schemes reveals a huge decline in income levels. In the debate earlier this afternoon, I referred to the Government's miserable performance in taking pensioners out of poverty. For the bottom fifth of the pensioner population, the picture has been absolutely flat, but the gap between rich and poor has widened. I am sure that the hon. Member for Newport, West would not be pleased with that. One of the factors behind those figures is the fact that take-up is so poor.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Heald: In a moment, as I have three or four other points to make.

The introduction of the occupational pension scheme was probably the most important social welfare reform measure of the 20th century. The number of such schemes has fallen from 130,300 in 1998 to 103,000 now—down 30,000. The number of members of schemes that have started to wind up has risen from 10,000 to 40,000. The pension status of adult employees in 1994–95—I am sorry, I mean 1998—

Mr. Andrew Smith: The hon. Gentleman wants to choose the worst possible figure for the Government.

Mr. Heald: No, I was being generous to the Government. The date I shall choose, 1994-95, is worse for me. In 1994–95, 64 per cent. of adult employees were in an occupational or personal pension. In 1998, the proportion was 60 per cent. That figure is now 56 per cent. now, which shows the collapse that is happening.

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): Does my hon. Friend agree that the decline in private sector occupational pension schemes—whether defined benefit or defined contribution schemes—risks a rather invidious comparison with what is available under publicly financed schemes, including those available to Members of Parliament and civil servants? Is there not a danger that there could be two nations in respect of pensions, as hon. Members have suggested is possible in other areas?

Mr. Heald: I understand entirely the concern felt by many that we are developing two nations in pensions. At the top of the pile among public sector pensioners is the Lord Chancellor, who gets an absolutely enormous public pension. At the other end of the scale, there has been a collapse in private sector pensions.

However, I must not go down that road too much, as we are talking about the guaranteed minimum pensions. Many recently retired pensioners receive guaranteed minimum pensions, which are being uprated by this order. In 1997–98, the percentage of recently retired pensioners with an occupational pension was 67 per cent.; now it is 59 per cent.

David Winnick: If we look in the round at the way in which pensioners on limited incomes have to try to make ends meet, we can see how difficult that is. I cannot understand why the hon. Gentleman's Government refused any additional help during the winter months, whereas this Government introduced from the very beginning the winter fuel allowance, which is now £200 per pensioner household. Why did his Government not do anything of the kind? I know that he is not responsible—he is a more reasonable or moderate Tory.

Mr. Heald: In fact, the hon. Gentleman is entitled to an answer because I was the junior Minister for two years. I suggest that he puts the matter in its overall context. In the Conservative years, those who had an occupational pension or a personal pension saw marvellous results. The yields on investments in those pensions were about 10 per cent.; now they are running at less than 5 per cent. The stock market has collapsed and occupational schemes are closing hand over fist. In the past year alone, the rate of closure of schemes to new members has doubled. The National Association of Pension Funds says that a large number of schemes are moving towards wind-up. One has to ask why that has happened, and the reason is the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. Some latitude has been allowed, but I hope that the hon. Gentleman will now return to the matter under discussion.

Mr. Heald: The Chancellor of the Exchequer put at risk the livelihoods and the financial position of those who receive guaranteed minimum pensions and this uprating because he whacked a £5 billion-a-year tax on pensions, the effect of which has been disastrous. We warned about it time and again, but what have we got out of it? Not very much.

Finally, I want to ask the Minister about a technical aspect of guaranteed minimum pensions. Actuaries say that one of the greatest problems involved in winding up pension schemes and one of the reasons for the delays is having to sort out the equalisation of guaranteed minimum pensions as between men and women following the judgments of the 1990s. That is relevant in the context of uprating guaranteed minimum pensions. I would be grateful to know whether the Minister has any plans to sort that out and to provide the help for which those in the actuarial profession are asking.

3.47 pm

Mr. McCartney: I congratulate the hon. Member for North-East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald) on making the speech that he was unable to make in the previous debate.

I shall not be enticed down the route on which the hon. Gentleman set out, other than to say, in relation to what he described as the golden years, that we have just cleared up the consequences of those golden years, which cost £13 billion in mis-sold pensions, which were sold mainly to individuals who already had a good pension but were persuaded by the Conservatives, by various means, to put it at risk.

On the hon. Gentleman's final point, that is not a technical matter, but a very important issue that has exercised my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and me in relation to representations that I have received since becoming Minister for Pensions. To be frank, until I became Minister I had not realised some of the problems that were associated with this. I have met Conservative Members who have constituency problems in that regard—if the hon. Gentleman has any such, I shall be prepared to meet him. That is why we are hoping that proposals in the Green Paper will meet both the hon. Gentleman's objectives and our own, which, to be honest, are about the same.

The hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) raised several issues. First, I shall take the opportunity to advise him about his local Pension Service. We are in the process of setting up three surgeries only for him in partnership with Age Concern, two of which are in Market parade and Malmesbury lawns. I can give him further details if he wishes. Doubtless even he will get some support from the Pension Service.

Mr. Boswell: I want to make a constructive suggestion. While the Pension Service gets its act together, it might not be a bad idea if local management wrote to all Members of Parliament to inform them of surgeries' location.

Mr. McCartney: That is a fair point. We are encouraging local managers, and I write to hon. Members as each centre is established. Informing hon. Members is not a problem but a priority. We are doing that as we develop the local Pension Service and put partnership arrangements in place. Further information will be sent to Members of Parliament as we roll out the service. Our job is to keep Members of Parliament and, I stress, their staff involved in our activities. Staff are in the front line and we want to ensure that every member of staff is fully apprised of the service that we are providing and that we forge continuing links.

Mr. Willetts: From the addresses that the Minister mentioned, I suspect that one may be that of an Age Concern office and the other that of a social services nursing home. Will he clarify whether Pension Service staff—his officials—will give the authoritative advice?

Mr. McCartney: Indeed. Highly trained, highly committed local Pension Service staff, whose raison d'être is to be advocates for the older person and work with groups, will give advice. We are rolling out centres throughout the country; I believe that 700 are already in place. We are developing and building on that.

We are also willing to consider ideas. For example, my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) asked whether we could arrange for Pension Service staff to hold advice centres with her. We will partner any individual, organisation or community group. That includes Members' staff who want assistance and advice on pension matters. It is part of the ethos of the Pension Service, especially the local service, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I are committed to it. We shall do anything that we can to assist hon. Members.

The hon. Member for North-East Hertfordshire tried to entice me again. Conservative Members always try to entice me. I do not know why, but they try to tickle my fancy—politically speaking, of course. He tried to persuade me to give a different view from that of the Government Actuary on the contract rebates. I am not an actuary and we employ Government Actuaries to give us appropriate advice. They do not do that in isolation. The proposed rebates were sent out for consultation and the Government Actuary's Department produced a document. The Actuary presented recommendations after that consultation.

Recent changes in economic conditions have not altered the Actuary's long-term assumption on which the rebates are based. It is reasonable and fair for actuaries to make long-term assumptions. Changes in cycles will occur from time to time, but the system is well proven and the advice that we receive non-partisan. I assure hon. Members that Ministers have not interfered politically in the past, are not doing so now and will not do so. The decisions are non-partisan; they must be taken independently and based on best practice.

The changes in the order involve £11 billion over five years—2002–03 to 2006–07.

Mr. Heald: There is widespread anxiety in the actuarial profession about the matter. What was the balance of opinion in the consultation? Does somebody support the Government Actuary's opinion?

Mr. McCartney: The whole purpose of consulting is to consult other actuaries. One could take a range of issues and receive different actuarial views. It was obviously the balance that the Actuary came to. He will not give advice to the Government that is so much out of touch with the long-term view that he and others in the profession have expressed. From time to time there will be different views. Actuaries' opinions are sought. The thing about the Government Actuary is that, unlike other actuaries who give advice to clients, who can take it or leave it, he consults over the proposed advice that he may wish to give. That is a democratic, accountable process. There is nothing to add to what I have told the hon. Gentleman. He is looking for a fox. It is not there.

[Mr. McCartney]

The hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) asked a range of questions about the lack of numbers on contracting out. I hope that I can give him the right information. If not, I apologise in advance. I am told that the data for the financial years up to 2000–01 will be available by the early summer this year, with an update in the autumn relating to 2000–02. [*Interruption.*] Remarks are being made from a sedentary position. I am being open, frank and honest. The hon. Gentleman asked me a technical question and I gave him the answer. If there is any change, I shall notify him and other hon. Members as soon as I can. I want to make sure that the information available in this context is put in the public domain.

Mr. Webb: I am grateful to the Minister. That is the information that I was asking for, but now that I have heard the answer I am even more worried. Is the right hon. Gentleman not concerned that he will be trying to shape pension policy in this critical consultative stage without knowing how many people are contracting out, whether the number is going up or down and how people are responding behaviourly? The last information the hon. Gentleman gave me in a written answer was for 1995–96. How can he make policy in that void?

Mr. McCartney: It is fine to try to make a crisis that does not exist. We have had to reconstruct the NIRS programmes. Therefore, the whole structure and basis of how information is collated has changed. To suggest that this is the only information that we require to determine our pension policy—in relation to the public sector, the state pension provision or private pension provision, second-tier provision—is nonsense. The hon. Gentleman, who is an academic, knows that what he is saying is nonsense.

We are attempting to give the information and put it in the public domain. I apologise if the hon. Gentleman thought that it should have been made available sooner. There are genuine technical reasons why that was not done. It has fallen to my watch to sort it. I am trying to sort it, so that we all have more up-to-date, more accurate information. I am sure that the hon. Member for Havant will take that comment about more accurate information to his heart and challenge me about it some time in the future.

I will take the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn) as a pre-Budget submission to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor and make sure that they are passed to my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Willetts: I am grateful to the Minister, who is trying to respond to the various points that have been raised about pensioners and the effect of the order on them. I return to the assurance given by the right hon. Gentleman's PPS, the hon. Member for Wigan (Mr. Turner), to me in the radio interview to which I referred earlier. Can he repeat the guarantee that there will be a face-to-face meeting with officials from the Pension Service, if that is what pensioners want?

Mr. McCartney: I have given a written assurance to the Select Committee. If the hon. Gentleman has not read it, I shall send him a copy. Any pensioner who requires a home visit will receive one. We are doubling the staff in the local service. The whole point of the local service is to have an interface to make sure that pensioners have direct access to the services that we want to provide.

I know that the hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr. Mitchell) is working with the hon. Gentleman to privatise the state pension. While he is getting on with that dastardly deed we are getting on with a face-to-face relationship with Britain's pensioners.

Question put and agreed to.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am aware that you and Mr. Speaker are not responsible for the management of business, but I want to bring to your attention the fact that yesterday a large number of Members wanted to speak in the debate. I was one of those who were unfortunate. I have tried on other occasions to speak in debates on Iraq and other Members, too, were not called yesterday who might have wanted to speak previously. Today, business has collapsed at 4 o'clock in the afternoon. I realise that we cannot always anticipate what is going to happen, but it seems odd that arrangements cannot be made. Yesterday many Members, including me, could not speak in the debate despite all our efforts, while today we are finishing at 4 pm instead of 6 pm. I am sure that I am not alone in my concern. Is it possible to communicate the concern of some Members about this matter?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): To some extent, the hon. Gentleman has answered his point of order: it is indeed not a matter for the Chair but for the usual channels. I have no doubt that they will have taken note of his comments.

PETITIONS

Fireworks

4.1 pm

Ian Stewart (Eccles): I am grateful for the opportunity to present this petition on behalf of myself and my hon. and good Friends, the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the Member for Salford (Ms Blears), and the Member for Worsley (Mr. Lewis). We support a partnership between local authorities, the police service, primary care trusts, the fire service, the *Salford Advertiser*, the *Prestwich Advertiser* and, of course, the public in our constituencies in presenting this petition relating to the sale and use of fireworks.

We have received an increasing number of letters from our constituents expressing their growing concern about fireworks. None of us who are in our mature years can remember from our youth anything like the type of fireworks that we see nowadays. They are vastly different. On behalf of the public, the partnership calls for better restrictions on the type and use of fireworks. It is concerned about the licensing and registration of the sale of fireworks to the public and wants better regulation of the importation and distribution of fireworks.

The petition states:

The Petition of the *Salford Advertiser* and *Prestwich Advertiser*, signed by more than 6,000 readers and other supporters, declares that there should be new regulations restricting the type and use of fireworks available and licensing restrictions for those who sell [illegible]rks in order to cut down on distress caused to families, the eld[illegible]heir pets by irresponsible firework use.

The Petitione[illegible]fore request that the House of Commons introduce new regulatio[illegible] restrict the type and use of fireworks available and to institute a new licensing regime for those who sell and/or organise public displays.

To lie upon the Table.

4.4 pm

Jim Dobbin (Heywood and Middleton): My petition is on the same subject, so I shall not reiterate the words of my hon. Friend the Member for Eccles (Ian Stewart). I have previously handed in 60,000 signatures to No. 10 Downing street. The petitions are timely as tomorrow there will be a Second Reading debate on a private Member's Bill on fireworks.

I take this opportunity to thank the *Manchester Evening News*, the *Middleton Guardian*, the *Heywood Advertiser* and the *Rochdale Observer* for their help and support.

The petition states:

The Petition of over 2,500 residents of Heywood and Middleton, and surrounding areas of Manchester,

Declares that the disruption and distress caused by extensive use of fireworks throughout the year to local communities and animals is wholly unacceptable; that the Private Member's Bill to be introduced by the Honourable Member for Hamilton South is worthy of support.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons take such measures as lie within its power to restrict the use of fireworks and to legislate for their regulation.

To lie upon the Table.

Body Piercing

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Jim Murphy.]*

4.5 pm

Ms Meg Munn (Sheffield, Heeley): Daniel Hindle was a healthy, active teenager with a passion for music. He attended Sheffield college, studying media, English and information technology. He was a skilful guitarist and, by last summer, he had formed his own band, which had already started playing gigs and was in demand for further performances.

Daniel had a girlfriend and, last October, they decided that they would get a piercing together. They went to a popular studio in Sheffield, where his girlfriend had her eyebrow pierced and Dan had his lip pierced. That turned out to be the catalyst for the nightmare that was to ensue. A few days after the piercing, he became ill and slowly got worse. He was admitted to hospital and subsequently into the coronary care unit. He was infected by septicaemia, or blood poisoning, which attacked his major organs and left him too weak to fight the infection. A few days before Christmas, on 21 December, Daniel lost his fight for life. He was 17 years old.

Daniel and his girlfriend did what many teenagers do; they decided to get a piercing—the sort of thing that ordinary teenagers do. Tragically, Daniel was not an ordinary teenager. He had been born with a heart defect called tricuspid atresia—a condition that had necessitated two life-saving operations when he was younger. Both operations were 100 per cent. successful, and Daniel had grown up normally with an excellent quality of life.

Daniel was not aware that for him, piercing could pose a serious health risk. His mother, Christina Anderson, believes that if he had been aware of the risk, he probably would not have had it done. Unfortunately, nobody drew that possibility to his attention before or during his visit to the piercing studio.

There is no suggestion that the studio did anything wrong. It was not ignoring Government regulations. Astonishingly, there are no regulations for body piercers in Sheffield. Local authorities in London have powers to control ear piercing and cosmetic body piercing businesses by licensing, using provisions in the London Local Authorities Act 1991, or by registration and byelaws, using provisions in the Greater London Council (General Powers) Act 1981. The majority of London local authorities have adopted licensing powers. Local authorities outside London have powers to register and make byelaws for ear piercing businesses under the provisions of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982, but not for cosmetic body piercing businesses.

Sheffield city council's website contains information about body piercing, stating that it does not require registration. It provides information, however, on how to register on a voluntary basis with the health protection service, which offers that service. Those who register with the authority receive a premises inspection to ensure that appropriate standards are being achieved and a certificate stating that the premises and practices are suitable and sufficient.

[Ms Meg Munn]

Sheffield's voluntary code of practice aims to

> "offer guidance to body piercers regarding the practice of body piercing and outlines specific recommended hygienic procedures."

That includes that body piercing shall not be undertaken on any person under the age of 16 unless parental consent is given, and an expectation that proof of age will be requested. It advises that the client's medical history should be discussed and draws attention to particular conditions that should lead a client to consult a general practitioner before proceeding. Those include heart disease, major infections, allergies and skin complaints. That is good advice, but registration is voluntary. No statutory requirement exists to find out how old someone is before piercing them, and no law exists stopping a child under 16 from being pierced. No compulsion exists to find out whether a customer, such as Daniel, has a heart defect.

The Government have stated on a number of occasions that they believe that primary legislation should be introduced to give local authorities outside London powers to regulate the hygiene and cleanliness of cosmetic body piercing businesses when parliamentary time allows. I am aware that that issue was raised recently in the Local Government Bill Committee. I have also spoken to my right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and the Regions urging him to seek to amend the Bill if at all possible to introduce this provision. Parliament needs to act now. Daniel's death is already one death too many.

Today, I am not just asking for legislation to be changed. I want to raise awareness of the health risks of body piercing and I want the Department of Health to consider what it can do to raise awareness. I understand from previous parliamentary answers that the Department does not have information on the number of people who seek medical help as a result of body piercing. In answer to my written parliamentary question in January, the Minister stated that the Department was not aware of any research into the risks of body piercing for individuals with congenital heart disease, although there have been a small number of published case reports from abroad of endocarditis in individuals with congenital heart disease following skin piercing.

That is not the only area of medical risk, however. A search of the internet has revealed the following information. Dr. Junaid Hanif of Heath hospital in Cardiff carried out a study of body piercing last year. He discovered that

> "more than 95% of GPs in Greater Manchester have treated complications caused by body piercing in the past year and incidences in England and Wales of damage to ear cartilage caused by piercing have doubled in the last decade with more than 2,000 cases reported in 2001."

Writing in the August 2002 issue of the journal *Emerging Infectious Diseases*, Drs. Akhondi and Rahimi of the Mercer university school of medicine in Georgia reported the case of one 25-year-old man who became seriously ill soon after having his tongue pierced. The man had a heart defect, and blood tests revealed that his heart was infected with a type of mouth bacteria, and the stud of the piercing also tested positive for the presence of the same bacteria. Thankfully, that young man survived after a period in hospital.

Almost as common and potentially far more serious than jewellery allergies are infections, which result in redness, swelling, tenderness, pain and, often, swelling of nearby glands. When sterile techniques are not used, bacteria and viruses can be introduced into the bloodstream, including the hepatitis B virus that can cause chronic hepatitis and liver cancer, and HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. In people born with heart valve disorders, bacterial endocarditis, a potentially deadly infection of the heart, can result if they fail to take preventive antibiotics. Piercing the nose can result in a staphylococcal infection and piercing the cartilaginous part of the ear, which has a very poor blood supply, can result in an infection necessitating surgery and can result in permanent deformity. Even tetanus is a risk in people who have not been immunised in the past 10 years.

In an article in the *Student British Medical Journal* last year, Jamie Wilson of Leeds said:

> "The largest ever 'body art' study has found that a fifth of students with body piercings have excessive bleeding, bacterial infection, and tissue trauma. The research was reported in Mayo Clinic Proceedings . . . after 454 undergraduates from a New York college completed questionnaires on the subject."

More than half the students had piercings outside the traditional domain of the earlobe, and 29 per cent. of women had a navel ring or belly bar. Complications were most likely for nipple, navel and genital piercings, and bleeding and bacterial infection were the most common ailments. Piercings were most frequently permanently removed from the nose, tongue, eyebrow and male nipple. In September 2000, a woman with 118 piercings, including six lip rings and 11 belly bars, died from bacterial septicaemia. She refused to seek medical attention, believing she could offset any infections with saline swabs.

The Chartered Institute of Environmental Health contacted me stating that it, too, is calling for stricter licensing controls on body piercers in response to concern about health risks. It has issued a set of recommendations for consumers designed to inform and educate the public about the possible health implications of skin piercing treatments ranging from body art and tattooing to electrolysis and acupuncture. The institute echoes my concerns that there is no control over who can set up in business as a body piercer, and there are certainly no recognised standards for new practitioners. It also calls for any piercing below the neck to be made illegal for under 16-year-olds.

Body piercing has become much more fashionable in the past few years, with many teenagers thinking nothing of going out and getting a piercing done. Daniel Hindle did that and a life was cut short. Given the concerns and the possible medical risks that are already known, will the Minister's Department consider commissioning further research on the risks of body piercing, especially if there is an underlying heart condition? The Department of Health is aware that a small study in the United States stated that physicians should advise patients with heart conditions against piercing, but that if the person decided to go ahead, antibiotics should be taken, which is usually the case for dental or surgical procedures. Further research is needed to understand the risks and to ensure that proper advice is given.

Daniel's death has devastated his mother, his family, his friends and the whole college community at Norton in Sheffield. A website has been set up to raise awareness and to commemorate his life at www.danaid.com. I am not against body piercing; I am against ignorance about the effects that such piercings can have. No other young person should lose his life in that way. In spite of her grief, Christina Anderson, Daniel's mother, has dedicated herself to preventing that from happening. Now it is the turn of the Government to act.

4.18 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Ms Munn) on her success in obtaining this important debate. I know that she has taken an increasing interest in the regulation of cosmetic body piercing in recent months. I am grateful to her for giving me the opportunity to explain the Government's position on the issue. I also hope to respond to the specific queries raised.

As body piercing becomes more common, especially among young people, the problems associated with it become more important, too. I am aware of the tragic case of Daniel Hindle. I should like immediately to put on record my sympathy for his family, friends and community. I have looked at the website and am aware of the tremendous campaigning work that Daniel's mother has undertaken. Sheffield city council is carrying out a detailed and thorough investigation of the circumstances surrounding Daniel's death. As the investigation is not yet complete, it would not be appropriate for me to comment further. However, it will be important to consider whether there are any general lessons to be learned once the investigation is completed.

I agree with my hon. Friend that the health risks of body piercing and the measures in place to control them are crucial. People considering body piercing should be aware of the risks and should be confident that appropriate controls are in place. Where existing health conditions may be relevant to body piercing, that should be clear to all concerned. That applies not just to heart defects but to other pre-existing conditions. I am aware that there is great concern about the piercing of children. Body piercing has become more fashionable in recent years, and the trend has been stimulated by celebrities who have had their bodies pierced. It can be extremely worrying for parents when their children have ear or body piercing done against their wishes.

I should like to address my hon. Friend's concerns by considering the possible health risks and the measures in place to control the situation. If cosmetic body piercing is carried out in an unhygienic manner or incorrectly, it may cause a variety of problems such as local, usually trivial, wound infections, as well as transmission of serious blood-borne viral infections such as hepatitis B. Most complications are local, minor wound infections that do not appear to be caused by the piercing itself. Typically, they may be caused by exposure to bacteria, for example, by touching the piercing in the days following the piercing with unwashed hands or by the wound coming into contact with hair, bedding, clothing and so on.

As my hon. Friend said, I stated in a recent parliamentary answer that there has been a small study in the United States that investigated ear piercing and tattooing in patients with congenital heart disease. In that study, no patients experienced serious infections following ear piercing and tattooing, although a quarter of them experienced minor local skin infections following ear piercing. As my hon. Friend said, there have been a small number of case reports abroad of endocarditis—infection of the heart valves and perhaps the heart lining—in people with congenital heart disease following skin piercing. My hon. Friend asked whether the Department of Health can carry out more investigation into the extent of difficulties that arise as a result of skin piercing. I am pleased to tell her that we are considering the feasibility of a special study in that area. I have asked my officials to look into that, because it is important that we have an evidence base on the extent of those problems. My hon. Friend's information about the GP survey is tremendously interesting, as it reveals the extent of problems in the Greater Manchester area.

Non-infectious complications can result directly from body piercing, and include swelling around the piercing and allergic reactions to jewellery, metal and antiseptics. Serious complications, as far as we know, are uncommon, according to case reports in the published literature and surveillance by the Public Health Laboratory Service. None the less, it is vital that we have the right measures in place to ensure public protection. A pressing question for us is how to regulate body piercing businesses in the face of those possible risks. We have a legislative framework in place that facilitates the promotion of safe and hygienic practice to try to minimise those health risks. We intend to strengthen that framework, as I shall explain. Local authorities have powers under specific and general legislation to regulate cosmetic body piercing businesses. In London, local authorities may regulate those businesses by licensing and inspection, or by registration, byelaws and inspection, depending under which legislation they have chosen to proceed. The vast majority of London local authorities have adopted licensing powers, and can set the conditions under which a licence is granted. Licence conditions may cover matters such as cleanliness, hygiene of the premises, and equipment and its safety. Local authorities can refuse to grant, renew or transfer a licence, or they can revoke a licence if they are not satisfied that the business will provide a safe and hygienic service.

My hon. Friend is right that local authorities outside London do not have specific powers to regulate cosmetic body piercing businesses. When the legislation governing skin piercing businesses outside London was introduced in 1982, I think in the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982, cosmetic body piercing was not widely known about or practised to the extent that it is these days. My hon. Friend will recognise that many—probably most—cosmetic body piercing businesses also carry out tattooing or ear piercing. Such businesses often operate side by side in the same premises.

[Ms Hazel Blears]

Local authorities outside London have powers to regulate by registration and byelaws both ear piercing and tattooing. Local authorities therefore have the opportunity to work with businesses that offer cosmetic body piercing together with tattooing or ear piercing to provide safe and hygienic practices. That will be to the benefit of all their customers, whether they come for tattooing, ear piercing or cosmetic body piercing.

In addition, local authorities can use general enforcement powers under health and safety at work legislation. That allows them to use improvement and prohibition notices and ultimately to prosecute cosmetic body piercing businesses if they judge that there is a risk to customers' health and safety. Sometimes the health and safety powers are under-utilised, perhaps because local authorities do not see them as local government powers, but they exist and they are extremely strong powers in terms of improvement and prohibition notices. Local authorities can use those powers if they are appropriate.

There was a consultation exercise on these matters in 1996. Following that consultation, we concluded that there should be primary legislation to give local authorities outside London the specific powers that they lack to regulate cosmetic body piercing businesses. As my hon. Friend said, we have been trying to find parliamentary time to ensure that that happens. We know that there is substantial support from local authorities and from businesses for such legislation. The good businesses in operation want to ensure that they are providing excellent and safe practices. There has been heavy pressure on parliamentary time. I cannot be precise about when it might be possible to introduce legislation, but we shall take every opportunity that we can.

My hon. Friend mentioned the Local Government Bill. If possible, we want to pursue that, but I cannot give a commitment at this stage. That does not mean that cosmetic body piercing businesses outside London are entirely regulated. There are powers in place for local authorities to inspect, advise and, if necessary, enforce the legislation. The framework enables local authorities to play a role in driving up standards and promoting good practice. It is important that we build constructive partnerships with the businesses and get the proper advice out to the public.

My hon. Friend referred to the voluntary registration scheme and code of good practice introduced by Sheffield city council for body piercing businesses. We are also aware that some local authorities have produced information for the public on the risks of body piercing and how to choose a reputable body piercer. In Bury and Rochdale councils area and in Southampton such guidelines and information for the public have been introduced. The Department of Health has used the Bury and Rochdale body piercing leaflet as an example of good practice in our recently issued strategy on hepatitis C. It is important that we encourage local authorities to issue such information.

Action is being taken by industry bodies such as the Association of Professional Piercers and the European Professional Piercers Association, which have also produced good practice guidelines. Those need to be distributed widely. There has also been guidance from the Health and Safety Executive, which in October 2001 produced updated guidelines. Those guidelines should assist local authorities in advising businesses on issues such as hygiene practice, treatment of customers with existing health conditions, after-care, and adopting a reasonable approach to age of consent issues.

All these measures and activities should help in promoting safe practice. That must include prospective customers being made aware of the potential health risks of body piercing, the relevance of existing health conditions, the need for medical advice, and the proper after-care of the piercing to reduce the risk of infection. Those are all aspects that my hon. Friend highlighted in her contribution.

On the age of consent, I know that my hon. Friend is concerned about young children having body piercing done without parental consent, in terms of whether that is appropriate and also because of the possible health risks. Overall, Government policy on the age of consent is the responsibility of the Home Office. However, let me explain the position on skin piercing.

Only the tattooing of minors is controlled by specific legislation—the Tattooing of Minors Act 1969. The question of what is a valid consent for cosmetic body piercing is governed by common law. If a person under the age of 18 is capable of understanding the nature of the act that is to be done, he or she is capable of giving a valid consent to it unless statute provides otherwise. The degree of competence that can be exercised by children will depend in each case on the relative maturity of the child concerned, as well as upon his or her age. I understand that parents are concerned when their children have had body piercing done without their consent. However, I am advised by local authorities and the industry that body piercing should not be carried out on children without parental consent. Obviously, practice in individual businesses may vary.

Our concern is that, if we introduced a minimum age of consent, we could end up increasing the health risks of body piercing. Children might try to pierce themselves or each other in an unsafe or unhygienic manner or they would go to disreputable piercers rather than to those who abide by a code of practice and guidelines. It is a difficult issue on which to make the right judgment, but I am sure that we are all aware that, when an activity is subject to prohibition, the prospects of it taking place with greater risk always remain on the horizon. We are keeping the age of consent under constant review and will continue to consider whether it may be appropriate to introduce a minimum age of consent for this practice. Most reputable businesses would like guidelines that make it clear that people under the age of 16 should not be pierced.

In conclusion, our primary concern is that cosmetic body piercing is provided in a safe and hygienic manner. I have outlined the legislative framework that is in place and said that we plan, wherever possible, to strengthen that framework. We want to encourage local authorities outside London to use their existing powers under the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974 and under the provisions to regulate ear piercing and tattooing.

We will keep the position under review in the light of any new evidence that emerges, and we will consider the need for further action once the investigation into the tragic case of Daniel Hindle has been completed. I am keen that we learn the lessons of that case. I am pleased to confirm to my hon. Friend that we will consider the feasibility of carrying out a special study to make sure that we increase our evidence base on this issue. That will become increasingly important in the future as cosmetic body piercing becomes more popular, particularly among young people. It is important that Government keep up to date with developments.

I thank my hon. Friend for raising a matter that is important not just to her constituency but to the country.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-seven minutes to Five o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 28 February 2003

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[SYLVIA HEAL *in the Chair*]

MR. SPEAKER'S ABSENCE

The House being met, and the Speaker having leave of absence pursuant to paragraph (3) of Standing Order No.3 (Deputy Speaker), SYLVIA HEAL, THE FIRST DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF WAYS AND MEANS, *proceeded to the table.*

Orders of the Day

Fireworks Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

9.33 am

Mr. Bill Tynan (Hamilton, South): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Before I outline the main problems with fireworks and how the Bill would respond to them, I pay tribute to those who have tried to respond to public concerns over the past decade and change the way in which we deal with fireworks. The last successful private Member's Bill on fireworks was in the 1963–64 Session, so I approach this Bill with trepidation. The fireworks debate has obviously moved on at a considerable pace since then. In response to public concern, a statutory instrument was laid before the House in 1997 under provisions of the Consumer Protection Act 1987, but the Act's narrow scope limits what we can deliver on changes to fireworks legislation. The Bill would provide the opportunity for regulation to be laid before the House.

The fireworks issue has become more important for the general public over the past few years. Many hon. Members have responded in different ways and many of them wanted to sponsor the Bill. I am grateful for the cross-party sponsors and apologise to those who were unable to add their names to the list because of the limited number of Members who can sponsor a Bill. The number of hon. Members in the Chamber demonstrates the public interest in the Bill and the concerns that our constituents have expressed over many years. I have received hundreds of e-mails and letters. Yesterday, the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association successfully lobbied and spoke to many hon. Members.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Tynan: When I have made some progress.

There is wide interest in the issue in the UK. Some 300,000 signatures have been delivered to No. 10 over the past six months, and four petitions on fireworks were presented this week. When I decided to pursue a Bill on fireworks, I had the benefit of the experience of the Bill promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Linda Gilroy), which, unfortunately, failed. She was lucky, however, in that there was no discussion on Second Reading and only one hour was spent on it in Committee. It was only when it was in the House of Lords that concern was expressed about its width and scope. The Lords Select Committee on Delegated Powers and Regulatory Reform concluded that it did not "inappropriately delegate legislative power". Having examined that Bill and discussed the way forward, I felt that we needed to be as inclusive as possible.

I met various organisations, including the fireworks task group of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and the Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. I corresponded with and consulted other groups that had expressed tremendous support, such as the TUC, the British Medical Association, the National Farmers Union, the Windermere campaign for fireworks control, the main groups representing trading standards officers and the national campaign for fireworks safety. If I have inadvertently left out an organisation or individual, it is because the consultation was so wide-ranging. Many groups in a large number of local authorities also offered their support. Yesterday, we were lobbied by people from Salford, who said that they support the Bill. I must also thank the all-party parliamentary group on fireworks for its guidance, help and support over the past few months.

Starting from day one, I announced my intention that my Fireworks Bill would be as consensual as possible. I met representatives of the British Fireworks Association, the British Pyrotechnists Association and the explosives industry group of the CBI to discuss issues, exchange information and learn about the industry to reach, if possible, a consensus on the Bill's content. The assistance, support and advice from everyone has been extremely gratifying. I listened intently on the last Friday that a private Member's Bill was discussed and heard the clear message that such Bills should be simple and brief. This Bill is neither simple nor brief, but hon. Members and the general public demand it.

The COSLA fireworks task group published an excellent report last October. It is the most comprehensive report on fireworks in the past 25 years. I pay tribute to how well informed, wide-ranging and meaningful the recommendations are that emanated from six months of consultation and inquiry, involving all interested parties. I am proud to base many of my proposals and my speech on the evidence collected by the task group and the suggestions that it made.

The COSLA fireworks task group was established in 2001. Many local authorities throughout Scotland received unprecedented complaints about fireworks that

[Mr. Tynan]

covered a diverse range of issues, from general antisocial behaviour to cruelty, abuse of animals and, most commonly, noise.

Michael Fabricant: Will the hon. Gentleman now give way?

Mr. Tynan: I shall allow the hon. Gentleman to intervene.

Michael Fabricant: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. He talks about the general nuisance caused by fireworks, and he is absolutely correct. He mentioned guide dogs for the blind. Is he aware of the permanent trauma that fireworks inflict on them, which costs between £150,000 and £200,000 a year of public money donated to the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association? More to the point, that means that some six blind people—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Tynan: If the hon. Gentleman will be patient, I shall come on to the problems caused to guide dogs.

Many people have complained to councils that fireworks are getting louder and more intimidating, and that their use is becoming increasingly antisocial. The remit of the task group was to identify the changes needed to the legislative framework governing the sale and use of fireworks, to consider and to recommend the means by which the changes could be secured, and to consider recommendations through which public concerns could be addressed. It began by examining the current legislative position on storage of fireworks, their sale and supply, and their use and abuse—issues on which I shall expand later. It considered noise issues, the legal definition of fireworks, the different categories under British standard 7114—including indoor, garden, display and professional—and the injury statistics associated with firework misuse.

The task group examined the case for change from a number of viewpoints. All 22 Scottish local authorities that responded favour tighter controls; indeed, six favoured an outright consumer ban. The Association of Chief Police Officers was of the opinion that fireworks misuse has escalated significantly, resulting in its becoming a serious community problem that causes considerable annoyance to the general public and affects the quality of life in local communities. The Chief and Assistant Chief Fire Officers Association expressed concern about the increasing misuse of fireworks, and about the need to strengthen the current system; indeed, it has offered its support for this Bill. The society of chief officers of trading standards voiced particular concerns about the problems of storage and supply. The SSPCA reported that 90 per cent. of vets who responded to its survey had treated animals for injuries resulting from the misuse of fireworks.

Public opinion submissions from community groups and voluntary organisations demonstrated the serious nature of many of the incidents, including arson, physical attack and the abuse of the most vulnerable. The task group also met many of the industry representatives whom I have met, such as Martin Guest of Black Cat Fireworks, who was particularly concerned about the illegal importing of fireworks.

The task group then looked at the current legislative framework and the Explosives Act 1875 in particular. The storage of fireworks is covered by that Act, which, with input from the explosives industry group, is being reviewed by the Health and Safety Executive. It will consider the storage of larger quantities under the terms of the manufacturing storage explosives regulation. A report is due in 2004. As I shall explain, storage of quantities of less than 1 tonne of fireworks is currently inadequate, so this is a sensible moment to introduce the Bill, and to work alongside the changes planned under the manufacturing storage explosives regulation. The report looked at the voluntary code, and it is just that: a voluntary agreement between the Department of Trade and Industry and the fireworks industry on how certain fireworks are sold. The agreement reached in the autumn on a ban on air bombs is to be welcomed, but it is just not working. In addition to differences of interpretation about the sales period, it is not possible to enforce the code. Indeed, the main industry groups have been advised that attempting to enforce the code on their members and on those who supply could be interpreted as uncompetitive conduct by the Office of Fair Trading.

Soon after the air bomb ban was unveiled, internet messages from firework forums noted that the agreement was only voluntary, and that a business opportunity had therefore been created for the irresponsible. In the light of this, and having considered all the options, the COSLA report came down firmly in favour of the need for new firework regulations.

Having touched on some of the problems relating to fireworks, I should like to discuss some of them at greater length. The first problem is licensing and storage. For a payment of some £13, an annual licence to permit storage of quantities of fireworks suitable for sale can be obtained. Local authorities or fire authorities in metropolitan areas cannot refuse to grant a licence, and have no powers to revoke one. Although selling illegal fireworks, selling fireworks to minors, or engaging in improper storage or sales practices may be offences in themselves, they cannot lead to a licence being revoked.

The second problem is noise and nuisance. There is a general perception that fireworks are getting louder, and that they are now being used year-round and later at night. Fireworks have become a part of weddings and birthdays, and I have even seen them advertised for Valentine's day. I did not buy any, by the way. A European standard of 120 dB has been proposed, and is being considered. The recent report from the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, entitled "Quiet Please", has argued for lower noise levels.

In discussing this issue, I am conscious of the need to consult all interested parties, which I hope might lead to agreement on appropriate noise levels for fireworks. There is also increasing concern about the use of fireworks by those engaged in the wider problem of antisocial behaviour. The use of fireworks to destroy bins and post boxes, and in attacks on cars, has been reported in my constituency.

The third problem is injuries to humans and to animals. Statistics show that the 1997 regulations and the emergency regulations that preceded them arrested the steady increase in firework injuries, but in the past five years the figures have been increasing rapidly. It should of course be noted that the figures apply only to the four-week period around 5 November, and as such the injuries caused by increased, year-round use—including the death that occurred in 2001–02 new-year period—are not included.

There has been increasing focus on the injuries caused to animals. Animal charities have reported deliberate attacks on domestic and farm animals.

Mr. David Marshall (Glasgow, Shettleston): I congratulate my hon. Friend on his success in the private Member's Bill ballot, and on introducing such a worthwhile Bill, which most people in the UK will undoubtedly want to see on the statute book as soon as possible. Will he clarify whether it will give the police and the courts the power to deal with unscrupulous shopkeepers who indiscriminately sell fireworks to young people for a profit, in the knowledge that they will cause misery to many people and animals, and to society as a whole?

Mr. Tynan: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. If he will allow me to continue, my speech will respond adequately to his question.

Linda Perham (Ilford, North): The London training centre for the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association is in my constituency. As my hon. Friend said, that organisation is very concerned about the waste of expensive training, as well as the stress imposed on animals. He will doubtless confirm that the Bill will give better protection to animals than that provided under the Protection of Animals Act 1911.

Mr. Tynan: I can only agree with the sentiments expressed by my hon. Friend.

The National Farmers Union and the British Horse Society have logged incidents for a number of years, and both the Blue Cross and the SSPCA have campaigned on the issue of animal protection. Each year, the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association, with which I have worked closely in the past few months, has to retire as many as four dogs, and provide additional training for up to another 150, at a cost of £27,000 per dog. If we were to target only that issue, the Bill would still prove extremely worth while.

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney): I should tell my hon. Friend that the blind people from my constituency who visited Parliament yesterday, with their guide dogs, are extremely grateful to him for introducing this Bill, and they expect the House to ensure that it has a speedy passage.

Mr. Tynan: When my hon. Friend goes back to his constituency, he will have the comfort of knowing that the Bill has been supported by all sections of the House.

A final area of concern is importation. Only one company—Kimbolton Fireworks—manufactures fireworks in the UK. I have visited it to see the process for myself and to discuss these issues with the son of the owner. I spent a considerable time there. I am told that about 1,000 containers of fireworks are imported to the UK annually, mainly from the far east, of which the majority go to legitimate UK fireworks companies, where they are stored on premises licensed by the Health and Safety Executive. The industry estimates, however, that up to 13 per cent. of fireworks that come into this country are not stored in HSE-licensed premises. Containers can sometimes be driven to a lay-by—or who knows where?—where the contents are divided for distribution by rogue retailers. Companies that transport fireworks to safe and secure premises licensed and inspected by the HSE are required to have marked vehicles that are driven by trained drivers. Those who flout the law, although needing import licences, can remove containers from the port without having to confirm that they are being transported in the correct manner to licensed storage.

John Robertson (Glasgow, Anniesland): Does that mean that, if someone drives up to a dock in a white van, loads it up with £25,000 of fireworks, drives it to the House of Commons, parks it and then lights the blue touch paper, the only time that he breaks the law is when he lights the blue touch paper?

Mr. Tynan: My hon. Friend has read my speech.

The industry has serious concerns about the importation of fireworks to this country. It is acknowledged that HSE-licensed premises are not a problem. However, I decided to test the Department of Trade and Industry—and I hope that my right hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry is not surprised by that. I asked a friend to write an application from a private house on a sheet of A4. He sent away the form and the reply asked him to convert his figure of £25,000 to euros. He did so. He was then asked to say where the fireworks were coming in. "Felixstowe", he said. He was told that he would have to give the date. He then asked, "I haven't got the date, but can I not have the licence?" He was told that there was no problem with getting the licence but that he would have to give the date. It is therefore obvious that anyone can make an application. There are no checks that the fireworks will go to licensed premises. We have to address that in this Bill.

When preparing for this Second Reading, I wrote to the Serjeant at Arms to ask about the possibility of bringing fireworks into the House of Commons. I was told that I would need a responsible person. [*Laughter.*] I was told that I would need to carry the fireworks in a closed steel container and that I would have to have a police escort while they were on the premises. That demonstrates the level of security in the House of Commons, but it also highlights the converse situation with the importation of fireworks to the country.

My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Anniesland (John Robertson) is right. Any organisation that fills in an import licence application can find itself with a container of fireworks that it can drive wherever it wishes. That has to be tightened up.

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley): There is great concern about the storage of fireworks. Mine is one of the few constituencies that has a licence for explosives, but that does not cover fireworks. Many hon. Members will have

[Mr. Lindsay Hoyle]

seen huge car boot sales in their constituencies at which huge amounts of fireworks can be sold without containers. Will the Bill outlaw such sales?

Mr. Tynan: It is essential that we are able to track the supply of fireworks to this country and within this country. If we do not do that, we will end up in the situation that my hon. Friend describes. Fireworks can be sold in pubs, clubs, car boot sales or wherever. We have to deal with rogue retailers, and the way to do that is through this Bill. I expect my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary to implement appropriate measures.

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough): Liberal Democrats also congratulate the hon. Gentleman on introducing the Bill. We also thank the Home Secretary for being in the Chamber for the first discussions on the Bill, showing how seriously it is being taken.

The hon. Gentleman has spoken about importation. There have been increased sales of fireworks from the far east via the internet for private use. Will the Bill deal with that issue, about which activists in my constituency—including Mrs. Marjorie Johnston, who has led the campaign—are concerned?

Mr. Tynan: The Bill makes it clear that consultation is necessary on a range of issues. When that consultation takes place, people will have the opportunity to have an input.

I have clear expectations of the firework regulations that this Bill will introduce. I foresee a new regime whereby we respect fireworks as the explosives that they are but acknowledge their legitimate use. Powers would be granted to allow firework regulations to be made in a range of areas—such as the life of fireworks, import, storage, sale and use.

Mr. Jim Cunningham (Coventry, South): I congratulate my hon. Friend on introducing a Bill that is long overdue to say the least. Later in his speech, will he touch on the problem of enforcement?

Mr. Tynan: I hope that, as I go through the Bill, my hon. Friend will be reassured on that point.

The aim of the Bill is to provide an effective and comprehensive solution. Now that I have outlined the problems that the Bill seeks to address, I hope that hon. Members will have some concept of its aims. I hope that this is not presumptuous, but I do not propose to detain the House with an extended clause-by-clause analysis of the Bill. I trust that that can wait until another day.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West) *rose—*

Mr. Tynan: This is an ideal time for my hon. Friend—I mean the hon. Gentleman—to contribute to the debate.

Mr. Swayne: The hon. Gentleman was right the first time.

I am entirely sympathetic to his objectives but, given the extensive regulatory powers that he seeks to give Ministers, what can he say to reassure me about the survival of the firework party held by law-abiding citizens who seek to entertain their children in their back garden?

Mr. Tynan: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention, which was very helpful. I think that I can reassure him. The Bill is similar to the Bill that went through the House of Lords in 1997–98. At that time, reassurance was sought on the width and scope of the Bill. That convinced the House of Lords to send the Bill back, unamended, to the House of Commons. My Bill will seek to allow the participation of people such as the hon. Gentleman who wish to let off fireworks for their grandchildren—I am sorry, for their children. [*Laughter.*] I am sure that he will be delighted to be able to do so.

Clause 1 establishes the definition of fireworks. I do not intend that the Bill should extend to items such as pyrotechnic bird-scarers, small explosive charges for car airbags, amateur rocket motors or marine distress flares. I have been asked to give assurances to groups that use such devices. They are not currently classed as fireworks, and that will continue.

Clause 2 grants powers to enable firework regulations to be made, and outlines the grounds on which they can be made. Included are protections for humans, animals and property, and a requirement to consult interested and relevant groups before making regulations. However, the scope for making emergency provisions—as happened in 1996—continues to be included.

Clause 3 would ban sales to minors. The intention is that the current minimum age of 18 should be retained. Clause 4 would limit the times at which fireworks can be sold or used. There is scope to allow exceptions, such as a post-11 pm use at new year. The clause would introduce a year-round curfew of 11 pm.

Mr. Brian H. Donohoe (Cunninghame, South): I congratulate my hon. Friend on bringing the Bill before us. It is long overdue. One reason for that is that the industry ignores its own code of conduct. Companies such as R.S. McColl sell fireworks 365 days a year and will continue to do so. Will my hon. Friend's Bill prevent that?

Mr. Tynan: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. I have held extensive consultations with the fireworks industry. The industry is receptive and supports the Bill. It recognises that there is a problem and wants the Bill to address it. I think that my hon. Friend will be content with the provisions and with the discussions that will have to take place before it is implemented.

Vernon Coaker (Gedling): I congratulate my hon. Friend on the Bill. It is most welcome and many of us hope that it will be passed quickly. Has my hon. Friend spoken to the police, the local authorities and trading standards officers about the proposed regulations? My constituents complain that existing regulations are not enforced, so we need to ensure that the police, trading standards officers and council officials realise the importance of enforcing regulations introduced under the Bill, and that people selling fireworks to children or letting off fireworks in the street are prosecuted.

Mr. Tynan: I thank my hon. Friend for those comments. The professional bodies of the UK fire service and of chief constables all support the Bill. They recognise the need for regulation.

Clause 4 would specify the hours of day when fireworks may be used. Clause 5 would restrict the sale of certain categories of firework to people who are trained, experienced and insured as appropriate. Existing British standards categories would be retained.

Valerie Davey (Bristol, West): I offer my hon. Friend congratulations from my constituents and from the police in Bristol, who have experience of category 3 large display fireworks being used as hand-held weapons. When the provisions are considered in detail, will he take into account experience in Bristol, and also in Northern Ireland, where the law was changed?

Mr. Tynan: I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister is listening intently and that she will address such points in her contribution.

Ross Cranston (Dudley, North): One of the valuable points about clauses 4 and 5 is that they deal with possession. At present, there are enforcement problems. The police have power to prosecute people who throw those things in public streets but they cannot catch them. The Bill includes regulations on possession that will definitely allow enforcement—at least in England—especially coupled with the valuable penalty and notice system.

Mr. Tynan: My hon. and learned Friend is correct.

Clause 6 would introduce conditions on matters such as training, insurance, consultation with people nearby and local authority permission for public firework displays. Those holding displays would be expected to take reasonable steps to ensure that certain standards were adhered to in respect of training and insurance, and that the impact of displays on people or animals nearby was curtailed or minimised.

Mr. Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh, North and Leith): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way once more. Can he assure me that the Bill will do something about the irresponsible behaviour of far too many retailers? Is he aware that a survey conducted by Edinburgh city council found that retailers in more than half the premises visited were willing to sell fireworks to children who were clearly under age, even though the council had sent out a letter warning retailers that it was about to carry out that survey? Does my hon. Friend agree that if the Bill is successful the Government should use their powers to ensure that such practices do not continue?

Mr. Tynan: I think that the Bill covers the problem of rogue retailers. At present, trading standards departments have to issue permits and there is no chance to revoke or refuse a licence. Retailers who sell to under-age children would certainly be dealt with under the Bill.

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): I congratulate my hon. Friend on presenting the Bill. My constituent Mrs. Marlene Healey has collected a petition of 9,000 signatures; one in eight of my constituents are calling for the types of change in the law proposed in the Bill.

Does my hon. Friend agree that even at private parties fireworks can maim and kill? Can he assure the House that the restrictions on sales to which he refers will ensure that fireworks that can maim and kill children and young people will not be available for use at private parties?

Mr. Tynan: I have been accused by some individuals—although very few—of being a killjoy. I want to make it clear that I want the Bill to promote opportunities for the responsible and safe use of fireworks. It is essential that we do not introduce a ban when there is no public demand for one. The Bill will help to ensure the responsible use of fireworks. It is important that people organising private parties understand the dangers of fireworks, and I hope that the annual safety campaigns will continue to stress how dangerous those explosives can be.

Jonathan Shaw (Chatham and Aylesford): On behalf of my constituents, I congratulate my hon. Friend on bringing forward the Bill.

Does my hon. Friend agree that retailers who advertise, as they did in Chatham, "Free Fireworks" are extremely irresponsible? Can my hon. Friend confirm that at private parties, especially weddings, people will be able to obtain a licence without too much difficulty and bureaucracy, as long as they provide proper safeguards? My hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Pond) may be interested in that point as he is getting married in a couple of weeks' time.

Mr. Tynan: Clause 7 would strengthen the existing system for licensing retailers. A two-tier system would be introduced, with tougher licensing and a lower tier that allowed retailers to sell fireworks for a limited three-week period around 5 November and for a short period before the new year. I recognise that, in addition to properly run displays for births, marriages and Valentine's day, there is a more than legitimate demand for fireworks for Diwali, Eid and the Chinese new year. I have held discussions with relevant communities and groups as to how we could deal with the sale of fireworks outside the defined periods.

Mr. Andrew Dismore (Hendon): My hon. Friend has just come to the point that I wanted to put to him. I represent a diverse constituency, with people from many ethnic minority backgrounds. There is concern that the Bill might prevent legitimate celebrations, starting in the autumn with Diwali and running through to Chinese new year in the winter. Can my hon. Friend assure me that, while his Bill would rightly control the misuse of fireworks, it would not prevent legitimate family celebrations for those important events in the diverse communities of my constituency?

Mr. Tynan: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. I checked on when Diwali takes place; it is normally within the three-week period before 5 November. I spoke to the Chinese embassy about Chinese new year, as I wanted to make sure that I could

[Mr. Tynan]

answer questions such as those put by my hon. Friend, and I was told that fireworks are not used at the celebrations but that crackers are used.

Under the Bill, fireworks would be available throughout the year, but only with a higher tier licence. There would be higher costs, and stricter standards of training and record keeping would apply. It has been pointed out that if we allowed the sale of fireworks only for a three-week period, people would buy them and store them for months. I want to avoid that. We could have a situation in which people from the different cultures existing in this country felt that they were being discriminated against. I want to avoid that.

Bob Spink (Castle Point): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his Bill, and I support him. On his point about training, I note that one aspect of his Bill is to enforce stricter rules on the training of those who give professional displays. I want some comfort on that. We want more professional displays—we do not want to raise barriers to them—and I am not aware that there is a major problem with the safety of professional displays. I have never had a representation from a constituent about that. Will he assure me that he will not over-regulate in that area?

Mr. Tynan: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that. I have consulted widely, and the British Pyrotechnists Association is currently running a pilot scheme in four areas. It is looking at the training of operatives at licensed displays to make sure that two tiers apply to the people who operate and the people who manage. There is some merit in the manner in which they are setting up the training scheme, and consultation and discussion can take place to see whether it is a practical proposition for the future. I hope that that will satisfy the hon. Gentleman.

Jim Knight (South Dorset): My hon. Friend is being exceedingly generous in allowing so many interventions. I applaud him for that and for introducing the Bill, which is being very well received in Dorset. Today, three Members have received some 8,000 representations from Dorset area residents. In response to the point about the killjoy element, is there not some local variation through local authorities regulating the licences that allows them to make judgments about traditional firework events in their area, and whether they will be carried out responsibly?

Mr. Tynan: I thank my hon. Friend for that. As I said, I think that I will get a rocket if I take any more interventions. Local authorities will have such an opportunity depending on conditions. A uniform position will apply in relation to the granting of a licence to deal with rogue sellers and those who currently abuse the voluntary code, which has not been enforced. I hope that that will content my hon. Friend.

Both tiers of retail licences could be refused or revoked, and the higher tier would apply to those selling via the internet or mail order. Clause 8 allows regulation to be made in respect of the information that must be provided about fireworks. The intention is that that would relate to packaging and information provided with both individual fireworks and packs of fireworks.

Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South): I am not just supportive of the hon. Gentleman's Bill: I am highly supportive. I have a genuine question. He spoke about several things that he would like to happen as a result of the Bill, none of which is contained in the Bill, which is nothing but an enabling measure giving the Minister powers to introduce such regulations. Does he have assurances from the Minister that the things for which he asks will happen?

Mr. Tynan: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that. It is important that I set out, after my consultations and discussions, the content that I believe should be included in the Bill. It is an enabling Bill, and it is essential that the Minister listen to the voice of Members and of the general public outside. Under the circumstances, I hope that that will be acceptable to the hon. Gentleman.

Clause 9 allows regulation to be made on the impact of the importation and manufacture of fireworks. The intention of that is that information will be provided to confirm that fireworks entering the UK have been transported to legal storage, and hence that action can be taken more swiftly if they have not. Clause 10 allows for and defines the nature of training courses referenced under the fireworks regulation. It is intended that, in consultation with the industry—as I said, I understand that the British Pyrotechnists Association has already studied this area—and other interested parties, appropriate training courses and standards would be established to cover those areas.

The remaining clauses are supplementary, covering penalties for committing an offence, a number of technical aspects, the financial provisions of the Bill, the means of firework regulations coming into law, and a number of other minor aspects. From my discussions with the industry and enforcement officers, I would not expect regulations made to have a significantly adverse effect on the business of legitimate parts of the fireworks industry, or to place too large a burden on trading standards, Customs, the Health and Safety Executive or the police.

In presenting the Bill to the House, I am aware that there are those who may be worried by the fact that this is an enabling Bill. I, too, have some concerns about some of the visions of draconian provisions being enacted using the scope of powers granted under the Bill. I am, however, reassured by the discussions that I have had in preparing the Bill. I believe that, with proper thought and scrutiny, the regulations made under it would not be an instrument of tyranny. This is not a killjoy Bill. As those with expertise have agreed, it is a sensible, considered response to the problems of fireworks misuse, unless it is denied that there is a problem and it is thus contended that the public are wrong to be alarmed about the nuisance of fireworks.

I trust that I will find agreement that action is needed. I would welcome comments and, as appropriate, amendments to the Bill—perhaps I should not say that—as it progresses through the House. I hope that those who may have a problem with the Bill will work to strengthen and improve it rather than dismiss it.

This Bill is a timely and comprehensive attempt to modernise how we deal with fireworks in the United Kingdom. I understand that some are concerned about any attempt to tighten the import, sale and use of any item. I trust, however, that they will agree with me, a large number of charities, local authorities, enforcement officers and the British fireworks industry itself—all those who know about fireworks—that the current situation is not acceptable, that we need to change it, and that the Bill provides the way forward. I commend the Bill to the House.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I make a plea to all Members that, since many of them wish to contribute, they should make their speeches concise.

10.17 am

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): Last night, at about 20 minutes past 11—not 12 hours ago—there was a loud explosion of a firework of some description outside my bedroom window. It woke my daughter, aged three, who started screaming. She fell out of bed 20 minutes later, for which I will also blame the firework. Not 36 hours ago, on Wednesday evening, there was an explosion outside my front door followed by another series of explosions. It may have been the hon. Member for Hamilton, South (Mr. Tynan) trying to make a point, but, instead, it brought home to me how apposite this Bill is. I am delighted to see it, and I congratulate him on his good fortune—I wish that I could win the lottery—and on his comprehensive speech in which he outlined the reasons why the Bill is being introduced.

We should not forget, however, the enormous pleasure that fireworks give, and have given for many years, to a huge number of our constituents. Just because they have not written to us about it does not mean that they do not enjoy fireworks. It is those who are badly affected who write to us. When I was a child, we would have a bonfire in our little back garden on the edge of London on 5 November only. If it was not in our back garden, it was in somebody else's. We used to eat a lot of sausages, and quite a lot of ash that had attached to them—

Mr. Willis: We did not have a back garden.

Mr. Robathan: Oh dear. I suppose that the clogs were a bit rough, too. Poor old chap.

Joan Ryan (Enfield, North): He lived in a penthouse.

Mr. Robathan: I thank the hon. Lady for her submission that the hon. Gentleman lived in a penthouse. That is a typical example of Liberal double standards. I suspect that she will agree with me about that.

In back gardens around the country on 5 November, children gather and have an enjoyable bonfire night. As the hon. Member for Hamilton, South said, we do not wish to spoil their pleasure. I am old enough to remember that I was sent to the local toy shop with a letter from my mother telling the retailer that I was allowed to have some fireworks. Those were the regulations some 40 years ago. There seemed to be very little trouble at the time, although the accident rate may have been worse. Those of us of my age need to realise, however, that the situation has now changed.

We have all received many letters, and know that the problem is growing and needs to addressed. Hence the Bill introduced by the hon. Member for Hamilton, South.

For the benefit of doubt, the Bill is sponsored by two members of the Conservative Front Bench. I am sure that all the press releases issued by the phalanx of Labour Members in the Chamber will mention that.

Mr. Tom Watson (West Bromwich, East): Members on both sides of the House are genuinely appreciative of the fact that the Conservative party supports the Bill. However, does the hon. Gentleman agree that we did not have to do it this way? If his right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth)—"Airbomb Eric", friend of the noisy neighbour—had not talked a similar Bill out two years ago, we would not all be here now because legislation would be in place.

Mr. Robathan: I was going to say that I am delighted to see a phalanx of Labour Members here today. I expect my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) to walk into the Chamber at any moment.

The Conservative party generally supports the spirit of the Bill although, like the hon. Member for Hamilton, South, we do not like enabling powers. I cast no aspersions on the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry or the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Miss Johnson), but I dislike giving the Government powers that may be abused in future. Members on both sides of the House are always concerned about that. Draconian powers may be introduced, but I hope that they will not.

Mr. Swayne: Is there not a danger that the Government might enable too much? My hon. Friend began with his fond memories of 5 November. Part of my concern about regulating powers derives from the fact that we will accommodate much wider dates than 5 November. It would be much better to have a narrower range of dates.

Mr. Robathan: I shall come on to the dates later, as there is a big issue about the periods when fireworks can be used.

I should like to look at three general topics—the current situation, the improvements that are already being made and the Bill itself. As the hon. Member for Hamilton, South mentioned, we are dealing with explosives. That needs to be stressed, as they are always dangerous. I have probably used more explosives than most hon. Members in my previous incarnation. When I was blowing up stacks of high explosives I was always worried, whether I was using an electrical circuit or a safety fuse. Those things are dangerous, especially when the detonator does not go off and you are left wondering why. Unlike a rocket, you cannot put a few pounds of plastic explosive in a bucket.

Mr. Russell Brown (Dumfries): In a previous life, I spent 18 years working in the explosives industry, so

[Mr. Russell Brown]

I know exactly what the hon. Gentleman is talking about. As politicians we must get across to parents in particular the important point that although young children think that fireworks contain only a small amount of explosive, they burn fiercely and are white-hot. We have been very lucky not to have witnessed real tragedies on our housing estates. Only a couple of weeks ago, something went wrong in a discotheque or nightclub in America. Part of the cause may have been the building, but we saw the ferocity of the fire and the damage, devastation and death that can be caused by fireworks.

Mr. Robathan: I agree with the hon. Gentleman, who rightly gives a particularly good example of the way in which the mistreatment and mishandling of explosives can have disastrous consequences. I shall not now mention it in my speech. Whether we are parents or grandparents, we should all be aware of that.

My constituents have expressed concerns about safety, which the hon. Gentleman has just raised. We all welcome any measures that will serve to limit injuries caused by fireworks. In 2001, there was a total of 1,362 injuries—a 40 per cent. rise on the previous year, which is a worrying trend. Of even more concern is the fact that 58 per cent. of those injuries were to under-17s, and 33 per cent. to under-13s. I am sure that all hon. Members will welcome anything that reduces those disturbingly high figures and prevents even one child from being blinded.

Mr. Iain Luke (Dundee, East) *rose—*

Mr. Robathan: I am conscious of the press releases that are being issued like mad, so I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman. However, I would rather not accept too many interventions.

Mr. Luke: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman gave figures for the number of people injured by fireworks. Does he accept that if the numbers are not reduced with the introduction of a licensing scheme in the Bill, there will be a call for a total ban in future?

Mr. Robathan: I shall discuss later the proportionate nature of action to be taken. There are already calls for a total ban, which I do not support any more than I support a ban on every other thing that can injure people. I know that the Government do not support a total ban either. However, we wish to see children protected. Members may have had letters calling for a ban in their mailbags, but millions of our constituents would not welcome that. We need to bear that in mind when reading letters from people who are unhappy about the noise caused by fireworks.

Fireworks often cause a serious nuisance or disturbance, especially to older people and pets. In the past few years, we cannot have failed to notice that the use of fireworks has escalated, as I illustrated earlier, and that the period in which they are used has grown longer. We have all received many letters complaining about the considerable disturbance that they cause. Indeed, I suspect that there is not anyone in the House who has not received such a letter. A closely related issue is noise, which goes to the heart of the matter and is particularly problematic in built-up areas. The 12 target areas of last year's campaign by the Department of Trade and Industry, snappily called "Fool with fireworks and bang goes your image", were urban conurbations, including Liverpool, Portsmouth, Gateshead and greater Strathclyde.

Not only is the noise getting worse, but fireworks are used throughout the year. There are fireworks on 5 February, during Diwali, the Chinese new year, Eid and the new year—who can forget the millennium celebrations three years ago? Fireworks were used to celebrate the Queen's golden jubilee and her official birthday. Of course, we also have 6 May—*[Interruption.]* I am surprised that one or two Government Members do not know that 6 May is the official birthday of the blessed leader of the Labour party. These days, they either celebrate it or burn his effigy.

The noise of fireworks has become relentless, and is of particular concern to those of us with dogs and other pets. I have a gundog called Otter, which I have mentioned before in the House, as Members may recall. When I get my shotgun and take Otter shooting she gets excited. She is a Labrador retriever, and that is what retrievers do. However, if she hears fireworks, she cowers under the table and is terrified.

Huw Irranca-Davies (Ogmore): Hopefully, the hon. Gentleman was not shooting his neighbours.

Mr. Robathan: The hon. Gentleman must not tempt me.

If Otter hears fireworks or a thunderstorm, she cowers under the table.

Mr. Willis: Does all that happen in your back garden?

Mr. Robathan: It certainly does not happen in my penthouse.

Everyone in the House agrees that this issue is important, but we should not overstate the case. I should like to discuss safety, which was raised by the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. Luke). In 2001, there were 1,362 injuries and no fatalities during the period of bonfire celebrations. The previous year, there were 972 injuries, with two fatalities—which is too high, I accept. However, we should compare those figures with the DTI's figures for accidents in the home. According to the DTI website, 2.7 million accidents required visits to hospital, and there were nearly 4,000 fatalities from accidents in the home. In 2001, there were 313,000 injuries following road traffic accidents, of which 40,000 were serious, and there were 3,450 fatalities. So our response must be appropriate and proportionate.

I have a great deal of time for the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association, which does excellent work. I understand from the association's website that at any one time there are 5,000 guide dogs for the blind. Each dog has a working life of approximately seven years, so there is a turnover of 700 to 800 dogs a year. I am told that only four or five dogs have to be retired each year because of distress caused by fireworks. I accept that that is a problem, but again, we should be proportionate in our response. I know that fireworks terrify animals, but we should not overstate our case. The root problem is the amount and repetition of noise and the decibel level.

Mr. Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich, West): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the issue as regards guide dogs is not just the cost of the retirement of, I acknowledge, a relatively small proportion of the total guide dog force, but the inhibitory effect that fireworks have on the lives of so many blind people, who are fearful of taking their dogs out during quite long periods of the year? If the hon. Gentleman or I are concerned about the safety of our dogs, we can go out alone, but that option is not available to a blind person. The use of fireworks substantially prejudices the blind person's quality of life.

Mr. Robathan: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. My point was that we need to be proportionate in our response. The use of fireworks, especially during daytime on the streets, which is what scares guide dogs most, is already illegal. We should remember that. Incidentally, if my figures are wrong, I should be delighted if any hon. Member in the Chamber, or the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association, would correct me. I understand that between four and six dogs out of 5,000 are retired each year as a result of firework incidents. Some dogs may need retraining. The figures need to be analysed, as there may be other factors that have made the dogs nervous. I am not understating the case, but we should beware of hyperbole.

Linda Gilroy (Plymouth, Sutton): Has the hon. Gentleman heard that there are cases in which dogs have to be drugged as a result of the fireworks nuisance, and therefore cannot be used by their owner, which causes problems?

Mr. Robathan: As I said, I do not underestimate the problem, but we should not overestimate it, either. I draw attention to an example of hyperbole. The hon. Member for Hamilton, South mentioned animals being tortured or injured. I received a letter a couple of days ago about kittens being tortured by having a firework strapped to their back. None of us would applaud that, and it has been illegal since the Protection of Animals Act 1911. It carries a penalty of up to six months imprisonment and it should not happen. The issue is one of enforcement, as has been mentioned.

The Act is often enforced by the RSPCA, to which I pay tribute for its work in such matters. However, I do not accept the RSPCA campaign, "Quiet Please", which aims to reduce the permitted decibel level to 95 dB. According to the RSPCA, that is similar to the sound produced by a book dropped on to a table from 1 m. I shall demonstrate that. I suspect that few of our children, the children of few of our constituents, and few of our grandchildren would welcome such a reduction in noise level.

Mr. Chris Pond (Gravesham) *rose—*

Mr. Robathan: As the hon. Gentleman is about to celebrate his marriage with fireworks, of course I shall give way.

Mr. Pond: I thank the hon. Gentleman for the opportunity to reassure the House and, through the Chair, the Speaker's Chaplain that I have no intention of redoing Guy Fawkes's job by letting off fireworks in the Chapel in a couple of weeks' time. The hon. Gentleman is missing the point about the impact, especially on blind and elderly people. Regardless of the decibel level, it is the long period of time during which dogs, especially guide dogs, can be frightened or rendered less effective that reduces the quality of life for people. One of my constituents told me yesterday how he had been led across the road by his guide dog, which had been frightened while in the middle of the road. The dog disappeared and my constituent was left in the middle of the road with no means of getting across. For those reasons, we must make sure that the Bill goes through, and that there is a restricted period during which fireworks are available on the streets.

Mr. Robathan: First, as I have not done so properly, I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his impending marriage. I have done it myself, and I think that it is generally a good thing. I say that for the benefit of my wife. Secondly, I do not think that I am missing the point. I pointed out that guide dogs and other animals are terrified for a long period of time. Thirdly, from what the hon. Gentleman said, I imagine that his constituent was in the middle of the road when somebody threw a firework in the street. That is illegal now.

The RSPCA does much good work, but its firework campaign is misguided. I am still waiting for the RSPCA to react on its report entitled "Pain and Stress in Fish", last updated in 1994, which stated:

> "The society's policy is to oppose the infliction of pain and suffering in the name of sport"—

which is why it is opposed to hunting, and

> "the case for fish feeling pain is surprisingly complete".

When the RSPCA writes to me to complain, I hope that it will tell me all about that.

The situation regarding fireworks is getting worse and we need to consider why. The first reason is that fewer fireworks are manufactured domestically. The overwhelming number of fireworks come in from China. The UK is quite a small market, whereas the other markets, such as the United States, which are much larger, prefer bigger bangs. Perhaps that is because they have more space. In any event, the Chinese are making fireworks for a different market and they are being sold in this country.

The second reason is a good example of the law of unintended consequences. The 1997 regulations banned the manufacture, sale and use of bangers—we all remember the penny bangers that used to be thrown around the street. Because bangers are banned, yobs now use air bombs. Since 1997 the price of air bombs has fallen to a quarter of what it was, so they are more accessible. They are much louder, they are directional—I have never fired one myself because I am too old, but perhaps I should go and buy one to find out—and they can be fired some 60 m, so they become almost a weapon in the hands of the teenage hooligans who mainly use

[Mr. Robathan]

them. We should remember the law of unintended consequences resulting from regulations that we make in the House.

Mr. Bailey: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Robathan: I will not, as I have already given way to the hon. Gentleman, and a great many hon. Members wish to speak.

The third reason, as has been mentioned, is the larger white van trade, as I shall call it, for want of a better term—the black market that has sprung up in fireworks, which can be bought and distributed through unscrupulous retailers, car boot sales or wherever. The boxes, I understand, are split up from containers in lay-bys, which is illegal under the 1997 regulations. I suppose we have become a more antisocial society. When I was young, I do not think people threw bangers at old people and guide dogs. Perhaps I am being naïve or showing my middle age.

The problems associated with fireworks are compounded, as we heard from several hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Coventry, South (Mr. Cunningham), by the lack of enforcement. Bangers are illegal, as we know. Throwing fireworks in the street has been illegal since the Explosives Act 1875, yet, notwithstanding all the letters of complaint that we have had, only 64 cases were brought in England and Wales in 2000. I hope that the Bill will make enforcement easier for the police, which is what we all want.

I shall deal with improvements that are already on the way. Like the Minister who ruled out a ban on fireworks in the Westminster Hall debate on 30 October, we do not favour a ban. I commend the Government—very unusually—on the voluntary measures that they have been instrumental in introducing, which came into force on 1 January.

The industry, with the assistance of the DTI, has banned the import and sale of air bombs. That will turn out to be the key. People have told me that they believe that it will produce the quietest 5 November and surrounding period for years and that it will remove 10 million bangs from the market, and we all welcome that.

After eight years' discussion, the CEN, the Comité Européen de Normalisation, or the European Standards Committee—I have A-level French, although it is a little rusty—has agreed on a European standard of 120 dB. I understand that the DTI, the industry and most animal welfare groups are happy with that agreement and standard, and it could be introduced—I am sure that the Minister will tell us—this year.

The industry will also support a ban on displays after 11 pm—except, of course, on 31 December, although licensing may be needed for that day. Of course, displays after 11 pm are already illegal under the Noise Act 1996. I do not know whether there have been almost no prosecutions under that Act but I am pretty sure that that is the case. The Government are trying out a sort of curfew after 11 pm, which would give the police a greater chance to act, but they are also trying out fixed penalties. They started trying out £40 on-the-spot fines in four areas last August. I hope that the Minister will tell us how those trials are working and how many fines there have been.

Richard Ottaway: May I assist my hon. Friend on that point? My constituency has one of the pilot schemes for fixed penalty notices, and precisely none has been issued against people for throwing fireworks in the street, mainly because those people are under the age of 18 and fixed penalty notices cannot be given to people under that age.

Mr. Robathan: My hon. Friend makes an extremely good point, and I hope that he may say more about it in his speech. The good wishes of the House are commendable, but the actions that follow our legislation are perhaps more important, and my point about enforcement relates very much to that.

Most of the things that we have heard about break the law already, and a lot of them come from unscrupulous importers and retailers selling to yobs, as the hon. Member for Hamilton, South mentioned. The biggest problem of all is the white van trade, selling broken up boxes of fireworks to small retailers, who sell them on to teenagers.

I now wish to turn to the Bill itself. Conservatives generally are pretty wary of enabling legislation. We certainly do not like extra unnecessary regulations, but we generally support the spirit of the Bill, as I have said already. It is very much a last-minute Bill; the explanatory notes and the Library document for this debate were only published on Wednesday and the Bill was only agreed and published on 13 February, and I understand why. The hon. Member for Hamilton, South is being extremely sensible because, as we know, the Bill will be passed only if the Government give it a fair wind. That is why we have an enabling Bill, which was decided only on 13 February, so let us be in no doubt about that.

The Bill has been hugely watered down to get Government support, as the House is aware. I shall quote the Government's position, as explained by the Minister. *[Interruption.]* I trust that she has not changed her position since 30 October, when she said:

> The Government do not believe that a case has been made for banning the sale of fireworks and limiting their use to organised public displays. Such a ban could lead to the development of an illegal firework market and might encourage people to produce home-made devices. Sensible and considerate use of fireworks is a popular family entertainment.—[*Official Report, Westminster Hall,* 30 October 2002; Vol. 391, c. 272WH.]

We agree.

Of course, as a result of being watered down, there is very little substance in the Bill. The hon. Member for Hamilton, South talked about what is in the clauses. Well, actually, there is nothing in them, except the opportunity for the Government to act, and we all need to be aware of that. The Bill gives the Government—I quote the title of clause 2—"Power to make regulations", and the explanatory notes, which I received only yesterday, summarise the Bill as follows:

> "The Bill makes provision for the Secretary of State to make regulations . . . which will regulate the supply and use of fireworks."

That is all that it will do.

I have concerns about the Bill, and I should like to mention two of them. The first relates to clause 10 on training courses. As I said and as the hon. Member for Dumfries (Mr. Brown), I think—

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Wherever.

Mr. Robathan: I am glad to welcome my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst to the Chamber.

I have blown up a lot of explosives in my time, but the easy thing with fireworks is that we light the blue touch paper and retire—that is just about all the training that people need—and I was able to do that as a boy. I am not against training courses, but I am concerned because when I was younger I went on something called a mountain leadership course. It was an excellent course in many ways, but I vividly remember being taught, in the shadow of Ben Nevis, to light a little gas stove. It was just like lighting a gas stove at home: I turned it on and put a match to it, and then I switched it off. I was taught that as part of the course and, as a result, I left the course because I thought that it was such nonsense. If there are to be training courses, they should be short, apposite, inexpensive and as unregulatory as possible. It may sound great to have training courses, but it is the substance of the course that is the test.

My second concern relates to clause 3 on the supply to children. Of course, it is already illegal to sell fireworks to children. I understand that that clause is designed to stop unscrupulous people buying fireworks and passing them on to teenagers below the age of 18, who cannot be given on-the-spot fines, unfortunately. I am not against that provision, but is it likely—I hope that the Minister will put my mind at rest—that it will extend to giving sparklers to my six-year-old? The hon. Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Marsden) winces, but where does the Bill state that it will not do that? He has no answer because there is nothing in the Bill about it.

Mr. Gordon Marsden (Blackpool, South): We can rely on the good sense of the Minister.

Mr. Robathan: The good sense of the Minister—ha, ha, ha—what good sense have we seen so far from the Government? Let us leave it at that.

Mr. Tony Banks (West Ham): Has the hon. Gentleman ever thought about taking up pantomime?

Mr. Robathan: Unfortunately, I would not be able to get a place in pantomime because I know that the hon. Gentleman is already playing Widow Twankey.

The Bill will give the Minister the enabling power to ban the supply of fireworks to children. That is what it does, and we need to know exactly what that means when we pass a Bill. We should give parents credit for being responsible. I trust that the Government will use their powers wisely and proportionately, but we need to hear an answer on that.

I commend two points in the Bill, and this relates to what the hon. Member for Hamilton, South said. First, at the moment, there is a £13 registration fee. There should be proper licensing, and the possibility of having two tiers of licensing is sensible. There could be a cheap licence, perhaps for three weeks around 5 November, and a more expensive licence for mail order throughout the year, so that there is proper control over how fireworks are bought. Licensing will not answer all the problems, such as stock piling, but it can be useful and it is relatively sensible.

I also commend clause 9 on importation. That is the key to enforcement. The Chinese and other fireworks that are imported legally mostly come through Felixstowe. Although that port has the necessary explosives controls, legal fireworks are imported in containers. Where do they go when they leave Felixstowe? There is no check on them. The Health and Safety Executive does not properly check on them. Do they go to registered or licensed suppliers? We just do not know.

Already it is reckoned that between 10 and 18 per cent. of the fireworks in this country are sold on the black market—off white vans, for want of a better term. What storage do they go to? Storage is not properly enforced or supervised currently, and more kilograms of fireworks are imported than there are licensed or approved storage facilities for them.

The Bill has little substance, so we can only guess what will come in its wake. For that reason, we are not entirely happy. I urge the Minister to concentrate on enforcement more than on anything else. I suspect that she will because, notwithstanding what I have said, what she has done on fireworks until now has been fairly sensible. Praise indeed.

Much remains up to the Home Office and police enforcement. I was pleased to see the Home Secretary here, unusually, on a Friday morning. However, a lot remains the responsibility of the DTI, and I suspect that the storage, licensing and tracking of goods comes under the Minister's Department.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Miss Melanie Johnson) *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Robathan: No? I hope that the Minister will ensure that there is sensible, non-bureaucratic enforcement. Checks should be carried out at Felixstowe so that fireworks go to properly licensed retailers. If those provisions are made and there is proper enforcement, the Bill will work. The enforcement of existing regulations on decibel levels is also the key to improving the lives of our concerned constituents and their pets, as they are genuinely troubled at present.

I am not a killjoy. I was glad to hear the hon. Member for Hamilton, South say that he was not a killjoy, and I hope to entertain my children in the future. I appreciate that the situation is worsening. We do not like extra regulation, and I hope that the Bill may help to improve the situation, so, for that reason, we wish it a fair wind.

10.49 am

Linda Gilroy (Plymouth, Sutton): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton, South (Mr. Tynan) on his good fortune and on taking forward this Bill. I have had the pleasure of serving with him on a couple of Standing Committees and I know that he has a keen eye for the detail of legislation. He ably demonstrated that in his speech.

[Linda Gilroy]

In 1997-98, my first year as a Member of Parliament, I was very involved with the work that the my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, South (Nigel Griffiths), the then Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs, did in respect of the Fireworks (Safety) Regulations 1997 that he introduced. We worked closely with my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Richard Burden), who has also done much work on firework safety. Safety was the dominant issue at that time.

Some Members may not have seen the excellent Library briefing that charts the history of the safety issues in which we have all taken an interest. The appendix lays out the fireworks statistics for the years from 1996 to 2001. It shows clearly the impact of the regulations that my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, South introduced. They succeeded in reducing the number of accidents. However, over the past year or two—and, predominantly, since the turn of the millennium—the number of accidents is, sadly, increasing as fireworks become more available. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton, South pointed out, the statistics reflect only a small amount of what is happening. The period in which fireworks are sold has been extended. They are on sale from September to February and, in some parts of the country, for even longer than that. Therefore, the statistics do not capture the full dimension of the problem.

Helen Jones (Warrington, North): The hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) compared the statistics for fireworks accidents with those for other accidents, but does my hon. Friend agree that most fireworks accidents are entirely avoidable with the right regulations? Furthermore, the statistics do not describe the misery caused by the antisocial behaviour that is associated with fireworks. It causes great concern to our constituents.

Linda Gilroy: Absolutely. The fireworks safety campaigns carried out by the consumer safety unit every year target the key problems revealed in the statistics. They have been very successful, and I was about to refer to the hooligan use and noise aspects of fireworks.

Sandra Osborne (Ayr): Does my hon. Friend agree that, although the number of accidents can be measured, the distress caused particularly to elderly people who may have small pets is enormous? Furthermore, the veterinary bills that they have to pay are something that they can ill afford.

Linda Gilroy: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. I was heartened by the initial message of the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan). He appeared to understand the scale and nature of the problem. However, we then heard many mixed messages even on issues such as guide dogs for the blind.

Mr. Gordon Marsden: My hon. Friend highlights a very important point. I presented to the House this week a petition signed by more than 2,000 people. A significant majority of the people who have written to me have described the effects on guide dogs. Will those people who express concerns about the Bill accept that fireworks affect not just guide dogs for the blind but hearing dogs for the deaf? As dogs are trained increasingly to help people in a number of different circumstances, the scale of the problem could escalate. If we do not do something about the problem by controlling and restricting fireworks in the way that the Bill suggests—I heartily commend it to the House—we will store up significant problems in other areas.

Linda Gilroy: We certainly will. Hearing dogs for the deaf is a fascinating subject. I have a letter from a constituent called Lillian who owns a guide dog called Callum. She is totally blind and wrote to me on 3 February to say:

> "Even last night fireworks were being let off in my street. I know it was Candlemas"—

Lillian has a sense of humour—

> "but I was unaware that this was a time for letting off Roman Candles."

She adds:

> "However, a few years back whilst walking in the local park area, with a school adjoining, during the morning, I was stopped by a couple of adults who told me not to go further as boys were tossing fireworks across the footpath. As my dog was running free, I called him back to put him on the lead and take a different route. Goodness knows the outcome if I had not done so. I have heard of several guide dog owners who have had to get tranquillisers for their dogs, which of course causes distress to both dog and owner...I trust my letter will add to all the others".

The petition that my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Marsden) is in addition to the 250,000 signatures on the petition collected by my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner).

Huw Irranca-Davies: Does my hon. Friend recognise that it is a UK-wide problem as reflected by the more than 21,000 signatures on the petition from south Wales presented here a month ago? There are also 250 distressing letters detailing exactly the concerns that were highlighted in the letter from which she has quoted.

Linda Gilroy: The problem is repeated up and down the country. Almost every Member would be able to quote a similar case.

Mr. Robathan: To avoid doubt, let me make it clear that we have enormous sympathy for guide dog owners and the constituent that the hon. Lady has mentioned. Everything that that constituent has written about is currently illegal. Just introducing extra regulations will not necessarily prevent such problems. We wish that guide dog owner to be able to walk her dog safely through the streets.

Linda Gilroy: The hon. Gentlemen's view of regulation is not the view of the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association or an impressive list of animal welfare organisations, including the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. He should consult page 35 of the Library briefing document.

Deregulation will be an important issue in debate on the Bill. My hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton, South rightly said that the Bill had been considered by the House of Lords Delegated Powers and Regulatory Reform Committee. This Bill is to some extent modelled on my original Bill, which was backed by the CBI's explosive industry group. In fact, the thrust of my Bill came from the industry, which wanted training courses to take place. I spoke to the annual general meeting of the British Pyrotechnists Association that was held in Plymouth where the national fireworks championships are held each year. The association is working closely with the industry to develop training courses, but cowboys can undercut the cost of supporting that training if a standard is not set for the whole industry.

David Hamilton (Midlothian): I wish to emphasise that point. Many of the 1,500 people in Midlothian who signed a petition in just four weeks and the letters that I have received do not argue for a total ban. People like to see public displays and training is required for them. People using large amounts of explosive require training.

Linda Gilroy: My hon. Friend is exactly right.

Finally on deregulation, consultation with the stakeholders and the fireworks industry and organisations is well honed. The hon. Member for Blaby should not be too concerned that the regulations would be implemented without the fullest possible consultation and consideration of the industry's views. This is a sensible Bill and I commend it to the House.

I see that the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) is no longer is in his place. The House has strong associations with Guy Fawkes. The right hon. Gentleman was the leader of the pack that sabotaged the 1997 Bill and Opposition Members were called to order 38 times when it returned to the House from the House of Lords. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will recognise that he may become the "Guy Forth" for those who are interested in this issue. We will not just stick pins in the right hon. Gentleman's photograph, but will try to do some rather more robust things as well.

10.59 am

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): I too congratulate the hon. Member for Hamilton, South (Mr. Tynan). My congratulations are heartfelt, because during the last Session I was in charge of a private Member's Bill and I know how much work goes on behind the scenes—the dealing with interest groups as well as the legislative drafting. It was clear from the hon. Gentleman's generosity in responding to interventions and the confidence with which he did so that he had done his homework.

Let me say unequivocally that my colleagues and I support the spirit of the Bill, and will support its Second Reading. It should be noted that the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth), the shadow Leader of the House, is a sponsor.

Despite my support, I think it would be rather feeble to come here just to say "Hear, hear". While I think that the Bill deserves an airing in Committee, I also think that there is a need for constructive criticism at this stage. Many questions need to be asked. We should ask, for instance, to what extent an all-embracing Bill such as this, covering all aspects of production, distribution and use, is required, as opposed to the incremental approach that has been adopted so far. There is also the fact that a "framework" Bill such as this does not address key controversies. Indeed, I do not think that the hon. Gentleman aspires to address them. One of the main controversies concerns whether there should be a ban during the three weeks before Guy Fawkes night—one of the issues in the voluntary code.

Mr. John Lyons (Strathkelvin and Bearsden): Although most retailers have applied the guidance measures, one or two rogue companies have ignored it and have deemed it legitimate to extend sales beyond the three-week period. That is causing problems.

Dr. Cable: That is a good practical point, and we should be discussing precisely such issues. We should be discussing whether a three-week moratorium is a good idea. My point, however, was procedural: I feel that the general nature of the Bill simply defers such arguments until the Minister produces a regulation.

We talk of a fireworks issue, but there are in fact a number of issues. One is the issue of injury. As has been said, fireworks cause about 1,000 injuries a year, many of them serious. That has been the case for some years. The actions that it has led to relate to the dangerous nature of some fireworks, many of which are currently illegal, and to how regulation can be enforced.

A second issue, mentioned by the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Linda Gilroy), is the antisocial use of fireworks which, although perfectly safe in sensible and mature hands, are dangerous when abused. We are told that 40 per cent. of those injured are teenagers. The Minister has already responded to the problem by introducing regulations that aim to stop the throwing of fireworks.

In fact the antisocial issue is largely dealt with by existing legislation. We have had a lot of legislation on antisocial issues. Indeed, both the issues I have mentioned have already been dealt with in different ways. The major issue—this, I think, is why we are here today—is noise. Loud fireworks distress elderly people and, in particular, the blind.

I echo the tributes already paid to the Home Secretary, who made the effort to come here this morning and show his moral support for the Bill. One of the people who have lobbied me is Julia Schofield, one of the most impressive people in the country. She is a leading information technology electronic government entrepreneur, and she is completely blind. She came to me for help several years ago. As a jet-setting business woman, she had to take guide dogs around the world. Taking a guide dog around the streets of New York, Hong Kong and Frankfurt was not straightforward, she said, but it was simple compared with the process of getting a guide dog through the British quarantine system. She wanted some help with that problem. She has now explained to me, in businesslike terms, the practical problems caused to a blind person by fireworks. Dogs must often be sedated because of the distress that they suffer, and her life is made much more difficult by the thoughtless, excessively noisy and antisocial use of fireworks. That, I think, crystallises the issue for many of us.

What, then, is the best way of dealing with the problem? Should it be dealt with through new legislation, through enforcement or through fireworks

[Dr. Cable]

standards? I have an open mind, but I wonder how much could be achieved had I the simpler expedient of tough industrial standards. As has been said, it is possible to impose BSSI standards on industry under existing 1997 regulations, which can then be translated into import controls; but perhaps those standards need to be tougher. As has also been said, the European standard prescribes 120 dB. Guide dog groups tell me that 95 dB—roughly the volume of a banging door—would be more appropriate, as anything above that level is distressing. I suspect that if the appropriate level were defined and then imposed through BSSI standards, and if that were properly enforced, many of the problems we are discussing would be solved.

Linda Gilroy: The main aim of the Bill is to extend regulations dealing predominantly with the goods themselves to the use of those goods, particularly through possession. That would make enforcement easier.

Dr. Cable: I do not quarrel with that. I am posing a question: would the need for the regulation of use be quite so great if we dealt with the definition issue, and imposed tough standards?

Even if we dealt with the issue of standards, however, the issue of enforcement would remain. Several Labour Members have raised that point. Many of the problems are due to the absence or inadequacy of enforcement procedures. As we know, councils are struggling at present. They have too few consumer protection officers, and their environmental health departments are weak. They have been run down over the years, and often cannot deal with abuses.

Mr. Gordon Marsden: That has been a particular problem in my constituency. As in many other coastal towns, fireworks are sold in shops with either a short-term lease or no lease at all, which has caused difficulties for hard-working trading standards officers.

Dr. Cable: That also applies in my local high street. I am not sure whether my hon. Friend means there should be legislation to deal with the problem, or more resources for enforcement, but I suspect it is the latter, as with many such problems.

We should bear in mind—the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) tried to refer to this, but found himself in various cul-de-sacs—that there are already a number of legislative prohibitions. There are prohibitions on dangerous fireworks, or bangers. There are restrictions on the storage, public sale and the sale of single fireworks rather than boxes. If all those regulations were properly enforced, many of the current difficulties would not exist. This is an enforcement issue as much as a legislative issue, and we need an assurance from the Minister that there will be enough enforcement back-up. She has a good record on consumer legislation and ensuring that legislation is supported by additional resources for consumer protection officers. Parallel measures are needed in this case.

In the last few minutes of my speech, I shall refer to some aspects of the Bill that will need detailed scrutiny when it passes, as I hope that it will, into Committee.

One of the key bits of the Bill is clause 2, which defines the nature of future offences in terms of not using fireworks safely. It talks about the use of safe fireworks to minimise the risk. I shall read this phrase because it is quite important. Clause 2(2) talks about fireworks causing

> "death . . . injury, alarm, distress or anxiety to"

any person, or

> "death . . . injury or distress to"

any animal. Setting aside for a moment the quibble as to why animals do not suffer alarm and anxiety, there is a big issue about how these rather subjective measures will be translated into the law. As I understand it, at the moment most of the offences under the regulations are quite specific and easily identified, but the Bill introduces a subjective test. The prosecuting authorities will have to define personal distress, and I am not sure how they will do so in a practical way that will satisfy the courts. That clause requires in-depth examination.

Mr. Barry Gardiner (Brent, North): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that if a dog required sedation by a veterinary surgeon, that would constitute distress?

Dr. Cable: I would think so, but I am not a defence barrister, who might throw up all kinds of objections to that argument. I am simply suggesting that this definition is not straightforward—I think that I saw the hon. Gentleman nod when I raised this point—and will need a lot of critical scrutiny.

Clause 3 relates to under-age sale, which is already illegal. There are problems of enforcement, but I do not understand what clause 3 adds to the existing prohibitions.

Clause 4, a particularly all-embracing clause, relates to restrictions on the time of day and time of year when fireworks can be sold. As I have previously said, that raises the questions of whether it would be sensible to try to impose a moratorium before bonfire night, and how we should deal with Diwali and Chinese new year. My feeling is that perhaps local authorities should be allowed a discretion to allow sale during a festival time; it would not necessarily be 5 November. In an area with a large Asian population, the local authority would probably have a different view from an authority in Cornwall or the highlands of Scotland, but that is perhaps best dealt with at local level.

Mr. Robathan: I am slightly confused, because the hon. Gentleman spoke about a moratorium around bonfire night. I thought that the intention was to allow sale around bonfire night, not impose a moratorium.

Dr. Cable: I did not explain myself clearly. I meant a moratorium outside that period. I am sorry if I did not use the correct language.

Clause 6 raises interesting and important questions about public display. Many of the provisions contained in it and the associated clause about the need for training, and the need for properly responsible people of the right age group to be in charge of public displays, are helpful and useful, but is it really necessary to superimpose a separate licensing, fee-paying system on the existing obligation on environmental health officers? These people are already under a lot of pressure, but the clause will imply a new regulatory regime, with all the paper filling and bureaucracy involved. One wonders whether they have the resources to cope with it.

Clause 7 deals with the licensing of suppliers. However, there is already considerable legislative control of suppliers in terms of permitted access, storage, and sales in boxes but not single units. We need persuading that there are important loopholes to be filled. In his own private Member's legislation, the hon. Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) identified some weaknesses here, but the provisions that clause 7 makes possible are very wide indeed.

Finally there is the issue of imports, which is covered by clause 8. There are provisions under existing legislation for import controls on dangerous fireworks and I am not sure what additional requirements are needed.

I raise all these questions in a very preliminary way. They will need to be studied in detail. I support the Second Reading enthusiastically, but although I am not a parliamentary draftsman, as I read the Bill all kinds of questions came to mind.

In conclusion, I pose a couple of questions to the Minister to which I hope that she will give clear answers. Will she explain clearly why she regards framework legislation of this kind as necessary? She has been carrying through a series of incremental steps, adding to the powers that she has. Why does she feel that that process has reached its limits? The other key assurance that we need from her is that the Government will properly support legislation of this kind—which imposes new regulatory obligations on local authorities—by providing the resources that environmental health departments will require. If we have reassurance on those two counts, I will feel completely confident that we are moving into some very secure, worthwhile and welcome legislation.

11.15 am

Shona McIsaac (Cleethorpes): As the Member of Parliament who chairs the all-party group on fireworks, I must say that there has been a marvellous turnout today. The group has about 150 members, most of whom seem to be present. I am just a little sad that not everyone can contribute to the debate, but I say well done to everyone for being here.

We congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton, South (Mr. Tynan) on his shrewd move in selecting this subject for his private Member's Bill, because it affects every constituency in England, Scotland and Wales. We have all had letters from people complaining about the noise and disturbance of fireworks, and it is time to toughen the legislation, so I am glad that my hon. Friend has introduced his Bill.

I did not mention Northern Ireland when I referred to all constituencies in this country, because in Northern Ireland the system that the Bill would introduce already exists. I suggest that those who doubt that the system would work look at how it is working in Northern Ireland. Much of the antisocial behaviour that was associated with fireworks—the noise and disturbance—has plummeted since the licensing and regulatory regime was introduced.

Mr. Gardiner: I commend the work that my hon. Friend has done in campaigning on this issue for so long. Is she aware that since 2001, when the new regulations were introduced, the number of injuries in Northern Ireland has dropped from 138 a year to just 36? That is significant in showing the effect that the Bill would have in this country.

Shona McIsaac: My hon. Friend is quite right, which is why I tell people who question whether this enabling Bill would work that they should look at how it has worked in Northern Ireland.

We want this Bill to pass because of the noise, the disturbance, the vandalism, and the hooligan misuse of fireworks. The noise and nuisance have always been around, but they were confined to a few days of the year. The period has extended from a few days to day after day, week after week, and now month after month. I usually get my first letters complaining about the misuse of fireworks in August, but the date is getting earlier every year, which shows that the voluntary code is not working.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Coatbridge and Chryston): I congratulate my hon. Friend on the marvellous work that she has done, and congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton, South (Mr. Tynan) on introducing an excellent Bill. Does my hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac) agree that a number of people outside the House—including Councillor Tom Maginnis, who led the task group for the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities—are very keen not only that the Bill should be passed but that it should be implemented with all possible speed?

Shona McIsaac: I agree. In fact, I too have held discussions with COSLA. Its research was excellent and it laid good foundations for today's debate. Yes, of course we want the Minister to use the powers that she will be given by the Bill. Some people are saying that she may go too far, but some of us think that she may not go far enough. If we give her the powers, we hope that she will use them.

Mr. Luke: I congratulate my hon. Friend, as well as my hon. Friends the Members for Hamilton, South (Mr. Tynan) and for Plymouth, Sutton (Linda Gilroy), on doing so much work to bring the Bill before the House. Does she agree that, despite the fact that we hope that it will become law, the all-party group should not be made redundant? The regulations may not satisfy public demand for control and provide the successful conclusion that we are all looking for, and surveys taken throughout the country show that a significant number of people, whose voice is not often heard, want a total ban.

Shona McIsaac: I hope that the all-party group does not cease to exist when the Bill is passed. There is a lot of work yet to be done, including in Committee. We must monitor how the Bill works and see whether it reduces noise and disturbance.

Mr. Marsha Singh (Bradford, West): I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton, South (Mr. Tynan) on choosing the Bill, but does my hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes (Shona

[Mr. Marsha Singh]

McIsaac) agree with a ban on the sale and use of fireworks, except around bonfire night and at other licensed events?

Shona McIsaac: The Bill would restrict sales outside certain times of the year, but it also acknowledges the importance of festivals such as Diwali and Chinese new year by providing for the use of fireworks at such times. It would, however, reduce the months of the year in which disturbance would occur.

Thousands of my constituents have been in touch with me to discuss noise and disturbance, which they want to see ended. I shall give a few examples from my area, which I am sure other Members will share.

Mr. Paul Truswell (Pudsey): Does my hon. Friend share my slight dismay at the attitude of Opposition Front Benchers towards the setting of noise levels? If the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) is looking for a pantomime character, Wishee Washee might be the most appropriate.

Shona McIsaac: I will not be drawn into that. We have support from Opposition Front Benchers, and I do not want to reduce it.

An 81-year-old asthmatic woman had to be rescued from her smoke-filled home after louts put lit fireworks through her letter box. In another example, 60 people had to be evacuated from a Grimsby pub, again after lit fireworks were thrown into the building, which filled with smoke. Fire officers said that the incident could have been serious if fires had caught hold.

Post boxes seem to be a target for hooligans. In one incident in our area in which a post box was blown up, the firework used was not a consumer firework; it was meant to be used only in licensed displays. Such fireworks are banned for sale to the consumer, which shows how various types of firework get into circulation and are used by hooligans and louts.

Vandals target plastic wheelie bins time and again because the plastic goes into wonderful shapes when fireworks are put in them. The phone calls of drug dealers in Grimsby and Cleethorpes are monitored, so they use fireworks to let addicts know when new supplies have come in. A woman on an estate in our area says:

> "We get fireworks going off all year round here. Even the kids know what a rocket going off means."

We must take such things very seriously.

Apart from the danger, vandalism, noise nuisance and disturbance, there are the safety aspects. What happened in Rhode Island has been mentioned, but we must also remember that, a couple of years ago, 282 people died in a fire in Lima in Peru as a result of fireworks triggering a fire. In Enschede in the Netherlands, more than 20 people died and thousands of people were made homeless when a place in which fireworks were being stored caught fire. That area of Enschede is still devastated.

We should never forget that we are not dealing with toys; we are dealing with lethal incendiary explosive devices. We must toughen up the law because fireworks have become more available. A lot more are being sold and there is a lot more misuse.

This is not just an urban problem, as some people have suggested, owing to the fact that more fireworks are being let off in cities and towns, creating more noise—it is a rural problem, too. A resident from the village of Ulceby in my constituency said to me:

> "Why do people have to be so selfish? Would they want to spend eight nights outside checking on their livestock?"

She has to go out to check on her livestock because of firework misuse. A resident from Barton wrote to me:

> "Two years ago a horse bolted, got on to the road, caused an accident and had to be put down because of its injuries."

Rural and urban constituencies alike are affected by firework misuse.

I am also grateful to a constituent from Barcroft street in Cleethorpes who sent me leaflets that were put under the windscreen of her car and which show the problem that we are dealing with. We should consider the prices of those fireworks. One is called a devil rocket and the price is only £1.25 for five. That is why these things are getting into the hands of hooligans—they are very, very cheap. Another leaflet refers to

> "mega loud coloured air bombs only £1.50"

for five. The flyers also refer to rockets at £1.25 for five, making loud screeches and bangs, to £25 monster fireworks

> "that would scare the SAS".

That says it all. These fireworks are not toys; they are designed to disturb and to create noise—that is all they do.

Some of the other firework names are air raid, air torpedo, cruise missile, mega scud, nuclear warhead and 100-shot ack-ack barrage. Those retailers also offer free alcohol with the sale of fireworks, which I deplore. Yesterday, a resident phoned me to say that retailers were still selling, although we are outside the time of year laid down by the voluntary code for selling fireworks. He went into a shop and noticed that a firework being sold there was called missile attack, a 150-shot screeching missile at only £8. That is still being sold at this time of year in Grimsby town centre.

We are not discussing pretty little stars in the sky with nice sparkles and fizzes; these fireworks are noisy, and I hope that the Bill halts their sale. Such fireworks are creating all the antisocial behaviour, noise and nuisance that our constituents want to see ended. I wish the Bill well and the all-party firework group supports it, so let us have all the fizz and none of the bangs.

11.28 am

Derek Conway (Old Bexley and Sidcup): I am grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to take part in the debate. It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac), who made many valid points and has done a sterling job behind the scenes in co-ordinating the all-party group. It is good to know that the hon. Member for Hamilton, South (Mr. Tynan) has managed to obtain all-party support for the Bill. This is a challenging Bill for him to steer through the House and I hope that the usual channels, as well as Front Benchers, assist him to get it on to the statute book.

Like many Members, I have received lots of representations and petitions from my constituents. I shall not follow the example of Liberal Democrat Members by listing them all so that I can put them in my newsletters, but those in Old Bexley and Sidcup have made their views clearly known to me, and I have passed them to the Minister. I am grateful to her for her typically courteous and speedy reply. It is good that the Government have taken notice of the depth of concern in constituencies across the United Kingdom. The Minister was most prompt in dealing with that, for which I am grateful.

My hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan), in an admirably early and thoughtful contribution, made it clear that those who have some concerns about the drafting of legislation are not party poopers. Sadly, most of us in this Chamber are not that young any more, but we remember with joy the time when we were children and watched fireworks go off. I seem to recall—I do not know whether it is age or not—that in those days they did not seem quite as effective. Most of our fathers had some difficulty getting Catherine wheels to spin, whereas now one could tie a human to them and they would work, so there is a difference between the fireworks that most of us and many of our more elderly constituents remember and the whiz-bang things that the hon. Member for Cleethorpes was right to mention. There is a problem with the type of firework, not just the abuse of the firework.

I am glad that some concern has been expressed about the period of use. The population in my constituency of Old Bexley and Sidcup is slightly more elderly than in many parts of the country. They know when Guy Fawkes night is coming and they are prepared for it, but they are not prepared for it starting in September. The same seems to happen to everything we do: summer time hardly changes and everyone is shopping for Christmas. It is not a problem just for the fireworks industry, and it results from a general impatience to get to periods of celebration. There is, however, a particular problem with fireworks and the length of time during which they appear, despite the voluntary code, to be readily available.

Fireworks are undoubtedly frightening. My hon. Friend the Member for Blaby mentioned their impact on his children. Their experience is widely felt, even among those who have taken their children to fireworks displays or used fireworks in the garden. Most families enjoy the spectacle rather than the volume of noise from fireworks.

One of the things that worry me is not the display aspect of fireworks but the use to which they are put. If fireworks were used just for observation and amusement, perhaps we would not all need to be here. It is the abuse of fireworks that is the cause of the Bill. There is no need in a debate such as this to go into detail about injuries to children because everyone sees them every year in hospital casualty units. Damage is done to children who are unaware of the danger of fireworks but who have managed to get hold of them.

John Robertson: May I add to what the hon. Gentleman is saying about children having accidents? When I was 12, a friend of mine thought that fireworks did not make a loud enough noise, so he decided to make his own from the fireworks he had. As a result, he blew his hand off. That happened 50 years ago. Is it not sad that we are talking about these things today instead of when I was 12?

Derek Conway: The hon. Gentleman, as he always does when he contributes to this debate, makes a telling and thought-provoking response. The consequences of the misuse of fireworks are considerable and often damaging for life.

I perhaps should at this point declare an interest because of what I am about to say. In the Register of Members' Interests, I declare that I am the chief executive of the Cats Protection League, or Cats Protection as we prefer to be known these days, so I should like to make some observations about animal cruelty, which the hon. Member for Hamilton, South mentioned. The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association has taken a leading role as an animal welfare charity, and everyone is impressed by the way in which it has done so.

The animal welfare charity world can be like the world of political parties. We all know what we are doing and we all do it for the best possible reasons, but there is often a degree of in-fighting and spats. The hon. Member for Hamilton, South will be glad to know, however, that on this occasion the animal welfare charities have come together. For once, they agree on something, which does not happen often, so it is quite a triumph for him. The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association has led the way, with everyone's support, especially that of an excellent organisation called the National Canine Defence League, which takes stray dogs and abandoned dogs, re-homes them, cares for them and does a splendid job across the country.

Not far from this House, the dogs home at Battersea is another superb organisation. Many people do not realise that for more than 100 years it has been helping cats, too. There is the Blue Cross centre, the Wood Green centre and an organisation much maligned in this place, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, which has a high political profile in campaigning, which in itself can be controversial. However, I think that all hon. Members would congratulate it on the excellent document that it has produced highlighting the difficulties faced by all species. I am particularly glad to see in his place the hon. Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks), one of the patrons of Cats Protection. He has a wide interest and reputation in animal welfare matters. It is helpful that organisations such as the RSPCA and those that support it have managed to brief the House this morning so effectively. Action unquestionably is overdue.

Cats Protection helps about 170,000 cats year, which is more than all the other animal welfare charities put together, through a network of 300 groups across the UK and 30 permanent shelters. I could keep the House going for hours, which of course I do not intend to do, discussing the difficulty with cruelty cases. What we find, particularly in the 30 permanent shelters, is that around Guy Fawkes time there is a phenomenal increase in the number of strays. I refer not to feral cats but to domestic cats that have been scared from family gardens and arrive at our shelter needing help and, often, veterinary support.

[Derek Conway]

I will give the House one example of cruelty that explains what is happening. It is from Belfast, where we have a shelter in Dundonald on the outskirts of the city. Callous thugs tied to the tail of a 10-week-old kitten a firework that blew its tail off. The distressed animal was brought to our shelter, where the manager, Janice Watts, who is a superb girl with a wonderful crew, cared for the cat and gave it veterinary treatment. It was subsequently re-homed but, not surprisingly, it was a bit suspicious of humans for a very long time.

The fact remains that cats scare easily. They do not react well to quick movement or to loud noises. They certainly do not react well to having their tails tied. These are not family displays or organised charity events to try to raise money and please everyone. As we know, sadly, on the whole, the cruelty is by very young men who are clearly stupid and who think it is a bit of a giggle and a kick to do something unspeakably horrible to an animal. If they were doing it to one another, I would perhaps have less concern, but they like to use animals to vent their stupidity.

Mr. Luke: The point that the hon. Gentleman makes about that atrocious incident in Northern Ireland gives strength to the movement towards regulation and control of fireworks throughout the United Kingdom. Does he accept that there is a quite strict regime on control of fireworks in Northern Ireland, and that we need police forces and the authorities to take stronger action against individuals such as the ones who perpetrated the attack on that poor cat to ensure that they face the full rigour of the law? That is the best deterrent we have.

Derek Conway: The hon. Gentleman is right. Obviously, Northern Ireland, if anywhere in the United Kingdom, has a greater awareness of what explosives can do and the danger and fright that they can cause, yet still we have examples such as that. In many ways, one of the frustrations of being in Parliament, and an even greater frustration of being in the police service, is that one cannot outlaw human stupidity. That is what we are talking about in such cases. It is wanton, mindless cruelty. However, we must still try to encourage those who are less ridiculous along a law-abiding route. That is why I hope that the Bill will make progress this morning.

Charities such as Cats Protection are more interested in finding homes for cats than in paying vet bills for animals damaged by fireworks displays, although sadly that is a large part of our expenditure at that time of the year. It is mindless cruelty. Certainly, the animal welfare sector, as well as my constituents, who are irritated by the human consequences of fireworks, will wish the hon. Member for Hamilton, South Godspeed with his Bill. I am glad that it is getting support from all parts of House.

11.39 am

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): I shall begin by paying tribute to a man called Malcolm Armstrong, who taught me what little more than most people I know about pyrotechnics in one hour of a moving morning. Mr. Armstrong follows in a fine tradition of firework manufacturing in Thanet, which used to host the Astra fireworks factory. I visited Mr. Armstrong's business some years ago; it looks like a collection of garden sheds in a field, but he manufactures some of the finest pyrotechnic fireworks produced in this country, and over the years he has given pleasure to very many people.

All visitors to Malcolm Armstrong's establishment are taken to one particular shed, which contains a workbench on which there is a photograph of his son, who worked in the business and was blown apart. Because of the care that everyone was required to take, and the careful separation, only one person—the proprietor's son—died in that accident. If I ever needed to learn, I learned then how very dangerous fireworks can be, even when they are properly handled.

Malcolm Armstrong went on; others might not have been big enough. He did not give in; he continued to manufacture superb displays that gave pleasure to thousands of people. He manufactured the displays for the Quex park promenade concerts in my constituency, which attracted thousands of people and raised hundreds of thousands of pounds for charity—but he has never forgotten, and never forgets to tell anybody handling fireworks, or anybody operating for him or running a display, that those explosives can kill.

All constituency Members of Parliament will have had the privilege and pleasure of attending firework displays held for charity. Any constituency Member representing a rural area will have been to village fêtes, the culmination of which, in the evening when the sun has gone down, is often a firework display. Anybody with a school in their constituency—and that means everybody—knows that schools too have displays. Everybody knows that a balance has to be struck between the hazards and the pleasure that fireworks give to many people.

About 30 per cent. of the population of my constituency are over retirement age. Many of those elderly people are widowed, and many of them have pets. I shall not rehearse again the arguments so well deployed by my hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Derek Conway); suffice it to say that double distress is caused by the irresponsible use of items primarily designed for enjoyment. The constant use of fireworks throughout the year by irresponsible hooligans, often late at night, causes distress for the elderly and a second distress to their family—because their families are their animals.

What I want to say to the Minister and the promoter of the Bill is simply this: what is being done here today is necessary, and it has my fullest support—but as one who has the privilege of scrutinising legislation from time to time, I think that another concern needs to be expressed too. The Bill is fairly loosely drafted, and has deliberately been designed to give the Secretary of State powers to introduce regulations. I hope that those regulations will strike the balance needed to control the irresponsible use of fireworks while at the same time permitting public enjoyment, not only on bonfire night but on other proper occasions throughout the year. I ask the hon. Member for Hamilton, South (Mr. Tynan) to consider that. When he takes his Bill into Committee, will he carefully consider discussing with his colleagues in Government the possibility of introducing amendments that, at the very least, make the regulations subject to the affirmative statutory instrument procedure, so that we in the House can be sure that we are doing what we intend to do?

11.44 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Miss Melanie Johnson): I join all the other Members in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton, South (Mr. Tynan) on his success in winning the lottery and bringing forward this important Bill. I can give the House the reassurance that the Government support it. I am also pleased to hear from Members on both sides of the House about how my hon. Friend has gained the support of organisations such as the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association, the RSPCA, the Blue Cross and many others, such as Cats Protection, which we have just heard about.

The British Fireworks Association, which represents the fireworks industry, also broadly supports the Bill. That is important, and represents a recognition on its part that there is a growing impatience in the community about the difficulties that people are experiencing with fireworks, and that these issues need to be addressed.

As hon. Members have said, many people have concerns about fireworks. All our postbags contain many complaints from our constituents about their misuse, and the noise and nuisance that they cause. I believe that there has been a sea change in those concerns over the past few years. At one time public concern was principally focused on injuries, and although we and the public continue to be concerned about the number of injuries, the vast majority of the letters, many of which I have received via other Members for my attention, and which I study carefully, highlight the problems that Members have already mentioned—the noise and nuisance, and all their consequences.

Mr. Luke: I am one of those Members, and I have received no letters back from the Minister. I congratulate her on being instrumental in bringing about her Government colleagues' acceptance of the need for the Bill, but does she accept that this is simply one stage, and that if the Bill is not strong enough, stronger measures may be needed to deal with the problems of noise and nuisance that she is talking about, and which our constituents experience?

Miss Johnson: My hon. Friend alludes to other possibilities. I could construe him, perhaps wrongly, to mean that fireworks should be banned from general public use.

Mr. Luke *indicated assent.*

Miss Johnson: That is one thing that some people have argued for. Indeed, the fireworks industry recognises that if the concerns that are preoccupying us today are not properly addressed in terms of both legislative powers and the enforcement to back them up, there may be growing support for a ban. Hon. Members have accurately expressed the balance of views. Fireworks still give enormous pleasure and many people want their use to continue within a better framework.

Mr. Singh: When it comes to regulation, will the Minister consider banning exceptionally loud and dangerous fireworks to the general public?

Miss Johnson: I will consider that. I can also assure my hon. Friend that the European Union is turning its mind to the problem and a European standard may also be set.

Mr. Truswell: Does my hon. Friend accept that people fear that the European Union may introduce a noise level that is far too high? Although the Bill contains a raft of desirable measures, does she accept that noise is at the core of the problems with fireworks? Is she attracted to the approach that we should set our own level, perhaps along the lines suggested by the RSPCA, and if not, why not?

Miss Johnson: I am attracted to the approach that people should no longer experience undue noise from fireworks. We have to bear in mind a number of considerations. A certain explosive charge is necessary to put something into the sky which is, obviously, the minimum requirement. Beyond that, we must consider the issues that my hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac) rightly outlined in considerable detail. It is often the availability of cheap and noisy fireworks—how they are sold and marketed, and to whom they are sold—that is the cause of the problem. As we have heard from many constituencies, it is the way in which fireworks are used by hooligans in communities and their availability throughout the year that cause the problems experienced by the public.

Hon. Members raised the same points in a variety of ways and we all know that we must address them. The protections necessary for humans, animals and property are major concerns. Our powers are limited at the moment and we cannot introduce those protections now. The Bill's main purpose is to provide the capability to use regulations to address the problems associated with fireworks. As hon. Members recognised, it will give us enabling powers to make regulations that control, among other things, the times of the day when fireworks can be used. We will also be able to set a maximum noise limit on all fireworks sold to the public, to require suppliers of fireworks to be licensed, to ensure that public firework display operators meet requirements before giving displays and to control the importation of fireworks. All those measures will play a role in solving the problem. So a package of measures will resolve the difficulties that many people face.

The hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) mentioned the framework legislation. We are interested in a Bill of this nature because the problem requires a package of measures. It is also clear that it may need to be flexibly implemented to address problems as and when they occur. The main problem is not in going too far or not far enough—although both of those have been suggested to me, and it would, of course, be for the House to consider any regulations—but in making things as effective as possible. That requires us to ensure that legislation is flexible enough to respond to problems

[Miss Johnson]

as they occur. Indeed, some of the problems arise from the fact that legislation principally focuses on product safety. There is no longer such a large issue about firework product safety because they are mostly safe when used "as it says on the tin". Unfortunately, that is not how they are being used and we do not have the legislative support to deal with the problems that are arising.

I know that for many people the period of sale is a big issue. The voluntary agreement worked in recent years, but we have had to press the industry to hold to it. Trading standards officers have also had to work hard to sign up retailers. Unfortunately, growing evidence last November showed that a number of retailers—mostly individual shopkeepers, but also one or two well known chains—were openly flouting the voluntary agreement. The Bill gives us the power to enforce the code, and I accept entirely the point—made by several Members—about the multicultural nature of our society, and that we must enable fireworks to continue to be used in the cultural festivals of which they are traditionally a part. The Bill will give us powers to regulate any traditional firework-using festival, and we anticipate that no group will be disadvantaged as a result of these measures.

On enforcement, the hon. Member for Croydon, South (Richard Ottaway) mentioned the use of penalty notices. Fixed penalty notices have indeed been used in some pilot areas—of which there are only a few—but not in Croydon, according to his account. It would be worth while exploring with the local authorities what the difficulties are, but I can assure him that such notices have been used in other areas. We should turn our minds to the fact that we need more complex powers not simply to provide better enforcement. We are talking about young people—mainly, young males—acquiring fireworks with hooligan intentions and using them in what are essentially hit-and-run crimes. As hon. Members well recognise, that creates a continual difficulty for the enforcement authorities. What we must do is to crack down on the source of the trouble, as well as to tackle it with more effective enforcement, and that is exactly what this Bill will enable us to do.

Mr. Banks: My hon. Friend has correctly pointed to the central issue. Enforcement will necessarily be dealt with if the supply is cut off. Such people do not wander around the streets throwing sparklers at each other. They use exploding fireworks; we need to attack them and ban their sale. I hope that the Government will introduce regulations to that end.

Miss Johnson: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend, and it is for just that reason that we need to implement strong measures to deal with the hooligan element. It is a great sadness that the hooligan element in our society has terrorised our communities, and I trust that this time sense will prevail in the House on the new powers that are needed to address the problem. I believe that the last time such legislation was debated, a few spoiled things for the many. I hope that the existing consensus and the difficulties reported by many today, all of which point in the same direction, will make Members determined to take the opportunity that my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton, South has provided, and—while continuing to make key and constructive criticisms—to support his Bill's passage through the House. Its passage is crucial if we are to achieve any diminution in the difficulties that all of our constituents are affected by.

I am determined that we strike the right balance by regulating only where necessary, and I want to ensure that the Bill introduces no extraneous or unnecessary regulation. As I said, we must consider its effectiveness and its implications, and I shall study carefully the speech of the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) as an exemplar of the avoidance of extraneous material. The Bill will undoubtedly be considered at much greater length if the House decides to commit it to Standing Committee. Assuming that it does progress, much of its detail would need to be thrashed out not only in Committee, but when regulations are introduced, and in the light of the way in which such regulations should be constructed. Given the great public concern that exists about this issue, and given that many support the Bill and want it to make progress, I hope that Members will continue to support it as it progresses—as I trust it will—to Standing Committee for more detailed consideration.

11.59 am

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I am delighted to support this Bill as a sponsor. My hon. Friend and co-sponsor the Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) and I can demonstrate that both London and Cornwall have a considerable interest in this Bill. I congratulate the hon. Member for Hamilton, South (Mr. Tynan) not only on his luck in the draw, but on the assiduous way in which he has consulted on the details of the Bill, which has been a model for all who wish to take private Members' Bills through the House. I give credit to the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry—she and her Department are already heavily involved in discussions on how to make regulations effective.

We must emphasise that this Bill does not put us on the slippery slope to prohibition. It is precisely to prevent the need for prohibition that we should introduce effective regulations that will deal not only with supply—which has been the main concern in the past—but with possession and use. I entirely endorse the concerns that were raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) about making the Bill sufficiently robust and ensuring that sufficient resources are available for the enforcement of regulations. However, I am sure that everybody in the House will wish to ensure that this Bill is given all the support possible today.

I wish to pick up on one or two points that have not been raised so far. Most of us have wondered, "Why now?" Indeed, the rather lacklustre speech from the Conservative Front Bench was all about misgivings over whether we should go any further than we have gone already and whether existing legislation is sufficient. Most of us feel that it is not sufficient. A number of hon. Members have worked on this issue and I pay particular tribute to the hon. Members for Plymouth, Sutton (Linda Gilroy) and for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac) for the work that they have done to draw attention to the inadequacies of existing legislation, making them all too clear.

The increased availability of fireworks is a problem and reference has been made to the incredible products that are now available cheaply. The hon. Member for Cleethorpes read out a list that sounded like an inventory that might be sent by President G.W. Bush to any country in the middle east that was trying to buy arms. It was extraordinary. Other problems include the length of period during which fireworks are now used, the scale of displays and the simple power of the explosives that are now used, even for private displays.

Another problem that I wish to highlight is that of confusion. At a time when we are all alert to the dangers of terrorism, there is a particular reason for ensuring that regulations are robust. I can recall sitting in the Members' Tearoom just a few days after 11 September. Suddenly, there was an almighty explosion. From the Tearoom we could not see what it was. It turned out to be a fireworks display on the south bank but—believe me, Madam Deputy Speaker—some elderly Members leapt out of their seats.

The threat of confusion is important. Hon. Members will appreciate that in Cornwall and Devon it is extremely important that the emergency services can immediately recognise a distress maroon signal from a boat or ship anywhere along the coast. The confusion that can arise because of expensive fireworks can be very dangerous indeed.

North Cornwall has a large number of elderly people and people who live in remote rural areas. I entirely endorse the point that was made by the hon. Member for Cleethorpes: this is not just an urban problem. Indeed, in a way, fireworks can be more dangerous in rural areas because the explosion is much more dramatic when there is not a lot of background noise. That can be dangerous for livestock and pets—and we know that some 8,000 pets a year may be affected—and can also be very disruptive for elderly people in remote communities.

One particular issue has rightly diverted this morning's debate. Fireworks can cause permanent damage to guide dogs, but they can also cause the disorientation of the dogs. My hon. Friend the Member for Hereford (Mr. Keetch), who was here earlier, mentioned that the Royal National College for the Blind in his constituency is very concerned about such disorientation. It can not only be disruptive to a dog, but lead a person into a dangerous situation.

North Cornwall has, in the past, been somewhat notorious for attracting holidaying snob yobs to beach parties. In addition to burning boat equipment for their barbecues and bonfires, they let off fireworks at various times through the night, which is terribly disruptive in comparatively quiet neighbourhoods.

Like other Members, I want to speak briefly so that we can bring the debate to a successful conclusion. In cold print, the explanatory notes set out excellent justification for the measure. Existing powers are limited to the supply rather than the use of consumer goods. We must deal with use, possession and irresponsible attitudes. Yes, powers are available to the Minister for dealing with supply, although they may not be sufficiently well enforced. I understand the point about imports; it was made strongly in the debate and is extremely important.

It is demonstrable not only from what our constituents tell us but from the big turnout in the Chamber that the Bill is extremely important and timely and should be supported this morning.

12.5 pm

Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South): Time presses so I shall not dwell on the niceties, other than to congratulate the hon. Member for Hamilton, South (Mr. Tynan) on introducing the Bill.

The problem with legislation of this type lies in finding a balance: we want to deal with a nuisance without interfering in people's reasonable enjoyment of fireworks in appropriate circumstances. There is no doubt about the inappropriate growth in the use of fireworks in recent years. It affects elderly people and, above all, pets and animals. It is no surprise that many Members referred to cases involving animals. My hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Derek Conway) made a powerful speech in which he drew attention to the effects on animals. That is the engine room for reform.

We all have horror stories about the distress caused to animals by inappropriate use of fireworks. Recently, a constituent wrote to me to say that she had had to have her dog put down because it had bitten her child after it was distressed by a firework display. An excellent briefing document from the RSPCA draws attention to the problems for horses, cats, small mammals and nocturnal wildlife such as badgers and foxes.

If pet owners receive notice that there is to be a firework display, they can take action to lessen the distress that could be caused to their pet. They can sedate animals or move horses. It is distressing to witness the anxiety caused to animals by fireworks. Dogs often shake and shiver from head to foot; they whimper and hide under beds to try to get away from the noise. Owners feel helpless in such situations because we cannot explain what is going on.

In recent years, there has been a growth of municipal displays, such as the large ones held on the other side of the river. They have taken over from the family, domestic type of event held in the back garden, with sausage rolls and dad trying to light a pathetic small fire, after which everyone retires early. There is real growth in the use of fireworks, especially in the London boroughs, so it is no surprise that many London MPs are in the Chamber.

The types of fireworks used are on the up. In an excellent speech, the hon. Member for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac) set out the wide range of fireworks on display. There are shops that appear in the weeks leading up to 5 November where one can buy a huge container with just one fuse. It costs about 70 or 80 quid and is a complete, self-contained display. I admit that my constituency is fairly affluent and many young people buy such things; they give them to their younger brothers and off they go.

Unsurprisingly, many injuries are caused by fireworks—a point that has not been much mentioned today. The DTI briefing noted that 1,300 people were injured by fireworks last year, a quarter of the number of people injured in road traffic accidents, which was about 5,000. Given the amount of money devoted to the prevention of road traffic accidents, the Bill's proposals are modest by comparison.

[Richard Ottaway]

As many Members have pointed out, the regulations are not working. The Minister dealt with the point that I raised in an intervention: no notices have been issued under the fixed penalty pilot scheme in Croydon because, as has been said, the offenders are mainly young kids aged under-18 who cannot be issued with such penalties. That is one of the problems that the Minister said that she would address.

Mr. William Cash (Stone): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Richard Ottaway: If my hon. Friend does not mind, I will not. He has only just arrived in the Chamber.

As a typical Conservative, I am reluctant to introduce powers if regulations are seen to be working. There is a common consensus, however, that those powers that are currently available are not seen to be working. I am wary about the enabling Bill, and I was comforted by the Minister's speech, when she said that she would consider these matters seriously. What is important is not just what can be sold and when they can be sold, but when they can be let off—we should contain the period within which fireworks can be let off—and to whom they can be sold. As my hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup said, this problem seems to occur earlier and earlier—fireworks seem to go off throughout the autumn, and often through the night. The House must deal with that situation.

I return to the theme to which many Members have referred—animal welfare. That is desperately important, and I hope that the Bill will be given a fair wind.

12.11 pm

Mr. Michael Weir (Angus): I join other Members in congratulating the hon. Member for Hamilton, South (Mr. Tynan) on introducing this important Bill, which strikes at a serious problem in all our communities. It is not often that he will receive a compliment from an SNP Member, and I hope that it does not damage his career too much.

I want to reinforce the point made by the hon. Member for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac) that this is not just an urban problem. I cite the example in my constituency of one small village where more than £2,000 worth of damage was caused to a house when a firework was jammed through a letterbox in the early hours of the morning. If that fire had not been discovered quickly, it could have turned out to be fatal to the family sleeping in the house. That is how serious this matter is.

Fireworks are meant for enjoyment and celebration. Unfortunately, they are misused by a small minority, which causes huge distress to our constituents and to animals. It is perhaps no coincidence that fireworks are governed by the Explosives Act 1875. Sadly, many of those most at risk in our society are the most vulnerable. It has been noted that the numbers of injuries are increasing. In Scotland alone, in 2000–01, there was an increase of 35 per cent., which is seriously worrying. Last year, I pursued this matter through parliamentary questions to try to ascertain the dates of accidents involving fireworks. The answers showed that the majority of incidents took place before and after 5 November, not on the date itself. Perhaps even more worryingly, the majority of those injured were under 18.

The hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) asked why this measure was a framework Bill rather than having the incremental approach that has been adopted until now. It is true that after the Government introduced the Fireworks (Safety) Regulations 1997, which, along with other measures, restricted the sale of fireworks to those over 18, the number of injuries from fireworks decreased. The level of injuries reported in 2001, however, was higher than in 1996, and substantially higher even than in the millennium year, 2000.

If the increase in the number of injuries is worrying, the age distribution of those injuries is even more disturbing, especially when one considers that, under those regulations, youngsters should not be able to buy fireworks. Injuries to under-13s account for 34 per cent. of the total injuries. A further 25 per cent. is made up of 13 to 15-year-olds. In essence, therefore, 59 per cent. of all firework-related injuries are to children under the age of 16—the very people who should not have access to fireworks. It seems clear, therefore, that the age restrictions in the 1997 regulations are not working and that further action is required.

I appreciate that time is short, but I want to raise the issue of the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association. My constituency has long been associated with guide dogs because of the presence of the Scottish training centre. The training centre is actually in Forfar, which is just across the border, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for North Tayside (Pete Wishart). Much has been said about the problem for working guide dogs, but it goes further than that. Throughout the boroughs of Angus, many people look after and train puppies for the association. Many of those dogs are affected by fireworks before they even become working guide dogs. The problem is therefore serious and should not be underestimated, as it affects the association's puppies as well as the working guide dogs that assist our blind constituents.

Much has been said about the fact that the Bill is effectively an enabling measure, which is both a strength and a weakness. The weakness is obvious, as we are not entirely certain what the regulations will say, and trust the Minister to be reasonable. However, I was reassured by her speech and I believe that acceptable regulations will be introduced. The strength of such regulations is that they can be adopted more quickly than primary legislation. In an area like this, that is very important and, interestingly, was used by the industry as an argument in favour of the voluntary code. It argued that the code could be quickly amended. However, the code is simply not working because it is voluntary and, as has been noted, several retailers are not sticking to it, which has led to the need for regulation. If the Bill is not successful, there will be calls for a total ban. If there are no improvements, it will become more difficult to resist those calls.

12.16 pm

Mr. David Atkinson (Bournemouth, East): Last year, I received more complaints from constituents about fireworks than ever before, as did Bournemouth borough council, which serves my constituency. In response to those complaints, it passed a resolution on 26 November last year calling on the Local Government Association to make the strongest possible representations to the Government to ban the sale of fireworks to the public and ensure that fireworks are supplied only to qualified organisers of displays. My local paper, the Bournemouth *Daily Echo* collected a petition in the form of over 4,000 completed coupons signed by its readers in response to its "Bang Out of Order" campaign, together with a separate petition supported by 3,500 signatures, both of which were presented by its senior reporter, Paula Roberts, to the hon. Members for Mid-Dorset and North Poole (Mrs. Brooke) and for South Dorset (Jim Knight) and myself outside St. Stephen's entrance at 9 o'clock this morning.

Any initiative to reduce the nuisance of fireworks will therefore have the widest possible support from my constituents. I congratulate the hon. Member for Hamilton, South (Mr. Tynan) on introducing his Bill today, but I shall suggest some ways in which it can be improved. The complaints and nuisances that have already been cited in justification of the Bill's introduction echo very much the complaints that I have received over the years against the unregulated and indiscriminate use of fireworks, which can have a serious effect on young children, the elderly and, indeed, all of us who cannot avoid an involuntary jump in response to a loud bang outside the home or anywhere for that matter. The effect on dogs, cats, aviary birds, horses and livestock is also distressing for the owners, particularly when pets and other animals have to be put down as a consequence.

The nuisance extends well beyond midnight, when most of us are trying to sleep. It needs only one bang to set off a chorus of dogs barking in the neighbourhood. The period in which we have to endure such nuisances seems to widen every year, starting well before Halloween and not ending until after the new year. Indeed, fireworks are used throughout the year, as we have heard. Many hon. Members have rightly stressed the traumatic effect of fireworks on guide dogs for the blind and on their owners—it can bring the dogs' useful work to a premature end. The conclusion we should draw from the ever-widening experience of our constituents is that the fun of fireworks for some does not justify the widespread misery that they cause for many. The Government's response has been to rely on voluntary restraint by the industry to reduce the level of noise and to reinforce the voluntary sale agreements with retailers, together with other initiatives, but the Bill goes further in enabling the Government to introduce new regulations on the use and supply of fireworks and in introducing other measures.

What will happen when the Bill becomes law? Will my constituents immediately be better protected? That will not necessarily be the outcome. As the hon. Member for Hamilton, South acknowledged, his Bill is neither simple nor brief. It is also extremely bureaucratic, and I share the reservations expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South (Richard Ottaway) that it may prove to be unworkable. I want much clearer proposals in the Bill. I would not restrict the sale of fireworks. Instead, I would restrict when fireworks can be used and by whom.

Although I am a Roman Catholic Member of Parliament, I do not propose that Guy Fawkes night should be abolished, as it is so much part of our national culture. I am also a monarchist and a democrat, and believe that he should not have attempted to blow up the King and Parliament. The weapons inspectors did good in discovering the gunpowder plot—I hope they do the same in Iraq.

I propose that the private use of fireworks and the holding of bonfires should be restricted to seven days a year, which include 5 November and the nearest weekend to it. For the rest of the year, fireworks should be only for public display by organisers who have obtained an occasional licence from the local authority. That should also apply to private parties. There should be a curfew of midnight for all fireworks on every occasion.

How should these restrictions be policed? Because my proposals are much clearer than what the Bill proposes, I believe that public pressure and self-restraint could prove surprisingly effective. It would simply be considered antisocial to behave otherwise, even by young people towards those who offend. I believe that what I have proposed would have much more support than what is proposed in the Bill. I look forward to support from the promoter of the Bill for my proposals, and I wish him success in the passage of the Bill.

12.22 pm

Mr. Robert Syms (Poole): I shall not detain the House long, as there is a general consensus in support of the Bill. I congratulate the hon. Member for Hamilton, South (Mr. Tynan) on introducing it. We all know the growing problem. Year on year as Members of Parliament, we get more letters, more complaints and more hassle from constituents. We have heard well-rehearsed arguments about the problems caused to guide dogs for the blind, young children and the elderly, and the trauma caused to pets.

There is undoubtedly an argument for more controls on those who use fireworks. We are not killjoys, but the balance is wrong and we need to redress it. I support the Bill, although I have a number of concerns because it is an enabling Bill. I welcome the Minister's assurance that many of the regulations will be available for the Standing Committee and certainly before the Bill comes back to the House, so that we can see what the Government intend to do.

I also welcome the training aspect of the Bill, which is vital. Even those who are experienced should undergo training at regular intervals. Not much has been said about the provision of information. We can legislate all we like, but giving information to people and changing attitudes will be tremendously important. We have heard throughout the debate about abuse, largely by teenage boys. Much more can be done. Over recent years, the Department of Trade and Industry has provided much better information, but as the legislation goes through, there should be a commitment from Government to spend a little more on promoting good practice and highlighting the dangers of fireworks. As my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South

[Mr. Robert Syms]

(Richard Ottaway) said, according to the most recent figures, 1,300 people were injured and taken to hospital. That is far too many.

Shona McIsaac: For the record, those injury figures are only for the month of November. There are probably more injuries than that, but the figures are collated only for that one month.

Mr. Syms: The hon. Lady makes a good point. As has been said, there are many injuries because of the extended period over which fireworks are used.

I support the principle of the Bill. We shall have to look carefully at the detail. My constituents will welcome the measure. As we have heard from Dorset Members today, firework safety is an issue in Dorset and the Poole-Bournemouth conurbation. The *Daily Echo* has conducted a strong campaign. I wish the Bill well and hope that it makes good progress.

12.25 pm

Mrs. Annette L. Brooke (Mid-Dorset and North Poole): I will be very brief and try not to repeat points, but I congratulate the hon. Member for Hamilton, South (Mr. Tynan) on presenting his Bill so clearly today. I am impressed with the amount of support that he has gathered from such a large number and wide range of organisations.

Like all hon. Members in the Chamber today, I have an enormous mailbag of letters about the problems caused by fireworks. As the hon. Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) has just said, this morning, I was party to the presentation of a petition from out local paper, the *Daily Echo*. The petition was absolutely enormous, with readers writing to the paper day after day, saying that fireworks are going off all hours of the night, that they are louder than ever, that they terrify pets and the elderly and that they are being let off over a longer period of time. I do not think that that is just a perception; those are facts. Matters are getting worse and we need to do something about it.

I am also concerned that fireworks are getting into unauthorised hands, and I have an example from my constituency. A 1.5 m long firework—labelled "For display only. Made in China"—was found after badly damaging a roof in a residential area, and the incident was unrelated to any organised firework display. Those very large fireworks are really frightening. They might go through the glass roof of a room where people are sitting. All sorts of things could happen.

Many organisations have been mentioned, and I should like to add another: the Townswomen's Guilds—a very formidable organisation—carried out a survey among its 70,000 members last year. More than 90 per cent. of them were concerned about firework nuisance and believed that there should be more regulation.

I am concerned about how local councils deal with consumer protection complaints. I have a letter which states:

> "It is so obviously true that it is such a cop-out. It is difficult for us to investigate private displays, as we never know where and when they will occur, so don't do anything about the noise at unsocial times."

Paul Farrelly (Newcastle-under-Lyme): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Brooke: I really have not got time to give way.

Local councils are looking for help, and I was very pleased to hear what the Minister said. The letter goes on to say:

> "We appreciate that the Government is looking into the question of retail sales of fireworks, but until legislation is made, we are not in a position to take any action."

That is much appreciated.

We have heard much about the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association, and I share all those thoughts.

As a Liberal Democrat, of course, I should like to quote one of my constituents. She wrote to me—this is very moving—saying:

> "Our beautiful large dog has to have 14 expensive tablets a day to calm her down and is still under the vet for a medical condition caused through stress and fear."

All the local vets are saying that this is the worst year ever. That is the point: things are getting worse and worse. Vets and doctors are being involved in emergency call-outs because of the injuries. Apart from the cost to the individuals who are hurt, there are all the add-on distress, medical costs and so on.

I am very pleased that we are making progress. I am pleased to hear the level of support today. I am certainly not a killjoy—I really do enjoy celebrations and having a good time—but if we do not take action now, we will be face very strong calls for a ban, and we would all be worse off if we had a total ban on fireworks.

12.28 pm

Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire): I, too, am pleased to support the Bill, although I am concerned that it has been watered down by the DTI, and I noted that the hon. Member for Hamilton, South (Mr. Tynan) said that he hoped that it would be strengthened in Committee.

Among the incidents that have been reported to me by my constituents, I received a letter from a lady in Houghton Regis early last week saying:

> "We dread the month prior to and following Bonfire night."

She spoke of a firework display near her house that went on from 7 in the evening until 1 am, depriving all her household of sleep. A lady from Leighton Buzzard wrote to me to say that the local vets now put out advice leaflets to all who go to their surgery. They have never before had to tell owners how to deal with animals that are distressed by the use of fireworks.

Figures from the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association tell us that four guide dogs are prematurely retired every year because of injuries caused by fireworks. Some 150 guide dogs have to be taken away from their owners every year and retrained, and we can imagine the distress that that must cause to their owners. It also estimates that up to £200,000 of publicly donated money is wasted because of fireworks. It is a serious issue and we are grateful to the association for providing that information.

Another constituent from Leighton Buzzard wrote to say:

> "Some of the explosions round here remind us of the blitz."

Two other incidents were also extremely worrying. Only a few weeks ago in Leighton Buzzard, a rocket was fired at a house. It went through a window and only just missed a five-year-old child who had just left the room. Had the child been in the room, there could have been a casualty or even a fatality. Similarly, in the village of Kensworth in my constituency, rockets were recently fired at local shops and even at the Methodist church.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): Does my hon. Friend agree that the trouble that we now face results from the sheer size of many fireworks? That is the feature that has changed so much in the past few years. Much bigger and more dangerous fireworks are available to the public when, in the past, they would have been used only at displays. I hope that the Bill will cover that point.

Andrew Selous: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I am sure that we are all indebted to the hon. Member for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac) for reading a list of the type and size of rockets that are freely available to the public.

The current law and regulations are failing. The Fireworks (Safety) Regulations 1997 have not done their job. We have already heard that it is not possible to give on-the-spot fines to those aged under 18, so that penalty will not be effective. My concern is that the police are simply unable to enforce the legislation that is on the statute book. That is the sad reality. We can pass laws in this place, but we have to examine whether the police are able to enforce them.

South Bedfordshire district council tells me that it cannot take action against offenders unless the offence is persistent. Except in a few cases, the same household is not likely to cause a problem again and again. The problem for our constituents arises when many different households and individuals cause offence and when the local authority cannot do anything about that.

John Robertson: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. The police cannot arrest anyone unless the evidence is on the person or unless that person is seen lighting the firework. The police have an impossible job. We need to amend the law.

Andrew Selous: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. That is why I want the Bill to do two specific things, and I hope that the hon. Member for Hamilton, South will deal with these points when he responds.

First, the Bill must end the sale to the public of noisy fireworks. The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals is right when it says that a 95 dB level should apply to the fireworks available to the public. Its evidence is that such a limit is needed because of the effects on animals. It has widespread public support. Secondly, the Bill must stop the sale of rockets to the public. We have already heard that they are used as missiles against people's houses.

Noisy fireworks and rockets can be used at the large properly organised public displays, but they should not be available for sale to the public. The public's use of them should be made illegal. I do not want to stop private individuals using sparklers and holding quiet colourful displays. They are fine. However, the public must be prevented from using noisy fireworks and rockets.

12.34 pm

John Barrett (Edinburgh, West): I congratulate the hon. Member for Hamilton, South (Mr. Tynan) on his good fortune and all the other Members who have worked on this issue over the years. The hon. Members for Plymouth, Sutton (Linda Gilroy) and for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac) have done a lot of work on it.

The issue has been brought to my attention by people in both the urban and rural parts of my constituency. Yesterday, I took a petition containing the names of more than 3,000 of my constituents to Downing street. The petition is the result of a campaign that showed the depth of feeling in Edinburgh, and names are still flooding in. That is why I support the Bill, and I am glad that many Members have given it a fair hearing.

I am not anti-fireworks, and do not favour an outright ban. Like many others I enjoy a good fireworks display, and those who have visited Edinburgh will know that my constituency is part of a city that hosts some of the most magnificent displays in the world, both at Hogmanay and during the Edinburgh festival. However, as has been said today, we need tighter restrictions—limits on the times of year during which fireworks can be bought and sold, and limits on the time of day during which they can be set off to end displays that take place throughout the night.

Clause 7, which I consider the most important part of the Bill, addresses one of the main deficiencies in the current law: the lack of a proper system to license the sale of fireworks. The question of licensing has given rise to a great deal of debate north of the border following the introduction of a private Member's Bill in the Scottish Parliament. I hope that the Government will consult the Scottish Executive to ensure that the issue can be tackled comprehensively on a cross-border basis.

We need the Bill because the current laws are not working, and because some retailers do not always behave responsibly and consider public safety. The Bill would provide an opportunity, which has never existed before, to require proper training of suppliers and retailers not only in the legal position but in simple matters such as storage. I was amazed to learn that such training did not already exist.

Despite the current laws, serious problems are still being caused by the sale to under-age people. In parts of my constituency major problems are being caused by very young children. That is partly because a minority of shopkeepers—I stress that they are a minority—are still prepared to sell fireworks to under-age children despite the law.

Clause 7 also makes a bold but necessary provision enabling licences to be issued for a set period only, reinforcing the Secretary of State's power effectively to limit the times of year in which fireworks are available. In some parts of the country they are sold throughout the year. When a voluntary code of practice fails, we must have a Bill to remedy the problem.

Paul Farrelly: Like many other Members, I have been inundated with complaints about the nuisance of

[Paul Farrelly]

fireworks and the distress that they cause children, dogs and other animals, and elderly people. Some of my constituents have asked me to investigate the possibility of a byelaw. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that national legislation such as this is needed, rather than a patchwork of local pilot schemes and byelaws?

John Barrett: Absolutely. The Bill has been a long time coming, but now that it is here it is very welcome.

The Bill is urgently needed for another reason: animals need better protection. Much has been said about guide dogs for the blind. Last year, the Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, which is based in my constituency, produced a chilling report on the impact of firework misuse on animals following a comprehensive survey of Scottish vets. The report included a catalogue of stories relating to injuries and deaths caused by fireworks. In a single year, 8,000 animals needed veterinary attention, but perhaps more significant was the long period during which animals were exposed to firework injury and stress. They continued to suffer for many months after the event. Some of the worst instances cited in the report were deliberate attacks on animals with fireworks, which deserve total condemnation. There must be strict penalties to deal with people such as those described in the report.

This is a popular Bill, and many who have spoken have already covered issues that I would have raised had I been called earlier. Let me end by repeating that the Bill is strongly supported in my constituency. The police and the fire services there tell me how much time they must spend responding to incidents involving fireworks, and those in medical centres tell me how many injuries they must treat. Vets and people involved with Edinburgh zoo tell me of the distress and deaths that fireworks cause. As I have said, the Bill has been a long time coming, but it is urgently needed and I give it my full support.

12.39 pm

Mr. Tynan: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I will be brief, because other Bills are on the agenda. I hope that other Members will understand and respect that.

Hon. Members have shown today the strength of feeling, not only in the House but in the nation, on the question of fireworks. The turnout today was incredible, and that was down sometimes to organisation and sometimes to the issue. My hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Bennett), an old campaigner in the House, gave me tremendous support and advice as regards organising to ensure that Members were in; I thank him for that. I also thank all colleagues for taking time to attend on a Friday, because I know how precious it can be to be in one's constituency. I am delighted.

Once again I emphasise the broad support that the Bill has received from outside the House. The National Campaign for Firework Safety—one organisation that I may have inadvertently omitted to mention—the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association, the explosives industry group, the CBI and the British Pyrotechnists Association have all been exceptionally helpful to me. In order to get consensus, I believed that it was necessary to have discussion and debate.

I believe that the Bill is a timely, comprehensive and consensual solution to the problems of fireworks for the future. I commend it to the House.

Bill read a second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 63 (Committal of Bills).

National Lottery (Funding of Endowments) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

12.41 pm

Mr. Keith Simpson (Mid-Norfolk): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

I begin by providing some background to the Bill. Parliamentary interest in this issue arose out of an unsuccessful appeal to the Community Fund by the *Eastern Daily Press* "We Care" appeal 2000 for a grant towards an endowment fund. The hon. Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) introduced a private Member's Bill, the National Lottery (Amendment) Bill, which sought to give the National Lottery Charities Board an additional power to consider, and indeed award, grants towards the endowment of charities under the National Lottery etc. Act 1993, as amended in 1998. The Bill received the support of every Norfolk Member, and many of us were present in the House and I spoke in support of that Bill at its Second Reading on 23 March 2001.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): Is my hon. Friend also aware that that Bill received the implicit support of the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Support, when it too recognised that there needs to be endowment to ensure, when capital grants are given, that progress can be made over the years in fulfilling the projects that they support?

Mr. Simpson: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend, who was present during that private Member's Bill debate on 23 March 2001. He is a leading member of the Select Committee; he adorns the Committee, and always speaks knowledgeably and with great force. I am grateful to him for drawing to the attention of the House the fact that the Select Committee particularly supported that private Member's Bill.

I note that the hon. Member for Great Yarmouth (Mr. Wright) is in the Chamber and intends, if he is lucky enough to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to support the Bill. I received apologies from the hon. Member for Norwich, North, the right hon. Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Clarke), my hon. Friends the Members for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham) and for South Norfolk (Mr. Bacon), my right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard) and the hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb). All those hon. Members support my Bill, as do many other hon. Members outside the fair county of Norfolk.

I pay particular tribute to the hard work of the hon. Member for Norwich, North, who worked very hard in the last Parliament to get his Bill on the statute book. As you will recall, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Bill received a Second Reading, but the general election prevented it from reaching Third Reading. Following the general election, Lord Walpole of the county of Norfolk sought to introduce a similar Bill in the other place, but it was withdrawn before Second Reading.

The purpose—the key objective—of my Bill is to make it clear that all lottery distributors, including the Community Fund, which is the lottery distributing body that gives grants to charities and the voluntary and community sector, can distribute lottery moneys by funding endowments, including permanent endowments, for the purpose of establishing endowments as well as for contributing to those already in existence.

The powers of distributors under current statute give lottery distributing bodies power to distribute lottery money for meeting expenditure of the types specified in section 23 of the 1993 Act. However, it does not define what is meant by "for meeting expenditure" or contain any explicit reference to the funding of endowment funds. This private Member's Bill would amend those sections of the Act that refer to "for meeting expenditure" to clarify the fact that, in each case, the term includes funding of endowments.

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport previously advised that distributors other than the Community Fund could fund endowments, and some distributing bodies have made such grants. The Bill would have retrospective effects, which are in clause 1(9).

What are the benefits of the Bill? It would clarify the powers of all the distributors, put the Community Fund on the same legal footing as other distributors in being able to fund endowments and benefit charities such as the *Eastern Daily Press* "We Care" 2000 fund, which wants to apply for lottery funding and which I want to comment on.

Many of us in Norfolk became involved with the appeal. With the support of the *Eastern Daily Press*, a fund was set up in Norfolk to endow the Norfolk millennium trust for carers. It aimed to raise £1 million in cash to establish the trust, which is registered as a charity, and to enable it to become long lasting as well as to provide financial help for an estimated 130,000 unpaid carers in the county of Norfolk. Its purpose was to respond to the identified need of such carers, and it sought to help with the purchase of equipment and improving the quality of life for carers.

So far, the appeal has raised approximately £635,000 and has made more than 100 grants to pay for equipment, holidays and support for carers. I do not have to describe to the House the emotional, financial and physical burden endured by carers, or the loneliness, frustration and sheer exhaustion involved for many of them, some of whom are among the most elderly members of the community.

I pay particular tribute to two groups of people who have been involved in the appeal. I must mention the work done by the editor, Mr. Peter Franzen, and the deputy editor, Mr. James Ruddy, of the *Eastern Daily Press* in driving the appeal forward and the trustees, in particular Mrs. Paddy Seligman, who has worked tirelessly on behalf of the fund. As with other charity funds, it involves tens of thousands of local people and organisations, who run everything from jumble sales to sponsored walks.

We in this country are proud that although considerable public expenditure is given to support the needy, and rightly so—I pay tribute to the work done by previous Governments and by this Government—a lot of money, work and sheer commitment are given by thousands of individual volunteers as well as the voluntary sector. It is not an either/or. They provide

[Mr. Simpson]

something that is extra that is not just money. The mission statement of the *Eastern Daily Press* "We Care" appeal is

"to relieve the elderly, infirm, sick or disabled in Norfolk by providing financial aid and practical support to carers, either individually or through carers' groups."

It is estimated that one in seven of the population in the United Kingdom are unpaid carers. In the county of Norfolk, that comes to some 110,000 people, which means about 12,000 in my constituency of Mid-Norfolk. It has been calculated that, nationally, carers save the Government approximately £34 billion a year, so anything that we can do to help carers not only saves the Government and the taxpayer literally billions of pounds but, most important of all for organisations such as the "We Care" campaign, brings relief to tens of thousands of carers, who often have to do a job in addition to looking after a sick parent, partner or child.

At the moment, all lottery distributors are able to make grants to endowments but the Community Fund is not. Charities such as the "We Care" appeal and other local voluntary groups cannot bid to the fund to augment their endowment funds. My Bill would give the Community Fund power to fund endowments and would clarify further the powers for other distributors to make grants to endowments.

What are the benefits of endowment funds? They can be a useful way of providing long-term revenue funding, particularly for voluntary sector bodies. They can enable bodies to plan strategically and with some certainty on the security of funding, enabling them to operate more effectively on behalf of their client groups. They can also improve creditability with potential third-party funders and partners secure in the knowledge that core funding is guaranteed.

Nevertheless, I recognise that endowment funds require large sums up front to provide reasonable returns in the longer term and that future income levels are subject to variations in interest rates. However, the power in my Bill is a permissive rather than a mandatory power for distributors. It would ultimately be up to the distributors to determine how to treat applications for grants to endowment funds against other calls for lottery funding. I understand that, should my Bill be successful, the Minister's Department intends to assist distributors by issuing guidance.

What is the regulatory cost of the Bill? I suppose that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, would expect a Conservative to look with a gimlet eye at the cost of regulation. As a permissive power, there would be no regulatory cost to businesses or the voluntary sector resulting from my Bill. Indeed, the measure is intended to assist charities in the sector and other good causes by enabling them to apply for lottery funding to help set up or augment their endowment funds, and thus to help manage their operations more effectively.

That power may result in additional calls on distributors' resources, but, ultimately, it would be a policy decision for distributors on how to prioritise such applications against others for non-endowment grants. Therefore, it would be a permissive, not a mandatory power. That is the great appeal of the Bill. There would be no impact on the expenditure or manpower of central or local government. I am sure that that would appeal not only to hon. Members present and the Minister but to the Treasury, which oversees all public expenditure.

This Bill would affect all national lottery distributors' powers and therefore would be UK-wide. The policy for the lottery is a reserved issue, but I understand that the Bill has attracted the support of the devolved Administrations.

This Bill is the outcome of a Bill that was introduced as a private Member's Bill in the previous Parliament. It has been redrafted and enjoys, I believe, widespread support. I hope that the Government can support the principles of my Bill, which will enable endowment funds to be drawn upon by a wide range of charities and voluntary organisations, not only directly saving national and local expenditure, but also bringing relief to the tens of thousands of our fellow citizens who work so hard to care for many of the most vulnerable people in our community.

As Members of Parliament, it is not often that we can do something really constructive. Two or three years ago, my son, who was then about nine or 10, asked me about my job, and I explained about the parents of his friends in his class who were teachers, doctors or farmers; he understood all that. Then I attempted to explain what a Member of Parliament's life was like, and what one did. He fixed me with a sceptical look, as young children do, and said, "Yes Dad, but what exactly do you do?" That is usually the problem—but, occasionally, we in Parliament can do something practical beyond the narrow confines of party politics and the constraints of party discipline.

I hope that the House will approve the Bill today. I commend it, and hope that it will find widespread support.

12.56 pm

Mr. Anthony D. Wright (Great Yarmouth): I congratulate the hon. Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Simpson) on securing a high place in the ballot and introducing the Bill. My comments will be very brief, first because he has already adequately covered all the points, and secondly because there are three or four other private Members' Bills to be debated.

It is hard not to feel a slight sense of déjà vu as we discuss this Bill, because we debated a similar Bill promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) two year ago. As we all know, that Bill eventually failed because of the general election, but we hope that the same fate does not await the Bill before us today.

The fact that we are again assembled here today to debate a Bill whose main aim is to allow lottery distributors to fund endowments is a remarkable testament to the degree of cross-party support for the idea, because it was a Labour Member who introduced the private Member's Bill in the last Parliament, and the Bill that we are now debating was introduced by a Conservative Member. If I can be a little parochial for a moment, I might add that it is also a testament to the unity of the hon. Members representing the county of Norfolk, because they have been the driving force behind this legislation.

I pay tribute to those who support the Bill, but I must also congratulate the *Eastern Daily Press* on its "We Care" appeal. It was the EDP that originally drew attention to the anomaly in the National Lottery etc. Act 1993 that the Bill seeks to address. I know that the appeal's director, Mrs. Paddy Seligman, has worked hard to raise funds, and I add my congratulations and thanks not only to her but to Peter Franzen, the editor, and James Ruddy, as well as to the hon. Member for Mid-Norfolk.

I understand that the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the Minister for Sport, who is here today, also support the Bill, so we hope that in due course it will make it on to the statute book. The purpose of the Bill is expressly to permit all lottery distributors to distribute lottery moneys by funding endowments, including permanent endowments—both establishing endowments and contributing to endowments already in existence.

When we debated this matter in 2001, there was some discussion about whether it was a good idea to make the change. It was pointed out that granting an endowment would inevitably tie up a relatively large amount of capital, so it might be better for the money to be distributed to more recipients in the short term. It was further argued that the current low returns on endowments were another reason not to make the change. Although I appreciate those arguments, I do not agree with them. The *Eastern Daily Press* "We Care" appeal provides a perfect case study of why the proposed change should be made.

The amount raised by the appeal stands at £650,000, which is a magnificent effort. All the income produced from investing that sum goes in awards to carers throughout Norfolk. I was pleased to learn that, as the capital is invested for safe income rather than capital growth, the rate of return has not been badly affected by recent falls in the stock market. However, the "We Care" appeal target is £1 million because such an investment would provide a sufficient return to allow the organisers to deal adequately with the requests for assistance that they receive from carers throughout Norfolk. I am told that they are not always able to grant the full amount requested, even in the most deserving cases, because they do not have enough funds. Although they have demonstrated great persistence, determination and professionalism to raise £650,000, the law does not allow them to apply to the lottery for assistance to reach the £1 million target simply because the fund is constituted as an endowment.

It seems wrong in principle that those who are in charge of the various lottery distributors, who discharge the difficult duty of deciding which groups should benefit from lottery funds, should have their hands tied by not being allowed to make grants to endowments. It may be that the present low rates of return on investments and the long-term tying up of capital militate against the funding of endowments in some cases, but surely we should trust those who have been empowered to make such decisions and allow them the flexibility to consider the widest range of possible applicants for the widest range of benefit to the community.

In any case, there is another thing in favour of funding endowments, as I told the Department for Culture, Media and Sport when it invited responses to its Green Paper, "Review of Lottery Funding". Put simply, the long-term and stable nature of the funds that an endowment provides is desirable. No Government have stressed the value of long-term economic stability, nor done as much to bring it about, as this Government. So if we can give the lottery fund distributors the freedom to encourage that outcome for those who receive their grants, we should do so.

I understand that there is a difference between today's Bill and the Bill promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North in 2001. This Bill is more widely drawn and specifically allows all the lottery distributing bodies to fund endowments. The purpose of the previous Bill was to allow the National Lottery Charities Board to fund endowments, which, at the moment, it is specifically not allowed to do. The situation for the other lottery funding boards is unclear but would be clarified by the Bill. A welcome effect of that would be to include not only charities but the range of voluntary groups as possible recipients of lottery endowment funding.

I know from my constituency how deeply ingrained the culture of volunteering is in our society. Last year, I held a reception for representatives of voluntary groups in the borough and was shocked to find that in my constituency of 90,000 people there are no fewer than 350 charitable and voluntary groups. I am hopeful that, if the Bill is passed, some of them will be successful in applying for lottery endowment funds. So I hope that it proceeds with the wholehearted support of the House.

1.3 pm

Mr. Malcolm Moss (North-East Cambridgeshire): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Simpson) on his success in coming high in the ballot for private Members' Bills and on taking the opportunity to reintroduce a Bill, suitably amended, that secured widespread support when first introduced by the hon. Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) two years ago.

The original Bill focused on the anomaly in the National Lottery etc. Act 1993 which prevented the National Lottery Charities Board from distributing funds to local charities in the form of endowments. A particular charity was mentioned at that time and the change was proposed in a campaign run by the *Eastern Daily Press*, in conjunction with the hon. Member for Norwich, North, known as the "We Care" appeal 2000. The aim was to raise £1 million to establish an endowment fund for unpaid carers in Norfolk. In my hon. Friend's eloquent speech, he re-emphasised the importance of funding carers in his county. Not only is that vital to him and his constituents, but it serves as a timely reminder of how important carers are in our communities throughout the country.

When the original Bill was debated, although there was general support for it, concern was expressed on all sides about its rather narrow and prescriptive proposals, linked as they were to only one of the seven lottery fund distributors—the National Lottery Charities Board. As [illegible] hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) said at the time:

> "The question for us is whether the proposed change is desirable, whether it would improve the working of the NLCB and provide greater equity of opportunity to obtain grants from the board, or whether it would have adverse consequences for the work of the board or the operation of the lottery funding bodies."—[*Official Report*, 23 March 2001; Vol. 365, c. 594.]

It is the latter point that is crucial. Would a facility offered exclusively to the NLCB have adverse repercussions for any of the other distributing bodies?

[Mr. Malcolm Moss]

This point was not teased out in Committee because the original Bill fell with the looming general election of 2001. However, the Government did then share that concern, along with spokespeople on the Opposition Benches.

These problems have, in our view, been properly and wisely addressed in the amended Bill of my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Norfolk. It adds to the powers of distributing bodies by including the distribution of money for the purpose of establishing, or contributing to, endowments in each appropriate section of the National Lottery etc. Act 1993: sections 22, 25, 25B, 38, 41, 43 and 44. My hon. Friend's Bill now gives each and every distributor of lottery funds the option of contributing either to the establishment of a new endowment, or to an existing one.

The previous debate also cited the endowment funds of the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts as a precedent already established by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, and as a template for possible national lottery endowment funds to follow, given the similarity between NESTA and various registered charities. Not only was the method of funding by endowment at that time praised; the freedom and continuity afforded to NESTA trustees, without undue interference from Government, was noted as both preferable and positive when targeting particular groups in need of support.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Norfolk has pointed out today, however, one of the downsides to the endowment route is the variation in interest rates. Only a few weeks ago, the Minister and I confronted each other, in a statutory instrument Committee, on this very point. NESTA, in receipt of an original endowment, found that the income that it was anticipating—and was presumably spending—had decreased because of lower interest rates. NESTA appealed to the Government and to the Minister's Department for additional capital moneys to put into the endowment fund. So a real problem has raised its head in respect of NESTA, which, at the time, was described as a useful template for others to follow and to adapt.

Another potentially detrimental aspect of the Bill's proposed amendments is that in funding endowments, less money would be readily available for projects in need of immediate funding. This is due, of course, to the large sums needed to initiate an endowment fund. Potentially, that would deny projects immediate funding in the short term. However, the benefits of establishing an endowment fund that can provide funding for an unfixed and prolonged period may prove more advantageous and beneficial in the long run.

As I understand it, the legal position for an endowment is that the money is conferred upon that endowment in perpetuity. Indeed, the Bill's amendment to section 44 of the 1993 Act specifically refers to "permanent endowment". Of course, that has the considerable advantage for the recipient bodies of guaranteed continuity of income, and overcomes the problems faced by many bodies currently in receipt of lottery funds, including charities, when their short-term funding—usually of three to five years—comes to an end. But what happens to endowed funds if the recipient body ceases to exist, for whatever reason? Does existing legislation allow sufficient control to avoid funds falling into the wrong hands or being misappropriated in any way? Who would have the ultimate responsibility? Would it be the recipient charity controlling the endowment, or the lottery distributing body that countenanced the funding to the endowment in the first place?

This Bill highlights an anomaly in the original National Lottery etc. Act which denied the funding of endowments by omitting it from the defined expenditure of the various funding distribution boards. No reason has been specified for denying funding of, or contribution to, endowment funds. Since the original Act, the NESTA fund has provided a framework, and precedents, for the establishment of endowments in all areas of national lottery funding.

As I have said, the short-term effects of a change may be detrimental in denying money to organisations that require immediate funding, as the cash will be directed into the establishment of an endowment fund. However, by allowing the funding of endowments, the long-term benefits include prolonged and sustained funding to worthwhile projects.

On this side of the House, we will need reassurance on the technical issues that the Bill raises. However, we are confident that those can be teased out in Committee. The lottery has been a major success since its introduction by the Government of the former Member for Huntingdon. Nevertheless, it is in need of reform to meet changing circumstances. We believe that the Bill introduces welcome—although overdue—reform. We intend to give it a fair wind on this, its Second Reading.

1.11 pm

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): I add my congratulations to the hon. Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Simpson) on the persuasive way in which he introduced the Bill. He has made great efforts to ensure that this is a non-partisan, cross-party Bill. He has involved the hon. Member for Great Yarmouth (Mr. Wright)—from the opposite side of the House—as well as my hon. Friend the Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb), who I am sure would want me to do all I can to expedite the progress of the Bill.

The hon. Member for Mid-Norfolk highlighted something that I recognise from constituency work. Organisations that are involved with carers face particular difficulties in raising funding. It is a difficult and unique problem. In my constituency, there is a wonderful group called Home Link, which is associated with St. Augustine's church. The group specialises in providing day respite care for carers. Carers come, and their elderly or disabled relatives are left for the day. Such organisations perform an enormously valuable social function, but they genuinely find it difficult to raise funding because they fall down the crack between health and social services. They may get a bit of cash now and then from hospitals, but they are not directly related to health care and do not provide mainstream primary hospital care; similarly, social services departments are always strapped for cash and are therefore reluctant to take on optional items such as respite care. As a result, such groups struggle constantly. They have to pay professional fundraisers and find themselves on a perpetual treadmill of fundraising activities. I can therefore see the logic of what the hon. Member for Mid-Norfolk is proposing. Secure, long-term funding that provides an income stream is exactly what such groups require to give them stability.

Michael Fabricant: I am interested in what the hon. Gentleman says. I feel strongly that funding of this type should not be used to breach the additionality principle, but does the hon. Gentleman feel that hospices should be considered in this discussion? Although partly funded by the state, they are mainly funded by charitable organisations.

Dr. Cable: That is a sensible and helpful suggestion, and I am sure that hospices could be included if this Bill progresses. The basic problem that hospices face is a lack of government support. Many of us have tried to address that issue.

The hon. Member for North-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Moss) spoke about NESTA. It provides a legal precedent and it also handles large amounts of money. I understand that the endowment for NESTA is about £200 million. That involves a substantial undertaking and provides a lot of useful funding, particularly in scientific innovation and the arts.

My final point is not a criticism of the Bill, but I would like to ask a question that the Minister may also wish to address. What effect will this type of approach to the use of lottery funding have on the overall success of the lottery?

Currently, we are not dealing with a successful concern; the lottery is in considerable trouble and people are increasingly reluctant to use it. There are many reasons for that. Lotteries all over the world peak and then decline as people become used to them and get bored. There may be a particular problem for the UK lottery because it has such huge jackpot prizes with a small tail of lesser prizes, so the incentive to keep playing it is eroded.

A subsidiary reason for the loss of appeal is that many punters see only a distant connection between the money that they invest and the good causes. There is a danger that endowments might make that problem worse. The punter putting in his or her money will not see the end product because the money will go into a financial investment vehicle, although of course it will be working for good causes. Considerable promotion will be required to explain to the public that endowment is a useful good cause and that they will not lose the direct connection between the money that they put on the lottery today and the money given to good causes tomorrow. That is a psychological danger and it should be addressed, although it is not a fundamental argument against the proposals. It is part of the lottery problem.

Michael Fabricant: The hon. Gentleman raises an interesting point. When we get some of our own money back from the European Union, we have to erect a big plaque and a flag to show that it is EU money, so perhaps it should be compulsory to do something similar for anything funded under the auspices of the Bill—shortly, I hope, to become an Act. Perhaps the Minister might consider that point.

Dr. Cable: In my area, such appreciation is advertised and expressed to the fund for most projects that receive substantial lottery funding, but I am not sure that we should make that practice highly prescriptive, nor what penalties should be imposed on charities that do not show due appreciation. However, the hon. Gentleman obviously has a fund of ideas, so perhaps he should make a speech and give us the benefit of them.

That is the limit of my contribution. I acknowledge the effective way in which the hon. Member for Mid-Norfolk introduced the Bill. I support him and my colleagues and hope that we can consider the more technical aspects in Committee in due course.

1.17 pm

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): My chance to speak has come sooner than I anticipated; I am grateful to you for calling me, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Simpson) on his ingenuity in coming so high in the ballot and on his good sense in promoting the Bill. I was in the Chamber when the earlier Bill was discussed. It had support on both sides of the House and only the general election, which sadly had to come about, meant that it did not pass at that time.

The hon. Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey), who was then the Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, said:

> "The Government sympathise with what my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North"—

as has been said, the hon. Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) was the promoter of the original Bill—

> "is trying to achieve. We may wish to offer technical improvements should his Bill make further progress, but we shall not oppose it today."—[*Official Report*, 23 March 2001; Vol. 365, c. 621.]

I hope that the Department of Culture, Media and Sport will treat my hon. Friend's Bill in the same way—*[Interruption.]*. He nods in affirmation. There will not be a general election in the immediate future, although one might wonder about that given the way things are going, so I hope that the Bill will become law sooner rather than later.

I very much welcome the Bill. As my hon. Friend has already pointed out, one in seven people are carers and the Bill is particularly directed at the National Lottery Charities Board. The measure would provide many opportunities for lottery money to be used to support carers throughout the country. However, as I said in my intervention on the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable), the money need not be used only for that; some of it could also be used for hospices, because the Government do not support hospices at present.

Many people have been touched by hospices, either because relatives are there or because they work in charities that support hospices. I have a hospice in my constituency—the St. Giles hospice—and huge amounts of effort go into supporting it. If it could receive additional support by virtue of this Bill becoming an Act, many people will appreciate it.

As others have pointed out, this measure has expanded since the original Bill, as it will also take into its orbit the other lottery boards. At the moment, there is a lack of clarity. I mentioned to my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Norfolk that the Select Committee, under the flamboyant chairmanship of the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman),

[Michael Fabricant]

examined the funding of organisations by lotteries. It was accepted that, often, large grants are given to museums, theatres and so on, which then find that they do not have the money to fund running costs. I am therefore particularly pleased that this Bill will enable lottery boards to provide endowments—if those are the most suitable means—for organisations such as theatres and museums. I suppose that I should mention that one museum in my constituency, the Erasmus Darwin museum, would be a particularly suitable recipient of such funds. That would provide additional flexibility to organisations such as the Arts Council and the Heritage Lottery Fund to provide funding for those organisations, which are so worth while.

I appreciate, however, the caveats that were raised by my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Moss). Controls must exist to ensure that, over time, moneys received from long-term endowments are used wisely and as was originally planned. I hope that the Minister will assure me and other Members that such provisions will be in place to ensure that moneys cannot be misused.

The hon. Member for Twickenham talked about the fact that moneys coming into the lotteries have fallen. That is true. Their total income has fallen by something in the order of 5 per cent. since April. Camelot says that interest in the main lotto game is declining for all sorts of reasons, one of which, as the hon. Gentleman pointed out, was simply familiarity with lotteries. That was not helped by somebody—I think she was the chief executive of Camelot—stating the obvious fact that one stands a greater chance of being struck by lightning than of winning £6 million or more. For whatever reason, however, income has fallen.

Camelot has said that one reason why interest in lotteries has fallen is that grants have been made to unpopular causes. It would be interesting to consider a couple of examples. The Rhondda Community Development Association received £200,000, which sounds fine until we find that the money was to improve the lives of Bolivian miners. At least a kind of synergy exists between Bolivian miners and miners in the Rhondda. The Blue Cross animal charity, however, received more than £180,000 to expand a helpline for mourners of pets. When income has fallen by 5 per cent., and there are so many worthwhile causes, one wonders about grants to mourners of pets. I remember once being mugged, and I had ladies from Victim Support constantly phoning me up, and I had to say, "Actually, I'm okay." If Victim Support does not receive lottery money, why should mourners of pets do so?

To me, the most amusing example, however, was the £295,000 given to a Worcestershire charity to breed giant guinea pigs in Peru. I do not know about you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I have walked in Peru, and I can tell you that giant guinea pigs are not kept as pets in Peru; they are eaten. I have to confess—I know that I will receive many letters for having done so—that I have eaten a giant guinea pig in Peru.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. I should tell the hon. Gentleman that my son's girlfriend is currently in Peru, but that has as much relevance to the debate as his comments.

Michael Fabricant: I am fascinated to know that, Sir. I only hope that your son's girlfriend does not try a giant guinea pig in Peru or elsewhere.

We must think wisely and carefully about where the money goes. It is particularly poignant to learn that the Royal British Legion was refused £500,000 for a residential home and that the Battle of Britain Historical Society was refused money for a memorial. We must always consider carefully how the money is spent. On balance, the Bill is overdue. Personally, I think that it should not be called the National Lottery (Funding of Endowments) Bill but simply the Norfolk Bill. I commend all Norfolk Members as well as the *Eastern Daily Press* on being its progenitors.

1.26 pm

Mr. Bill Wiggin (Leominster): It is a great pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant), who is fast becoming a national treasure. I wish that he had time to tell us how the guinea pig tasted before he was stopped in his tracks.

The lottery has not always been disastrous in its handing out of funds. I should like to touch on one or two successful appeals in my constituency. Herefordshire Headway provides education, day care and rehabilitation for adults with brain injury, and was lucky enough to receive £198,000. Bromyard public hall, Age Concern Leominster, and North Herefordshire and Tenbury area council for voluntary service all received lottery funding, for which they are extremely grateful. I was deeply concerned that my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Simpson) found that it was occasionally difficult for a Member of Parliament to be constructive. I suspect that he was referring to his time in the Whips Office.

It is important to declare my interest as a trustee of the Eveson charitable trust, which gives large donations to charities. The Bishop of Hereford, other trustees and I spend a great deal of time and effort to try to ensure that the best causes receive funding and focus particularly on who will do the most good locally. I do not envy people who have the job of making such decisions on behalf of the lottery. It would be a tragedy if they were prohibited from giving endowments, so I hope that the Bill is successful in altering that. I should also like to declare an interest as someone who has been lucky enough to get five numbers in the lottery. Unfortunately, I was part of a large syndicate of 18 colleagues, and we won the princely sum of £25 each. I sat next to the young man who chose the numbers and I was appalled to overhear a colleague say, "Well, why didn't you get the sixth one right, you idiot?" That just shows how ungrateful some people can be.

When looking at endowments to charities, we should remember that their purpose is to ensure that charities' good work continues. I recall a visit to the volunteer bureau in Leominster, where I witnessed something that most Members who have visited such bureaux will have witnessed. People were trying desperately hard to do something good—working hard for charity—only to find that halfway through their term they had to turn their attention away from charitable work and start to concentrate on funding their work for the next three years. Endowments would make that unnecessary, so the proposed change is thoroughly commendable.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield for mentioning the hospice movement. I am a patron of St. Michael's hospice in Bartestree in my constituency. Palliative care touches people so intensely personally, and the Government should consider the funding of it.

I am pleased to have had an opportunity to speak on this important subject. Like all those involved in charitable work, I believe that we should do it to the best of our ability and ensure that the work continues unabated. To that end, I support the Bill.

1.30 pm

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Richard Caborn): I congratulate the hon. Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Simpson) on his successful introduction of the Bill. As many hon. Members have said, it is pleasing that he took the opportunity afforded to him to bring the Bill before the House. I know how much the issue addressed by the Bill means to the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues in the wider Norfolk constituencies, many of whom are present and have contributed to the debate.

I put on record a tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) who, as has been mentioned, introduced a similar Bill back in 2001, seeking at the time to apply the Bill's provisions solely to the Community Fund. My hon. Friend's Bill reached its Third Reading before the general election intervened to prevent further consideration. That was unfortunate, to some more so than to others. Although we believed the Bill to be technically flawed, as my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey) explained from the Front Bench, we were sympathetic to the principle. That, together with the help of my Department, has enabled the hon. Member for Mid-Norfolk to produce a Bill that is technically sounder than the previous one.

It would be remiss of me not to mention the comments of the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) about the lottery in general and the subject of good causes in particular. Several hon. Members have referred to their experience with the lottery. I remind the House what an institution the lottery is, and credit for its existence is due to both sides of the House. The lottery has raised £12.4 billion for good causes. One or two have been highlighted today, including guinea pigs in Peru. That £12.4 billion has benefited 127,000 individual projects. Independent audit has shown the UK lottery to be among the most efficient lottery operators in the world, and it is considered to return more money to good causes than do lotteries in many other countries. The lotto, which is a large part of the portfolio—Camelot is looking into that—ranks in the top two lottos in the world. By any standards, it has been a huge success.

Bob Spink (Castle Point): I am listening carefully to the Minister. Does he accept that it would help the lottery to get more money in and facilitate endowments under the Bill if we could attract more support for the lottery? One way of doing that is to ensure that the lottery money is spread more evenly among the constituencies, and that constituencies such as mine, which receive only the bottom 5 per cent. of receipts, receive more lottery funds.

Mr. Caborn: The hon. Gentleman was successful in raising questions on the matter a little while ago, and I responded in detail. He knows that, with agreement across the House, we have tried to refine the distribution of lottery receipts for good causes, and we will continue to work at that. I told him that I would write to him about the possibility of his constituents making more applications—they can get the money only if they make an application, and unfortunately his constituents had not made as many applications as others.

Finally on that point, I have had discussions—as late as this week—with Camelot about hon. Members' genuine concerns about the decline in lottery sales, although, as I say, such things are relative and must be put in context. Camelot is very mindful of that and, I think, will produce some innovatory ideas about how it can return to the growth path and encourage more people to participate.

I wish to say very genuinely that although it is easy to make fun of one or two of the causes being supported, it is incumbent on all hon. Members to get behind the lottery because at the end of the day all our constituents gain from it. If hon. Members on both sides of the House can agree on that, it will be a win-win situation for everyone. Indeed, at the beginning of this month the tally was that about £135 million had been awarded to good causes just in Norfolk, including £21.6 million from the Community Fund to charitable and voluntary bodies.

We have heard very firmly that the Bill was originally inspired by the *Eastern Daily Press* "We Care 2000" appeal, which was launched back in October 1998, with the aim of raising £1 million to establish an endowment fund entitled "The Norfolk Millennium Trust for Carers". So I join many hon. Members in saying "Thank you very much" to the *Eastern Daily Press*, particularly its editor and deputy editor, as well as the fund's trustees who have undoubtedly done a sterling job.

It is pleasing that, from time to time, the House focuses on groups of people throughout the country. We sometimes forget carers. Indeed, they are the unsung heroes who deserve our admiration and support for the work they do week in, week out; year in, year out. It is great that the House can acknowledge that, and a paper, such as the *Eastern Daily Press*, can bring that to the fore.

It is unfortunate that the existing lottery legislation does not expressly refer to the power of distributors to fund endowments. I am sure that it was not the deliberate intention, when the National Lottery etc. Act 1993 was originally drafted, to prevent any distributor from awarding grants to establish or augment endowment funds, so it is good that we can take this opportunity to tidy up the legislation in the way that the Bill will allow.

I asked my office to take a quick look at the other endowments, as we tend to home in on the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts,

[Mr. Caborn]

which is the big one. I wish to say briefly that the New Opportunities Fund has given £50 million to a 10-year endowment, as part of the fair share initiative. The Millennium Commission has awarded £16 million, as a 10-year expendable endowment, to the millennium seed bank. Under the stabilisation and recovery programme, the Arts Council of England has given three awards to endowments, totalling less than £2 million. The Heritage Lottery Fund has also given a few awards to endowments—probably three or four—totalling about £15 million. So we can see that endowments have been used effectively to top up or stabilise certain funding.

I hope that we can tidy up the legislation that is already on the statute book That is why I welcome the Bill, which expressly provides all distributors, including the Community Fund, with the power to use lottery money to set up or contribute to endowments if they choose to do so. As the hon. Member for Mid-Norfolk has highlighted, the Bill will clarify that all the distributing bodies have powers to fund endowments, so it will ensure that charitable bodies are not put at a disadvantage in gaining access to lottery funding. Expressly enabling charities to create or augment endowment funds through lottery money would allow voluntary sector organisations to manage their funds much more effectively.

The Bill also fits in well with the key theme emerging from the Department's review of lottery distribution, and I refer the hon. Member for Twickenham to the review that we have undertaken. A number of announcements have been made earlier this week, including on bringing together the community programme and the NOF.

The general thrust of that consultation has been mentioned in the debate, and we must ensure that lottery decision making ties in with what people believe the lottery should be used for in their localities. That would help to bring certainty back, and we will endeavour to achieve that over the coming months and years. Making lottery funds more responsive to the needs and priorities of local communities is important. Giving distributors express powers to fund endowments will give them much more flexibility to respond to the needs of applicants and help to give charitable organisations a little more flexibility in managing their resources.

I would now like to respond to some concerns highlighted in the debate. Several hon. Members asked about the powers that we would have to make sure that the moneys would continue to be spent well. Section 23(3) of the National Lottery etc. Act 1993 gives the Secretary of State the power to issue a statement on financial requirements to each distributing body. It is quite a wide power, so the House can be reasonably certain that we will keep control of the matter. However, it is always possible for the House to challenge the Department or the Secretary of State.

We recognise the concerns expressed over the value for money of grants to endowment funds. Although endowment funds can be a useful way of providing long-term revenue funding for voluntary bodies and enable them to manage their funds in a more effective way, it is true—we have had experience of this—that they require large sums of money up front to provide a reasonable level of revenue in the longer term and that future income levels are subject to variations in interest rates. Nevertheless, I do not believe that those factors should prevent us from clarifying the powers of distributors in this area. As has been suggested, this is a permissive, rather than mandatory measure, enabling distributors to grant funding for endowments should they choose to do so. It will be a judgment for the distributors.

There is little evidence that distributors intend to use the power on a regular basis or that they would be flooded with applications for grants to endowment funds. Nevertheless, I can announce that, should this Bill proceed—I hope that it will—my Department will issue guidance to distributors on this matter, and that a draft of the guidance will be made available to peers during the Lords stages of the Bill.

Another related issue has been the effect of the measure on non-endowment applications. As I have already said, endowment funds can and do tie up large sums of money in the short term. This is, however, a factor that distributors will need to bear in mind in the grant assessment process against other, non-endowment applications. I expect this issue to be flagged up in my Department's guidance note to distributors. Distributors will need to make difficult decisions on the best use of lottery funding, but it should be remembered that they already have to make hard choices in assessing grant applications. The contributions of hon. Members have already made that clear, and there will be nothing to prevent bodies from applying for non-endowment funding.

This has been a good debate and the Bill has received all-party support. However, when I read the *Hansard* report of the previous debate on the issue, I saw that the then right hon. Member for South Norfolk—now Lord MacGregor of Pulham Market—made a number of predictions. I see that the hon. Member for Mid-Norfolk has not gone that down route, but Lord MacGregor responded to the statements that my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) had made in the opening remarks of that debate by saying:

> "I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his success in the ballot, and I am delighted that he has chosen this subject. I agree with everything that he said, apart from two points. In his tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for North Norfolk (Mr. Prior), he suggested that his seat might be in jeopardy. I assure him that that is not the case. My hon. Friend has done remarkable work in his constituency, which will be well rewarded by an increased majority."

The then hon. Member for North Norfolk lost his seat. Lord MacGregor continued:

> "The other point on which I disagreed with the hon. Gentleman was when he said that he hoped to be performing in one of the appeal's charitable concerts in the summer. I do not know when the election will be, but I am sure that he is hoping that it will be way beyond the summer, because I am sure that he will not want to participate as an ex-Member."—[*Official Report*, 23 March 2001; Vol. 365, c. 587.]

My hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North was re-elected. Those predictions were not very accurate.

In our view, the Bill is compatible with the European convention on human rights. As the hon. Member for Mid-Norfolk said, my Department has also prepared a regulatory impact assessment for the Bill that I will place in the Libraries of both Houses.

We consider the Bill useful, and I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for introducing it. It will clarify the powers of all distributors to fund endowments should they choose to do so, and will put charities on a footing equal to that of other applicants for lottery grants. I am happy to offer the Government's support.

1.45 pm

Mr. Keith Simpson: I shall speak briefly, because another hon. Member wishes to speak on his Bill.

I am much heartened by the support of a number of hon. Members. I thank the hon. Member for Great Yarmouth (Mr. Wright) for his support, and for what he said about the impact of charities on his constituency. The hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) rightly raised points about the future of the national lottery, as did my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Moss), who also raised technical issues that I hope will be dealt with in Committee if I am lucky enough to secure a Second Reading. I thank him for his generous support. My hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield (Mr. Fabricant) provided strong support; we shall probably never know about the giant guinea pigs in Peru, but they may be the subject of a future Adjournment debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin) was also very supportive.

I thank the Minister for his comments and his general support. I was grateful for the technical help that I received from officials in his Department. He mentioned the former Member for North Norfolk, my friend David Prior. I know that, despite his slightly chiding comment, the Minister will accept that David Prior raised thousands of pounds for the *Eastern Daily Press* "We Care 2000" campaign. I also know that Members on both sides of the House believe he will be a great success as chairman of the Norwich and Norfolk hospital trust.

Bill read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 63 (Committal of Bills).

Marine Safety Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

1.47 pm

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Bill principally concerns merchant vessels. It contains exclusions for naval vessels and Government ships. I was assisted in its preparation by the Secretary of State's representative Robin Middleton—of whom more later—and John Mairs of the Department of Transport, as well as their staff. I thank them all for their advice, and for their hard work in drafting the Bill.

I have always been fascinated by the sea. Although I now live inland and represent an inland constituency, I was born on the banks of the River Douglas, which flows into the Ribble and out to sea in an estuary between Southport and Lytham St. Anne's. I was once quite familiar with the Lancashire coastline, including the dangerous Ribble marshes. My secondary school education was in Southport, and I also attended the local technical college. My father's business interests often took him to Liverpool and he let me travel with him—usually by lorry—to the docks to pick up cattle food for a mill in our village, Tarleton, on the west Lancashire plain.

In those days, the Liverpool docks were extremely busy with the transatlantic trade. The largest ships in the world visited them—both merchant ships and cruise liners owned by famous companies such as Cunard and P&O. Liverpool had an overhead railway—long since demolished, sadly—which ran the full length of the docks. My father and I often took a return trip on the railways just to get a glimpse of those impressively large ships.

I have had few regrets in my life, but one is that I never learned to sail. Another is that I have never owned a boat, although one of the happiest times in my life was spent crewing a catamaran hired in Teignmouth along the French coast and around the Channel islands.

Even though nearly all my constituents are landlubbers, many of them—possibly all—are dependent on the sea in one way or another, so the Bill is as relevant to them as to any coastal constituent. Some of us use cruise ships; others cross the seas using ro-ro ferries, hovercraft or other means of marine transport. In any case, most of us are reliant on goods transported by merchant vessels. I am told that worldwide trade by sea has increased significantly and is still increasing. At the same time, fortunately, the number of incidents at sea is going down. Nevertheless there are still far too many accidents involving shipping, and many lives are still lost at sea.

When I was elected to Parliament in 1997, my attention was drawn to the existence of the all-party parliamentary MV Derbyshire group. Like the existing members of the group at that time, I was astonished by how long it had taken to get justice for those who had sailed on that ship, lost their lives and, in the case of the crew, even been accused of negligence; but that is another story, which we have placed on the record previously.

[Dr. Brian Iddon]

Nevertheless, it is a sad fact that bulk carriers are still going down at the rate of one a month worldwide. Since the Derbyshire sank in 1980, 3,000 seafarers have lost their lives on bulk carriers alone. The MV Derbyshire group now concentrates on improvements in marine safety. That is why I have decided to take charge of this Bill, which I truly hope will have the Government's support and that of all the Opposition parties.

We are never far away from a major disaster at sea. The most recent incidents best known to us are the sinking of the Tricolor and the loss of the Prestige, noteworthy for the fact that the Spanish authorities refused to give the Prestige a place of refuge, which might have allowed most of its oil to be offloaded. Of course, pollution is a common consequence of sea disasters, and that is what the Bill is partly about: avoiding pollution and dealing with it when it occurs.

A national contingency plan for marine pollution from shipping and offshore installations exists. Command and control of the tasks associated with a major maritime incident involving pollution, both marine and terrestrial, is divided into four distinct theatres of operation: search and rescue, salvage, clean-up of the sea and clean-up of the shoreline.

Let me give the House some statistics, because no debate in this place is complete without them. Currently the Maritime and Coastguard Agency—MCA—receives more than 1,000 reports of pollution incidents a year. Between 6 October 1999 and 31 December 2002, the SOSREP was involved in a total of 262 incidents and was required to give directions in 30 of those. In 30 of those incidents that he was involved in, there was a spillage of oil greater than half a litre. The incidents are almost equally spread between summer and winter seasons. They involve all kinds of ships, most commonly general cargo vessels, 53 incidents; fishing vessels, 45 incidents; tankers, 34 incidents; and bulk carriers, 23 incidents. There were 65 engine failures, 52 groundings of vessels, 38 collisions and 25 fires amongst the incidents involving the SOSREP during that period.

In the 10 years from 1991 to 2001, there were 347 fires on vessels within the United Kingdom 12-mile limit. On 21 December 1997, for example, the Kukawa, a ro-ro cargo vessel, developed an engine room fire 25 miles north-west of Guernsey, which spread into the accommodation. The fire services of both Guernsey and Cornwall were involved. The ship was towed into Falmouth and the fire extinguished, an incident that lasted three days. This is the important point. A court ruling declared that the fire services could not recover their costs, which was a serious blow to offshore firefighting provision in the UK.

The Suffolk fire service's last offshore incident was extinguishing a fire in the engine room of the passenger ferry Norsea, off Norfolk on 2 September 2002. Firemen were airlifted to the ship to assist the crew. Funding problems have caused them to revoke their declared facility status today.

Public attention in the UK focused on the impact of major oil pollution in March 1967 when the tanker Torrey Canyon hit the Seven Stones rocks between the Scilly Isles and Land's End.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): Sounds like Tory Canyon.

Dr. Iddon: I beg the House's pardon.

Michael Fabricant: Do not blame us.

Dr. Iddon: I am fixated on Tories. The pace of interest quickened with the 1993 Braer disaster in the Shetlands, which led to a report by Lord Donaldson that resulted in the strategic placement around our coast of the first Government emergency towing vessels. Today, those number four. Then came the Sea Empress disaster, as recently as 1996.

Between 1967 and 1996, a statutory basis for the Government's powers of intervention in such incidents was created. Those are enshrined in the Merchant Shipping Act 1995, which was amended by the Merchant Shipping and Maritime Security Act 1997. Following the Sea Empress incident at Milford Haven, Lord Donaldson conducted a review of salvage and intervention, and of their command and control. His report was published in March 1999, and one of its recommendations was the establishment of a Secretary of State's representative, or SOSREP, as the post has become known.

The holder of that post, Robin Middleton, is based at the MCA's headquarters in Southampton. The MCA came into being on 1 April 1998 as a result of the merger between the Marine Safety Agency and the Coastguard Agency. Lord Donaldson recommended that the

"SOSREP must be a considerable, and, preferably, charismatic, personality".

I can assure the House that Robin Middleton certainly is that. Although his office is based in the MCA's headquarters, he is independent of it and answerable directly to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport. Of course, the SOSREP works extremely closely with the MCA.

I emphasise that the SOSREP's intervention powers are regarded as ones to be used only in exceptional circumstances. Provided that the control of an incident at sea is going well, the SOSREP merely monitors that incident. Only in cases that appear to be getting out of hand will he take over control and command of the incident.

Although our coastal waters extend for 12 miles around the UK coastline, the UK's pollution zone—the zone of responsibility for dealing with marine pollution or even the threat of it—extends 200 miles seaward, save where it meets the pollution zone of another state. That happens in the English channel, the North sea and the Irish sea.

Since the post of SOSREP was established, two gaps have been identified in his powers, which the Bill is intended to rectify. Clause 1 would give the SOSREP powers to make directions when he takes over an incident, which he does not possess. The 1995 Act would be amended by the insertion of proposed new section 108A in part 4. The safety directions that clause 1 refers to are set out in schedule 1, which would become new schedule 3A to the Act.

One of the greatest difficulties for those who deal with such incidents is finding a place of refuge for a stricken vessel. Under section 137 of the 1995 Act, as amended, the SOSREP may give directions to the owner, master or pilot of a vessel, the salvor and the harbourmaster, or the harbour authority where the vessel is in waters that are regulated or managed by a harbour authority. However, in an incident, the SOSREP cannot issue a direction to the riparian owners and managers of facilities such as berths, wharves and jetties to require them to make their facilities available to help to deal with that incident.

My Bill would empower the SOSREP to commandeer such facilities, as and when they are required, to deal much more effectively with a stricken vessel. Let me illustrate that through an important real-life example. In July last year, a fully laden oil tanker was approaching a jetty to unload its cargo when it suffered an engine fault. The master did not want to shut down his engines at sea in case he could not restart them and lost control of the ship. For purely economic reasons, a leading oil company would not allow that tanker to berth at its jetty to offload the oil. That might have prevented other tankers berthing while the ship's engines were being repaired. Instead the ship was sent out to sea again in the eye of a gale. Clearly, that was an unsafe practice that could have had serious consequences. My Bill would give the SOSREP the powers to direct that such ships should be berthed in order to offload their cargoes of oil. Fortunately, the SOSREP in that case was able to issue a direction to the ship's master for him to re-enter fresh water in Milford Haven and a tug was placed on standby.

Lord Donaldson recommended in his report, on page 13, paragraph 29 and again on page 26, paragraph 2.9, that the Government be given the powers to require the aid of

> "the riparian owners or managers of facilities, such as berths, wharfs and jetties, which may well be required to moor a stricken vessel whilst a potentially polluting cargo is discharged."

Without going into too much detail, because the details are given in the explanatory notes, schedule 1 to the Bill, which will become schedule 3A to the 1995 Act and entitled "Safety directions", details the circumstances under which those powers would be activated and enforced. The ships to which the schedule applies are detailed too, and allowances are contained in the Bill for the Government to pay compensation as and when required to do so, for interruption of business when a facility is put out of commercial use for some time.

Bob Spink (Castle Point): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman. He has recognised expertise in this area. Samuel Plimsoll, a former Member of the House, would be proud of him. I am here to support the hon. Gentleman. Does he have any estimate of the number of times that the SOSREP might be called on to use those powers in the Bill?

Dr. Iddon: I am told by those who know better than me that private facilities would be commandeered—I think that that is what the hon. Gentleman is referring to—on very few occasions. I do not think anyone could put an actual number on it.

The circumstances under which costs can be recovered through the ship's owners are detailed in the schedule. Various definitions that apply to the Bill are contained therein. Fines for non-compliance with a SOSREP's directions are also identified. Disputes between aggrieved parties will lie with the admiralty jurisdiction of the High Court and Court of Session.

Many disasters at sea involve a vessel on fire. Clause 2 allows an important amendment to section 3 of the Fire Services Act 1947, which is concerned with the supplementary powers of fire authorities. At the moment, a fire service's legal authority ends at the low water mark of a coastal fire service. Because of that, there have been problems recently. It has been extremely difficult or even impossible for a coastal fire service to recover its costs for fighting a fire on board a ship in an estuary, a harbour or out at sea.

Coastal fire services have added burdens in that their personnel have to be highly trained to deal with ship fires. Obviously, that requires special skills and equipment and can be even more dangerous than fighting a terrestrial fire. Because of the difficulties that I have outlined, the number of coastal fire services willing to train personnel to deal with those incidents is declining. My Bill is intended to halt or even to reverse that decline by making it far easier for those services to recover their costs outside the borders of their current legal authority. At a recent meeting of the offshore firefighting working group of the Department for Transport, it was reported that only 10 fire brigades are still prepared to consider providing offshore firefighting services. That is very serious.

Subsection (2) of clause 2 amends section 3(1)(e) of the 1947 Act to put it beyond doubt that a fire authority may use its brigade for purposes other than firefighting in its area, in the area of another fire authority or at sea especially. Subsection (3) amends that section to include a provision that gives fire authorities in England and Wales and in the Scilly Isles power to recover costs they incur in fighting fires at sea outside any fire authority area. A fire at sea could be beyond territorial limits, perhaps on a ship or an offshore installation such as an oil rig or pontoon.

Clause 3 refers to schedules 2 and 3, which cover the minor and consequential amendments to the Dangerous Vessels Act 1985, the Merchant Shipping Act 1995 and the Merchant Shipping and Maritime Security Act 1997 that will follow should the Bill be enacted.

Clause 4 covers commencement of the Act and clause 5 its extent; clause 6 gives its short title.

To summarise, the Bill proposes to confer on the Secretary of State for Transport powers to give directions to the owners of certain facilities used by ships, such as berths, wharves, jetties and so on, to make those facilities available to reduce or prevent pollution and safety hazards caused by ships, and to allow fire authorities to make a charge for firefighting services carried out at sea outside the area of every fire authority.

I hope that I have convinced right hon. and hon. Members of the extreme need for the legislation, and I hope that the House will agree to give my Bill a Second Reading. I commend it to the House.

2.6 pm

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): I congratulate the hon. Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon) both on introducing the Bill and on the lucid way in which he expanded on a complicated piece of legislation; I felt much better educated by the end of his speech.

[Dr. Vincent Cable]

I apologise in advance to the hon. Gentleman and the Minister for having to slip out slightly before the end, because at 3.30 pm I have to be back to meet the owner of a sex club involving what is described as a "group of housemothers". As I opposed the installation of that club in the middle of Twickenham, those people are visiting me to persuade me to be less puritanical—and I hope that the House will agree that that is a suitable reason for my catching my train on time.

As the hon. Gentleman spoke, I began to appreciate the full significance and importance of what he was saying. In an earlier incarnation, I understood the importance of this subject because I worked in an oil company before becoming an MP, and my time there was framed by two major disasters. One of those was the Exxon Valdez, which not only did enormous damage to the coast of Alaska and its wildlife but virtually killed off, in terms of capitalisation, what at the time was the world's largest company—Exxon, which almost sank as a result of the disaster. Shortly before I left the company there was the Piper Alpha disaster, and the terrible loss of life associated with that.

Both those events were reminders of the enormous capacity for damage and loss of life as a result of maritime accidents and the importance of dealing with such matters in a preventive way. One of the key points that emerged from the presentation by the hon. Member for Bolton, South-East was the way in which the authorities have always reacted to disasters. It was in the aftermath of the Braer disaster, and also of the Piper Alpha disaster, that new regulations and procedures were introduced. It was entirely proper to react in that way, but the lesson to learn is that it is better to deal with such problems in anticipation than in retrospect. The hon. Gentleman's Bill is therefore helpful, in that it provides a framework for dealing with such possibilities before they happen rather than after.

I picked up from the hon. Gentleman's speech the fact that the Bill will make three fairly substantial contributions to the law. First, by clearing away some bureaucratic legislative obstacles, it will help to allow a rapid reaction to disasters. A point that he made in the context of the recent disaster off the coasts of France and Spain is that speed is essential: hours, let alone days, are crucial. Everything possible should be done to ensure that there will be no territorial arbitration and no boundary disputes, so that problems can be dealt with rapidly. If the Bill helps in that respect, it will be admirable.

The second point that the hon. Gentleman made is important too. He reminded us that the existing framework of fire legislation is somewhat restrictive and archaic. Several people, including the Government Whip on duty today, the hon. Member for Poplar and Canning Town (Jim Fitzpatrick), have campaigned to have the fire service regulations updated, because they are restrictive and narrow and prevent the fire service from reacting with the flexibility and speed that would be desirable. As the hon. Member for Bolton, South-East correctly explained, there are difficulties with the extra-territorial duties of highly specialised firefighting services. Those are not covered by existing legislation and it is appropriate that we should deal with them.

The Bill makes a third valuable contribution by addressing the issue of funding. We know that fire services are severely stretched financially for a variety of reasons, including pensions. Anything that they are not required to do in a narrow mandatory way will tend to be passed up. I was struck by the information that only 12 fire services can cope with offshore disasters. The principle of fire services recouping costs needs to be treated with care. A few weeks ago, I saw the film "Gangs of New York". It was a reminder of how the fire service used to be funded in the free-for-all days of the 19th century, when competing fire services would turn up and put out the fire depending on whether a suitable amount of cash was available. We do not want to return to those purely market principles of dealing with fires. None the less, the principle of recoupment in limited circumstances, especially if they involve a fire outside territorial waters, is sensible and prudent. It would ensure that fire services are properly reimbursed. There are admirable reasons for pursuing the Bill. I give it my full support and hope that it makes progress.

2.11 pm

Mr. John Randall (Uxbridge): I congratulate the hon. Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon) on introducing the Bill. Just over a year ago, I was lucky enough to introduce a private Member's Bill which also dealt with marine issues. Sadly, the Marine Wildlife Conservation Bill foundered on the rocks in another place. I wish the hon. Gentleman better luck.

Conservative Members believe that the Government must do everything possible to protect our environment from pollution damage. Some of the busiest shipping lanes in the world lie close to the British coast and it is imperative that the necessary contingency plans for dealing with marine incidents are in place. That is why we broadly welcome the provisions.

I see from the front page of the excellent explanatory notes accompanying the Bill that they were provided by the Department for Transport with the consent of the promoting Member. I infer from that that the Government not only broadly welcome the Bill, but positively support it. If that is the case, why are the provisions in the form of a private Member's Bill rather than Government legislation? The Minister and I are serving on the Railways and Transport Safety Bill. Although we would have been denied the excellent speech by the hon. Member for Bolton, South-East, the provisions could have been included in that. The same was true of provisions in the recent Aviation (Offences) Bill. Although I do not want to carp too much on that, we should remember the devastation that was caused late last year by the sinking of the Prestige. If the Bill falters on the reef elsewhere, I hope that the Government will consider introducing the proposals in Government time.

Clause 2 would allow fire authorities to charge for firefighting services at sea outside the area of every fire authority. A major research project, the "Sea of Change", was launched last month to review the response by UK fire brigades to incidents at sea. The primary aim of that project team is to research and submit recommendations to the project board, which will co-ordinate the implementation of a local authority fire brigade's integrated response to firefighting, chemical incidents and rescue at sea.

The project has been acknowledged by the United Nations International Maritime Organisation, and expressions of interest in it and its outcomes have been received from Canada, Sweden and Germany. I mention this simply to point out that extensive and thorough work is now being undertaken on the role of fire brigades in marine incidents. Perhaps it would have been slightly more sensible to wait for the project's findings to become a little clearer, so that we could benefit from that research in considering legislative provision.

Figures show that the number of recorded oil tanker accidents off the UK coast has risen from 17 in 1992 to 22 in 1999. Those are the incidents that capture the headlines and the public imagination, but it is worth bearing it in mind that it is operational pollution—day-to-day operational incidents or illegal discharges—that accounts for more than 73 per cent. of incidents. Most of those day-to-day incidents occur in harbour and estuarine areas, most of which are environmentally extremely sensitive.

Shona McIsaac (Cleethorpes): I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's mentioning that point. My constituency has large oil refineries, and oil tankers offload into the pipeline, but the adjacent Humber estuary also contains areas of special scientific interest. Many local residents fear the potential for accidents, so I welcome the Bill.

Mr. Randall: I thank the hon. Lady for that intervention. I know that she takes a great interest in this issue; indeed, I seem to remember her speaking forcefully on behalf of seals.

In the aftermath of major incidents such as the Braer in 1993 and the Sea Empress in 1996, there are always loud and distinct calls for action. However, it is important to remember that, alongside the more major incidents, minor ones such as those that the hon. Lady referred to occur each and every day. Given that 90 per cent. of our overseas trade and 7 per cent. of our internal trade is carried by sea, a huge number of ships ply our waters. That gives rise to the potential for a disaster, and we must be prepared for that.

As was said, the Bill makes provision to confer powers on the Secretary of State to give direction to a person in charge of land next to, or accessible from, UK waters. That is a worthwhile provision, but we should take account of the problem of pollution once it reaches the coast. A key recommendation of the Donaldson inquiry into the Braer disaster, and of the inquiry into the Sea Empress, was for local authorities to have a statutory duty to plan for and undertake shoreline clean-ups following marine pollution incidents.

That was mentioned in the National Audit Office report that was published at the end of last year. It states that the Government

> "should consider the case for taking powers to require all coastal local authorities to have up to date oil spill contingency plans consistent with the National Contingency Plans, so that the United Kingdom as a whole is properly prepared to deal with maritime pollution incidents in compliance with international conventions."

Perhaps I am getting a little old and cynical, but the reason why there is no statutory duty on local authorities to plan for, and to undertake, shoreline clean-ups might be because the Government would have to fund the additional responsibility.

Raising this issue enables me to highlight current general deficiencies in the resourcing provided for local authority emergency planners, who are often the unseen saviours in the event of a major incident such as an oil spillage on our coastline. They have been short-changed in recent years. They face growing responsibilities, yet they have received no corresponding growth in budget or in recognition.

Accidents are a product of human fallibility and error. They cannot be subject to absolute prediction or guaranteed prevention. However, measures can be taken to limit the likelihood of occurrence and to mitigate the degrading environmental consequences. Preventive action is the only option for a disease that has no cure. It is all very well for a national authority to look outwards, beyond its frontiers, to international agreements, but such agreements will count for little unless local authorities are able to act effectively.

The marine ecosystem is a very precious part of our environment; for too long, it has been the Cinderella part of the environment. If a Second Reading is obtained, we will wish this Bill well in its later stages. If it goes to Committee, we will be able to consider its more detailed parts. I hope that it will not founder and that, in time, the Bill will become an Act. If not, I hope that the Government will find sufficient time to introduce legislation, because legislation is needed.

2.20

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. David Jamieson): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon) on securing the slot for this Bill and on the way in which he presented his case. His arguments were well informed and clearly set out—although I would not have expected anything else from him. I noted his long-standing interest in these matters, so it must have given him considerable pleasure to introduce such legislation in the House.

The Government take safety at sea very seriously and we welcome the proposals in this Bill. Any fire is a frightening experience, but a fire on a ship or installation causes unique problems. The fire can be many miles from shore, a ship can be carrying toxic or explosive cargo, and even the act of fighting the fire can cause a ship to lose buoyancy if hoses are used.

Ships' crews are trained in the basics of firefighting. However, nothing can replace the benefits of expertise and specialised equipment that professional firefighters can bring to an emergency. The proposals encourage fire authorities to continue to provide their expert and life-saving services, and I welcome that.

The conferring of powers on the Secretary of State to give directions has been proposed. We saw all too plainly, with the sinking of the oil tanker Prestige off the coast of Spain, the severe damage that can occur when such a vessel gets into difficulty. That incident has caused enormous devastation to the coasts of Spain and France; it is likely that its effects will be felt long into the future. It can be vital for a stricken ship to have access to the kind of facilities that are available on wharves and jetties, where remedial work can take place. The Secretary of State should be given the power to issue directions to the owners of such facilities.

The hon. Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink) asked how often such interventions would take place. I hope that the need for them would be infrequent.

[Mr. David Jamieson]

Nevertheless, an incident may be extremely serious and intervention may prevent an enormous amount of pollution from coming on to our shores.

Michael Fabricant: Such proposals risk breaching article 1 of protocol 1 of the European convention on human rights. Has the Minister's Department considered that?

Mr. Jamieson: I assure the hon. Gentleman that, for all Bills that come before the House, that issue is considered. The promoter of the Bill will have to consider it as well. The Bill consolidates all the existing provisions to issue directions in a single document, and that, too, is welcome.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, South-East reminded us, the United Kingdom has suffered three of the world's largest recorded oil spills: the Torrey Canyon—his pronunciation was correct. [*Interruption.*] The right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) laughs, but he was not in the Chamber earlier when the jokes were being made. Opposition Members were making the jokes, not Labour Members, although when we think about crashing and wreckage, the Tory party comes to mind at the moment.

The Torrey Canyon spillage took place in 1967, with the Braer in 1993 and the Sea Empress in 1996. Indeed, the Sea Empress incident led to Lord Donaldson's recommendation in his "Review of Salvage and Intervention and their Command and Control", published in 1999. In at least one case, permission for the use of facilities was refused and the Bill would make good that deficiency, as my hon. Friend pointed out in his opening contribution. We have learned lessons from those major oil pollution incidents and now make it a high priority to reduce the risk of oil spills and to minimise the impact of any spill that occurs.

My hon. Friend congratulated Department for Transport officials for their work in assisting him. I am pleased that we could offer him that facility for such a worthy measure. I, too, have taken a private Member's Bill on a marine-related matter through the House. Indeed, I was ably assisted by the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst, who is now shadow Leader of the House, so it has been interesting to observe his position on such matters during the past few years. Sometimes, the passage of private Members' Bills can be precarious; they rely on mutual support from both sides of the House. I assure my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, South-East that we shall give him every assistance in getting the Bill through.

The hon. Member for Castle Point, who is unfortunately no longer in his place, made some good points about the powers of the SOSREP to instruct ports to take ships in, although such a facility would be used only rarely.

I, too, congratulate our SOSREP, Robin Middleton. He is astonishingly able and extremely well thought of in the marine world. The difference between the approach taken in the United Kingdom and that taken in most other countries is that our representative is independent of the political process. Although he is ultimately responsible to the Secretary of State, he can act independently.

Questions were asked about the amount of goods that travel by sea around our coast, or to and from the country. I am informed that more than 96 per cent. of the weight of goods going to and from this country are transported by sea. That point is often not generally understood by the public. Such transportation is usually quiet and safe, but when a disaster happens it has an enormous impact.

I hope that the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) has managed to see the sex shop owner. At one stage, I felt that he was at risk of giving us too much information. None the less, he raised several points about the inadequacy of current legislation and I thank him for his support.

The hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall) asked why the provisions could not have been included in another Bill, although the Opposition are always complaining about the size of Bills. The matter was originally going to be dealt with in the Railways and Transport Safety Bill, but we have not yet found parliamentary time for that, so we are happy to support this measure.

I give the Bill my full support and I hope that it receives the full support of the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 63 (Committal of Bills).

Remaining Private Members' Bills

HOUSING (OVERCROWDING) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 4 April.

CROWN EMPLOYMENT (NATIONALITY) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 7 March.

HUMAN FERTILISATION AND EMBRYOLOGY AMENDMENT BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 16 May.

Village Halls

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Kemp.]*

2.30 pm

Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset): I should begin by warning the Minister that this debate, if we are successful in the forthcoming ballots, is merely the beginning of a sequence of similar debates that will emerge from Members of all parties in Dorset, and increasingly, I hope, from rural Members around the country. Our rough intention is to keep holding debates until the point at which the Minister, who I know has a considerable amount of patience, nevertheless eventually loses patience and urges his officials to do something about the problem.

We do not intend to pursue this campaign, however, in any of the vigorous ways that some other campaigns that currently afflict the Minister are being conducted. I assure him that there will be no demonstrations to which he will be subject, other than the occasional and regular Adjournment debate.

The Minister for Rural Affairs and Urban Quality of Life (Alun Michael): I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving good warning of his intentions. In the same spirit, will he recognise in his remarks the increased support that this Government have been giving to village halls, and the way in which we have initiated discussion with those who promote the work of village halls to see what more can be done in future?

Mr. Letwin: Oddly enough, the answer to that is no, as that is not the impression that we have on the ground. I shall certainly welcome the second part of the Minister's remarks, however, in relation to improvements that may come about through discussion.

First, I should explain why we seek to raise the issue of village halls at such a time, when we are faced with the exigencies of the Iraq situation and terrible problems for the Government in law and order, public services and public spending. Why should we concentrate on such an apparently minute issue as village halls? The reason is extremely clear. There is always something that is ostensibly more important and more urgent than village halls. On that principle, over many years, Britain's sewers declined—there was always something more important than dealing with the funding of Britain's once splendid Victorian sewer system. Chancellors of the Exchequer always found something more pressing, and, with the effluxion of time, after about 100 years, the sewers were in a most dreadful condition, as nobody had done anything about them. Village halls stand in danger of being treated in the same sort of way. They are never the most urgent item, so there is a dreadful possibility that they will receive no attention at all.

The second question that I need to address is this: why do village halls matter? Someone might reasonably ask: why do we not concentrate on the dreadful problems of our inner city estates, where drugs are rife, gangs control the estates, pimps organise young girls into prostitution and many people find themselves virtually imprisoned in their high-rise flats as a result of the horrors that afflict them when they go out? Why do we concentrate on villages and village halls when the average village is in so much better a condition than the average inner-city estate? Even the worst village is in much better condition than the worst inner-city estate.

Those of us who care about the promotion of the neighbourly society—as I have preached for the past 18 months in another capacity, it is critical that the nation take steps to reintroduce the neighbourly society in inner-city estates, where it has all but crumbled—know that it is important that we do not allow a slow erosion of that society in places where it still vibrant. It is important that we do not create, slowly and unwittingly, problems in areas that are not at present a problem while we solve, at great expense and with great difficulty, the severe problems in areas that are a problem. Villages fall into the category of areas that, on the whole, display a vibrant neighbourly society, and we must not let it diminish or disappear.

To have a neighbourly society in a village, it is important that the inhabitants know and talk to one another, and understand enough about one another not to fear one another but to regard one another as good neighbours. To encourage that kind of society it is important that there are places where people can naturally meet and talk. The tradition in most villages in my constituency in West Dorset and many other rural areas is that such conversations go on in the pub, the village shop, outside the church and in the village hall. The Minister is as aware as I am—I do not blame him for this any more than he will blame me—that pubs have often disappeared for want of custom as habits have changed. Pubs that serve food survive, but those that do not broadly do not. The Minister will also be aware—neither he nor I is responsible for this either—that church attendance has diminished greatly in the past 50 to 100 years. There is nothing that the Government can be expected to do about that.

There is however something about which the Government could have done something, although I do not blame the Minister personally or his Department. Some Departments have disregarded the policy of Peter Lilley—I am sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I mean my right hon. Friend for Hertford and wherever.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): I think that the right hon. Gentleman means the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley).

Mr. Letwin: I am most grateful, Mr. Deputy Speaker. When my right hon. Friend was Secretary of State for Social Security, he steadfastly refused to remove the arrangement whereby benefits were paid through post offices. The disregard of that long refusal by the relevant Departments under the present Government has led to an accelerated collapse of rural post offices and the shops associated with them. As footfall has diminished, those shops have become increasingly non-viable. I blame the Government for that, but not the Minister.

Steps have now been taken to improve that situation, yet we all know that in many cases, alas, they will not be successful. In too many cases, we are therefore left with only one village institution, at least in villages that do not have a primary school—the village hall. It plays a special role, because it is the place where social capital is built, as it is a site of active participation. People do not go there to be passive recipients as if they were in front of

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[Mr. Letwin]

a television set, but go there to act together, sometimes literally—they may act together in a play—or sing together, engage in auctions to raise money for good causes, have meetings about mutual concerns, or allow their Member of Parliament, as I have been allowed in various villages, to hold a surgery and meet people with particular concerns.

In all these respects, the village hall functions as the centrepiece of the neighbourly society of the village. Its importance has risen rather than declined with the other changes that I mentioned, so it is of the utmost importance that village halls should be supported.

The Minister said he hoped that I would acknowledge the massive efforts that the Government have made to support village halls. For quite a long period, village hall renovation was the order of the day, because lottery funding was available in significant quantities to support bids for the renovation of village halls. I am sure the hon. Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole (Mrs. Brooke) will echo that, as will the Minister's hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Jim Knight), who would have liked to be present and who shares our concerns. Each of us would recognise that for quite a long period, many of our villages were able to obtain funds from the lottery to renew village halls. All over West Dorset there are village halls that testify to the success of that enlightened regime, which persisted into the early years of the present Government.

Now, alas, we find that although it has never been officially acknowledged, the lottery has been virtually closed to applications for the renovation of village halls, at least in my constituency.

Alun Michael *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Letwin: I hope that the Minister will explain why he dissents from that. I shall send him a record of the applications that have been made and the responses—

Mrs. Annette L. Brooke (Mid-Dorset and North Poole): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that with the shrinkage of funds, the applications have become more complicated, and there is a feeling that the goal posts are continually being moved? Perhaps businesses can cope with that, but for volunteers in villages, with all their other activities, that is enormously off-putting for them to carry on. I hope the right hon. Gentleman will agree that we are looking for incentives for people to keep going and keep their villages alive, as they want to do.

Mr. Letwin: The hon. Lady is right. There is undeniably huge complexity. The goal posts do seem to change; the criteria seem to change. In part, that causes a problem because of the difficulties to which she refers—those of keeping up with the need to change the nature of the applications. In part, I fear, the criteria have been altered precisely to push money towards the inner cities. Although I utterly recognise the claim of the inner cities to public funds, I do not believe that measures that effectively exclude many village hall applications are justified.

Alun Michael: I can deal with those points in my response, but it would be unfair not to point out to the right hon. Gentleman that there has been an increase in the amount of finance available to village halls over recent years. I am concerned about targeting and assisting with the quality of applications, which is sometimes a problem. However, the amount of money available to village halls has increased.

Mr. Letwin: All I can tell the Minister is that this is one of those strange events in which the appearance that he presents and the reality as we observe it on the ground appear to differ. There may be many explanations for that, but people who make applications have been informed by officials of his Department and by staff at the lottery that those applications are not likely to succeed, as they are no longer the flavour of the month. If the right hon. Gentleman is not aware of what is being said, he needs to be aware of it. I will present him with a full dossier of evidence about what happened some years back, when village hall applications were repeatedly successful in Dorset, and what has happened in the last year or two, when they have not been successful. He will find it difficult to reconcile that with the general picture that he has probably genuinely been presented with. I do not know what the explanation for the difference is, but whatever it is, the upshot is that in Dorset today it is extraordinarily difficult to raise money. The message coming back to us has been, "Let local funds provide."

In the couple of minutes before I sit down, I wish to point out that that strikes people, at least those in Dorset, as a strange and ironical response. Because of the exigencies of the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the decisions of the Deputy Prime Minister and of the Minister for Local Government and the Regions, Dorset is among those shire counties throughout England that have been forced to raise council tax by an enormous proportion simply to tread water—a matter about which the hon. Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole and I have both lobbied Ministers.

There is no local money currently available for village halls, except in tiny quantities, and it cannot be a substitute for the lottery. I believe that the lottery is an appropriate funding source for village halls. If the Minister knows something about the amounts available and if he can do something to change the situation so that that money can be available once again in Dorset, at least, and perhaps other rural counties too, we would be profoundly grateful—it is certainly needed.

2.45 pm

The Minister for Rural Affairs and Urban Quality of Life (Alun Michael): I am grateful for the opportunity to respond to the debate, partly because I feel passionately about the issue but not least because the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) always brings a serious and mature note to debates in the Chamber. I always find it a pleasure to respond when he initiates an Adjournment debate. It is not the first time that I have had the pleasure of responding to him.

I therefore chide the right hon. Gentleman more gently than I would some of his colleagues for not paying tribute to the Government for the increased help that is being given to village halls. I cannot resist pointing out that it is a bit rich for someone who is a member of the shadow Cabinet of a party that wants to cut public spending by up to 20 per cent. to seek an increase in funding for village halls. The leader of the Conservative party endorsed that as "a rational target"—I think that those were his words. If that £80 billion cut were made, there would be little room for increased spending on village halls.

Mr. Letwin: I certainly shall not prolong things—I do not want to turn this into a cat and dog act—but I should point out that there has never been the slightest suggestion by the Conservative party or, indeed, the Labour party that the total amount available from the lottery should be reduced because, of course, the Government do not control that amount, and the only question is how is it distributed.

Alun Michael: The right hon. Gentleman naturally wishes to narrow his remarks to the lottery, but if that massive £80 billion cut in public expenditure were made there would be precious little left for anything else.

I have recently met Diana Britten, the chairman of the Community Fund, and we discussed how to involve the fund in a series of meetings, led by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, to quantify the funding needs of village halls and to determine how best to meet those needs. My concern is that, although a lot of money is being spent, there are certainly problems locally with individual village halls.

That is why, when I attended the annual general meeting of the association representing village halls a few weeks ago, we were speaking through the opposite ends of a telescope—perhaps I that is not the right phrase, but the right hon. Gentleman will understand what I mean. It was almost as though we were communicating in two languages. The issue is how to ensure that real need can be recognised, that applications are of a high quality, that financing can be targeted and that the job is done properly.

As the right hon. Gentleman has asked me to refer specifically to lottery funds, it is worth pointing out that, in 1996–97, less than £1 million in Community Fund grants went to village halls—£956,397 to be pedantically precise. By 2001–02, the figure had gone up to £17,365,436, and, to be slightly less pedantic, that is roughly a 1,800 per cent. rise. I acknowledge that the amount in 1996–97 was less than the previous year. I have chosen that year simply because it is the pre-election year and it is a reasonable comparison. In 1995–96, the figure was just over £2 million, so even if that year is chosen for the comparison, a massive increase in finances is going in. Despite the fact that smaller sums are available to be distributed from the lottery, the amount going to village halls is about 7 per cent., which remains as it has been since the earliest days of the lottery. The Government support greater expenditure on village halls than has ever been provided from national financial resources in the past. I refer to my experience as a county youth and community officer some years ago on the old South Glamorgan council. The amount of money then available for village halls was minimal, which led to problems of targeting.

To put the matter in context, the Government are doing more than any previous Government to help rural communities and economies. We have not only published the rural White Paper but created the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, with its focus on rural affairs, rural communities and rural economies. For the first time this year, we have a specific public service agreement target that focuses on improving economies and services in rural areas. We are making great progress on rural proofing, which engages Ministers and officials across Whitehall to ensure that the needs of rural areas are targeted. That is an example of co-operation across government.

Mr. Letwin: The Minister has moved off the subject of village halls—briefly, I hope, but I wish to bring him back to the topic. No one denies that the sums increased in the years up to 2001–02. For all I know, they may even have increased in 2002–03. That will be the result of applications that were made some years ago. The question is not the level that is being disbursed at present, but the extent to which people making applications now find that their applications have no prospect of success.

Alun Michael: The fact that far greater finance is going into village halls and has done consistently at an increasing rate over the past few years is certainly a salient point in responding to the claim that village halls are somehow being strangled of funds. I will be quite happy to examine any evidence that the right hon. Gentleman can provide from his area. Dorset may face a specific problem. Perhaps it did rather too well in the past—I do not know. However, we should consider the matter objectively so that we agree about the facts and can then debate policy in an informed manner. That was the flavour of my discussions with the association representing village halls.

Although I want to focus on the position of village halls, I merely wanted to place in context how much the Government are doing to treat seriously the difficult issues of helping the economies and communities in villages across the country. I was at an academic seminar this morning that examined how we identify the social problems of rural areas. That is a big challenge. There are about 8,700 parish councils and about 15,000 parishes, some of which do not have councils. That is an enormous number of small communities, given that, in an urban context, one can target a comparatively small number of highly visible, identifiable and concentrated aspects of social exclusion. The problem of targeting rural areas is different and somehow more challenging even if the concentration of problems in urban areas makes their position appear more problematic.

We certainly recognise the vital role that village halls play in rural communities as multi-purpose community centres and as hubs for village life. However, I should repeat that the village hall is not the only body to play that role. The right hon. Gentleman referred to church halls, and some places have a local British Legion and a number of community meeting places. Indeed, there may be over-provision in some small communities,

[Alun Michael]

which may lead to competition for funds. That is why targeting becomes an important issue. Village halls must be considered in the context of wider community provision at the most local level.

We support the development of active local communities and parish and town councils in a variety of ways. The idea that the village hall is a hub for social activity and social provision fits well with our policy objectives. There is an increasing need for village halls to link their provision with that of commercial and voluntary organisations. There should be joint provision of services across public, voluntary and commercial services.

The available evidence suggests an increase in the number of village halls and meeting places. The Countryside Agency's rural survey of 2000 reported that 85 per cent. of parishes had one in that year, while 72 per cent. had one in 1997. That is probably mostly due to the impact of lottery-funded grant programmes. The statistics must, of course, be treated with a degree of caution, as there have been definitional changes. I am not convinced that we are entirely certain of the picture across the country.

It is difficult to generalise about funding needs—although there is a tendency to do it, as the right hon. Gentleman did in his introduction. The Countryside Agency's research identified a need for less expenditure on the buildings themselves and more on the services and activities involved. Through the community services grant, we are focusing our support on what goes on inside village halls. The right hon. Gentleman will not be surprised to learn, however, that some of the correspondence I receive expresses the opposite view.

The Government are helping to support community activity, but buildings matter too. We are aware of widespread concern about the lack of funds for rebuilding or renovating village halls. I do not think, though, that the problem is entirely a national one. While I have no means of knowing the position in Dorset, in some areas local authorities have withdrawn their support, thinking "This can be left to the Community Fund and the lottery." Traditionally, local finance from local authorities, parish councils and voluntary subscriptions has constituted the most important element of support for village halls.

Mrs. Brooke: Dorset county council is strongly committed to village halls and it does provide funds, but in the case of a very small village with perhaps 300 residents it really is not an option to use parish council tax to raise sufficient funds even to make the improvements necessary to meet disability requirements in the near future.

Alun Michael: That should be scrutinised at local level, but facilities are certainly available to parish councils enabling them to help village halls, even if the parish itself does not run the village hall. For instance, public loans can be used to finance improvements that can then be funded over a period by means of rental income and the use of facilities that could not be used had the improvements not been made.

We must see this as a business plan that takes account of the availability of direct funds from parish councils when they make some contribution, voluntary funds, funds from local authorities and funds that might be available through loans and then financed from income, as well as the small amounts that may be contributed by the Countryside Agency or the money resulting from lottery applications. It is unrealistic to assume that the only source of finance is the lottery, and to focus entirely on applications to the Community Fund. Even if Community Fund money increased year on year, there would never be enough to finance the whole programme.

As I have said, traditionally the funding of village halls has been very much a local issue. Only in comparatively recent years have significant funds been contributed at national level. If we start from the premise that such funds, including lottery funds, are used and targeted effectively, and that they can be used best if spread across the country as fairly as possible, that must involve making the best possible use of funds available from local sources as well—local authorities, parish councils or voluntary organisations.

Let me return to a point that I made earlier—

The motion having been made at half-past Two o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.

Adjourned at Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 3 March 2003

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

DEFENCE

The Secretary of State for Defence was asked—

Armed Forces Deployment (Gulf)

1. **Mr. Wayne David** (Caerphilly): What the level of preparedness is of British armed forces deployed in the Gulf region. [99846]

2. Mr. Paul Goodman (Wycombe): If he will make a statement on the deployment of troops in the Gulf. [99847]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): In three previous statements I have detailed the composition and deployment of United Kingdom forces from all three services to the Gulf region, presenting a significant and credible threat of force in support of United Nations Security Council resolution 1441 and the disarmament of Iraq.

In addition, our forces continue to enforce the no-fly zones, which has lately involved more frequent patrols and a broader range of aircraft.

Detailed planning will continue to evolve, but we currently envisage the total deployment of around 45,000 armed forces personnel. The UK presence in theatre is rapidly building to form a highly capable force. Approaching 30,000 UK armed forces personnel are now deployed in theatre, making a significant contribution to the flexible and balanced range of coalition capabilities that would be used in the event of military action.

Mr. David: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. He will be aware of various accusations, not least in the press, about the alleged inadequacies of the clothing, food and equipment that is being provided to our forces in the Gulf. Can he give a commitment that the necessary logistical support is being given so that any problems may be ironed out? Moreover, can he give a cast-iron commitment that our troops will be fully equipped and ready to meet any action that they have to take in the Gulf?

Mr. Hoon: I can give my hon. Friend that assurance. There have been a number of particularly ill-informed media reports, including, in one newspaper yesterday, the complaint that our soldiers were getting three meals a day. I assure my hon. Friend and other hon. Members who may be concerned that our forces are being properly supported. The deployment and sustained supply of our forces in the Gulf is a vast undertaking. The Defence Logistics Organisation estimates that the same volume of equipment and stores has been deployed in half the time that was taken in the 1990–91 Gulf conflict. I take this opportunity to pay tribute to the thousands of personnel, military as well as civilian, who have accomplished that.

Mr. Goodman: Is there any reason why the Secretary of State cannot confirm that the command and control arrangements for British forces will be the same as they were during the Gulf war, and can he confirm reports this morning that American marines may be placed under British command?

Mr. Hoon: The command and control arrangements will not differ significantly from those that operated in the course of the Gulf war. It is not sensible to talk at this stage about who may be commanding which different forces in the Gulf, but this is certainly a significant coalition operation.

Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North): Have contingency plans been made for the stationing of our troops over the next few months if it is decided to continue with intrusive inspections, or were the repeated promises by the Prime Minister that war would be regarded only as a last resort worthless?

Mr. Hoon: I have made it clear to the House on several occasions that the size and composition of the forces that are being deployed to the Gulf are flexible to allow for any number of eventualities. Clearly, that involves the continuing possibility that Saddam Hussein might, even at this late stage, accept the will of the international community and disarm in accordance with resolution 1441.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East): Would it not assist the British troops enormously in their preparedness if the Secretary of State had some clear idea of what weapons they are likely to face? Can he say, in view of the excellent new relationship with the United States, whether the Americans are prepared to make public to him, or indeed to the general public, the extent and the size of the weapons of mass destruction that were provided to Iraq at the time when it was a friend of the United States?

Mr. Hoon: The US Defence Secretary has categorically denied making those kinds of equipment available to Iraq. I underscore the fact that it is for this House to judge the contents of the dossier that the Government published as long ago as last September, which clearly set out the details of the weapons of mass destruction that we judge that Iraq has continued to develop and continues to possess.

Angela Eagle (Wallasey): Will my right hon. Friend provide some reassurance in responding to today's press coverage suggesting that the increased activities in the no-fly zones are a precursor to, or a beginning of, action in the Gulf? Will he comment on that?

Mr. Hoon: As I said a few moments ago, our forces have been undertaking more frequent patrols in the no-fly zones with a broader range of aircraft. However, I assure my hon. Friend that they do that in response to efforts to attack them and act entirely in self-defence, in accordance with international law.

Mr. Paul Keetch (Hereford): I join the Secretary of State in paying tribute to forces that have been involved in logistics. I am sure that all hon. Members, regardless of our anxieties about the conflict, would tell him that if he can sort out the supply problems about which our constituents tell us, he will have the support of the House and the country.

I want to ask about the RAF. The right hon. Gentleman mentioned northern and southern no-fly zones. Have United Kingdom aircraft been involved in recent weeks in targeting Iraqi ground positions that posed no threat to the northern or southern no-fly zones? When I asked him in February whether the United Kingdom had changed the rules of engagement for our aircraft, he declined to comment. Will he answer that question today?

Mr. Hoon: On the hon. Gentleman's first observation, may I just say in passing that several comments have been made about the way in which he has "unreasonably fuelled" the criticism of the logistics arrangements? I simply report that to hon. Members. Perhaps if the hon. Gentleman concentrated on the generality rather than the occasional difficulty that inevitably arises in such an operation, we might all be better off today.

On the rules of engagement, the hon. Gentleman is again somewhat misleading. He knows full well that Ministers never comment on them in detail. I assure him that the arrangements for patrolling the southern and northern no-fly zones remain unchanged. As he would expect, our forces are authorised to deal with any threats that Iraqi forces pose to them.

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): In the event of hostilities breaking out, does my right hon. Friend anticipate that Iraq will use chemical, biological and nuclear weapons?

Mr. Hoon: That must be one of the factors that military planners take into account when preparing for any military conflict, not least in this case because continued development of those appalling weapons forms the essence of our complaint against Iraq.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): Having returned this morning from Kuwait with my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition, I join the Secretary of State in congratulating all those involved with the British military build-up there. Although there are inevitably some short-term frustrations for our soldiers, sailors and air men, we found them well prepared, in good spirits, with high morale and fully deserving much wider recognition for the success of a major deployment over a great distance so quickly.

I take issue with the Secretary of State's insistence that nothing has changed in the no-fly zone operations over southern Iraq. Is it not clear that US and UK aircraft are now pre-empting threats to allied ground forces in Kuwait that are preparing to invade? Although we continue to hope that diplomacy will avoid the need for the last resort of war, have we not already seen the opening shots of the second Gulf war?

Mr. Hoon: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his observations, especially those about our forces and civilians who are engaged in logistics. Although it is not always the most glamorous part of armed forces' activity, it is indispensable. Without the superb work of those forces and civilians, the fighting forces would not be able to get into and remain in position.

I repeat the point that there has been no substantial change in the arrangements for the northern and southern no-fly zones. Clearly, those forces have always been entitled to deal with any threats, whether directly to aircraft that fly above the northern and southern no-fly zones or to forces on the ground in places such as Kuwait.

Mr. Jenkin: But the tactics are no longer simply to enforce the no-fly zones. They reflect the Government's decision to help clear the way for the invasion of Iraq, which requires the protection of British and American ground forces that are now massing to cross the Iraqi border. The B-52s that arrived at Fairford this morning are not intended to support enforcement of the no-fly zones. We are on the cusp of great events. Would not Ministers' honesty and openness about what is going on help to win the hearts and minds of the British people?

Mr. Hoon: I am sorry about the hon. Gentleman's final observation— Ministers have been as honest and open as is consistent, clearly, with the security requirements of the situation. I emphasise to the House that no decision has been taken about the use of military force, and I repeat that there is no substantial change in the operation of the northern or southern no-fly zones.

Since the hon. Gentleman has mentioned this—I intended to deal with it later in questions—may I tell the House that I have agreed to a United States request to deploy 14 US Air Force B-52 bomber aircraft to RAF Fairford in Gloucestershire, together with their extra support personnel? Those aircraft began to arrive at the base today. That is part of our continuing contingency preparations—no decision to commence military action has been made.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): We cannot keep 30,000 troops in the desert indefinitely, so will the Secretary of State tell the House what arrangements are being made to rotate the troops?

Mr. Hoon: My hon. Friend is right to the extent that, obviously, the same forces cannot be kept indefinitely in the desert or, indeed, in any other theatre. That is certainly not part of our intention and, as is happening already with some United States forces, arrangements will be made to rotate them when and if that is necessary.

Ministerial Meetings

3. **Mr. Andrew Mackay** (Bracknell): What recent meetings he has had with central and eastern European Defence Ministers to discuss developments in the middle east. [99848]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): Since 24 September last year, I have had meetings with my counterparts from Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania, Estonia, Albania, Macedonia and Ukraine. Those meetings addressed a range of topics of mutual interest, including, where appropriate, developments in the middle east.

Mr. Mackay: In the light of President Chirac's deeply unpleasant threat to those central and eastern European Governments who signed the Iraq letter that he would try to ensure that they did not become members of the European Union, was the Secretary of State satisfied or happy with the comments of his French opposite number when she visited Warsaw last week and told the Poles it was better

"to keep silent when you do not know what is going on"?

Is it not time that we told our French allies that they are behaving disgracefully, particularly towards our new friends in NATO, whom the right hon. Gentleman has been visiting in the past year?

Mr. Hoon: We have made it absolutely clear to candidate countries that there will be no change whatever in British Government policy; we welcome the enlargement of NATO, as we welcome the enlargement of the European Union. That will continue to be absolutely central to the Government's policy.

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): In any of the discussions that my right hon. Friend has had in the past couple of months, have the Poles or the Czech Republic had a good word to say for the French position; or have they been pointing out that it was France that not only systematically and deliberately supported and strengthened Saddam Hussein, but armed him?

Mr. Hoon: If my hon. Friend will forgive me, may I assure him that we do not spend our time in such bilateral discussions considering the respective position of any other country, other than the relations that exist between this country and the country in question? So I am sorry to disappoint him: we have not had that kind of conversation.

Armed Forces Deployment (Gulf)

4. **Mr. Henry Bellingham** (North-West Norfolk): What percentage of the Army is deployed to the Gulf region. [99849]

The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): As of 25 February 2003, 11.5 per cent. of the trained strength of the Army was deployed to the Gulf region. That number is increasing on a weekly basis, as we continue to deploy those forces previously announced to Parliament. When all the previously announced forces are deployed, approximately 25 per cent. of the trained strength of the Army will be deployed to the Gulf region.

Mr. Bellingham: I am grateful to the Minister for that reply. I am also grateful to the ministerial team for assuring the House that the Army is properly equipped. What percentage of the Army so far deployed has been issued with nuclear, biological and chemical kits? Will he confirm that the required respirators and canisters have not passed their life expectancy? Will he also confirm that the MOD has not extended the relevant warranties on that kit?

Mr. Ingram: We have a wide-ranging support mechanism for all our troops who are deployed on the basis of the perceived and possible real threat that may arise from NBC attack. As for the respirators and the other equipment that the hon. Gentleman mentions, on the basis of the advice that we, as Ministers, have been given, we are wholly satisfied that the equipment being deployed is satisfactory, and the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin), who recently visited the troops, will be able to give an equal assurance if he spoke to our people in theatre about it.

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): Whatever the rights and wrongs of issues that we are told may be debated by this House on many occasions, the fact is that the Prime Minister has so squandered his inheritance of trust that large numbers of people in the United Kingdom still do not believe that our troops should be in the Gulf. Many men and women with family members in the armed services are very concerned about the provision for their clothing, accommodation, and, most importantly, equipment. What practical steps is the Minister taking to reassure the families of those who may be required to sacrifice everything on our behalf?

Mr. Ingram: The hon. Gentleman makes a very good point. It is not just the welfare of the deployed forces and the dangers that they may face that we must consider but the families back home, who, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said earlier, have to listen to some of the silly comments made in the press. Clearly, certain shortfalls exist, but there is a very big logistics chain in which thousands of people are employed in moving a wide range of equipment into theatre. It is a huge logistical exercise. In practical terms, much of the communication is done by people in bases, at barracks and at stations, where our service personnel are clustered, as well as by Ministers. We must address any concerns as best we can. We should not minimise the scale of this logistical exercise. We must, however, give the assurance that the equipment and supplies being put into theatre meet the needs of the many thousands of troops who will be deployed, and that we respect the concerns of families in all those regards.

Mr. Keith Simpson (Mid-Norfolk): Does the Minister agree that the deployment of tens of thousands of our troops, particularly soldiers, to the Gulf—and the fact that they may be committed to combat shortly—means that their morale and that of their families is crucial? Both my hon. Friend the Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) and the Secretary of State have emphasised what an important job they are doing, with little practical acknowledgement of that from the media so far. In the last Gulf war, I remember how important it was for the MOD to have a coherent media strategy. One veteran reptile cynically said to me the other day that he believes that the MOD's media strategy is not to have one. Will the Minister tell the House how many journalists are now accredited to UK forces in theatre, and what arrangements have been made for them to accompany UK forces into combat?

Mr. Ingram: I will not descend to the type of language that the hon. Gentleman used to describe the press. [HON. MEMBERS: "Go on."] No, I won't. I am always conscious of how the press report some of my comments, so I shall try to be nice, although I must be truthful, too. There are silly stories out there, but some of them are coming back from theatre, because open and transparent lines of communication exist between the front line and families back home. We must examine each and every comment that has substance to see whether we can address it meaningfully, and, I hope, correct the problem. Alternatively, we must see whether such comments are based on misunderstandings and, subsequently, misreporting and falsehoods by the media.

We are dealing with a difficult media climate. I cannot give the hon. Gentleman a figure on the precise number of journalists, because, if I gave him a figure today, it would probably increase by tomorrow, and it would probably increase in future. That is not the issue we must deal with. Perhaps the particular journalist whom he says is criticising our media strategy should write to tell me where his criticism lies and where the shortfalls are. If we can correct them, we will. We put a lot of effort into handling the media because of the point that he and the hon. Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale) mentioned about the importance of making sure that the families back home are not being fed lies and distortions.

Iraqi Armed Forces

5. **Mr. Andrew Robathan** (Blaby): What assessment he has made of the morale of the Iraqi armed forces. [99850]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): Given the nature of the Iraqi regime and the lack of information available, it is not easy to make these assessments. However, from what information we have, we judge that the morale of the regular Iraqi armed forces is low.

Mr. Robathan: In 1991, Iraqi conscripts surrendered in their thousands. They were badly led, cold, wet, demoralised and terrified. When they discovered that we were not going to murder them, they actually rather enjoyed being in prison camps, because we fed, watered and sheltered them, and gave them clothing. We saved many lives among those who were threatened by dehydration.

Those conscripts believed that we were bringing them freedom; but it is rumoured that, after the Gulf war, when many of them were returned to Iraq, a great many were butchered by the regime. This time round, they will be worse equipped and they will be similarly demoralised. What plans do the Government have to use any prisoners that may be taken—in conjunction with Iraqi opposition groups, or, perhaps, in information programmes, during the occupation of Baghdad or the reconstruction of Iraq—should there be conflict?

Mr. Hoon: I take this opportunity to pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman's expertise in this area. I know that he served in the Gulf war and was responsible for dealing with prisoners of war.

The judgment that I make on the morale of Iraq's armed forces depends on the extent to which they have a stake in the survival of the regime. For example, organisations that are more closely associated with the regime—such as the special republican guard and Saddam Hussein's personal security apparatus—are much more under the regime's control and therefore much more likely to continue the fight. However, I share the hon. Gentleman's concern about the position of conscripts. I understand that the majority of the members of the regular forces are Shi'as and that they have no particular enthusiasm for the regime in Iraq—although they undoubtedly feel fear because of the kind of action that Saddam Hussein has taken against their people over many years.

In the planning that is under way for any post-conflict situation in Iraq, it is important to take account of a range of factors—including how to deal with potentially a large number of prisoners, and how to ensure that basic steps are taken to provide initial security leading to the reconstruction of the country. I assure the hon. Gentleman and the House that a great deal of thinking is under way along those lines.

Mr. John Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it would be a big mistake to talk down the war-fighting capability of the Iraqi army—even if it does lack morale and is motivated by the fear of retribution from its leadership? Our soldiers will face a grave challenge going into battle.

Mr. Hoon: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Because I was asked a specific question about morale, I gave the best assessment that is currently available to the Ministry of Defence. However, that does not mean that we in any way underestimate the threat that our forces face. All our planning is based on the highest level of resistance that we might anticipate, in order that our forces may be properly protected in the job that they may have to do.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): It is to be hoped that the increasing and continued deployment of United States and British armed forces in the Gulf will have an adverse effect on the morale of Iraq's armed forces. Can the Secretary of State persuade me that having about 64 per cent. of the British Army deployed on active service throughout the world is not having an adverse effect on the sustainability of the effectiveness of our armed forces in the Gulf and elsewhere? Can he assure me that the effectiveness of our armed forces—in the Army, the Air Force or the Navy—is not affected by the huge number of tasks that he rightly imposes on them?

Mr. Hoon: The hon. and learned Gentleman is right to raise that issue. Previously, I have responded to questions about stretch and about the impact that our various commitments have on our armed forces. There is no doubt that our armed forces are busy right around the world. The commitment in the Gulf is part of the challenge that they face. However, I rely on the military advice and judgment of the chiefs of staff and they assure me that they are perfectly capable of undertaking this particular deployment at this time.

Mr. Jim Marshall (Leicester, South): The answer that my right hon. Friend gave to the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) indicated to me at least that, in practice, the state of the Iraqi military poses no threat. If it is so weak, why do we have to have a proposed military invasion of Ir[illegible]?

Mr. Hoon: I did not say that at all. Indeed, I want to make it clear to my hon. Friend and to the House that no one should assume that there is not a direct threat from Saddam Hussein's forces. I have already dealt today with the risk that will undoubtedly be faced if Saddam Hussein authorises the use of chemical or biological weapons against our forces. That is a significant threat that we might have to deal with in the event of military action being necessary. There is a range of threats and no one should underestimate the ruthlessness that Saddam Hussein has shown over the years in the use of his armed forces and in putting down a series of insurrections inside Iraq and in attacking two of his neighbouring countries.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): During its recent visit to Washington, the Defence Committee was briefed by senior US officials about the extensive contingency arrangements currently under consideration for any post-war reconstruction of Iraq. Are the British Government being consulted on that, as we were led to believe? If so, why will Ministers not share with the House these plans which involve extensive assistance to the Iraqi people to ensure that they have supplies of food and water and medical facilities?

I am afraid to say that the Secretary of State's reaction to the question of my hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) illustrates my point. My hon. Friend made a very serious point about the possible use of Iraqi soldiers in any post-conflict reconstruction of Iraq. Can the Secretary of State not be more forthcoming or will we have to go back to Washington to get the answers?

Mr. Hoon: I am slightly surprised by the hon. Gentleman's question, because the Defence Committee has been briefed on these matters. That information is not such that I am not willing to share it with the House. I, too, have recently visited Washington where we had detailed discussions about the arrangements in hand for preparing Iraq for a return to the international community and for the reconstruction of that country. A senior British military officer is engaged day to day in this work in Washington and, during my recent visit to the Gulf, I saw that a great effort is also being made in British headquarters to prepare for what might happen to Iraq thereafter in the event of there being a conflict. A great deal of work is being done and I would be delighted to continue the briefing of right hon. and hon. Members that is already under way.

Armed Forces Deployment (Gulf)

6. **Mr. Huw Edwards** (Monmouth): If he will make a statement on the role of the Territorial Army in the deployment of forces to Iraq. [99852]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): The Territorial Army provides individuals for specific roles in our armed forces and also some specialist units in areas such as logistics, signals, medicine and engineering. My hon. Friend will appreciate that I cannot discuss the specific details of our military planning and of the possible roles that might be undertaken by individuals or units in the event of military action against Iraq.

I pay tribute to the vital role that the men and women of all the reserve forces play in the defence of this country and in serving our interests with such dedication and skill.

Mr. Edwards: Many of my constituents believe that the case for war against Iraq is yet unproven, and that is why I voted accordingly last week. Can he assure me that, if members of the Territorial Army are deployed in Iraq, that will be done with the further endorsement of the United Nations?

Dr. Moonie: If my hon. Friend had listened carefully to the debate last week, he would have found that that was the position of the British Government. I certainly have nothing to add to that.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): The Government have already acknowledged that the review that they carried out of the Territorial Army was not necessarily entirely wise. Will Ministers now consider the fact that, by stripping the Territorial Army of most of its combat areas, they have lost most of the surge capability that enables a small professional army to expand? Are the Government willing to consider the lessons after this conflict—we hope that it will be over quickly and soon—as to whether we need a larger reserve capability so that we can expand our very fine but very small professional Army if we face a major threat again?

Dr. Moonie: The hon. Gentleman's interest in this issue is well known. Defence planning assumptions are merely that—assumptions. Clearly, if the facts change, the assumptions will change with them. However, he is wrong. Surge capability has increased, and not decreased, as a result of our refocusing defence forces. Having large numbers of ill-trained and ill-equipped units was not the way in which to operate our reserve forces. They now operate much more closely to our front-line troops, as is seen by the number of people who we are calling up and who are ready to serve in Iraq.

Hugh Bayley (City of York): What contribution has been made by the new Territorial Army medical training establishment at Strensall near York? In particular, what contribution will be made by medical members of the reserve forces, and will they be equipped to deal with casualties, both military and civilian, of chemical and biological weapons, should the need arise?

Dr. Moonie: The new set-up is proving very successful. Reserves have to be well prepared for the roles that they may have to play, and that preparation is much more effective than it was at the time of the last Gulf conflict. Units will play a major part, and I can tell my hon. Friend that they have received the training and equipment that they need to discharge their duties effectively.

Armed Forces Deployment (Gulf)

7. **Mr. Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough): How many reservists have been called up to participate in Operation Telic. [99853]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): As the Secretary of State for Defence announced in a written ministerial statement on 30 January, it is our intention to serve enough call-out notices to secure a total of around 6,000 reservists to support Operation Telic. As at 25 February, 7,804 call-out notices had been issued and 3,316 reservists had been accepted into service.

Mr. Leigh: It is becoming increasingly clear that a great deal of planning is going on in Washington, if not in London, for changing the regime in Baghdad and running Iraq after a successful war. The commitment on behalf of our Army and our reservists may be very long term. What discussions have military authorities had with Territorial and reserve forces about the time commitment that they may have to make to this operation? How many reservists have applied for exemption from service?

Dr. Moonie: Up to now, roughly 15 per cent. of those called up have applied for deferment of one sort or another. Clearly, the numbers that we call out reflect the need to secure the numbers that we require in service, so we call out many more than will be ultimately needed. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that the procedure is going well.

Dr. Nick Palmer (Broxtowe): As my hon. Friend will know, one of the changes made in recent years was to establish a national reserve mobilisation centre at Chetwynd barracks in my constituency. Will he pay tribute to the staff working on that complex operation, and is he satisfied with their work so far?

Dr. Moonie: Yes, I certainly pay tribute to the dedication of the staff. The mustering centre at Chilwell is operating very well; staff are putting in long hours to carry out an enormous amount of work to ensure that reservists are properly equipped, briefed and prepared for any role that they may have.

Armed Forces Recruitment

8. **Mr. T[illegible] Boswell** (Daventry): If he will make a statement on recruitment to the armed forces since January. [99854]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): Audited recruitment figures since 1 January 2003 are not yet available. However, armed forces recruitment is progressing well, and the early indications are that the level of interest being shown by young people in pursuing an armed forces career reflects no discernible difference when compared to the same period last year.

Mr. Boswell: Is it not odd that at this of all times, and when recruitment shows encouraging signs of increasing, *Soldier* magazine has confirmed the fears of many of us that some recruits

> "are to have their initial training courses deferred because recruiting has exceeded current funding levels"?

Are the Department's finances so dire that such deferment has to take place, and do not the Minister and his colleagues appreciate that invaluable training momentum is being thrown away?

Dr. Moonie: No, it is not. As a former Minister, the hon. Gentleman will know that Departments always make certain planning assumptions for the year. To ensure that the training pipeline is able to cope with the number of recruits, some training periods are being deferred from March to April or May, which hardly amounts to much in the great scheme of things. I should have thought that it would be a matter of joy, rather than condemnation, in the House that recruitment levels are exceeding expectations.

Mr. Stephen Hepburn (Jarrow): Is the Minister aware that since 1997 recruitment to the armed forces in south Tyneside has more than halved? Does he have any observations on that dramatic decline? More importantly, what measures does he intend to introduce to make recruitment to the armed forces more attractive to young people?

Dr. Moonie: I should like to say that it is a tribute to the Government's economic policies that job opportunities in the north-east of England are looking up. Without appearing facetious, however, I am concerned when areas show a diminution in recruitment. I will consider that with those responsible to see what can be done to improve the situation.

Angus Robertson (Moray): I am sure that the Minister would agree that an important part of the appeal of the recruitment package is the armed forces pension scheme. Will he take the opportunity to quash rumours expressed to the Commander-in-Chief of Strike Command at RAF Lossiemouth last week that under Government plans, any length of service that terminates before an individual reaches 55 would result in a deferred pension to a new public sector retirement age of 65?

Dr. Moonie: Until the report is received and published, [illegible]not give that confirmation. However, those who complete their service, according to the rules, will suffer no deferment of their pension.

Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): Is the Minister on target for the recruitment of more black and Asian people into the armed forces? Is he as concerned as I am about the number of claims of racial discrimination that have been made against the armed forces? If he is, what practical steps are he and his colleagues taking to ensure that racism is eradicated from our armed services?

Dr. Moonie: We show zero tolerance to racism in the armed forces. The figures have increased dramatically over the past year, which shows that our policies on the recruitment of ethnic minorities are paying off and that those within our ethnic minorities are beginning to realise that they have nothing to fear from racism in the armed forces.

Mr. Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford): Given the evident problems with recruitment and manpower generally, why does the Ministry of Defence believe that our armed forces should be 4,000 fewer in personnel now than just two years ago?

Dr. Moonie: As I think I explained in an earlier answer, defence planning assumptions are not set in stone and vary according to the requirements that the armed forces tell us about. We are not the experts in that; they are. If the experts whom we employ, and our service personnel in particular, tell us what the requirements are, naturally we pay heed to them. What on earth would the hon. Gentleman do in the same circumstances?

Eurofighter

9. **Mr. Laurence Robertson** (Tewkesbury): If he will make a statement on the time taken for UK aerospace companies to be paid for the work they carry out on the Eurofighter project. [99855]

The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): All contracts for work on the Eurofighter Typhoon project placed by the Ministry of Defence or the NATO Eurofighter management agency are subject to national legislation regarding payment times. This legislation will apply equally to subcontracts placed on United Kingdom aerospace companies.

Mr. Robertson: I thank the Minister for that answer, but he knows that that system often does not work. One company in my constituency, which does not want to be named, has waited a long time for a tremendous amount of money for working on Eurofighter and has been rebuked by Eurofighter when it has tried to chase the money. On speaking to the company, it stressed that it does not blame the Government, but it does want them to introduce a new system that enables it to get paid at least in the same year as it carries out such a large amount of work.

Mr. Ingram: The hon. Gentleman has been very active on behalf of that company and he is right not to name it. Indeed, it would be wrong to name any company that might be experiencing similar difficulties. We are concerned about that company and try to help British companies as much as we can. However, most of the Ministry of Defence's UK requirements for Typhoon are contracted by the NATO European Typhoon management agency on Eurofighter GmbH. We have no direct contractual relationship with either ACMA, GmbH or the company to which the hon. Gentleman refers. However, the Ministry has written to the agency, requesting that Eurofighter GmbH reminds its partner companies and suppliers of the importance that we attach to prompt payment when contractual obligations have been met. Lord Bach, who has ministerial responsibility for defence procurement, is actively dealing with the representation made by the company to which the hon. Gentleman referred, and other concerns have also been raised.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): Will the Minister confirm that over the past six years the project has cost the British taxpayer £4 billion? Does that sum include the moneys outstanding mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Tewkesbury (Mr. Robertson)? What are the implications of the recent unfortunate aeroplane crash in Spain for the cost of the project and the delay to it?

Mr. Ingram: There has to be a full assessment following any incident of that nature such as a crash or equipment malfunction. If modifications are required, that has to be costed into the programme. I cannot give the hon. Gentleman a figure at this stage. The project is a sizeable one, and the British defence sector, which is contributing expertise and technological input, is without doubt also gaining considerably from it. It is good for the British economy, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman supports that.

Ministerial Meetings

10. **Mr. George Osborne** (Tatton): When he last held discussions with the US Defence Secretary on Iraq. [99856]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): I have regular discussions with the US Defence Secretary. I last met him on 12 February in Washington.

Mr. Osborne: Does the Defence Secretary agree that behind some of the opposition to the Government's policy on Iraq is a caricature of US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, which is a gross distortion of the truth? Will he take the opportunity to set the record straight, as the Prime Minister helpfully did when I asked him to set the record straight about George W. Bush last week?

Mr. Hoon: I certainly find working with the US Defence Secretary straightforward. He deals with issues in a clear and concise way, and I assure the hon. Gentleman that our discussions, although sometimes terse, are very effective.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): If military action is taken, what discussions has my right hon. Friend had about the future, first and foremost the territorial integrity of Iraq, but also protecting the Kurds after Saddam; the start of democratic rule; and of course the necessity for an international presence apart from the United States and the United Kingdom? Is it not essential to make it clear to the people of Iraq that democracy is our first priority?

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful to my hon. Friend who is absolutely right. Central to the Government's policy on Iraq is preserving that country's territorial integrity, which includes ensuring the safety and security of its population, not only the Kurds, but also the Shi'as and minority groups in the country. Clearly, there will be a need for a continuing international presence in the event of military conflict in and around Iraq. It is important that the international community uses its influence, ability and resources to start Iraq back on the process of becoming a fully integrated member of the international community. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has set out our policy objectives, including the idea of representative Government in Iraq, which seems to me a thoroughly worthwhile objective for the international community.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): The Prime Minister has repeatedly stated that one purpose of any military action would be to prevent Saddam Hussein giving chemical or biological weapons to terrorists. Has the Defence Secretary discussed that with the Americans, and how could anyone ever have any assurance that no matter how much CBW material Saddam Hussein gave up he had not retained other material that could be given to terrorists? Is not the logic of the Government's position that that could be prevented only by removing Saddam Hussein from power once and for all?

Mr. Hoon: That is why it is important that the regime in Iraq complies fully with the terms of Security Council resolution 1441, and does not simply play the games that it appears to be playing at present. I have told the House many times since 11 September 2001 that those appalling events threw into sharp focus our need to ensure that we are protected against threats wherever they may arise in the world. We should therefore concentrate, as we are doing, on not only the continuing terrorist threat, but the threat posed by Saddam Hussein both in his capacity as a leader of a state and his willingness to support terrorism. We are therefore right to have regard not only for the safety and security of the region, but of the wider world.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Has my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State seen the authoritative report in yesterday's *Independent on Sunday*, which says that the United States is prepared to use toxic gases in Iraq that would be illegal within the terms of the chemical weapons convention, and that Britain would not use them and would not transport them on behalf of the United States? Given this report, what discussions has my right hon. Friend had with the US Secretary of State? Will he impress upon him that illegal action by anybody is illegal and should not even be contemplated?

Mr. Hoon: I am confident that the United States, like the United Kingdom, will fully respect its obligations in international law.

Patrick Mercer (Newark): As British troops mass alongside American troops in the Gulf, so both forces become vulnerable to chemical and biological attacks, which I believe that Saddam Hussein is capable of launching. Will the Secretary of State confirm that the Government have ruled out retaliating to such attacks with nuclear weapons?

Mr. Hoon: The hon. Gentleman knows as well as I do that Governments do not comment on the use of nuclear deterrent. We foresee no circumstances at present where nuclear weapons would be required. They are a deterrent but they are not necessarily war-fighting weapons. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has made clear, we see no circumstances in which they are likely to be used in the operation that we are discussing.

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): Will my right hon. Friend tell me what protection is being offered to the Kurds of northern Iraq in the event of Saddam Hussein using chemical weapons against them again? Does he know whether the UN inspectors have visited the border between Saddam Hussein's part of Iraq and the Kurdish part of northern Iraq, especially round Chamchamal, where the Kurds have seen rockets on the hillsides? They believe that there is the capability of firing chemical weapons at them all over again.

Mr. Hoon: Given Saddam Hussein's track record, my hon. Friend is right to raise concern about the plight of the Kurdish people in northern Iraq. That is why over so many years Britain's forces, together with those from the United States, have been patrolling the no-fly zones. In a situation of military conflict, we will be concerned about the position of the Kurds and other groups inside Iraq. It is part of our thinking in relation to what we might find in the event of military conflict and thereafter that efforts will be made to protect the Kurds and others against the threat posed directly by Saddam Hussein's regime.

Troop Inoculation (Gulf)

11. **Dr. Vincent Cable** (Twickenham): If he will make a statement on the progress being made towards inoculating British forces in the Gulf against diseases which could be spread by weapons of mass destruction. [99857]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): Immunisation is an important component of our armed forces' defences against biological weapons, alongside their detectors, training, warning and reporting systems, decontamination procedures, and other medical countermeasures such as antibiotics.

Anthrax used as a biological weapon represents a real threat to our armed forces, and independent expert advice confirms that immunisation offers safe and effective protection against it. We are expanding our programme of immunisation against anthrax for the armed forces in phases, and beginning with units held at the highest readiness, with the aim of making immunisation against anthrax routine for all service personnel. All United Kingdom units deployed or nominated to deploy in the Gulf have been included in the programme.

We have announced plans to vaccinate a cohort of nuclear, biological and chemical specialists and front-line medical personnel against smallpox. This is not in response to any specific or immediate threat but a sensible precaution, against a potential global threat, which will enable our armed forces to mount an effective response in the event that smallpox is used as a biological weapon. A number of those personnel included in the cohort have deployed, are deploying, or will deploy on operations in the Gulf.

Dr. Cable: Can the Minister confirm that, because of fears of a repetition of Gulf war syndrome, more than half of all armed forces personnel have refused to have inoculations, and only one in five is inoculated? If, as the Minister says, the inoculations are harmless, how can he justify sending troops into action who are unprotected against the most lethal weapon in Saddam Hussein's germ armoury?

Dr. Moonie: I assume the hon. Gentleman is talking about anthrax, rather than about routine public health inoculations. A pedant would tell him that he is wrong, and that about 51 per cent. of those who were offered the vaccination have taken it. The percentage rises in the forces that foresee themselves being most directly affected, with the result that the percentage among those likely to be deployed on land is between 65 and 70 per cent.

Gregory Barker (Bexhill and Battle): This morning in a written statement the Home Secretary made an important announcement regarding civil contingency planning to deal with a potential terrorist dirty bomb or biological attack on London. Can the Minister tell the House how many members of the armed forces are expected to take part in such a home exercise, and whether all those individuals, professionals and reservists, have been issued with NBC protective equipment and clothing and vaccinated against smallpox and anthrax?

Dr. Moonie: I have made it clear with regard to smallpox that we are vaccinating the cohort of people who would then have to vaccinate others in the event—the very unlikely event—of an attack taking place. I cannot comment in detail on planning provision for potential terrorist attacks, other than to say that our plans are robust and that they will, of course, include appropriate protection for those involved.

Armed Forces Deployment (Gulf)

12. **Angela Watkinson** (Upminster): If he will make a statement on the size of United Kingdom armed forces on duty in the Gulf. [99858]

14. **Mr. Desmond Swayne** (New Forest, West): How many British troops are stationed in the Gulf. [99863]

The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): I refer the hon. Members to the answer that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave a few moments ago to my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly (Mr. David) and the hon. Member for Wycombe (Mr. Goodman), and the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham).

Angela Watkinson: With a quarter of the Army deployed to the Gulf, is the Minister confident that there would be enough troops to cover firefighting duties, should negotiations with the Fire Brigades Union break down and another strike be called?

Mr. Ingram: Yes.

Mr. Swayne: What proportion of the troops deployed to the Gulf are earmarked for post-war reconstruction and peacekeeping roles? How long can we afford to keep them there, and what will be the impact on our other commitments? Does Telic really stand for "Tell everyone leave is cancelled"?

Mr. Ingram: It is easy to be cynical about the deep and complex series of issues that we have to address. As regards aftermath planning—what is to happen in the event of hostilities—a considerable amount of work is going on, so that there is a flexible range of options, because the nature of the environment could range from benign to extremely hostile. We have to plan across a range of possibilities. It would be wrong to give a precise answer to the hon. Gentleman's question, and I am surprised that he asked it in the way that he did.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): With the Turkish Parliament's decision not to allow American troops into Turkey, what assessment has the Department made of any increased risk to British ground forces who might have to fight the Iraqis on one front only?

Mr. Ingram: We have to plan across a range of eventualities for the future deployment of forces. Again, it would be wrong to set out the detailed assessment of possible outcomes from the scenarios painted. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would understand that that is important for our own troops and because others could exploit any information that we give.

Suez Medal

15. **Mr. Bob Blizzard** (Waveney): When he will make an announcement on the award of a service medal for veterans of the Suez canal campaign in 1951–54. [99864]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): A sub-committee of the HD Committee—the Committee on the Grant of Honours, Decorations and Medals—chaired by Lord Guthrie of Craigiebank, took evidence from canal zone veterans and the Ministry of Defence on 22 November last year. The recommendation regarding the possible case for a medal in respect of service in the canal zone between 1951 and 1954 was passed to the HD Committee for its consideration. Until the members have concluded their deliberations, the matter must remain under review, but I will make an announcement when their findings have been published.

Mr. Blizzard: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer and hope that the announcement can be made soon. Does he agree that there are very special circumstances relating to the case for awarding a medal for the Suez veterans? In particular, the commander in chief at the time applied for a medal, but the claim was never properly considered by the HD Committee. Are these not unique circumstances that justify the award of a medal retrospectively?

Dr. Moonie: I think that my hon. Friend is well aware of my views on this subject, but we must be very careful in this matter to ensure that, if retrospection is to be breached, there are very clear and watertight reasons for doing so. The confusion about what happened when the action took place is well documented. Clearly, that was behind the decision to refer the matter back through the HD Committee to a sub-Committee for its consideration. In the very near future, I hope to be able to tell him and others the results of the deliberations.

Points of Order

3.31 pm

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. A very significant vote took place in the Turkish Parliament on Saturday that has an impact on British foreign and defence policy and obviously that of the United States as well. Have you received a request from a Minister seeking to make a statement on the issue or will there be an opportunity some time this week for Members to express their interest in this matter and their admiration for the Turkish Parliament on its preparedness to say no to George Bush's war drive?

Mr. Speaker: That is not a matter for the Chair.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for granting me the opportunity to raise this point of order. I understand from Sky news that B-52 bombers have been deploying to RAF Fairford in my constituency all morning. Have you received any information from the Secretary of State for Defence saying that he intends to make a special statement on this matter so that we can question him specifically about it?

Mr. Speaker: The matter was raised during questions.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I seek to raise the propriety of the correction by way of a letter of a major financial mistake made on the Floor of the House. On 9 December, I asked the Secretary of State to confirm that defence expenditure would be significantly lower as a proportion of GDP in the following year than in any year under the previous Government. In reply, he told me that that was completely incorrect and said that the level was sometimes higher and sometimes lower under the previous Government. The truth is that the proportion of GDP being spent is the lowest since the 1930s. Since then, I have received a courteous letter from the Minister of State in which he admitted that the Secretary of State had made a mistake and said that the letter had been copied to the Library. Have you had any application from the Secretary of State for an opportunity to correct the matter on the Floor of the House?

Mr. Speaker: No, but I get the feeling that the hon. Gentleman wanted to put the matter on the record.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. The Secretary of State for Defence was repeatedly asked about the B-52s and the change in bombing over Iraq in the past few days, which is a radical departure from only protecting the no-fly zones. Some of us think that war has already started through the back door and that last week's debate was an absolute mockery, while we were given an assurance that we would be consulted further. Given the lack of any answers to genuine questions, may I ask you to request that the Secretary of State comes back to the House and gives a full and proper statement in which he answers the questions asked today?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Lady can apply—I am not inviting her to do so—for an urgent question. That is the procedure that she should follow.

Prevention and Suppression of Terrorism

[Relevant document: Fifth Report from the Joint Committee on Human Rights of Session 2002–03, on the Continuance in force of sections 21–23 of the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001, (HC 462).]

3.33 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): I beg to move,

That the draft Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 (Continuance in force of sections 21 to 23) Order 2003, which was laid before this House on 23rd January, be approved.

As on previous occasions, I want to express on behalf of the House our thanks to all those who have worked so diligently over the past 20 months to secure our well-being, ranging from those in the intelligence and security services, the anti-terrorism branch and the enforcement agencies to those working in our Department who have given time, energy and commitment. I am very pleased that Sir David Omand is co-ordinating and working so well in ensuring that the Government, our agencies and those working with us are prepared for what the Prime Minister in his Mansion House speech and I in my publication of 7 November described as an issue for the years ahead, rather than the weeks and months.

Following the events since the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 was passed, all of us have become aware that we are in for a very long haul indeed. It is on that basis that we need incrementally to learn from experience and what has happened around us and build on that for the future.

As I said on 13 February, we must recognise that levels of security will rise and fall, and that on occasions information provided both internally and across the world indicates a heightened threat level. Let me also again make it clear that exercises will be necessary to make us better prepared to test existing arrangements, and to be honest about whether they are adequate. Over coming weeks we will organise such an exercise here in London to ensure that we are satisfied—and can satisfy the House and the public—that we are as prepared as it is possible to be, in the real world, for any internal attack, including chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear attacks. We ask for the patience of the House and the public, and for calmness, during the undertaking of such exercises.

The efforts that have been expended since part 4 of the Act was passed are well known to those who have taken an interest. I pay tribute to the Intelligence and Security Committee, which, in continuing its work, has been able to scrutinise Ministers and hold them to account, and also to report to the House as it did last July and will again this year.

In renewing the power contained in the Act, I feel sure that if anyone had doubts originally, what has happened since will have swept away concern about whether our action was proportionate. Later this afternoon my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary will deal with issues connected to the threat level relating to the attack in Bali, but the lesson of Bali is clear: completely innocent people were the target of that attack. Endeavours to attack innocent people across the world have been foiled

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by appropriate action on the part of the security and intelligence services, and by policing in a range of countries including ours.

Mr. Andrew Dismore (Hendon): I do not doubt the importance of this legislation, particularly when we are dealing with the likes of Abu Qatada, but have there been any requests for extradition by other countries of those currently being detained?

Mr. Blunkett: I am not aware of a request for the extradition of any of the 13 individuals whom we are currently holding in detention under part 4, including sections 21 and 22. I am of course mindful of the need to respond to requests of that sort. That is why, both through the extradition legislation we are updating and through general procedures, we are trying to improve the processes involved.

Sir Brian Mawhinney (North-West Cambridgeshire): I do not think it would be appropriate for me, as a member of the review committee, to take part in the debate, but I would like to ask the Home Secretary a question, as a Member of Parliament rather than a member of the committee. Does he intend to publish a summary of actions taken under various parts of the legislation for the information of the House, as part of the renewal procedure?

Mr. Blunkett: The right hon. Gentleman and I had constructive exchanges when the Bill was going through Parliament. In a later part of my speech—I shall try to be brief—I will spell out all the new arrangements both for informing the public more widely of what we have agreed here, and for reassuring the House that the information will be readily available to Members.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): The Home Secretary will remember that the precedent for this legislation going through was the Government's request for Parliament to agree to a derogation from article 5 of the European convention on human rights. Although opposed from the Liberal Democrat Benches, that was agreed to by Parliament. The Joint Committee on Human Rights has made it clear in its report that in order to comply with our international obligations we have to declare a public emergency and that that was not done explicitly before. Can the Home Secretary make it clear whether he intends from now on that, if there is what he or the Government regard as a public emergency, it will be formally declared in a way that does not allow any doubt?

Mr. Blunkett: We had not only excellent advice but the decisions of the Appeal Court in relation to whether we were justified in taking the steps that we took. I will repeat this later but the Appeal Court verified our actions following the appeal to the Special Immigration Appeals Commission. I have been very pleased to receive advice from the Joint Committee on Human Rights. My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, East (Jean Corston), the Chairman of that Committee, gives me regular advice extraneous to the Committee's.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Even when you don't ask for it.

Mr. Blunkett: Yes, even when I do not ask for it. I am very pleased to receive it.

I think that the Appeal Court was an appropriate venue—

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): The Home Secretary will be aware that many people in this country are very worried about the great powers that he is given under this legislation and feel that it undermines any respect for normal law and judicial processes. Can he give some indication how much longer he expects the legislation to last? And would it not be better to rely on the criminal law and the open courts system, rather than the great power that has been given to him as an elected politician to detain people indefinitely?

Mr. Blunkett: This House determined that we would have an annual renewal of the order and the derogation. This House determined that we would have the review by Lord Carlile, to which I shall come shortly. This House determined that there should be the review committee to which the right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire (Sir Brian Mawhinney) referred—of which he is a distinguished member—under the chairmanship of Lord Newton, and that there would be a sunset clause after five years. I do not think that there has ever been an Act or part of an Act that has been subject to as much review, scrutiny, renewal and cancellation as this— and rightly so because of the salience of the power being used not simply through me but in terms of the procedure that has to be adhered to and the determination of this House as to whether renewal and derogation from article 5 are justified.

The events around the issue of ricin; the alert three weeks ago at Heathrow; our action to proscribe additional organisations; the evidence that has existed across Europe on arrests; and the discovery of plots and plans for terrorist actions against civilians throughout the world lead to a justification for asking the House to renew both the order and the derogation this afternoon. It is in the context of recognising the importance of exercising the power with great discretion but also of recognising that we need to protect ourselves from those who recognise no legal procedures, no boundaries and no parameters in terms of the action they are prepared to take, that I am satisfied that there remains a public emergency, that it is as spelled out 15 months ago, to refer to the point that the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) made, and that therefore we need to ask the House to renew the power.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): I recognise some of the points raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn)—the rule of law is absolutely essential, although I do not believe that this contradicts the rule of law—but is it not a fact that if a terrorist could commit an atrocity such as 11 September in Britain, they would not hesitate for one moment because they believe that we are non-believers, infidels?

They believe that we have no right to live, just as the Nazis considered that the Jews, Slavs and gypsies had no right to live. We must recognise that we are faced with a deadly enemy that will strike whenever it can.

Mr. Blunkett: I am afraid that my hon. Friend is right. I say "afraid" because, if we were dealing with people who we could talk to, negotiate with and understand so far as the parameters that they are following are concerned, we would be in an entirely different situation in terms of the nature of the international terrorism that we are debating today, and which we have debated on a number of occasions since the Act was approved in December 2001. The many measures undertaken under the Terrorism Act 2000, and under the 2001 Act in general and part 4 in particular, have been undertaken only where no alternatives were available. In holding in detention the 13 people to whom I referred earlier, we are also mindful of trying to speed up the process. They decided, presumably on the advice of their solicitors, to challenge the whole validity of part 4 of the Act. That was dealt with in the first instance by the Special Immigration Appeals Commission, and then by the Court of Appeal. It was agreed that we had both the right and the power, that we were exercising it properly, and that it was proportionate. It is in that vein that we are having today's debate.

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): Given that one reason why it was necessary to take these powers is that the Home Secretary is no longer able to deport everyone whom he thinks is a potential threat to the life of the nation, what will he do when he can no longer place his hand on his heart and say that we face a threat to the life of the nation because of international events, and yet these people are still here?

Mr. Blunkett: If they themselves posed a threat according to the way we laid out that threat in the Act—in terms of their behaviour and contacts, and of the way in which their links affect the likelihood of terrorist action—we would not recommend that the House cancel the powers under part 4. That is the purpose of seeking annual renewal: to make the assessment, and to seek guidance from those who are independently advising us on the operation of that part of the Act. I want to pay tribute to Lord Carlile for his work in providing us with the first annual review. His timely comments are helpful. He supports the need for these powers, and he has confirmed that they have been exercised correctly, as laid down in the Act.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): Did my right hon. Friend note the suggestion by Lord Carlile that if the law were amended to make actions preparatory to committing an act of terrorism a criminal offence, it might be possible to subject some, most or all of these people to due process?

Mr. Blunkett: I hesitate to take on Lord Carlile in an area in which he has enormous experience and expertise; however, were it possible through normal legal procedures to identify actions that would lead to terrorist acts—and were we able to provide, in court, evidence of the level required to stand up to the normal processes—we would of course do so.

Mr. Mullin: That brings us to the point about telephone intercepts. The Home Secretary will recall that a debate has been going on for some time as to whether telephone intercepts should be made admissible in court. Were that to happen, it might be possible to provide a standard of evidence that would enable these people to be convicted by due process.

Mr. Blunkett: I see no reason at all why I should not tell the House that a consultation is currently taking place on whether there should be a change. There have been considerable differences of opinion among security, intelligence and law enforcement agencies in this country for many years as to whether that would be appropriate. Let me say this as carefully as I can. Anything that prevents the security services from being able to undertake the kind of work that leads them to pre-emptive action, and not just prosecution—or undermines that work—is deeply unfortunate. If people were to withdraw from their normal practice, or if they thought that by engaging in normal communications they would be subject to court action and therefore ceased—and that put us at greater risk—we would have gained nothing and lost much. We seek to achieve a balance.

Mr. Bercow: Given that it would be difficult ever to declare that we had won the war against terrorism, that relentless surveillance is required, and that it would be difficult to say with alacrity that this country no longer faced a particular threat, does the Home Secretary agree—further to the inquiry from my hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Cameron)—that in practice, the sunset clause notwithstanding, the power seems destined to remain in place for much longer than five years? By the way, I mean no indictment of the right hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Blunkett: The power is destined to remain as long as it enables us to protect ourselves against the international terrorist threat. That is what it was put in place to do. Should the threat recede to the point at which we believe that the powers are no longer appropriate or applicable, I would be the first—as I said when we passed the legislation—to tell the House to say that we no longer needed to renew them.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): The Home Secretary was earlier explicit that this country faces a condition of emergency and that that is the justification for these powers. Is it his assessment that the qualitative threat to the United Kingdom is greater than that to other western European countries? Is he satisfied that the areas of co-operation within Europe, for the exchange of information between security and police services, are adequate to the task of dealing with the terrorist threat?

Mr. Blunkett: On the second issue, I am absolutely clear that the level of co-operation that now takes place is materially improved from when we first met, at the Justice and Home Affairs Council on 20 September 2001, to address those issues, both in terms of collaboration between European states and between Europe, the United States and other international partners. We are continually trying to improve matters.

The hon. Gentleman's first point was addressed when we debated the Bill. We considered what would be appropriate in the new circumstances. For the

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avoidance of doubt, I should repeat that we believe that the order complies and is compatible with the European convention. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for reminding me to say that.

Simon Hughes: Will the Home Secretary give way one last time?

Mr. Blunkett: Yes, although I have never known it to be for one last time.

Simon Hughes: For today. Following the intervention from my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath), can the Home Secretary confirm that apart from the general reservation that France has had since the beginning about being a signatory to the European convention, no other country has sought derogation to allow the same powers and, therefore, that must mean that it is believed that Britain is subject to a different and greater threat than all other European Union countries? Does he think that it would be better if SIAC dealt speedily with the appeals so that a judicial hearing could be held in this country on the validity of detention, instead of people having to wait for a final decision?

Mr. Blunkett: On the hon. Gentleman's first question, we took the view, which we repeatedly spelled out in the debate on the comprehensive measures in the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001, that we faced a specific threat level to this country and that that required us to take the actions under part 4. The certification that I have engaged in reflects that. I indicated to the House when we took these powers that they would be used sparingly, and they have been. I said that they would be proportionate, and the Court of Appeal agrees that they have been. The decision, on the advice of the lawyers, of those who are held under sections 21 to 23 to challenge the validity of the measures as a whole is precisely why there has been such a delay in dealing with individual cases. I hope that they can now be processed within a matter of weeks so that those individuals have the right to be heard judicially and to challenge whether what we have certificated was proportionate and acceptable. I should like us to be able to get on with that.

I want to make one further comment about Lord Carlile's report. He recommended that there might be a discrete and specific change to the way in which those held under part 4 were held. I have authorised that we should make such a provision available should the individuals choose to take it up. It would not be appropriate compulsorily to move all 13 into one area against their will and I do not intend to get into a secondary dispute about that. Lord Carlile put perfectly valid arguments concerning the length of time for which they had been held and might be held, suggesting that we should consider that urgently, and I have agreed that we should.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): The Home Secretary will be aware that earlier today his Department issued a written ministerial statement entitled "Civil contingency planning to deal with terrorist attack", which is obviously related to this matter. The penultimate paragraph states:

> "We will issue proposals for a new Civil Contingencies Bill in the summer."

As the right hon. Gentleman knows, Conservative Members have been pressing for such legislation for some time, so will he inform the House of his prospective timetable for that legislation and, specifically, when he anticipates that it will be enacted?

Mr. Blunkett: First, I want to make it clear that there has been no delay in the original timetable that was envisaged and spoken to by the Cabinet Office in relation to that Bill. It was always envisaged that we would update the historic legislation in terms of emergency powers and address the structural changes at regional and local level that such a Bill would allow us to undertake. The draft Bill will be published in the summer and put before the House in the autumn. It is important to recognise that in doing so we will be able to assure people that we are talking about updating and learning from experience in terms of the structural framework, as opposed to taking measures that need to be passed immediately, which we would do if it was necessary in order to safeguard our basic interests. Most people who have been involved in these changes are aware that they should perhaps have been made in the normal way a long time ago, and it is opportune that we are now able to bring them forward as quickly as we can and to reassure hon. Members that having the legislation in draft will allow their views to be taken into account.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Rayleigh (Mr. Francois) for mentioning the statement that I put out today on investment in civil resilience and on key areas for future work and the way in which we need to proceed.

The right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire asked me about the material that should be made available. I have been looking with colleagues at what we should do to provide greatly improved access to the public, as well as to the House, in relation to what is already on the public record and is not held in terms of security-vetted material. That will ensure that people are much more aware, first, of what is being done, secondly, of the exercises that take place and why they take place and, thirdly, the kind of advice and information that the public would seek for themselves.

I therefore intend to establish in the next few weeks a dedicated website that will draw on all the readily available advice of the security and intelligence services, on civil resilience information and material that Departments publish on their task of protecting the public in this country. It will include readily available information not only on general civil contingency, resilience and protection but on specific events such as the emergency in and around Heathrow. We shall do that not least to ensure that people understand the difference between operational responsibility and accountability and politicians' responsibility and accountability.

We will be able to reassure people when they listen to the radio or watch television that, for example, action has been taken to provide adequate measures for smallpox vaccination. More than £30 million has been spent so far on acquiring the necessary vaccines, and more than 20 million doses exist in reserve. According to historical information, more than 50 per cent, of the population are already vaccinated against the disease. As the Minister of State for Health announced on 2 December, we will be able to advise people about vaccinating volunteers in the health service and in the armed forces as a preventive measure to ensure that they can do their job.

Given that politicians are not held in high esteem and trust is not readily given, politicians, including me, will not seek vaccination against smallpox unless the vaccine is made generally available to the population. We want it to be readily available to those who are closest to action such as ring-fencing areas to provide buffer zones.

I hope that the BBC as well as the general public can draw on the new website. However, I ask the BBC not to make weekly endeavours to worry people without cause. If information that should be available is not, and if so-called advisers believe that their advice has not been taken, we should act accordingly. I advise anyone who wants to say, in private or publicly, that there is a problem to come forward. I am thinking in terms not of a whistleblower's line but of an independent method other than approaching the "Today" programme whereby those who would like to throw suspicion on our preparedness or willingness to listen and act can express their views. We could thus sort matters out in a civilised and intelligent fashion without creating scare stories.

I shall also ensure that the hard copy of the material on the website is readily available in libraries throughout the country, although most are online and can assist people to gain access to it. I hope that that will establish a more open and transparent method of reassuring as well as informing, and that the necessary advice will be provided. We do not intend to replicate events in the United States and, to some extent in Australia, where there is the equivalent of "Protect and Survive". Older hon. Members will remember from the 1960s that that was mocked as being ridiculous.

We will not provide a ready market for those who would mislead people into believing that they have to buy this, that or the other for protection, thereby creating an industry rather than providing for reasonable and sensible protection. However, we shall ensure that we tell the public about any definable, specifiable risk. We will also tell them what is necessary to enhance their protection. We do that because we are in the same position as them. That is why I made the earlier comments on vaccines.

Jeremy Corbyn: I am interested in my right hon. Friend's comments. Does he realise that a sort of hysteria is currently sweeping the United States, where everyone is buying ducting tape in the belief that it will protect against all ills? Will he try to persuade the British public that such actions smack of panic rather than sense?

Mr. Blunkett: Similar tape is produced in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Brent North (Mr. Gardiner), so I shall be extremely careful about what I say because, I think, President Ford finished off the broccoli industry in the United States. [Hon. Members: "It was Bush senior."] Was it? Goodness gracious! Right. President Bush senior.

The danger of the kind of advice that would lead people to go out and buy particular materials is self-evident. In the US, a new danger has arisen from people doing that—they have sealed off the normal sources of ventilation in their homes—so we all have to be extremely careful that the advice that we give is both sensible and proportionate and that it helps people to protect themselves, but I repeat that if there were a specific measure that would protect people in a set of circumstances where we believed that a particular threat was imminent or that that threat could be dealt with in that way, of course, we would have to say so.

I repeat that we believe that the renewal of the order and the derogation are justified and that the House should scrutinise this issue. It is correct that we should continue to issue updates and to ask for the public's patience not only where emergency measures triggered by intelligence and security advice have to be put in place, but where we undertake exercises precisely to identify where we need to take further action. It is in that spirit that I ask the House to renew the order this afternoon.

4.6 pm

Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset): I should start by saying that we have no intention whatever of seeking to divide the House on this measure. We agree with the Government that it will be necessary to continue the order in force—not that the Government are quaking in their boots about any effort on our part to stop it, but it is important to state our view at the outset.

The Home Secretary rightly and generously says that this part of the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 is more surrounded, as he put it, than any other by reviews and sunset clauses. I use the word "generously" because there was an acknowledgement of the fact that Conservative Members and our colleagues on the Liberal Democrat Benches fought him into surrounding it with those devices. I hope that the next time the Home Secretary, in one of his less irenic moods, accuses us of having forced him to battle such things through, he will admit that it was rather a good thing that he did have to battle it through.

Having said that, it is important to pay attention to the character of the review that has taken place. As one would expect, Lord Carlile has produced a very serious report. The Home Secretary has announced today, if I understood him correctly, the acceptance of a slightly modified version of eight of Lord Carlile's recommendations, and we strongly welcome that. I agree with the Home Secretary that such things should be voluntary; we should not seek to force the 13 individuals, or subsequent individuals, into one place against their will.

It was interesting, en passant, that the report makes it clear that Lord Carlile discerned a difference between the conditions at Belmarsh and those at Woodhill, and I hope that the Home Secretary will pay attention to that. I am delighted to see that he is nodding.

Two other elements of Lord Carlile's report deserve pretty immediate attention, and I hope that the Home Secretary will be able to take them fully into account.

[Mr. Oliver Letwin]

The first is Lord Carlile's first recommendation that the pending hearings before the Special Immigration Appeals Commission should proceed without awaiting the final determination of the challenge to the derogation. We all know how long it may take a case to go not just to the House of Lords, which will happen relatively soon in all likelihood, but—Lord Carlile makes this point—to Strasbourg, and it would be a great pity if we had to wait two years. Again, I am delighted to see Ministers nodding.

Perhaps more controversially, Lord Carlile referred to links to terrorism under section 21 of the 2001 Act—an issue that the Liberal Democrat spokesman, the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes), and I raised on numerous occasions during proceedings on that Act.

Lord Carlile provides a splendid example of why we all pay lawyers so much in his examination of how we might tackle the problem of links. His exposition is lucid and, I find, compelling. In conclusion, he says that the

> "use of the word 'links' gives rise to understandable concern."

He continues:

> "It is unclear to me that there would be any detriment in terms of public safety if that word and indeed section 23(4) were removed from the Act and section 23(2) (c) amended to read—
>
> '(c) otherwise supports or assists an international terrorist group'".

I find that a compelling suggestion. I cannot understand why I did not think of it when the Act was a Bill now that I see it so well laid out; perhaps I did not hire legal advice as expensive as Lord Carlile's. As we now have the invaluable recommendation of an expensive and brilliant lawyer—at the Home Secretary's expense, not mine—I hope that he will take account of that suggestion.

I am not sure in what context that change can most expeditiously be made, and nor am I suggesting that we have another anti-terrorism Bill on the stocks before one can say, "Jack Robinson", "David Blunkett" or some such phrase. I hope that the Home Secretary will find a suitable moment, without adding to our legislative burdens, to introduce that change, and we would certainly co-operate with that.

With those adjustments, we are entirely convinced that the continuation is sober, proportional and right. The Home Secretary has evidently conducted his part of the bargain with exactly the seriousness that one would have expected. Lord Carlile makes it perfectly clear that he had access to all the information, and that he is content that all the decisions that have been made were made on the basis of the kind of consideration that was required.

Having occupied a few minutes saying with what we agree, I wish to occupy only a few minutes saying with what we do not agree. Strictly speaking, it is not the subject of the review, but I hope that the Home Secretary has given me licence to deal with it by mentioning the subject himself: the related question of the degree of preparedness to deal with a terrorist attack were it to occur.

Mr. Cameron: Before my right hon. Friend moves off detention without trial and the linked issue of deportation, will he reflect on the answer that the Home Secretary gave me? Given that we opted out of the European convention on human rights with reference to

> "In time of war or other public emergency threatening the life of the nation",

what will this Government or any other Government be able to do to protect this country once that no longer exists? People who use the asylum system and who may threaten the life of the nation are still here, yet we cannot deport them.

Mr. Letwin: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that rhetorical question. He knows—as I, and, as it recently transpired, the Minister for Citizenship and Immigration, who is present, also know—the answer to that question is that the right and sensible procedure is that which we recommended repeatedly when the Bill was going through the House. That procedure is that we should engage in the elaborate dance of denunciation, legislation and reservation to move to the position at which we have so reserved against article 3 that the Home Secretary can do what I am sure that he would have done and what his predecessor, the current Foreign Secretary, sought to do when he was Home Secretary: to deport those people rather than having to retain them indefinitely in detention.

My hon. Friend was right to unearth the point that, at any stage at which it becomes difficult to claim that a generalised state of emergency exists, it will be difficult to maintain the derogation that provides the basis for the legality of the current proceedings. Individuals may remain who are a great danger to the state, however, and it would be appropriate to be able to deport them, as the current Foreign Secretary, who was then the Home Secretary, sought to do in the case of Singh and Singh. As I have said, that will require the reservation for which we have argued.

I hope that, in due time—as we discovered just a few days ago that the Minister for Citizenship and Immigration is clear about it—the Home Office will also move to adopt that procedure. Of course, the Home Office will have to overcome the difficulty of persuading the Foreign Office, which shows remarkably little inclination towards anything that might protect British interests in its negotiations with foreign powers, but we will leave that be.

Simon Hughes: Does the right hon. Gentleman accept in his heart of hearts that, rather than the highly risky suggestion of leading the way out of the European convention and risking not being allowed back in, it would be far better to use the provisions of the Geneva convention that allow people to be turned or sent away if they have committed a serious crime, and the derogations procedure—even if some of us do not care for it—that allows a temporary exclusion from rights in cases of national emergency?

Mr. Letwin: Mr. Speaker, I am astonished at the latitude that you are allowing me in discussing this issue, and I shall not impose too far on your good will. We have investigated the possibility that the hon. Gentleman raised. It is attractive in principle but falls jurisprudentially. I fear that the judiciary will interpret article 3 as overriding that procedural device. The hon. Gentleman and I could spend a happy half-hour after this debate, during which I could take him through the legal advice that we have received. I suspect that the advice is parallel to that received by the Home Office, because the Minister for Citizenship and Immigration gave us such a pellucid explanation of the very suggestion that I had made a year previously, which she described as impossible just a few days ago in the House.

I want to do what the Home Secretary asked me to do by implication. He said that anyone who wished to raise a problem, in private or in public—although I am not sure which of those the Chamber of the House of Commons is these days—should do so here and not on the "Today" programme. I cannot fulfil all parts of that request as I have already been on the "Today" programme today—although I am aware that the Home Secretary was thinking of others. However, I wish to raise a problem now.

The problem is difficult to describe. It is not a problem of a lack of will. I hope that it has been clear to the Home Secretary that I accept entirely that he and his officials—and, indeed, Ministers and officials in other Departments—are keen that we should be properly prepared against terrorism. After all, this is not a matter of party political debate; it is not as if any of us is going into the next election on the question of, "Should we, or should we not, be prepared to deal with terrorism?" We all agree that we should be prepared and that Ministers and their officials wish us to be prepared.

It is also not exactly a problem of things being so maladministered as to be heading in the wrong direction. There is no doubt that Ministers and their Departments have gradually been moving towards greater rather than lesser preparedness.

So far, so good, but the problem is that I am not sure whether so far is far enough or fast enough. In fact, I am pretty sure that it is not. Partly because we are dealing with things that may necessarily be secret—which therefore I do not know or wish to know—and partly because we are dealing with things that are, almost inevitably, intangible and unable to be documented, it is difficult to get at the sense of what is going wrong. At any rate, it was difficult before today. It has become easier today. The Home Secretary has vouchsafed to the House a statement on civil contingency planning to deal with terrorist attacks.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman said earlier that I was allowing him some latitude, but he is now stretching the point just a little too far. We must keep to the order that is before us.

Mr. Letwin: Mr. Speaker, if you will allow me to respond to the precise points that the Home Secretary made, without straying any further, that would be enormously kind.

The Home Secretary said that he would set up a website a little while from now. However, that is not what the written statement says. It says:

> "Information for agencies and the public is available through",

and goes on to name the websites. We went to one of those websites this morning. What does it do? It gives one a link to what is done in Australia. It is otherwise empty.

The Home Secretary referred to smallpox and smallpox vaccination. For the life of me, I cannot understand why that is not available on demand to all those who wish it. I will never understand that until it ceases to be the case.

Mr. Blunkett: I do not want to take the time of the House, but I shall make two brief points. First, the new website will be designed specifically to put together all the information available, including that from the security services when it is not secret. Secondly, I do not believe that there is a problem with people approaching their general practitioner for the smallpox vaccination. If there is any difficulty with that, I will happily talk to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health.

Mr. Letwin: That is very constructive. There is a difficulty at present, because people cannot obtain the vaccination, but it is good news that the Home Secretary will speak to the Department of Health. In fact, it would be good for him to think of signing a memorandum of understanding with the Department. We found that the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister recently felt that it had to do that with the Department of the Health. Have things not come to a strange condition when two Departments of State have to sign memorandums of understanding between them?

The Home Secretary's written statement refers to a range of Ministers and units. As well as referring to the Minister responsible for London resilience—we already knew that the Minister responsible for the fire service and for destroying local government in the south of England had that role—it refers to a new figure appearing on the scene. Although the post may not be new, its holder is new to the British public. I very much doubt that anyone was aware that the Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community Safety also doubles as the Minister responsible for co-ordinating the response to chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear—CBRN—threats. As the written statement says, the role has existed since the end of 2001, but no one in Britain knew that. This Minister has been active in dealing with the police; everyone in England knows that he has responsibility for them. However, I do not think that anyone has ever heard him speak about CBRN co-ordination.

Mr. Bercow: Who is this person?

Mr. Letwin: I am speaking about the Home Secretary's colleague who has just left the Government Front Bench—the Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community Safety. He has reappeared in the written statement as the Minister responsible for co-ordinating the response to CBRN threats. That was a genuine shock to me. I thought that I was an observer of this scene and would have noticed who was responsible. I thought that the Minister of State, Cabinet Office was responsible for this issue, and then I thought that the Minister responsible for London and who is also responsible for the fire service had responsibility for it.

Mr. Mullin: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. What are we debating? Are we debating the renewal of the

[Mr. Mullin]

Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 or the written statement put out by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary on an entirely different matter?

Mr. Speaker: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that point. The right hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) is miles away from the issue that we should be discussing.

Mr. Letwin: With his usual acuity, the Chairman of the Home Affairs Committee is on to something. I could not resist the opportunity of pointing out a real problem. Now that I have done that, I shall not intrude on your goodwill, Mr. Speaker, or that of the House any further. I have made my point. There is a problem that desperately needs to be resolved because it deals with the life and death of our citizens. In the meantime, let us, by all means, continue with the operation of the Act.

4.23 pm

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): We all agree—at least, those of us who have studied the matter in any depth—about the need for these measures even though we might do so reluctantly. We recognise how draconian they are. We also recognise that it is not inconceivable that they will remain in force for many years. Therefore, the people who have been detained will remain detained without trial for many years. It behoves us to get this right.

I propose to make a few remarks about a couple of issues that have already been touched upon: the conditions in which such people are held and the consideration that has been given to the alternatives. Reference has been made to the safeguards that exist, and the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) put them down to the assiduous opposition of himself and the Liberal Democrats. In fact, several proposals, including the sunset clause, appeared in the report of the Home Affairs Committee.

Mr. Letwin: It would be churlish of me not to admit that that is perfectly true.

Mr. Mullin: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. Other proposals came from the Joint Committee on Human Rights.

As the House might imagine, I agree with several points that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary made. In particular, I agree with his point that the measures have been used sparingly. There was some fear when they were first mooted that they would be applied to a far larger number of people, and we must be grateful that that is not the case.

I have already made a couple of points that were taken up by Lord Carlile, and I hope that they will be considered seriously. Lord Carlile suggested amending the law to refer to "acts preparatory to terrorism". He said:

> "if the criminal law was amended to include a broadly drawn defence of acts preparatory to terrorism, all could be prosecuted for criminal offences and none would suffer executive detention".

That went slightly beyond the scope of his review, but given the source of the suggestion, it ought to be taken seriously.

I have already made the point about intercept evidence. I understand that, among the security services and others with an interest in this area, there is a strong difference of opinion about whether it is desirable to make intercept evidence available in court. I shall watch with interest the outcome of any review.

Turning to conditions of detention, certainly it was the case early on that people were held in pretty harsh conditions in Belmarsh. At one stage, they were allowed only 30 minutes out of cell during the day. When the measure was being introduced, Lord Rooker said that they would be held in remand conditions, and not alongside convicted prisoners. I know that some improvements have been made since the low point that was touched early on. I think that I saw Martin Narey quoted as saying that people are now allowed out of cell for seven hours and various other measures have been taken.

If we are to hold on these terms people who are unconvicted, I hope that we will, as we were assured at the time of the measure's introduction, detain them in conditions that reflect the fact that they are unconvicted and that their detention is indefinite. At one stage, there were signs that detention was beginning to damage the mental health of some of those held, as it might do to any of us in those circumstances.

Mr. Bercow: I do not want unduly to embarrass the hon. Gentleman, but I agree with his remarks about the treatment of people who are unconvicted. Surely we need an assurance of national security and not of personal privation. If we can be reassured that proper procedures are in place to guarantee the former, there need be no requirement for the latter.

Mr. Mullin: I completely agree, and I am glad to see that the point unites hon. Members on both sides of the House.

I turn now to a compelling point made by Lord Carlile about allowing appeals from abroad to be made by those who have been detained under this measure, who have agreed to go abroad and who have found a haven to accept them. At the moment, people in that position who take the view that they are not terrorists have no means of removing the stain, and it is quite a large stain, from their character. I imagine that only a handful of people would want to take advantage of the opportunity to appeal, but the possibility ought to be left open. As we know—we saw it with the pilot whom the Americans were trying to extradite some time ago—the security services can be wrong in the information that they lay before Ministers, or further information may come to light which casts doubt on the original. As Lord Carlile says, there ought to be some mechanism by which people can remove that stain from their character.

Finally, at paragraph 6.13 of the report, Lord Carlile touches on alternatives to custody. I do not suppose that he means community service but, to return to the point made by the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow), the purpose of the exercise is to satisfy ourselves and those whom we represent that such people cannot pose a threat. Once we have done that, all other considerations melt away. Lord Carlile suggests that restrictions on movement—perhaps even tagging—could pose an alternative to what are otherwise extremely draconian measures. I shall not go into too much detail on that for fear of being denounced as a namby-pamby liberal, which I am not. Although it is not my suggestion, it is in the report, so I hope that the Home Secretary will address it.

4.31 pm

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): The motion deals with important and controversial matters, as hon. Members know from our debates on the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Bill 15 months ago. The discussion has been even tempered and balanced. A coalition of the Select Committee on Home Affairs, the Joint Committee on Human Rights and the Conservative and Liberal Democrat Front Benches in both Houses ensured that we could discuss the issues again, and I am glad to have the opportunity to do that.

I think that the Home Secretary remembers, however, that the votes cast at the other end of the building, principally by Liberal Democrat and Conservative colleagues, along with a few Labour and Cross-Bench independent Members, made it clear to the Government that they could not get away with an indefinite provision along the lines that they wanted. We have no regrets about that. Through intelligent conversation, and frantic legislation, we came to a collective decision that it was necessary to build in safeguards for what is a derogation from an important human right. Like other hon. Members, we will not divide the House on the motion. To put it bluntly, we are in the middle of the process for which protection was given by review and checks and balances. Having persuaded the Government and Parliament to accept various checks and balances, it would be unreasonable and unfair not to allow them to be used to the full. That does not mean, however, that the issue is of any less importance.

It remains a difficult matter, not just for liberals and Liberal Democrats, that a power is in force in the UK which is outwith the European convention on human rights—it is a derogation from it—and the Human Rights Act 1998, which we passed only four and a half years ago, to allow people to be detained indefinitely without trial. That is of considerable concern. It is of most concern to the people in question, who are held without having been found guilty of anything. There may be only a handful of them and I concede to the Home Secretary, as I have set out consistently, that he has been true to his word and used the power sparingly. We should be grateful for that, but it is not a legislative requirement on him. He has chosen to use that discretion properly within the powers, which are significant. There is no limit to the number of people who could be detained under them. As it happens, only a few have been.

However, some people have been detained and it is no surprise that the fifth report of the Joint Committee on Human Rights, published last Wednesday as a preparation for today's debate, begins:

> "Although the Bill"—

now the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001—

> "was improved in a number of ways during its parliamentary stages, we continue to be concerned about a number of aspects of it."

Specifically, the Committee was worried about

> "a new power to detain indefinitely a class of 'suspected international terrorists' contained in Part 4 of the Bill . . . which was only doubtfully compatible with Convention rights."

Over the page, the Committee expresses a second concern about

> "the Government purporting to derogate from the ECHR Article 5 . . . to make the derogation . . . effective in the law of the United Kingdom by amending the Human Rights Act 1998"

by way of a derogation order. The Committee continues:

> "The legal validity of the derogations and of the Order is currently the subject of legal proceedings, and their impact on human rights in the United Kingdom may be significant."

We share the Committee's continuing concern, which is why we are glad that we persuaded the Government with our voices and votes to bring the measure back to Parliament after 15 months before the power could be extended. They will have to do so annually and, in addition, the measure has a limited lifespan. However much we have argued with the Home Secretary about whether there was justification in law—I have told him publicly that I have never questioned the integrity of his judgment on the necessity of the measure—it is better to have flexibility in the use of the ECHR and the Human Rights Act, which was built in from the outset, than question, as some have done, the very basis of the convention.

The ECHR is not an inflexible document and it allows derogation for such a purpose. The Home Secretary argued 15 months ago that we ought to have the derogation as we needed that protection and it was likely that others would follow us. However, as my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) implied in his intervention, no other European Union country has subsequently sought to derogate from the ECHR. None the less, flexibility, together with parliamentary scrutiny, is a much better alternative to ripping up, rewriting and renegotiating the convention. We believe that the convention should stand and are glad that the Human Rights Act was passed, allowing arguments to be made in the court down the road instead of people having to wait six, five or four years to go to Strasbourg. We hope that the public accept that that is an advantage.

I intervened on the Conservative spokesman partly to remind him and the House that there are other protections to deal with an issue uppermost in the public mind and the tabloid press. There is an argument that we cannot turn away somebody who is claiming asylum even if they are a threat to our national security, and cannot revoke their right to be here even if they are such a threat. It is clear from article 1F of the Geneva convention on the status of refugees that somebody who has committed a crime against peace—a war crime or a crime against humanity—can be refused entry, whatever they are claiming. Article 33 states that the benefit of asylum provisions

> "may not, however, be claimed by a refugee whom there are reasonable grounds for regarding as a danger to the security of the country in which he is, or who, having been convicted by a final judgement of a particularly serious crime, constitutes a danger to the community of that country."

The fear that asylum seekers are outwith the protection of the law on national security and are a threat is misplaced. It is wrong, unfair and often prejudicial to pretend that they are.

[Simon Hughes]

Finally, there is the linked question of whether there is a category—this is the basis of the Home Secretary's original argument—of people whom we could send away under the ECHR but not for other reasons of international law. We accepted the Home Secretary's argument that there are people in that category when he came to the House seeking the power. We argued then, and continue to argue, that there are other ways in which to test their position, for example by trial in camera to protect security information and so on. It is always better to try alternatives to the option of detention without trial. We were not satisfied—we are still not satisfied—that all the options have been exhausted.

I add my thanks to the Home Secretary for using the power sparingly, in the sense that that was honouring his commitment. I also thank Lord Carlile of Berriew, who produced a clear report with some significant recommendations. The Home Secretary said that he would look into at least one of those recommendations. The right hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) has argued that it would be better if we redefined the people with links with terrorism. We sign up to and share that view. If that can be agreed, I hope that an amendment can be incorporated soon. We agree with the recommendations of the Joint Committee on Human Rights, to which I shall return.

The Government offered the concession—it was accepted a year and a quarter ago—that there should be a cross-party Committee of Privy Councillors to examine the working of the Act. That work is now taking place. Lord Newton of Braintree is chairing the Committee. I understand that before it is necessary to have this debate again, the Committee will have produced its report. That is one of the specific reasons why we feel that it would be wrong to say that we should not wait a little longer. The Committee is in the middle of its work. Having accepted that as a protection mechanism, it is only right that we should wait for it to report. We wish the members of the Committee well and we look forward to their report, which I am sure will be honest and helpful.

The fifth report of the Joint Committee of last Wednesday picks up some of the other specific issues to which the Chairman of the Home Affairs Select Committee has referred. I shall mention them so that they are on the record and ask the Home Secretary, or the Minister of State when she replies, to undertake that the Government will consider them all. First, in paragraph 20, it is recommended that a different power should be given to the Special Immigration Appeals Commission to examine material so that it has

> "both 'open' and 'closed' material",

and is able to form a view about that so that it can form a better picture.

Paragraph 21 states that the availability of appeals is a safeguard, and adds that the Home Secretary would want to urge that they must happen, and happen soon. It is no good having a safeguard that is held up while another legal process happens. It may be proper to go to the House of Lords and the European Court of Human Rights to challenge the validity of the decision made last year by the Court of Appeal, which tested the national emergency issue. However, that is not acceptable if that is to the exclusion of the ability to have the Special Immigration Appeals Commission, which has the powers of the High Court, to be able to determine whether detention is unlawful. That is why the provisions were made. The fact that appeals have not been determined is not what we expected. I hope that that situation will be remedied extremely soon.

It would be helpful in future if the Government made a clear statement setting out when they believed that a public emergency had been achieved, as it were, so that there could be, as the Select Committee recommended, an official declaration of that, rather than that being done implicitly and, as happened last time, belatedly. In addition, the Select Committee referred to the appropriateness of legal advice. A recommendation is made in paragraph 42 that there should be a better guarantee of appropriate legal advice that is speedily available to detainees, and that that should continue at all stages in the appeal process. It is said that there should be no less ability to be represented at the Court of Appeal or the House of Lords than at a lower level.

Paragraphs 47 and 48 state that any piece of evidential material should be classified as "closed"—that is, not able to be seen—

> "only if there are substantial grounds for thinking that making it available to the detainee, or his or her legal advisers, would compromise the effort to protect the public against the national emergency that gave rise to the derogation under . . . article 15."

The problem, as the Committee points out, is that Parliament—including, possibly, the Intelligence and Security Committee—cannot form a view about the immediacy of the national threat and the national emergency if it does not have access to the maximum possible material. Therefore, we ask that the Government respond positively to those recommendations, which were made in a balanced way, as well the recommendation about the conditions of detention.

One reason why it seems to us that today there is a case, without dividing the House, to allow the power to continue is that court hearings about the validity of detention are under way. We accept the point of view expressed by the Home Secretary today—although I have heard him put things slightly differently, if I can be gentle about it—that the courts should always have the ability to review the Executive. It is a safeguard of the constitution that the courts exist to check on the Executive, just as Parliament does—Parliament first, hopefully by getting the legislation right and holding Ministers to account, and the courts later.

I realise that it is not the responsibility of the Home Office, but it is difficult and unacceptable enough that there is a period when people are detained without trial in this country, but at least there are safeguards. It is entirely unacceptable for British and other citizens to be held in a place such as Guantanamo bay when there are no powers for them to be brought before the courts. I hope that the Home Office will make representations to the Foreign Office, if it has not done so already.

It is not compatible with any sense of international human rights that there is a part of the world to which people can be taken, whatever their nationality, that appears to be outside the legislative and judicial purview of some independent tribunal. That is not acceptable. It is bad enough that people are held without trial in

Belmarsh prison or elsewhere; it is doubly and triply worse that people are held without trial on the other side of the world, with no justification having been proved before any independent authority at all.

Jeremy Corbyn: I apologise to the hon. Gentleman for missing the early part of his speech. Is he aware of reports that the United States is considering taking prisoners from Afghanistan, and possibly Pakistan, to be imprisoned on Diego Garcia and interviewed there? Although the Government assure us that there are currently no prisoners on Diego Garcia, what would be the legal situation of any prisoners, given that it is a British territory?

Simon Hughes: I sincerely hope that we would not allow that to happen. One argument that I have heard in regard to Guantanamo bay is that it has American jurisdiction, so America is allowed to determine the matter. However, I was troubled by a ruling by a court in the United States that that was outside its legal jurisdiction. That seemed entirely incompatible with all traditions of human rights and international law. We must have stronger voices from the Foreign Office.

The tradition in this country has always been that people have a right to a trial before the courts can lock them up. The imprisonment of suspected terrorists, no matter how few or how many, without charge or trial is an extraordinary departure from the norm. We opposed those powers 15 months ago because we did not believe that the case for them was made out sufficiently to mean that other alternatives would not have sufficed. However, given that there is, as every one of us across the House must accept, a real and ongoing terrorist threat, we are prepared to accept the renewal of the powers for the limited further period of a year.

In the meantime, it is a consolation that the Government's activities are subject to the strongest scrutiny, both by Parliament and the courts, but it is better to have occasional exemptions and derogations from the Human Rights Act 1998 than not to have a convention on human rights or a Human Rights Act at all. We are prepared to argue for the continuing tradition of human rights in this country on the basis that we will always be vigilant and that we will always hold the Government to account.

4.49 pm

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): In the minute that remains to me, I should like to make a couple of very short points.

I support the measure, just as I did when the Bill was introduced. A number of Opposition Members get slightly fed up with the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary telling us that we did not support the legislation. Of course we do not like it and we question it—that is what we are supposed to do—but we see that there is no full alternative at the moment. I wanted to talk about trying to work at an alternative by restoring the Home Secretary's powers to deport people.

I asked the Home Secretary earlier about the power that he is taking in using article 15 of the European convention on human rights to derogate from article 5. I pointed out that, in order to use the power, he has to claim that there is a

> "time of war or other public emergency threatening the life of the nation".

That public emergency will not last for ever. The problem that we face is that some people who have used the asylum system to come to this country threaten it, and that problem will continue unless we restore to ourselves the ability to deport such people.

That is why article 3 is so important. As I have said many times, it does not include the word "deportation". It is the interpretation of the courts that has internationalised article 3, which simply states:

> "No one shall be subjected to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment."

Under the Soering case and other cases, the article has been internationalised to apply to non-EU citizens who happen to be in this country and to every country in the world, whether or not it has signed up to the convention. Until we deal with that problem, I am worried that the law in question may have to stay in force very much longer than any of us want, as the Home Secretary will come back each year with a similar proposal. He may not be able to say clearly that a public emergency is threatening the life of the nation, but he will know that individuals are threatening this country. As he cannot deport them, however, he will have no choice but to use the power that he is taking.

In referring to the power, the Joint Committee on Human Rights cited in its excellent report a quotation from Winston Churchill:

> "The power of the Executive to cast a man into prison without formulating any charge known to the law, and particularly to deny him the judgement of his peers, is in the highest degree odious and is the foundation of all totalitarian government whether Nazi or Communist."

That is the power that we have to have in part, because in court cases under article 3 we have lost the right to remove from this country people who threaten it.

4.52 pm

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): Although this has been a short debate, it has been a very serious one, as befits the very serious issues that we are discussing. In passing, I say to the Government business managers that an hour and a half is perhaps rather too short a time to discuss such serious matters. Perhaps there should be a Southwark, North and Bermondsey allowance, given that the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes), who speaks for his party, took twice as long as my right hon. Friend the shadow Home Secretary and effectively used all the Back-Bench time. I shall be brief.

My right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) made it clear that we support continuation of the order. The legislation, which is hedged around with sunset clauses and reviews, is in the form in which we wished it to be enacted. As my right hon. Friend pointed out, the Home Secretary approved that hedging around with sunset clauses and reviews, but those changes were introduced only after a pitched battle in which, as the Chairman of the Select Committee on Home Affairs, the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin), said, both Liberal Democrats and Conservative Members voted against the Home Secretary, and in which both the Joint Committee on Human Rights and the Home Affairs Committee wanted the safeguards to be introduced.

[Mr. Nick Hawkins]

My right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset pointed out that Lord Carlile identified differences between Her Majesty's prisons Woodhill and Belmarsh. Opposition Members welcome the Home Secretary's acknowledgement that that is a serious issue that needs to be looked into. My right hon. Friend also pointed out that the Special Immigration Appeals Commission should continue to proceed without awaiting the final determination of the challenge to derogation, which may take two years and may go to Strasbourg. He also referred to Lord Carlile's concern about the possible need to consider rewording sections 23(4) and 22(3)(c) of the Act to make the phrases in those provisions more effective.

The hon. Member for Sunderland, South rightly pointed out that the current security situation might prevail for years, and that people might therefore remain detained for years. I think it fair to say, however, that there is still serious concern among Conservative Members and outside the House about those who canvass actively for terrorist organisations, particularly some associated with the Finsbury Park mosque. It is feared that the powers taken by the Home Secretary have not been used to detain specific individuals who are often in the public eye, and who seek actively to publicise support for terrorist groups.

Jeremy Corbyn: As the hon. Gentleman may know, the Finsbury Park mosque is in my constituency. I hope he is aware that the individual to whom I assume he was referring has been removed and banned from the mosque, that the mosque itself is not open as it is awaiting repairs and refurbishment, and that the perverted form of Islam preached by that individual has zero support in the area and the local Muslim community.

Mr. Hawkins: That is why I used the words "previously associated", as the record will show. I see the hon. Gentleman nodding assent, indicating that he had understood me to say that. Nevertheless, concern continues, and I think that concern legitimate. We want these exceptional powers to be used sparingly—as the hon. Member for Sunderland, South said—but to be used where appropriate for the protection of the state. We should not allow our proper concern for safeguards and human rights to overtake our primary concern as parliamentarians in all parts of the House, which is to secure the safety of the British people.

The hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey described the way in which the legislation, in its final form, came into existence, through votes in another place, and spoke of the built-in safeguards. He said, and we agreed, that it would not be appropriate to divide the House when the matter is in mid-process. He praised the Home Secretary for using the power sparingly. He expressed his view on the derogation, which was different from mine and that of my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset. He talked about the limited use of the powers, about the Geneva convention, and about the discussion he had had with my right hon. Friend when he intervened earlier on the different legal views that we take on that issue.

The hon. Gentleman accepted that there should be continuing use of the new Committee of Privy Councillors chaired by my noble Friend Lord Newton of Braintree, which also includes my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Cambridgeshire (Sir Brian Mawhinney), who intervened earlier. He described concerns prompted by the recent report of the Joint Committee on Human Rights. We agree that its view should be taken seriously: there is no division between any of us on any side of the debate in that regard.

My hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Cameron) was worried about the way in which our support for the legislation has sometimes been misrepresented—inadvertently, I am sure—by the Home Secretary and others. It has been suggested, even by as distinguished a figure as the Prime Minister, that we opposed it. We never did. We sought to amend and improve it, and following our success in improving it through the votes in another place the Home Secretary now praises the final version. I hope we shall not hear the Prime Minister misrepresent the position in future.

We support the continuance of the legislation, but we want the Government to listen carefully to the views we have expressed, and will go on expressing, about ways in which it could be improved still further and ways in which people who are a threat to this country may in future be deported rather than merely being detained.

4.58 pm

The Minister for Citizenship and Immigration (Beverley Hughes): I thank Members for the quality and tone of this debate, which were similar to those of the original debate on the legislation. They underlined the fundamental importance of the powers in the orders and the seriousness with which all Members take them.

We consider the detention powers in part 4 to be a fairly carefully crafted response to the threat, closing unacceptable loopholes that would allow foreign nationals suspected of involvement in terrorism and threatening our national security to be at large on the streets. A difficult decision and difficult issues are involved, but we think this is the best option. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary regularly reviews the need for the powers, and we are very pleased that the Court of Appeal upheld them in its judgment earlier this year.

I am very short of time, as hon. Members will realise. I shall try to deal with as many of the points raised as I can, and I will respond later to hon. Members on the points raised that I am unable to deal with.

The right hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) asked about appeals proceeding without waiting for the outcome on derogation. He will probably know that SIAC is proceeding on that basis and we agree that it is right that it should do so.

The issue about links that the right hon. Gentleman raised from Lord Carlile's report is less straightforward. Certainly, we are prepared to look at that, but he will remember that there was considerable debate at the time the Bill went through. A Government amendment, to which he referred, tabled by Lord Rooker attempted to deal with those issues. We think that section 21(4) of the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act as it is now worded should provide for the concerns that he expressed, but if the matter is continuing to cause concern certainly we will look at it again in the context of considering in more detail Lord Carlile's report.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) also raised a number of points from Lord Carlile's report. Again, the issue about acts "preparatory to" terrorism is less straightforward. We think that the recommendations relating to that point are encompassed by procedures already available to us, but again we will look at it. In relation to allowing for appeals from abroad where someone has been certificated but has gone voluntarily, SIAC has already determined that appeals may be continued from abroad. In fact, the two people who have already left are continuing their appeals against the certificates from the places to which they have gone.

Certainly, we will consider the JCHR report in some detail. In response to a number of hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes), who have raised the issue of appeals to SIAC, and the point that the possibility of appeal is undermined by the delay in SIAC hearing those appeals, that delay is not caused by SIAC or, indeed, by those acting on behalf of the Government. The delay arises from the decision of the counsel for some of the appellants to deal first with the derogation issue rather than the appeal against the certificates. We had no involvement in that decision.

I have every sympathy with the hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Cameron), who I am sure would have put a much fuller case for his point, which I understand fully. However, I think that it is another Trojan horse for the Conservative position that we should come out of the ECHR and seek to re-enter with a reservation on article 3, which we have already heard several times. He must accept that these are difficult issues. He argues for the ability to deport people knowing that they may be killed if they are sent to places to which they could go back—

It being one and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Standing Order No. 16.*

Question agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 (Continuance in force of sections 21 to 23) Order 2003, which was laid before this House on 23rd January, be approved.

Bali Bombings

[Relevant documents: The Intelligence and Security Committee Report, Inquiry into Intelligence, Assessment and Advice prior to the Terrorist Bombings on Bali, 12th October 2002 (CM5724) and the Government response thereto (CM 5765).]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Heppell.]*

5 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): I welcome this opportunity to debate the report on the Bali bombings produced by the Intelligence and Security Committee on 11 December last year, and the Government's written response published on 26 February.

The atrocity in Bali was an appalling act of terrorism. The slaughter was indiscriminate. People from many faiths and nations lost their lives. Many countries suffered terribly, not least Indonesia and Australia. For the United Kingdom, it was one of the worst terrorist attacks in our history—26 British and dual nationals died. I was reminded of the impact of the tragedy on communities across the UK only last month, when I attended the very moving memorial service for the victims, which was held in Southwark cathedral.

In the days and weeks following the attacks, the agony of those who had lost loved ones was compounded by speculation that the Government could have done more. In particular, there were allegations that we did not act on specific intelligence pointing towards an attack in Bali, and failed to inform the public of the dangers in advance.

It was for this reason that in my statement to the House on 21 October, I commissioned a review by the Intelligence and Security Committee to examine the Government's intelligence, assessments and advice prior to the bombings on 12 October. As I said in my statement to the House on 21 October, I did

> "not want the relatives of those who died in this atrocity, nor those injured, to have nagging anxieties about whether different judgments" [*Official Report*, 21 October 2002; Vol. 391, c. 23.]

could "have been made."

The House had an early opportunity to discuss the report on the day of its publication, 11 December, when I made a statement. I am sure that the whole House will wish to join me in extending thanks to my right hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Ann Taylor), the Chair of the Committee, and to her colleagues in this House and in the other place, for their diligent work in putting together their response. The ISC produced a comprehensive report based on evidence from Ministers, from officials in the intelligence agencies and in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and from travel industry representatives.

I welcome the fact that the Committee's report found that it had

> "not seen any intelligence that described or directly related to any form of terrorist attack on Bali on or around 12 October 2002",

and that on the basis of the available intelligence

> "there was no action that the UK or its allies could have taken to prevent the attacks."

[Mr. Jack Straw]

I hope that this finding provides a measure of relief for the relatives of the victims. I also welcome the Committee's conclusion that in the months leading up to the attacks, sufficient priority was given to intelligence collection in respect of Indonesia.

The report did, however, contain two broad criticisms of the threat assessment process, and of the system that we have in place to provide accurate and timely travel advice to the British public, so let me deal with these in turn. First, the Committee said that the Security Service failed to make the correct assessment of the level of threat to British interests on the basis of the available intelligence. So it did not challenge the available intelligence, but it did say that incorrect assessments were made on the basis of it. In particular, the Committee's report said that the Security Service's current six levels of threat assessment did

> "not provide sufficiently clear differentiated definitions of the threat level. They need to be of greater use to customer departments".

The Committee said that although the Security Service had briefed the FCO orally, it took too long—more than two weeks—to issue a report on Indonesia in the aftermath of a failed attack on a United States diplomatic property in Jakarta on 23 September. The Committee also found that, given the intelligence on a terrorist attack in Indonesia and the

> "reluctance of the Indonesian authorities"

to deal with the threat, the Security Service made a "serious misjudgment" in failing to upgrade its assessment of the threat to general British interests from "significant" to "high".

The Security Service acts under the authority of the Home Secretary, so I will keep my remarks on these matters brief and to the point. Having been Home Secretary, I realise that my right hon. Friend the current Home Secretary is responsible for the running of the Security Service as a whole. My right hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham) will respond to points of detail relating to the Security Service, but I should say that, having worked very closely with it and its officials in my four years as Home Secretary—as well as continuing to witness their work in the 21 months since I became Foreign Secretary—I have the very highest regard for their professionalism and integrity, and for the trouble that they take to make the best assessments that they can, always on the basis of inadequate information, for that is the nature of intelligence.

During the period preceding the Bali bombings, Security Service experts, in assessing the threat to British interests in Indonesia, took account of all the available information as being significant. This means that the security climate was such that our general interests were likely to be a priority target for terrorists. However, the Security Service judged at the time, and continues to judge, that the intelligence referred to in the ISC report was not specific enough to cause it to raise the existing threat level to "high" from "significant".

I realise that that is a point of difference with the ISC. The Security Service takes the ISC's recommendations seriously and, in many other respects, they have been accepted, but it is right for me to place on record that if the Security Service had judged that it had made an error, I would have brought that to the attention of the House. The Security Service has reviewed the evidence and believes that its original judgment was correct.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): The problem is the terminology. The use of the word "significant" does not make it clear enough, to those who have to decide whether they wish to take the risk of going to a place with that threat level, that it means—as the Home Secretary has just said and as the Committee's report confirms—that the place is

> "a priority target of terrorist activity".

Surely the problem is not the grading that the Security Service gave to the level of threat but the fact that the word used for that level did not sufficiently convey the seriousness of the accurate threat assessment that had been made.

Mr. Straw: The hon. Gentleman is on to something, but we do not include the Security Service's raw threat assessment in the published travel advice, which reflects the intelligence assessments. Including the raw threat assessment would, on occasions, compromise the source of the intelligence—if it changed suddenly, for example, it could send a signal to the terrorists—and would be more likely to cause confusion in the minds of the public. I shall address the issue of how we aim to improve the travel advice in a moment, but at present we use the threat assessment as one input, and set it against other inputs, including the capacity of the local law enforcement and intelligence agencies to cope with a threat, to come to a description of the threat that the tourist, business person or British resident is likely to encounter in that country. In certain circumstances, we also offer advice about whether people should travel there at all, or in qualified circumstances.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Will the Foreign Secretary note that there was a direct consequence of the Security Service not raising the threat level, which was that the Foreign Office did not revise the travel advice? It would have done so if the threat level had been raised, even if it had been raised to some intermediate level that was not available to the Security Service at the time.

Mr. Straw: It does not follow that because the threat level changes, the travel advice is automatically changed. The right hon. Gentleman is correct to say that had the threat level changed, it would have triggered a review of the travel advice. However, at the moment, threat levels move up and down, and the result of the Foreign Office's review of the risk, according to the Security Service's objective threat assessment, ends up on my desk or in my box. Often, I decide not to change the travel advice because it could need to be changed back the next week and that would promote confusion, not clarity. It would not necessarily improve the safety of the British public, which is always the paramount concern.

As the Committee noted in its report, the Security Service was already reviewing its threat assessment system before the Bali bombing. The Committee's recommendations have informed that review and I am pleased to tell the House that it will result in changes to the definitions of threat level, making them more informative to customer Departments, such as the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. That picks up the point made by the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis).

Counter-terrorism co-ordination is probably better in the United Kingdom than in most comparable countries. We do not have the inter-agency competition seen elsewhere on both sides of the Atlantic, but that does not mean that we should be complacent. We are continually taking steps to improve. As set out in the Government's response last month, experts from the agencies and relevant Departments will shortly be located in an expanded single joint terrorism analysis centre. Acting under the director general of the Security Service, that centre will be responsible for the long-term strategic assessment of the terrorist threat, as well as for the day-to-day response to specific intelligence. I share the Committee's concern that reports should be issued in a timely manner, and that will be a major objective of the new organisation.

I want to return to the point that the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) made about the intelligence that we received that mentioned Bali along with five other very large islands in Indonesia. Even if that intelligence had led to a change in travel advice, it might have remained very unspecific. It is important to make a point that the Committee itself made—that is, that we had received no intelligence that alerted us to the specific possibility of a terrorist atrocity taking place in Bali. Had there been, we would have ensured that that was reflected in the travel advice. I was anxious to make sure that the Committee was able to do its work and that, to that end, it had full access to all the intelligence. As was initially made public by Alexander Downer, Australia's Minister for Foreign Affairs, then confirmed here, the intelligence that mentioned Bali also mentioned five other huge islands in Indonesia, so it covered about half the population and 70 per cent. or so of the destinations travelled to by western tourists.

Mr. Beith: The Foreign Secretary did indeed give the utmost co-operation to the Committee, for which we are grateful. However, surely the question that nobody asked at the time was, "Where in the whole of Indonesia is it possible to attack the largest number of western tourists with the greatest ease?" The answer has to be Bali, because that is where tourists were gathered in concentrations in nightclubs, and we know how dangerous a situation that is. That is where the misjudgment took place.

Mr. Straw: The right hon. Gentleman says that with the benefit of 20–20 vision. When the judgment was made, the information was very unspecific, and tourists go to a large number of other destinations. The situation cuts both ways. Although western tourists congregate more in Bali than elsewhere in Indonesia, that is offset by the fact that Bali is overwhelmingly a Hindu, not a Muslim, island, so it should be a predominantly safe environment in which terrorists find it much more difficult to operate and to hide. Those are the kinds of difficult judgments that have to be made. I regret that the intelligence services did not have available specific intelligence saying that there was likely to be a serious terrorist threat in Bali because, for sure, we would then have alerted the law enforcement agencies in Bali and Indonesia, and we would also have immediately changed our travel advice. The truth about modern terrorists in the global village in which we live is that they can move anywhere in the world extremely quickly and that the equipment that they need to commit such atrocities is highly portable.

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): Paragraph 44 of the conclusions and recommendations says that

> "on the available intelligence, we do not believe that the attack could have been prevented."

Does the Foreign Secretary agree that it is vital that people recognise that this is not an exercise of risk elimination, but has necessarily to be an exercise in risk management, and that the only way in which we can eliminate the risk is by eliminating the original motivation for the terrorism, which was not the remit of the report?

Mr. Straw: It is a matter of risk management. There is a wider issue about the way in which we deal with terrorism. I have always believed that we did that through a combination of the toughest security and, when possible, a political process. However, I stress to the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) that it has been difficult enough to develop a political process in Northern Ireland, where at least the terrorist groups had political front organisations, which had a developed political agenda. Although they were trying to blow up democratic institutions, they also stood for them. It is much more difficult to know how to reach accommodation with some religious terrorist organisations, which carry out suicide bombings.

Of course, I accept the hon. Gentleman's underlying point that if we can make significant progress on peace in the middle east and deal with terrorism through a combination of political process and effective security, that should help to change the overall environment. We are working on that. I also agree that we are conducting an exercise in risk management, not risk elimination. I shall comment on the nature of our travel advice in that context.

Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): Will my right hon. Friend comment on the fact that British residents in Indonesia were given better advice through the e-mail service than travellers from this country received from the general Foreign Office advice service?

Mr. Straw: As ever, my right hon. Friend anticipates me. I shall deal with that specific point shortly, and if she is not satisfied with the reply, I shall give way again.

We are setting up a new, joint terrorism analysis centre. One of its major objectives is to produce more timely advice. The second broad criticism in the Intelligence and Security Committee's report covered the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's travel advice. The Committee found that the advice at the time of the Bali atrocity did not accurately reflect either the threat or recent developments in Indonesia. However, the report acknowledged that the advice was proportional to the assessment of the threat that the Security Service conducted.

The Committee reported that travel advice was not generally communicated to the public or the travel industry effectively, and that the purpose of the FCO

[Mr. Straw]

travel advice should be reviewed. In my response, I welcomed the reports from the Intelligence and Security Committee and the Foreign Affairs Committee and their valuable and timely examination of our travel advice system. Along with consular, immigration and commercial services, providing travel advice is my Department's core, front-line service to the British public. It is increasingly important.

British nationals make 60 million trips overseas each year. In addition, 15 million British nationals live overseas. The demand for advice is growing. My Department's website has 28,000 subscribers who receive changes to travel advice as they issue. We also receive 675,000 page impressions of travel advice each month. It is therefore imperative to do everything that we can to get the service right.

We have always taken great care to ensure that intelligence assessments translate into sensible advice to British travellers and residents overseas.

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): My right hon. Friend mentioned 675,000 page impressions a month. I suspect that all those are the direct result of people choosing rather than being urged to seek advice when they buy a holiday. That applies especially to buying a holiday online. Millions of people do that through Opodo or directly through the airline. I understand why an airline might not want an automatic rather than a chosen link; information on Bali might read, "Please don't go there." None the less, could the Foreign Secretary push the matter a little further with the Association of British Travel Agents and others, who remain somewhat reluctant about ensuring the availability of the advice?

Mr. Straw: Although I am happy to take up that point, co-operation with ABTA has been good. I have no evidence of travel agents trying to discourage people from seeking advice on the website. It is happily in the nature of the anarchic-cum-democratic internet that people cannot be prevented from gaining access to it.

We have ensured that our website includes links with the equivalent travel advice of several countries. The right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) made that suggestion, which I was happy to follow up. The original suggestion was to do it with a couple of countries but we have done so with eight or nine. People who are not certain can thus look at other websites.

To return specifically to travel advice, I accept that, at times, our advice has not been as clear, simple and informative as it should be, so in the aftermath of the Bali attack, I asked officials to undertake a comprehensive review of the travel advice system, taking advice from external sources, including the Plain English Campaign and ABTA, from the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs and the Intelligence and Security Committee.

The review also took account of comments made by others--Members of Parliament and the general public, including relatives of those who died in the Bali bombing. I have made myself available to see those relatives who wished to see me, and some of them have been extremely forthcoming in the detailed advice that they have given to us not only about the nature of the travel advice, but about the important improvements to consular assistance that we have put in hand.

As a result of the review, we have improved the content and layout of our travel notices. The aim is to ensure that the summaries are short and precise and that there is a specific terrorism paragraph where the situation in a country requires it.

To pick up a point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Ann Taylor), the report also drew attention to the importance of ensuring that the advice given to British travellers is no different from that we offer to British residents overseas, and I very strongly agree. It has always been our policy to ensure that the advice given to residents and travellers must be entirely consistent. In the aftermath of the Bali attack, we have issued strict instructions to posts to ensure that any information issued locally to British residents—whether by e-mail or otherwise—is entirely consistent with the FCO travel advice.

Of course if those in a local post have information that they think is not reflected in the travel advice, they are under a duty not only to use that information to warn local residents through their warning system—these days, it is online using e-mail in most areas—but to get in touch immediately with the relevant department in the Foreign Office, so that that information is properly reflected in the advice that we publish worldwide.

Our provision of travel advice, however good, must be subject to continual improvement. For example, it must be sensible to include a longer section in our travel advice assessing the risks to UK interests, thereby allowing British residents and travellers to make up their own minds, rather than being over-prescriptive. That is an important issue, and it was very striking that, when I made the original statement about the Bali attack on 21 October and, again, when I came to the House to make our initial response to the ISC report on 11 December, different opinions that transcend party loyalties were expressed about how prescriptive, or otherwise, we should be in our travel advice.

Since the Bali attack I have had to pay a lot more attention to the specific nature of advice for specific countries. I shall be interested to know what the view of the House is, but the more that I have to pay attention to travel advice, the more that I have come to the view that the advice ought to tilt towards being just that—advice—and that it should be as accurate as possible and describe the risks but that it should be left to travellers or residents to make their own judgment about whether to go to the country or, if they are in the country, whether to stay there or to leave.

Obviously, there have to be limits on such a permissive arrangement and, if we receive specific intelligence advice about high-level threats, it is our plain duty to tell people to leave. Whether they accept that advice is a matter for them, but we have that duty and, when we have to be much more categorical, my own view is that gradations in the advice about whether people ought to travel may be less effective than simply providing the advice and telling them to look at and make their own decision. I have come to that judgment particularly post-Bali, but also in the light of experiences relating to other countries last year. As I say, I shall be interested to hear what colleagues in the House have to say.

We can never achieve perfection. Some will criticise us for being too alarmist; others will always demand that we issue more and more specific warnings. We look forward to advice not only from hon. Members, but members of the public. However, what certainly does not help us—happily this has not been a feature of debates or comments in the House—is for people simply to attack FCO travel advice in a way that undermines people's trust in what has been a popular and much used service, run by staff replete with skills and integrity.

Given the nature and scale of the terrorist threat that we face, we have to recognise that we cannot guarantee that there will not be another attack such as that in Bali. The Government have to prepare for the terrible eventuality that, on any given day, a terrorist attack may claim British lives in any corner of the world. We have learned important lessons from our consular response to the Bali tragedy. As I told Parliament on 21 October, in the immediate aftermath of the attack we failed to get sufficient extra staff on the ground quickly enough. I want to reiterate my apologies for that to the relatives of the victims and to those who were injured.

To ensure that we deliver the most professional response in the event of any future major incidents, I have set up rapid deployment teams, on standby in London, ready to leave for the scene of an emergency anywhere in the world at 24 hours' notice or less. Each team is led by a senior FCO official and combines a mixture of skills and experience. Those teams may find themselves working in the most trying circumstances imaginable, but I am confident that they will live up to the finest traditions of the diplomatic service in delivering the highest level of consular assistance to British nationals.

One of the many sadnesses of having to apologise to the House, to the relatives of victims and to those injured for the fact that our service had fallen below the standard that all of us wanted was that that represented no criticism of any of the staff who were involved in responding in Bali, every one of whom worked phenomenally hard and often at great risk to their own safety in Bali and elsewhere.

Dr. Julian Lewis: I welcome what the Foreign Secretary has just said about the availability of a rapid deployment team in the future. May I point out to him that a prospective Conservative parliamentary candidate in the next election, Mr. Tobias Ellwood, featured prominently in the aftermath of Bali? He and his sister went out there and had to search by themselves, without any significant support whatever, for the body of their brother. Something like that should never have to happen again.

Mr. Straw: I accept that. I have met Mr. Ellwood and his sister, who are very courageous people. I discussed what had happened to them, and this is the first time that I have had any idea of their political affiliations. It was not of remote interest to me—

Dr. Lewis: Mr. Ellwood was selected later.

Mr. Straw: Mr. Ellwood is a free citizen. I would not have minded if he had been selected before. It is entirely a matter for him. I do not think that he would mind me saying that, notwithstanding the terrible grief that he and his family have suffered, he has been extremely helpful in offering us advice on how we should improve the service in the future. Of course, what happened to him, his sister and their parents should never have happened.

Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): These terrorist outrages are likely to increase, they may occur in remote parts of countries where we have representation, such as Indonesia, or countries where we have no representation. There is, therefore, a premium on international co-operation. On this occasion, that co-operation was with Australia, and it may occur frequently with our European partners. Will my right hon. Friend say to what extent the question of co-operation, in respect of terrorist outrages, has been addressed at an EU level, and with what result?

Mr. Straw: I agree with my right hon. Friend that these things can happen almost anywhere. The highest level of co-operation is among Commonwealth countries and the United States, and particularly the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom, which, as members of the Intelligence and Security Committee are fully aware, have intelligence sharing arrangements. Co-ordination is extremely good between those countries. Work remains to be done with members of the European Union, and I am happy to write to my right hon. Friend and to his Committee to spell that out in more detail. I accept that there is an important agenda there.

Donald Anderson: To clarify, I refer not just to intelligence sharing but practical co-operation in evacuations, for instance, with Australia, and with the EU in countries where we may have no representation but where France, or another country, may have representation.

Mr. Straw: My answer was referring to both. We have to improve co-ordination. I have no doubt that, if an atrocity occurred in a country where we had no, or limited, representation, but where one of our EU partners had good representation, that partner would respond extremely effectively. However, it is better to have standing arrangements.

One reason why, immediately after the atrocity, we thought that our arrangements in Bali were likely to be adequate was that our arrangements in New York had turned out to be more than adequate. Appalling though that atrocity was, it was fortuitous that only a mile or so from the twin towers we had 200 British diplomats, whose families were available. Most of the British victims were not tourists but were resident in New York and had a support base. We have learned that every terrorist atrocity is likely to be different. We have to be ready to respond to the widest possible range of atrocity.

To pick up on my right hon. Friend's point, the Committee's report on intelligence assessments prior to the Bali bombing cut to the heart of a problem that the Government have had to confront every day since 11 September 2001. There is a huge and growing volume of intelligence on terrorist-related activity. In responding to such material, officials and Ministers alike have to strike the right balance between providing

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the public with adequate warning of threats and not causing undue panic. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said in his speech to the lord mayor's banquet last year:

> "if, on the basis of a general warning, we were to shut down all the places that al-Qaeda might be considering for attack, we would be doing their job for them. The dilemma is reconciling warning people without alarming them; taking preventative measures without destroying normal life."

We will continue to do our best to strike that balance properly. We will do our utmost to ensure that the British public can go about their daily lives free from the threat of indiscriminate attack. We will work relentlessly to ensure that the prevailing climate for our citizens at home and overseas is one of freedom, not fear.

5.37 pm

Mr. Richard Spring (West Suffolk): Only last week, the remains of a number of the victims of the atrocity in Bali were returned to Britain. It brought home to us, once again, the full horror of the events of October last year. The victims of the bombing came from many countries all over the world. They included 24 Britons. Australians, in particular, suffered an especially grievous loss. The victims were largely young people enjoying an evening out in a nightclub.

I have been to Bali on a number of occasions. The island is known for its beauty, its unique culture, its tranquillity and its warm welcome; for those reasons, it acts as a magnet for young people who are seeking to relax and explore the world.

I warmly thank the right hon. Member for Dewsbury (Ann Taylor) and all the members of her Committee for the quality of their important report and the speed with which it was produced. I thank the Foreign Secretary for acceding to the request of my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram), the shadow Foreign Secretary, that time be found for this debate. My right hon. Friend apologises to the House for his absence today. He has asked me to thank the Foreign Secretary for the positive manner with which he responded to his suggestions in the wake of the attack. I know that hon. Members on both sides of the House are united in trying to deal with the implications of this terrorist act. The House meets in that spirit today.

The terrorist bombing in Bali on 12 October 2002 was a heinous crime. Once again, I extend our deepest condolences to the families and friends of the innocent victims of that crime; and I am especially grateful to the Foreign Secretary for referring to Tobias Ellwood and his family.

This report investigates what lessons might be learned, whether errors were made, and whether the attack and loss of life might have been prevented had errors not been made. It also investigates what might be done in future to make Foreign and Commonwealth Office travel advice more accurately reflect the threat. As the Foreign Secretary has said, the report grew out of the fact that it is important that relatives do not have

> "nagging anxieties about whether different judgments should have been made." —[*Official Report*, 21 October 2002; Vol. 391, c. 23.]

It grew also from the obligations on Governments to ensure that all procedures were "thoroughly examined", as the Australian Prime Minister, John Howard, has commented.

The Bali attack left unanswered serious questions relating to the intelligence dissemination system and to FCO travel advice. That has important implications for us all in an age when more and more of us holiday abroad and when the gap year abroad has become part of the culture for many of our sons and daughters. The report covers a number of key questions, following through from the collection of intelligence material to the travel advice displayed on the FCO website. It asks whether intelligence collection in Indonesia was given priority, whether any specific intelligence was overlooked, whether the security services adequately assessed the levels of threat, whether the system of levels was adequate and whether the assessment was reflected in the FCO travel advice. I praise the often dangerous, and more usually unsung, work carried out by members of our security services and our diplomats overseas. I am pleased that the report agrees, noting that

> "sufficient priority was given to the collection of intelligence".

The changed international scene after the attack on the twin towers and, indeed, since the end of the cold war has placed a far greater burden on the security services in many ways. Intelligence has assumed far greater importance in tackling unseen threats, and we welcome the Government's decision to increase resources for the intelligence agencies.

I was particularly interested when, last week, Sir John Stevens, the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis, indicated changed attitudes in police thinking and suggested that the visible presence of the police was important not simply as reassurance, but as efficacious in preventing and detecting crimes. We all recall that, in the 1990s, we were told that CCTV and electronic surveillance were perhaps an increasingly appropriate way to tackle crime. However, we now know that that is certainly not the case and that the human element remains invaluable.

At the end of the cold war, there were question marks about what the function of the security services should be. The old ideological battles were in the past and we looked to the future. However, as with the police in the 1990s, we saw an emphasis on spy satellites and other electronic surveillance to fulfil the intelligence gathering role. As my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames) has pointed out on many occasions in the House, although such means are highly valuable, we now know from the rise of al-Qaeda and many other terrorist groups that the human element remains hugely important in intelligence gathering.

Of course, it takes time to develop human networks, but the one lesson of 11 September, Bali and other outrages is that that simply must be done. I am sure that the Foreign Secretary will agree, for example, that much of the success that our security services had in dealing with the threats in Northern Ireland came about as a result of the infiltration of paramilitary groups. I hope that, in the winding-up speech, the Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community Safety will be able to confirm that he shares our assessment of the importance of human intelligence and will reassure the House that that receives due emphasis in Government priorities.

The report also notes that no specific intelligence of a specific threat in Bali was found by the security services. What is clear from the attacks in New York, Mombasa and Bali is the absolute need for co-operation worldwide. The Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee has just made that point. The confusion over what the United States knew or what Australia may have known demonstrates that, although we share intelligence, we must also be willing to re-examine whether it is shared in the most efficient and effective way.

Post the cold war, the threat of terrorism—the unseen enemy—poses many challenges, not least in our society, as between protecting citizens from attack and protecting their civil rights. Each and every democratic country has to face that dilemma.

The picture is not one of total gloom. There have been two extremely welcome breakthroughs in trying to reconcile terrorist groups with legitimate Governments. After many years of murder and mayhem in Sri Lanka, it is very good that productive dialogue is now taking place. Two weeks ago, I was in Nepal. The Foreign Secretary will know that, after many thousands of deaths, the Maoist guerrillas are in dialogue with the Nepalese Government. The consequences of the conflict in human terms have been tragic, but all hon. Members can take pride in the role that the different arms of the British Government have played directly and indirectly in helping to build trust and dialogue in Nepal. I hope that many lives can be saved in the future.

Donald Anderson: Will the hon. Gentleman also pay tribute to another example of practical co-operation, namely that between the British Government and the Greek Government following the appalling murder of Brigadier Saunders in Athens? It is significant that as a result of that excellent co-operation the trial of individuals for that murder starts today.

Mr. Spring: The House is grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for making that point, and of course we all agree that such co-operation, leading to events such as today's trial, is most welcome.

There is of course the question of how raw intelligence is assessed once it has been gathered. Paragraph 43 of the report notes that in the period in question 150 reports which related to terrorist activity were received each day, and that represents a problem for analysis. The development of the counter-terrorism analysis centre is welcome, and hopefully it is providing a focal point for the co-ordination of intelligence that can be fed into the decision-making process. I am sure that in his winding-up speech my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) will want to return to that aspect of the report.

The function of such a centre must be to facilitate the rapid digestion and analysis of raw information to feed it down the chain to the point at which it is available to the travelling public. However, there is a risk of what has been termed warning fatigue, which my right hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell (Mr. Mackay) raised in the House in October. I think that the right hon. Member for Swansea, East (Donald Anderson) was also making that point. As the Foreign Secretary will agree, many young people seek adventure and consider themselves virtually indestructible. Hence a balance must be struck between the provision of adequate warnings and the ratcheting up of all the threat assessments to such a degree that many people will simply comprehensively ignore them.

One of the key points at the time of the bombing was the question of why the threat level was not raised from significant to high. The report suggested that the level of "significant" recognised the security services' assessment, but it seems to suggest that the threat grading system is not as sensitive as it needs to be. Given the apparent information about a number of islands in Indonesia, and the attacks on American diplomatic property shortly beforehand, a higher threat level would, with hindsight, have appeared more appropriate.

My right hon. Friend the shadow Foreign Secretary has often called for the system to be looked at and a more sensitive graded system to be put in place, and the Committee says that the system needs modifications, but in the Government's response I see only a reference to the security services' review, which aims to give greater definition. That is welcome, and the Foreign Secretary referred to the matter, but further clarification could be given by the Minister who winds up the debate.

Finally, there is the question of the way the assessments become the FCO travel advice used by hundreds of thousands of people through the FCO website. The report recognises at paragraph 18 that the FCO advice did not properly recognise the threat in Bali but was proportional to the current assessments by the security services. I welcome the review of the travel advice system and its mechanisms, as noted at paragraph 13 of the Government's response.

Consistency is central. There must be confidence in FCO advice, and that comes from consistency with allies. In that respect I thank the Foreign Secretary for his response to a letter from my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes in December, in which my right hon. Friend suggested that the FCO website should carry links to the travel advice pages of other key allies, such as the United States and Australia. The Foreign Secretary wrote again this year saying that he had accepted and implemented the suggestion.

Such links do not detract from the need for our travel advice to reflect the information on the websites of other countries, assuming that it does not relate to specific threats to nationals from those countries. Are there FCO staff dedicated to daily monitoring and investigation of differences in advice and to pursuing the matter through diplomatic and intelligence links to see whether there is something that we should be taking greater account of?

It is also important, as the Government response notes, that advice issued to holiday makers be consistent with that given to Britons living abroad. The warden system plays a big role in that. Noting that once again a balance has to be struck between the need for intelligence information to be translated into advice as rapidly as possible and for that information adequately to be analysed and cross-referenced, what procedures are in place to ensure consistency of travel advice between us and our allies?

I have one or two remaining questions to pose in the hope that the Minister will address them. What assessments have the Government made of the impact

[Mr. Spring]

that travel advice from the FCO has on the validity of travel insurance claims for cancelled holidays? If such an atrocity were to occur again, and heaven forbid that it should, what steps are in place for a dedicated rapid response team, perhaps based at a suitably large regional posting, to be on the scene within hours to assist relatives and local authorities? From what the Foreign Secretary said, I understand that a team is based in London. Is it exclusively in London or can it be based elsewhere?

Mr. Straw: A number of teams are based in London and they are ready to draw on people worldwide. That is what happened in Bali. When the response was ratcheted up to the right level, people were drawn from Singapore, Bangkok and Australian posts. That was co-ordinated from London, where the core team was based. If we had another Bali, we would not wait for the planes to leave Heathrow. We would put teams in place very quickly from the region and supplement them with people as soon as we could get them out there.

Mr. Spring: I am grateful to the Foreign Secretary for that clarification. On the basis of our experience, I know he agrees that that is an important point. The consular staff from Bali and Jakarta worked tirelessly. We have all learned lessons from the incident and I hope that we have resolved the problem.

The scars of the horrendous bombing of Bali remain. It was an horrific crime. I very much hope that our deliberations, and the contents of the excellent report, will go some way to preventing future attacks or, at the very least, future loss of life on such a scale by timely intelligence and warnings.

5.52 pm

Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): I thank the Foreign Secretary and the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) for their comments and recognition of the Committee's work. I also thank members of the Committee, who spent many hours on the report and the large amount of other work that occupied us for many months. I cannot say that we enjoyed that aspect of our work because of the context in which we undertook the inquiry, but we all think that it was worth while, especially as many of our comments have been taken on board and have helped to move on the discussion and some of the issues. Today we are discussing what lessons can be learned to prevent such a tragedy from happening again elsewhere. However, we all have to remember the people who were killed or injured in Bali and their families. On behalf of the Committee, I reiterate our expression of sympathy to them all. I hope that the report sheds light on the processes and on what happened in Bali, and that it is helpful.

The Committee's work gave us a detailed insight into the workings of the agencies. We visit the agencies and have a great deal of contact with them, but having all the evidence before us and examining one issue in great depth was useful in giving us a general oversight of them while we considered the specific problem. It also clearly demonstrated the link between the agencies' work and the public policy decisions that have to be taken later, such as travel advice. That is not always the case with our work.

The Foreign Secretary said that he agreed at the outset that the Committee would have full access to all relevant intelligence. That approach is typical of my right hon. Friend, who tends to tackle problems head on rather than by moving them to one side. The full access to intelligence was essential for us to have confidence that we were doing our job properly. We are glad and grateful to him for that intelligence, just as we appreciate that it was necessary for us to have the full co-operation of the agencies involved and Ministers.

On the report and the Government's response, our inquiry focused on the six main questions that we outline in paragraph 6, as the hon. Member for West Suffolk said. The first question was whether terrorism in Indonesia was a sufficiently high intelligence collection priority. We concluded, partly on the basis of our previous work and annual reports, that sufficient priority had been given to that task, although we put that in a particular context:

> "The Committee believes that sufficient priority was given to the collection of intelligence, although we repeat the comments in our last Annual Report that the Agencies are still growing following the increased funding they received after the 11 September attacks and it takes time for the additional resources to be deployed to maximum effect."

The implication is that the reduction in the agencies' funding in the 1990s and the lack of long-term investment curtailed their ability to respond later. That was not helpful.

Our second question was whether intelligence had been overlooked. My right hon. Friend quoted the report on that. It said:

> "We conclude that on the available intelligence there was no action that the UK or its allies could have taken to prevent the attacks."

We are clear about that. As my right hon. Friend said, it is important for the families to know that it was not a simple matter of information being available that pointed directly to an attack in Bali which could have been foreseen on that day. It is important to stress that.

Our third and fourth questions related to threat assessment: was the correct assessment made and is the current threat assessment system effective and adequate? We thought that there were difficulties with that, some of which were mentioned by my right hon. Friend and the hon. Member for West Suffolk. We concluded that there was a serious misjudgment. As a result, the Security Service did not assess the threat correctly and did not raise the level of threat to high. We are clear about that. Some think that that judgment is too harsh, as my right hon. Friend said, but we did not choose our words lightly. We thought long and hard before concluding that a serious misjudgment had been made. On behalf of the Committee, I can say that we stick by our conclusion. Problems did exist with the way in which the assessment was made.

The Committee looked at all this evidence from a slightly different angle from that of those who look at it on a daily basis. On one day, we had all the relevant pieces of intelligence on the matter brought together so that we could go through them sequentially. The available intelligence did not come to us in dribbs and drabs over a period of weeks, as it does for people working in the agencies. There were, and indeed are, lots of reports about this matter and others coming daily to the Security Service. When we took evidence, we were told that there are about 150 such reports daily, and Indonesia is only one part of that wide reporting. There has been no diminution in the number of reports coming in, or in the amount of work, particularly in assessment, that the agencies must do.

When we looked at all the relevant reports, we could assess their nature and the way in which they varied. Some were sparse in detail; some were dull; some could be interpreted in different ways; some were repetitive; some may have given deliberate misinformation. Others, however, clearly had some relevance, and the Committee concluded that there was sufficient information to upgrade the threat assessment, thereby triggering a new assessment of what warnings were necessary. It is important that people understand the way in which the system works. We saw the individual jigsaw pieces, perhaps only fragments of those pieces, that are seen daily by people in the Security Service. No one had the full picture. Indeed, there is probably no single picture, because terrorist groups operate in a network of moving alliances. They do not present one picture which, if you get it, enables you to crack the situation so that all can be revealed. There is probably a multidimensional changing picture, and individuals come and go, and rise and fall. Different groups vie for influences, change their ideas and tactics, and so on. That has to be understood if we are to have a feel for the way in which the services work. The Committee is willing to acknowledge the difficulties and pressures on Security Service staff. Theirs is not an easy task, and they are dedicated professionals. Nevertheless, we concluded, not that the events in Bali could have been prevented, but that the threat assessment level should have been raised.

That brings me to the next point in that part of the report—was the threat assessment system effective and adequate? Perhaps the threat level was not raised because the system was not geared up to make distinctions that should have been made and which must be made in future. In our report we published for the first time the way in which the threat assessment system worked. In paragraph 9, we set out clearly the hierarchy of six gradations, ranging from negligible to imminent. We concluded that the threat assessment system

> "does not provide sufficiently clear, differentiated definitions of the threat level."

We suggested that there should be at least one more level between "significant" and "high" to assist users of that information such as the Foreign Office, which uses it for travel advice, and other Departments that rely on it. In their response, the Government accepted that work needed to be done on that. It has already started, and threat assessment definitions have been reworked with the intention of avoiding the problems of the old system. The Intelligence and Security Committee has been briefed on the matter, and we welcome the fact that things are moving in that direction, because they will be of benefit to everybody involved. We hope that the formation of the Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre, or JTAC—one of the problems in this area is all the initials—will lead to improved co-ordination and co-operation, and ensure that reports are issued in a timely way. However, I would echo the comment of my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary that the levels of co-operation between different agencies are extremely impressive in this country, and much better than those that I have seen elsewhere. I must tell my right hon. Friend that the changes that he and his colleagues have proposed are welcome, but the ISC will want to monitor them carefully as part of its ongoing work.

Turning briefly to the other main issue in our report—questions about Foreign Office travel advice—our inquiry asked:

> "Did the FCO Travel Advice accurately reflect the Security Service assessment?",

and:

> "Is this advice effectively communicated to the public and the travel industry?"

The Government's response is interesting, because it highlights part of the problem. Paragraph 7 of the response, as was said earlier, reads:

> "In the period preceding the Bali bombings the Service assessed the threat level to general UK interests in Indonesia to be SIGNIFICANT. This meant that the security climate was judged to be such that UK general interests were likely to be a priority target of terrorist activity."

However, anyone who read the Foreign Office travel advice at the time would not necessarily draw the same clear conclusions. The tone and clarity of the Government's statement are very different indeed from the tone and nature of the travel advice that was published before the Bali bombing. The travel advice put out by the Foreign Office before 12 October said:

> "Most visits to Indonesia are trouble free. However, particular care is needed for visits to some regions and others should be avoided altogether as specified below."

Bali was not on that list. On Bali itself, the travel advice concentrated on crime, and said:

> "Crime in Bali and Lombok remains relatively low but relatives and tourists alike should take the same precautions as they would in any major city."

The tone of the travel advice was problematic. While the general travel advice to tourists was couched in a reassuring tone, other travel advice was not. The Foreign Office travel advice was not revised after the grenade attack in Jakarta on 23 September. However, an e-mail service provided to subscribers resident in Indonesia revised its advice. New advice was sent to residents outlining what had happened in Jakarta and suggesting that UK citizens should be more circumspect. We were not quite sure what "circumspect" should mean, but there was advice to be more careful.

A further e-mail was sent out to subscribers that was not reflected in the Foreign Office travel advice or on the Foreign Office general website. However, it was sent out to subscribers in Indonesia, stating:

> "In the run-up to the fasting month, which starts around 5 November, activists are more likely to show their disapproval at many of the bars and nightclubs that are popular with Indonesians and foreigners, especially on Friday nights. British citizens should avoid these establishments."

That information was provided only in the e-mail service to those British citizens who subscribed in Indonesia. It was not part of general advice. I think that we were right to say that there is a problem with travel advice and that Foreign Office travel advice—its

[Ann Taylor]

purpose, its target audience and its presentation—needed to be examined by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office as a matter of urgency.

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has told us that that is exactly what is happening. I am pleased that the FCO has been able to respond so quickly. I acknowledge that there are problems, including warning fatigue and giving warnings without being alarmist. However, the changes that have been made to travel advice should bring about an improvement. It is not for the ISC to follow up this issue. I am sure that members of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee will want to keep an eye on what is happening.

Alan Howarth (Newport, East): This is not intended to be a flippant point because we are discussing desperately serious matters. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the word processor is, in a way, part of the difficulty? We found that the same phrases and the same paragraphs were repeated and recycled in successive issues of travel advice over a long period. Is it not important, especially when, rightly, the Foreign Office is seeking to keep travel advice low key and unsensational, that those who draft it regularly should revisit the prose and refresh and renew it? Otherwise, those who read it may take a glance and say, "It's the same as before and there is nothing significant for us to take note of."

Ann Taylor: I have completely to agree with my right hon. Friend that that sort of approach and attitude is part of the problem. It may also be part of the solution, in that it is easier to make changes quickly. E-mails make it easier to get out information to travel agents, for example. Occasionally we need people who have not been working with these problems and issues, day in and day out, to be involved. We need people who can step back from the generality of knowledge of the experts so that they can say what hits them from any block of information. Sometimes, when people are living too close to an issue day in and day out, they find it difficult to understand how someone outside might find information too reassuring or too alarming. That is one of the aspects that must be taken into account.

I am glad that the Government have found time for the debate. I hope that the report and the fact that we are having the debate show that the relevant agencies are accountable to Parliament through the ISC, and that the ISC performs a useful role. I am pleased that the Government have responded quickly. It is a tragic situation, but some positive things are coming out of it in terms of the changes to the threat assessment system, the improvement of co-ordination through JTAC, and the altering of the style and quality of Foreign Office travel advice. I know that that will be no real consolation to the relatives of those who died or who were injured, but I hope that these improvements will play some part in helping us all to protect people further in future. I am grateful to the Government for taking on board so many of our recommendations.

6.15 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon Tweed): I am glad to follow the right hon. Member for Dewsbury (Ann Taylor), the Chairman of the Committee, and to have had the privilege of working closely with her and the rest of my colleagues on the Committee on this matter. I do so by way of a surprising guest reappearance on the Liberal Democrat Front Bench. I am deputising for my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell). However, I will be reflecting on my experience as a member of the Committee. My right hon. and hon. Friends have welcomed the report and some of the things that have followed from it.

It was a terrible incident when nearly 200 holidaymakers were killed. Most of them were young people, 24 of them were British and many more were Australian. A couple of weeks later, the members of the Committee were in Australia. We saw there what a dramatic effect the tragedy had had on the entire Australian community, and on Australians of every racial and ethnic background. There was an outpouring of grief and a sense of shock. Perhaps that came almost as a surprise to us because we have become case-hardened in Britain by our experience of IRA terrorism. However, the incident had a profound impact in Australia. A recent service in Southwark cathedral commemorated the British victims of the tragedy. The Foreign Secretary, who attended, has referred to it.

We saw the fundamental evil of terrorism. It is not the loss of innocent life as an unintended consequence of the pursuit of a military target. It is, as we saw with IRA terrorism, the deliberate slaughter of people who are not involved in the military or political actions and decisions that terrorists are seeking to challenge. It is the most cowardly form of warfare.

There are many arguments about when there can be a just war. Indeed, many of us are engaged presently in those very arguments about when there can be a just use of military or violent means. Terrorism is the antithesis of a just war. It has no possible moral basis.

My right hon. and hon. Friends welcome the report. We welcome also the fact that the Foreign Secretary so readily ensured that all the intelligence evidence was available to the Committee. That is essential for a judgment to be made on behalf of colleagues in the House who cannot see the evidence. The fact that it is in part a critical judgment may be discomforting to the Government and the agencies, but it serves as a vindication of the process of democratic scrutiny of intelligence and security services. That is an essential process and one that needs to be exercised in this way.

It is important to recognise that the Committee concluded that there was no intelligence of a specific threat to nightclubs in Bali, and therefore no basis on which action could have been taken to prevent the attack or even to mount an emergency evacuation of western tourists from the island. Although Bali was covered, like many other places, by a significant threat level, it was generally regarded as a relatively safe location for tourism because its population is predominantly Hindu. Therefore, it was felt that it was unlikely to be involved in Islamic anti-western demonstrations or activities. By contrast, some Indonesian islands were regarded as very unsafe places, and more recent events have demonstrated that that was correct.

There was, however, increasing intelligence of Jemaah Islamiyah links to al-Qaeda and the potential development by that and other groups of local terrorism. There were threats to US and UK interests, including tourists in nightclubs, which were reported. The right hon. Member for Dewsbury referred to them. There was an attack on a US diplomatic residence on 23 September. Indonesia was known to have less than effective anti-terrorist policing, to put it mildly. There was no reliable basis for supposing that the risks were confined to Jakarta and would never extend to Bali.

That brings me to the crucial failure that led to what the Committee called a "serious misjudgement". It was the failure to ask the question that I put to the Foreign Secretary earlier. Where in Indonesia is there a concentration of tourists vulnerable to attack where many people can be killed in one operation? There is only one answer to that question, and it is Bali.

The threat that we are talking about was not primarily one to tourists who are not concentrated. It is not primarily a threat to hill walkers, scuba divers, surfers or independent travellers. It was the threat represented by the vulnerability of a large number of tourists—almost entirely western tourists—packed in one vulnerable location or a few vulnerable locations.

Mass tourism to Bali has nightclubs or discos as one of its principal attractions. That is what most tourists go to Bali to enjoy for at least part of the time that they spend there. Advice to

> "be circumspect . . . especially in the evenings"

is meaningless in that context. It is relevant advice to a business man who lives in the country and can alter his pattern of movements and look out for potential threats and dangers. It is not meaningful advice to people who are going to a place on the assumption that it is relatively safe for them to go there.

We know that nightclubs are vulnerable places, even without terrorism. If we add up the number killed in fires or other emergencies in nightclubs in the past few years in Chicago, Caracas, Vollendam, Durban, Gothenburg, Manila and two cases in China, it comes to almost 900 lives lost. Like crowded shopping centres, nightclubs are an attractive target for terrorists, particularly when they are known to attract only or primarily foreign visitors.

Perhaps it is the Foreign Office that should have been alert to the precise nature of Bali tourism, rather than the Security Service, whose focus was on the terrorists themselves. That brings me to the system failure. If the Security Service assessment had been raised to the next level, that would have triggered a review of the Foreign Office advice, as the Foreign Secretary agreed in an earlier exchange. But it was not raised, so the process was not initiated. That is one reason why we recommended a level of advice between "significant" and "high".

In any case, the Foreign Office should be conscious of the nature of the travel and tourism to which its advice relates. There is a world of difference between advising UK residents working in a dangerous country on how to minimise risks to their safety, and advising people whether they should go to a dangerous place if they intend to spend much of their time there in a crowded disco, which is a location vulnerable to terrorism.

Mention has been made of the difference between the advice on the website and the general travel advice. The Government's response relates to this and states:

> "The FCO has also issued strict instruction to Posts to ensure that any wording issued locally, whether by e-mail or otherwise, is entirely consistent with the FCO Travel Advice."

When I read that, I thought that it was the wrong way round. If the advice is not consistent, the message ought to be that the people locally, at the post, seem to know something that has not got through into the general travel advice being issued in London. I am glad the Foreign Secretary amplified that slightly puzzling statement to indicate that it means that if there is a difference, the local post should not take out the advice that there is a new danger; it should get on to London and report what it is advising, so that that can be reflected in the general travel advice. I am grateful for the Foreign Secretary's clarification.

We believe that an error was made, but it must be set in context. First, the agencies had obtained valuable intelligence in a difficult situation, in a part of the world in which they did not have substantial resources because it had not been of the highest priority in earlier years. As we said, it takes time for new resources to work through. The agencies did their job, and in all other respects, they did it remarkably well in difficult circumstances. We have seen the raw evidence of that. The "serious misjudgement" to which we referred was, I think, a gap in lateral thinking—a gap in making good and imaginative use of the information that they had striven to obtain and draw to the attention of those who needed to know about it.

Secondly, as regards context, although for reasons that I have set out Bali had become a dangerous place to be in a nightclub, there are many dangerous places. London is a dangerous place and the House is a dangerous place, although in both cases, the terrorist faces much better anti-terrorist measures than he did in Indonesia. But it only takes one to get through. We saw the consequences of that with the IRA mainland bombs. The twin towers were a dangerous place on 11 September. The Pentagon, of all places, was a dangerous place. As the Prime Minister said, we do not intend to close down the world and its activities and thus hand victory to the terrorists.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) pointed out, we are discussing how we manage risks. We need good advice on the basis of which to make prudent judgments—often, judgments as individuals about what risks we are willing to take. The advice should be as good as it can be. I do not think, and I believe that most of my colleagues on the Committee agree with me, that we want to go down the road of the United States' style of travel advice, which indicates a wide degree of threat and to some extent reinforces American citizens in their feeling that the world is not a safe place in which to travel. That must be seen in the light of 11 September, which demonstrated that key locations in the United States were exposed to serious danger as well.

I fear that the US approach to travel advice is influenced by the litigation and compensation culture, and the feeling that public bodies must guard against being shown to have been wrong and thus exposed to compensation claims. They therefore overstate or at least maximise the case in a sort of Health and Safety

[Mr. A. J. Beith]

Executive way, if I can put it that way. The result can often be advice that, if taken literally, would mean that one would not go anywhere or even stay where one was. We must recognise that we are dealing with how we cope with risks in the world. Good advice is the basis for individuals to make their own sensible judgments about that.

I welcome the fact that a number of new elements have been introduced, which have been mentioned in the debate. The joint terrorism analysis centre draws together expertise in a way that should prove a more effective vehicle. Better definition of threat levels, if it is achieved, will be welcome. Some restructuring of travel advice has also been referred to. All those measures are welcome.

Bali may well not be the last terrible terrorist atrocity that we have to debate in the House. We do not know where the next one will be, but I hope and believe that some lessons have been learned, not only about the handling of tragedies—the Foreign Secretary spoke about how help can be brought to those affected—but about how the best travel advice can be obtained, and how intelligence can be brought to bear most effectively for prevention, where that is possible, as it was not in the case of Bali, for guidance to tourists and travellers, and for wisdom in the management of the risks. It has been a terrible experience for the families involved, and a salutary one for the agencies that deal with such circumstances. In making a significant criticism, we also recognise the immense value of the work that they have been doing and the many lives that have been saved by it.

6.27 pm

Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): I apologise to the House for perhaps having to leave before the anticipated end of the debate for a constituency-related matter.

The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) made a number of cogent points, particularly in relation to what he called the failure of lateral thinking and the misjudgments made by the services. To put that in context, one must recognise what the Foreign Secretary said—that hindsight is a wonderful device for 20:20 vision—and the comment of my right hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Ann Taylor) that the task involves joining up dots in intelligence, often in a multidimensional situation where there are enormous difficulties and where one can easily get it wrong.

I will not follow the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed in another respect. Perhaps because he is a member of the Committee, he was rather coy about blowing the trumpet of his own Committee. On behalf of the House, may I say that the Intelligence and Security Committee has done a grand job? My right hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury has acquitted herself and the Committee extremely well. I am mightily impressed with the speed of the Committee's response. The House will recall that the outrage in Bali occurred on 12 October. On 21 October, the matter was referred to the Committee by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary. The report was published on 11 December, which suggests very fast Committee work. The Government's response was made last month. All the key questions were asked by the Committee, and the criticism relates to tone and the emphasis that was made in very difficult circumstances. Clearly, the terrorism threat is real throughout the world. We aware that in Indonesia, for example, the US, which had access to the same intelligence as us, had several members of its Jakarta embassy in Bali at the time. The scale of the threat as seen through US official eyes was not all that great.

I shall not concentrate on the intelligence aspects of the situation. Even though the Foreign Affairs Committee requested the information, we were not given access to the intelligence side, but travel advice generally is four-square in our remit. Indeed, the Committee has taken that responsibility very seriously. It recognises that a core responsibility of the Government, and hence one of its own core responsibilities in scrutinising them, is the safety of British personnel overseas. As I mentioned, that includes not only tourists, but personnel in our embassies. I also said earlier that, as a result of excellent co-operation between our intelligence services and the Greek intelligence services, we hope that all key members of the 11 November terrorist group in Greece who were responsible for the murder of our defence attaché, Brigadier Saunders, have now been apprehended. That trial starts today. It is to British tourists, a vast number of whom can now travel overseas, that the ISC report is especially pertinent.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has learned a number of lessons from Bali. In the judgment of the Foreign Affairs Committee, it is taking its work extremely seriously. We referred to the problems that have arisen in our report on the annual report of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and on 4 February we had a serious discussion in public session with Sir Michael Jay, the permanent secretary of the Foreign Office. I hope that we are not a mutual admiration society. The Foreign Office has certainly faced the sting of the Committee's criticism in a number of inquiries, not least in respect of Sierra Leone in the previous Parliament and of Gibraltar in the current one.

I believe that we have worked together particularly closely in respect of Bali. We received today a letter of commendation from the permanent secretary on our work. I reciprocate to this extent: we are pleased that, partly in response to our recommendations and those of the ISC, the Foreign Office has recognised that travel advice needs a higher profile. It has revised all the 209 travel advisory notices on its website and responded to the comments made by both Committees about the fact that travel advice should be more user-friendly and understandable. It has worked with the Plain English Campaign and is open to constructive comments from us and the general public on how travel advice can be improved.

The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, among others, has referred to the need to ensure that advice given on the spot is consistent with advice given in London. Hence, a new mechanism has been agreed whereby if a post wants to change advice, the information can come straight back through the geographical department in London. That means that any relevant changes should pass very quickly through the travel advisory unit and on to the website. The FCO website also has a new icon on the risk of terrorism when travelling abroad and lists the countries where terrorist attacks have occurred.

When the Foreign Affairs Committee prepared for its meeting with Sir Michael Jay, we carried out a comparative survey of the advice given by several countries to their nationals. We looked at the website of the US State Department, the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Australian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Canadian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in respect of one country—Saudi Arabia. We concluded that the FCO website compared very well indeed with those of other countries. Of course, it is important that, as the result of advice that came in part from the Opposition Front Bench, the FCO has created a link between its website and those of other countries.

The problem is how to respond constructively and realistically when intelligence is received about an impending terrorist attack, because of the volume and varied nature of the pieces of information that are received daily. If there is a serious threat, the FCO has to make the best judgment on the basis of the available information. The Committee was interested to learn in its evidence session with Sir Michael Jay that Ministers are consulted daily on changes to travel advice.

We also recognised the sensitivities regarding friendly countries when advice is received that can impact adversely on their economies. Two recent examples have arisen in that regard. First, the Government changed their advice in respect of Mauritius in November last year because the US embassy had received specific warnings about possible attacks on churches or other public places there and had posted a local warning to its nationals. Our high commission in Port Louis took the warning seriously. On 19 November, the Mauritius Foreign Minister wrote to the Foreign Secretary expressing concern that Mauritius had been placed among risky tourist destinations.

Secondly, a similar complaint was received from Trinidad and Tobago about what had happened as a result of intelligence information received in relation to a terrorist threat. In January or early February, the Trinidad Foreign Secretary was sent to London for urgent consultations with our Foreign Office because various tourist liners had been diverted as a result of the warning that we had issued. Quite properly, the permanent secretary told the Committee that the paramount duty of the Foreign Office is to our citizens. Although there may be occasions when quiet discussions should take place with friendly countries, that must be subordinate in any situation to the interests of British nationals.

The events in Bali also led to wider and more welcome changes in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. The Foreign Affairs Committee raised in our comments on the FCO annual report the question of the rapid response unit, which is potentially a very important development. We recommended

"that the Government, in its response to this Report, should set out what progress has been made in expediting the FCO's response time to the need to establish new diplomatic premises overseas, with particular reference to the use of containers".

That recommendation related to transportable diplomatic premises. We also recommended that there should be

"a register of former diplomatic staff . . . to respond to crises".

The Foreign Office responded to that recommendation on 29 January. In respect of rapid deployment teams, in our report on the 2002 FCO annual report the Committee recommended that

"the next Annual report should report progress on the development of systems for responding to international crises and for the rapid deployment of serving or retired diplomatic, consular or other personnel in response to changing circumstances worldwide."

In its 29 January response, the Foreign Office informed us that it had

"set up three Rapid Deployment Teams that can be despatched to support Posts when a major consular crisis occurs. These teams are on 24 hours stand-by in rotation. Each Rapid Deployment Team is led by a senior Diplomatic Service officer".

As a result of Bali, welcome changes have been made. The 24-hour "situation centre" will become effective in the summer, and the Foreign Office is looking at the outsourcing of caller answering services. Only today, on behalf of the Committee, I received a letter from the permanent under-secretary saying that the Foreign Office was considering establishing web-based databases

"to allow the call-centre staff to input simple details".

That will enable a more speedy and effective response to be made.

There is a continuing dialogue between the Foreign Office and the Foreign Affairs Committee on this important issue. We asked, for instance, why there were no medical advisers on the rapid deployment teams, and the Foreign Office gave us an interim reply. I assure the House that we take our responsibility for scrutinising the Foreign Office's oversight of the concerns of British nationals overseas very seriously. We are united in trying to counter, as best we can, the scourge of terrorism, and seeking to improve the position of those British nationals.

6.42 pm

Patrick Mercer (Newark): I welcome this excellent report, and it is a privilege to follow the right hon. Member for Swansea, East (Donald Anderson). I appreciate that I am in august company tonight, and I hope that my comments will not be considered out of order in any way; but I hope to cite the events in Bali as part of a series of events from which we can learn. Perhaps they can point to how we can cope in future with a threat that I believe will become much more dangerous as we approach what I feel must be an inevitable war with Iraq.

I shall return to the subject of Bali from time to time, but let me say first that the security services are doing a first-class job. Only their efficacy, I think, has prevented worse atrocities abroad, involving British possessions abroad, or indeed in this country. The news that a joint terrorist assessment centre is to be established is very good. That can only lead to further excellent handling and dissemination of intelligence.

Let me get two old aphorisms out of the way immediately. The first is that the terrorist needs to get lucky only once; the second is that the terrorist's aim is to terrify—not necessarily to destroy, not necessarily to kill and not necessarily to defeat, but simply to terrify. It is Government's job to keep that in proportion, and to learn how to control the perception of terrorism among the victim population.

[Patrick Mercer]

I want to compare the ways in which four societies handle terrorism. Two of them are similar, two dissimilar. First and foremost, there is Israel. Whether we approve of what is going on there is a separate matter, but the fact remains that every single Israeli has, directly or indirectly, been touched by what is regrettably an extremely effective terrorist regime. Yet Israel is not on her knees: life in Israel goes on relatively normally, as normally as it can under a threat of this kind.

Mr. James Arbuthnot (North-East Hampshire): As my hon. Friend no doubt knows, Israel does not issue threat assessments to the general public. Interestingly, it leaves its citizens to make their own assessment of how dangerous it is to go to another country.

Patrick Mercer: I thank my hon. Friend for enlightening us on that point.

My second example is Ulster, where I have carried out nine operational tours working in both the intelligence and the uniformed staff. That too is a society that was and remains very effectively terrorised, but in which life goes on normally. Indeed, it is a society in which life and prosperity are booming.

Then there is America, which has also been very effectively terrorised—by the events of a single terrorist attack. I will say more shortly about a sense of proportion, but there is no doubt that—while many people were killed in that one incident—America is unused to terrorism. Its reactions are an interesting lesson for mature and developed societies elsewhere.

Two weeks ago, when I visited Washington and New York with the Defence Committee, I had the edifying experience of watching surface-to-air missiles being deployed in the centre of towns, and policemen and members of the National Guard carrying their respirators—gas masks—in the "alert" position. Nuclear, biological and chemical warfare decontamination sites had already been established. There was advice on television every night on how to establish safe rooms—the modern-day equivalent of the Anderson shelter, perhaps—and on how society was coming to terms with the threat that was seen to be overweening. But the fact remains that on mainland America there has been only one substantial attack, and I therefore submit that in this instance terrorism is operating very effectively.

As for Bali, I think it fair to say—although others may well correct me—that Australia did not expect an attack of that kind. It was terribly badly hurt by the Bali bomb, and it has skewed its society's perception of terror. It is also interesting to note that the attack took place not in Australia itself, but abroad.

All that, I think, contains important lessons for us as the threat of terrorism grows—for, in my opinion, it is growing. For one thing, I think it important to retain a sense of proportion. On a number of occasions I have been extremely tedious on the subject of the House being "hung up" on the organisation al-Qaeda. The fact remains that al-Qaeda has been operating for more than 10 years, but has pulled off only one deeply successful incident. There is no doubt that 11 September was hugely significant, but it was only one attack. It killed thousands of people—the number was probably out of all proportion to that which the perpetrators expected—but it should be borne in mind that al-Qaeda's normal style is much less adventurous. Operations such as the bombing of USS Cole and the attack on the Limberg were very successful from its point of view, but individual assassinations such as those we have seen in the past few weeks are much more likely. We should also bear in mind that this country, so far, has been attacked with relatively little success—owing, I have no doubt, to the excellence of our security services.

I am convinced that terrorists are trying hard to attack this country, but so far, mercifully, casualties here have been relatively light. Yes, Britain suffered on 11 September; yes, Britain suffered in Bali; but it seems that our society has learnt to live with that. How will we cope when attacks of similar proportions are made on this country, or indeed when the tempo of terrorists operations is increased?

Dr. Julian Lewis: May I take my hon. Friend back to what he said about America and the broadcasts advising ordinary people how they could prepare? I was not entirely sure whether he was suggesting that that was an over- reaction or an appropriate reaction. If it were an appropriate reaction, is he about to recommend that similar messages should be sent here? If so, does he feel that perhaps a limiting factor was the experience of 1980, when "Protect and Survive" was published, which was widely mocked? Does he agree that there is a difference between the circumstances of nuclear war preparations and terrorist preparations?

Patrick Mercer: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for recalling me to my duty in this regard. It was a point that I was going to develop but I will it develop now. It is difficult for the public and the likes of me, who do not have access to the sort of intelligence that the Intelligence and Security Committee get, to assess exactly what the threat is. Therefore, it is the Government's duty to make that threat both palatable, if a threat can be palatable, and realistic.

I do not know, to answer my hon. Friend's question, whether that was an over-reaction or not. The fact remains that, simultaneously, two distinct pieces of news were being given in Britain and America of severe threats to the infrastructure of both countries. America chose to go down the route of national broadcasts. This country chose to go down an all together less extreme route, albeit deploying armoured forces and infantry battalions at Heathrow airport for the first time, I think, in eight or nine years.

We must understand that victims from this country will not necessarily be in holiday resorts such as Bali; they are more likely to be in British possessions overseas such as Gibraltar and Cyprus. How are the Government fixed? How do the Government stand to handle mass casualties in garrisons or British possessions overseas? A lot of what we have heard tonight is reassuring but I should like to know more from the Minister on that point.

We must realise that, while we hear about things such as ricin plots being developed and more exotic forms of terrorism, the fact remains that the sort of terrorism that is likely to kill is exactly the same as the sort of terrorism that we saw in Bali: operations that copy those carried out by the Provisional IRA over the past 30 years or so. This society must get used to the fact that improvised explosive devices cleverly targeted and placed will be the way ahead for the terrorist. We must learn as a society to live with that. Government advice, news and intelligence management must be sensitive to that.

For example, we constantly live with the threat of fire. Outside this Chamber, there are fire appliances. In our offices, we know what to do in the event of a fire; we are drilled. Until a few years ago, if one wanted to go shopping in the centre of Belfast, one understood that it would take at least 10 or 15 extra minutes to get into the city centre; one's car had to be searched and parking was difficult. Similarly, getting out again was a problem, but people learnt to live with that. During the blitz, this country learnt to live with a severe and clear threat.

If we are going to take the Prime Minister's words that we must take preventative measures without destroying our ordinary way of life to heart, we must become alert to the fact that there are terrorists abroad, inside our society, who wish to inflict the sort of casualties on us that we have seen both on 11 September and in Bali, but balance that with carrying out, as a Prime Minister would call it, ordinary life.

I believe, to use a naval expression, that we are standing into danger at the moment. We have seen Muslim extremists carrying out attacks in this country, or trying to carry out attacks in this country, and I have no doubt that as war with Iraq approaches, sadly, other forms of terrorism will become more and more prevalent. I echo the words of my hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) about warning fatigue, but I beg the Minister to understand that news and intelligence must be handled sensitively and consistently. We had contradictory information last November from the Home Secretary and in statements that were issued during the Heathrow alert a couple of weeks ago by the Labour party chairman. Issuing a warning or a warning of a threat and rescinding it is deeply counter-productive. There needs to be a code of practice that makes the approach much more cohesive and that the British public, be they at home or abroad, can understand more clearly.

The American system of a series of coloured warning levels is deeply helpful. Perhaps we have not approached that yet but I would like an assurance from the Minister that we are thinking of a public information campaign, again without alarming and panicking, but introducing the public to the fact that the threat will become more and more serious.

I welcome the written statement today on civil contingency planning to deal with a terrorist attack but I ask the Minister, although it is a matter not for his Department but for the Ministry of Defence, what plans there are to use the many tens of thousands of regular troops, by which I mean soldiers, sailors and airmen, all of whom are nuclear, biological and chemical warfare trained, to help with this matter. Currently I see no plans at all. There are plans with regard to territorials and reserves but what about those men and women who are not deployed overseas? Where do they fit into the plan?

At Mombasa, Israel had a very close shave from a hugely damaging and fatal series of terrorist attacks. What plans do we have to ensure that our airliners are protected more effectively from surface-to-air missiles? Again, we had an alarm two weeks ago at Heathrow airport. I do not know the intelligence background to it but it seems clear that we lay under the same sort of threat that we had seen at Mombasa a few months ago. I would be interested to know how we might avoid such an attack in future.

I am grateful for the report. I hope that it will avoid attacks similar to the one in Bali being perpetrated against British citizens but I doubt it. I ask the Government to be more consistent in the way they handle information, to be more realistic in the way they deal with a potentially frightened population and to be fully aware of a threat that is prevalent at the moment and which I believe will increase in the near future.

6.58 pm

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): I will not delay the House too long. It seems that most of the issues in relation to the report have been covered by previous speeches. As a member of the Intelligence and Security Committee, there is perhaps one area that I would like to introduce but, first, I have been a member of the Committee for nearly six years. After the tragedy, loss and injury that was sustained in Bali, the Committee was asked to look in great detail into what went off at Bali and to report back to the House. As was said earlier, that was done very quickly and in full co-operation with the different services: the Foreign Office and the Security Service.

If hon. Members look at the statute that brought the Committee into being, it restricts us in certain areas from looking into things. However, the Government asked us to look at such matters, and we were able to examine in close detail every intelligence report relating to this incident. I therefore hope that we can reassure the public that our reports are made after considering all the relevant issues. Indeed, the report in question noted that one of the agencies concerned was not in complete agreement with our analysis of events in Bali. Even though it creates a number of problems for our diaries and time scales, our ability to look at such issues in depth is very helpful, and I hope that the House agrees.

The Foreign Secretary rightly pointed out that the Committee had two broad criticisms of various aspects of the work relating to Bali. One of them I shall lightly skip over, but I should acknowledge that the Security Service does not agree with our analysis of the situation. That view is based on the wonderful principle of hindsight, but the threat assessment that was effectively the area of dispute between the Security Service and the Committee remains a very relevant issue. The report highlighted four factors that should have led to a higher level of threat assessment, including the grenade attack on an American diplomatic residence last September. A further point is that such developments needed to be considered in the light of the Indonesian authorities' public reluctance to deal with terrorism, and of the fact that terrorists may be more likely to attack a less well protected target. Again, such a view is based on the benefit of hindsight, but I should emphasise that at no time did the Committee find any evidence that the Bali tragedy could have been avoided.

A number of Members have touched on the travel advice issued by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and I should like to pick up on a point made by my hon.

[Mr. Kevin Barron]

Friend the Member for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant) in an intervention on the Foreign Secretary. The question of how to obtain travel advice was raised, along with the impact on the commercial aspect of travel—an issue that the Minister will doubtless have considered. The Committee considered the ways in which people obtain travel advice, including from the internet, from Ceefax and from the FCO's website, which has had many thousands of hits over the months, but also from travel agents.

On first considering this issue, I wanted to reassure myself that travel agents—who clearly have a commercial interest in making a profit—in no way attempt to filter advice that might otherwise prove commercially negative from their point of view. The Committee's conclusions and recommendations contain nothing negative in this regard, because we found no evidence of anything questionable in the way in which travel agents disseminate information on FCO travel advice. The Committee's report states:

> "The Association of British Travel Agents . . . and the Federation of Travel Operators . . . told the Committee that it is their policy that if the FCO Travel Advice requests tourists and residents to 'take care' then that is drawn specifically to the travellers' attention whilst booking or before travel. ABTA and FTO also told the Committee that, when the FCO Travel Advice changes to recommend that 'all non-essential travel is avoided', arrangements are made to evacuate all their customers from the area affected. ABTA and FTO communicate with their members to make sure they are aware of important changes in the FCO Travel Advice."

I point that out simply to reassure people that they are in no way being disadvantaged in terms of travel advice, and that commercial decisions are not preventing the giving of good advice before they travel or during their journeys, should the situation change.

It was said earlier that we could follow the example of some other countries and issue travel warnings, but that others such as Israel have none whatsoever. However, in some cases such warnings are more to do with ensuring that litigation does not follow anything that might happen while abroad, rather than with giving advice so that, on the basis of it, people can make up their own minds as to whether to travel or to leave a particular place. Although the Committee did not study what happens in other parts of the world in any great depth, it became clear during our conversations that this country's system is in many senses much better than some others'. I have confidence in our existing system, so the broad criticisms that were made are in no way criticisms of the bulk of the work done in interpreting information gathered by the intelligence agencies, or of how travel advice and more specific advice is given to the FCO.

As I said earlier to the Minister, although such an investigation is not welcome in the aftermath of the Bali tragedy, I hope that it has given this House and the public confidence in respect of matters that only we are allowed to look into, given that we work inside the ring of secrecy, under the terms of official secrets legislation. I hope that the investigation has given them confidence that the brave men and women who work in our intelligence agencies are acting in the interests of the greater public good. We shall continue to support them, but it is clear that, from time to time, our reports will highlight areas of criticism. However, I hope that, in general, those agencies have the support not just of our Committee, which worked closely with them, but of this House and of the general public.

7.07 pm

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): As so often, this House takes great care when subjects as serious as terrorist atrocities are being debated, and this debate has been no exception. The Foreign Secretary—who, for reasons that I understand entirely, is away on other duties—set out the Government's position at the beginning of the debate. It is fair to say that things are not easy for any Cabinet Minister when a Committee of this House produces a somewhat critical report, and I shall turn a little later to the comments of a number of distinguished members of the Intelligence and Security Committee.

I thought that the Foreign Secretary was very balanced in his approach to the fairly serious criticisms from members of the ISC. However, as many of them subsequently confirmed, they were making specific criticisms, rather than wholesale criticisms of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the intelligence services or the bulk of the work that they do. As my hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) rightly said, we want to add to the praise offered for the work done by the FCO throughout the world—and by those based in the FCO in London—and to the incredibly important work done by our intelligence services. That point was highlighted in the contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Patrick Mercer)—a contribution based on his considerable military experience before entering this House.

In response to the Foreign Secretary's balanced approach, my hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk reinforced the condolences offered to the families of all who were affected by this terrible terrorist atrocity, but he also asked a number of specific questions. Such concerns are shared by our shadow Foreign Office team and by our Home Office team, for which I have the honour of being shadow spokesman on national security issues. My hon. Friend said that he hoped that in the wind-up, the Home Office Minister, the right hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham), could confirm his assessment of the importance of human intelligence. Indeed, that point was stressed by several other Members on both sides of the House, but in particular by my hon. Friend the Member for Newark.

We want to hear from the Minister that both the Home Office and the Foreign Office are aware of the need to give human intelligence the proper emphasis in Government assessments of security matters in the future. In addition, my hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk pointed out that several of our colleagues have asked for the whole matter of intelligence assessment of levels of threat to be more graded and more sensitive. As my hon. Friend rightly said, the Government's response to the ISC's report refers to the security services review, which will consider how to achieve greater definition, and that is welcome. We have heard subsequently from the Chairman of the ISC and other members of it that some further changes have been made, and we would be grateful if the Minister clarified the matter when he winds up.

My hon. Friend also pointed out that the Foreign Office website should carry links to the travel advice pages of other key western countries, such as the United States and Australia. We are grateful that the Foreign Secretary has responded to my right hon. Friend the shadow Foreign Secretary that he has accepted and implemented the suggestion. However, I have one warning to give. We have accepted in this important debate that website and e-mail information is crucial—many British expatriates use the internet extensively—but I hope that travel advice will not be given only on the internet. Not all of those who wish to travel abroad use computers. Not all people, especially young students, have access to the internet—some of them cannot afford it. Also, because people travel from country to country, it might be important that a young British traveller could call in to any Foreign Office post anywhere in the world and get a hard copy of the travel advice. As my hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk pointed out, the gap-year phenomenon has grown—certainly since my time at university, 25 years ago—and so many young Britons now travel abroad and need access to updated advice as they travel. I hope that the Minister will confirm that hard copy will be made available.

My hon. Friend also said that he hoped that the Minister would be able to give us a specific assessment of the impact of FCO travel advice on the validity of travel insurance claims for holidays cancelled in response to a heightened threat level. I hope that the Minister will specifically address that point, but I will understand if he has to write to my hon. Friend. If the Minister puts his response in writing, I hope that he will place a copy in the Library. British citizens may change their holiday plans if FCO advice describes a heightened threat assessment. If they do so, it would be a shame if their travel insurance were invalidated.

My hon. Friend also raised the issue of whether rapid response teams will all be London based or whether in future some of them might be based in large regional posts. The Foreign Secretary helpfully intervened to explain that the rapid response teams created in the aftermath of Bali will be based in London, but they will be supplemented with people from regional posts. I hope that the Government will keep the matter under review, because some countries with very large diplomatic posts could benefit from a rapid response team. For example, a team based in Australia, which is a long way from London, would have been much closer to Bali.

Many of us have had some contact with families who lost loved ones in Bali. My hon. Friend the Member for Woking (Mr. Malins), for example, told me that a friend of a friend was a victim of the Bali bombing. Those of us who are interested in sport were particularly affected by the fact that so many of the young adult victims were members of sports clubs in Australia, Hong Kong and Singapore. Only a month before the Bali bomb I stood outside the Singapore cricket club, and the victims included some members of the rugby section of that club. Those of us who have been on overseas sports tours know the devastating effect that the loss of several members of a small sports club can have on a local community. I had a friend at university who was murdered by the IRA in the Harrods bombing, and I know that anyone who knows a victim of terrorism is affected by it and remembers it for the rest of their life.

The right hon. Member for Dewsbury (Ann Taylor), the distinguished Chairman of the ISC, led the House through the Committee's report and its experience of considering all the issues. She rightly paid tribute to the Foreign Secretary and his advisers for giving the Committee full access to all the relevant papers. She confirmed that they contained nothing about a specific attack on Bali. The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) made the point in an intervention—he later expanded on it in his speech—about the most likely location in Indonesia for an attack on western interests. There was a difference of view between members of the Committee about how significant that point was, but it deserves consideration when we learn the lessons from that terrible experience.

The right hon. Lady, in an effective analysis, made the point that the Committee saw sequentially on one day all the intelligence related to the region. She rightly made the point that that is not how it happens in reality for those in the FCO or the intelligence community who have the difficult task of analysing that intelligence. As so many hon. Members have pointed out, there is a danger in using 20:20 hindsight. The right hon. Lady, having made that allowance, went on to emphasise the Committee's conclusion that the threat level was not sufficiently differentiated between significant and high. She acknowledged that the definitions had been reworked and was pleased that matters were improving. She paid tribute to the creation of the joint terrorism advice centre, which she felt would improve matters, but she drew attention to paragraph 7 of the Government's response to the Committee's report which said that the information given to expatriate Britons in Indonesia was not as clear as the Foreign Office travel advice given to those about to travel to Bali.

The right hon. Member for Newport, East (Alan Howarth), who is also a member of the Committee, intervened to make the important point about the dangers of using word processors to lift complete paragraphs from previous texts. To someone taking a quick look at the information, it might look as if it had not changed. That is a valid point because it happens all the time, in this sensitive area and in so many others. The Chairman rightly agreed with her hon. Friend. She made the point that sometimes it is better if someone outside the direct operation of the daily revision of the advice is asked to take a fresh look at it. Someone from outside can see whether a wrong impression is given, as perhaps happened with the Foreign Office advice on that occasion.

Several other hon. Members spoke powerfully, including as so often, the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, who spoke from his extensive experience on the Committee and in the House. He talked about his observations, shortly after the tragedy, of the grief felt in Australia. It is important for all of us to recognise that however terrible we felt the attack to be—there were victims from the UK—it was Australia that suffered the most, and the right hon. Gentleman stressed that point. He rightly said that terrorism is the most cowardly form of attack and that there had been a failure of judgment in that the threat advice—the warning—should have concentrated on Bali, given its nature in terms of the concentration of young foreign holidaymakers.

[Mr. Nick Hawkins]

The right hon. Member for Swansea, East (Donald Anderson), the distinguished Chairman of the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, talked about his Committee's responsibility to scrutinise Foreign Office travel advice. He mentioned the need to use plain English in that advice and spoke about the work of his Committee on matters such as rapid response teams. I am sure that hon. Members are, as always, grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for sharing his expertise as Chairman of the Committee.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newark, who speaks from his extensive military experience prior to his election here, said that he has done nine tours in Ulster—experience that is unparalleled among Members of this House—including time spent on intelligence matters. He stressed that the terrorists' aim is to terrify but that, happily, the mature western democracies that are trying to match the threat are not terrified. He also emphasised that terrorists are still trying to attack the UK, and rightly paid tribute to the work that our security services are doing to detect and deter the threat and to protect all law-abiding citizens of this country. In a telling naval phrase, he said that we are standing into danger at present. He asked the Minister to confirm that news and intelligence must be handled sensitively and consistently, drawing attention to problems such as the mixed messages that were given out about Heathrow about two weeks ago, which my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin), the shadow Home Secretary, and I were concerned about. I know that lessons will have been learned from that, even if the Minister is not prepared to concede that anything went wrong. A great deal of confusion was created by statements about threat levels being made, then withdrawn. I hope that that will not happen again.

My right hon. Friend the Member for North-East Hampshire (Mr. Arbuthnot), another distinguished member of the Intelligence and Security Committee, intervened on my hon. Friend the Member for Newark to make an important point based on his experience of considering such issues as a member of the Committee.

The right hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron), who has been a member of the Intelligence and Security Committee for six years, said that he could see that our system was better than the system in some other countries, and although he entirely supported what his Committee said in its conclusions, he did not want to make any criticism of the way in which much of the work is done. I hope that I have made it clear that Conservative Members share his view that we ought to praise all the work that is done by diplomatic posts around the world and by our intelligence services, while hoping that lessons will be learned from one or two aspects that did not go quite right on this occasion.

Finally, will the Minister say a word or two about what is happening in Bali now? The various reports about the aftermath say that a huge amount of funding has been provided, particularly by the United States, to help the Indonesian Government with counter-terrorism measures and security, and I have no doubt that the UK is playing its part. Some hon. Members tend to speak in this Chamber from a viscerally anti-American viewpoint. If they looked at the reports on the amount of American funding in the aftermath of the Bali bomb, they might have a more positive view of the way in which America is shouldering its responsibilities to ensure worldwide peace and security. I hope that the Minister is able to say that this country will provide a lot more funding for that purpose. British taxpayers might be happier for their money to be spent on that than on, to cite a bizarre example, funding for gender equality programmes. That is not quite the sort of thing that we should be spending money on when there are British citizens to be protected across the world.

7.24 pm

The Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community Safety (Mr. John Denham): First, I put on record the apologies of my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary. I am grateful to Opposition Members for accepting that he has pressing business that meant that he was been unable to stay for the entire debate.

I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Ann Taylor) and other members of the Committee for their work on the report, which has led to a positive and constructive debate. As Ministers, we are in debt to the Committee for the way in which it did its work. As has been said, at least tangentially, one of the problems faced by a Government who are dealing with matters that are necessarily confidential is that one is always prone to the allegation that things are being kept under wraps, and the smallest difference in nuance between one statement and another is taken as evidence that something is being covered up. In this case, it was enormously to the advantage of the Government, the public and the media that the Committee was able to do its work as it did, irrespective of whether we have to live with the occasional judicious criticism or balanced disagreement on interpretation. It should be a huge reassurance to everybody concerned that the Committee was able to go about its work so responsibly. I am grateful to members of the Committee for thanking my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary for the co-operation that was extended to it.

I extend my sympathies and those of the Home Secretary and other ministerial colleagues to the victims, their families and friends and everyone else who suffered from the despicable acts in Bali. As all hon. Members have said, there can be no possible justification for the indiscriminate carnage that was caused. Inevitably, although not overwhelmingly, the debate has focused on the safety of the British public. That in no way diminishes the tragedy of the loss of life of 24 British citizens or the loss of life of the Australian citizens who formed the majority of those who were murdered in Bali. As the Committee reminds us in its report, nationals of some 20 countries were murdered. Many Indonesians lost their lives or were injured and have subsequently suffered severe damage to their livelihoods.

The hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) asked me about current actions in Bali. He will understand that that is more the province of my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, so I will write to him about it. I nevertheless thank him for having raised the matter.

Whatever might have been claimed, the murders were indiscriminate as to nationality and religion. Those who did it cared not a jot for those whom they killed or maimed; the story was tragically the same as that of 11 September. I make that point not only in remembrance of all the victims, but as an illustration of the dangers and difficulties involved in combating the enemy that we face, owing to its callousness and unpredictability. Hon. Members will need no assistance in making the link to the need for the precautionary powers that were debated and renewed in this Chamber earlier today. The debate demonstrates that information is an essential weapon in fighting terrorism—information for the authorities on terrorists and their plans, so that action can be taken, and information for the public, so that they can remain safe, assist in combating terrorism and, as far as is possible, go about their normal business while being aware but alert.

I shall try to weave my responses to most of the points that were raised into my general remarks, but it might be easier if I dealt with some specific points now. The hon. Members for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) and for Newark (Patrick Mercer) referred to human intelligence. We recognise that whatever the developments in technological methods of gathering information, human intelligence is of great importance. I hope that something that will be achieved through the expanded resources that several hon. Members mentioned is the development of our capacity to gain human intelligence and to use it effectively. I would not of course want to link that comment to any particular events, but I hope that I have given the hon. Gentlemen the reassurance that they sought.

The issue of travel insurance was raised, and my right hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) talked about it in the wider context. I was grateful to him for reassuring the House, on the basis of his experience as a member of the Intelligence and Security Committee, that the travel industry was co-operating well and using information responsibly. I am pleased that he did not find evidence that information was being concealed from the travelling public.

Let us consider travel advice, cancellation costs and insurance. It is important to remember that the aim of travel advice is to provide an objective picture of the risks to travellers. It is therefore important that it is given objectively, and not swayed by different parties' commercial interests. Sometimes individuals or companies press the Government to be firmer or less firm in their advice, according to the clarity that they seek. Although we are aware of those considerations, we are not influenced by them. It is the Government's clear responsibility to make an objective judgment on travel advice, and to get it right.

Sir John Stanley (Tonbridge and Malling): Before the Minister leaves the subject of insurance, is he aware that the son of constituents of mine was among the British citizens who were murdered in Bali? It was five weeks after his marriage; his young widow narrowly survived, thanks to the Australians. I have raised the matter on the Floor of the House previously, and I recently discussed it personally with the Foreign Secretary. My murdered constituent's life assurance policy is the subject of challenge because the loss of life occurred through an act of terrorism. The issue has been referred to the Financial Secretary. Will the Minister assure hon. Members that the Financial Secretary will make a full report on that important issue to the House when she has completed her discussions with the insurance industry? Does he agree that it would be deplorable if, as a matter of general practice, the insurance industry began to cover life assurance policies with terrorist exclusions, thereby rendering people unable to provide financially through insurance for their next of kin in the case of a terrorist attack?

Mr. Denham: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for making that point. I understand that ministerial colleagues are raising those issues with the insurance industry. I cannot say when it might be possible to provide a report, or specify its form, but I shall draw his remarks, which he has made previously, to my hon. Friends' attention. I shall try to ensure that he is updated on progress when it is possible to do that.

The hon. Member for Newark made several interesting points, which went wider than I wish to go in my reply, about the challenge of living with a level of international terrorism that we have not previously experienced. He asked a specific question about airline security. Some measures were publicised before Christmas, but I shall ask my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport to bring the hon. Gentleman up to date with the latest developments.

I have had the opportunity to thank the Committee for its work; let me now deal with specific items that it covered and that have been mentioned in the debate. The Committee made several observations about intelligence, threat assessment and the intelligence and security agencies. I hope that the Committee's finding that no intelligence that could have prevented the tragic events of 12 October in Bali had been missed or mishandled will provide some reassurance and comfort to the victims' families.

The Committee also found that sufficient priority was given to collecting intelligence. It believed that the Security Service should have raised the threat assessment for Indonesia from significant to high before the Bali bombings. As the Committee acknowledges, the judgments are difficult and I was grateful that my right hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury drew attention to the difference between the intelligence that was available to the Committee and that available to the Security Service.

The judgment of the Security Service remains that, on the intelligence available, "significant" was the correct assessment. The Committee published its definition of significant in the report, which states:

> "Recent . . . intelligence of terrorist activity, the overall security and political climate, or the target's individual circumstances, indicate that it is likely to be a priority target".

The assessment therefore clearly suggested that Indonesia was a priority target for terrorists.

The report and the Government's response deal with the threat assessment process, which was also mentioned today. Such assessments by the Security Service are a key component in countering intended terrorist actions and informing the public. Such information includes advice to travellers. Those who make such assessments are skilled, dedicated and experienced individuals, to whom several hon. Members paid tribute. They have to make difficult judgments.

[Mr. Denham]

The hon. Member for West Suffolk asked for further details of the review of the threat assessment process. My right hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury described the importance that the Committee attributed to greater gradation in the available assessments. The review to develop the process further has been completed and it will be implemented in the next few weeks. The Committee published the existing definitions of the threat levels. I do not believe that it would be appropriate to publish the new definitions, which are more detailed, and allow greater discrimination in order to be more valuable to customers who use the information, because it is important not to provide information that may be useful to terrorists by suggesting what is available to those who make threat assessments. It is important to stress that the threat assessment is not intended to be a public information guide but a tool, information and advice that is used by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, which offers advice through, for example, travel advice to the general public.

Mr. Beith: I understand why the Minister does not believe that it is appropriate to publish. The appropriateness of publishing the definitions of the level of threat assessment is debatable, but, when he quotes the Committee's definition of significant, he must remember that that information was not available to anyone at the time. The link between threat assessment and travel advice is therefore crucial, because even the improved definitions will not work unless they are translated into good travel advice.

Mr. Denham: The right hon. Gentleman makes a good point. Earlier, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary outlined the review and the changes to the travel advice. Of course, it is important—indeed, essential—to the process that threat assessment can be translated into useful and useable advice for members of the travelling public. A better designed threat assessment would help to address some of the anxieties that the Committee expressed in its report. Needless to say, details of the new threat assessment have been shared with Committee members in private. Doubtless the Committee will continue to keep the process under review.

Mr. Arbuthnot: The Minister may be right that the threat assessments should not be made public. However, is not the logic of that position that the Government should have asked the Intelligence and Security Committee not to make public the levels of previous threat assessments? What if the Government had undertaken a review and decided not to change them? Would not the same arguments have applied?

Mr. Denham: In my opening remarks, I praised the role of the Committee and said that such Committees are valuable to the Government—I say that as a parliamentarian as well as a Minister. The Committee, in publishing the information, may well have done something that previous Governments had not done. However, given the changed threat assessment, I believe that we should not publish it. My right hon. Friends the Home Secretary and the Foreign Secretary also hold that view. However, we are taking a step forward by sharing the information with the Committee.

The danger is that the more refined a system of threat assessment, the more information it effectively conveys about what information is available to the Security Service and those who make the assessment. That is the judgment that has to be made. As the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) suggested, the critical point is that we have to ensure that the process for translating the Security Service threat assessment into useful public advice is good, robust and clear. Of course, that is why we entirely accept that the two processes that have been discussed in the debate have to fit together well; they cannot be separated.

In passing, I agree with the hon. Member for West Suffolk in warning about the danger of an upward drift in threat assessments because there is a heightened threat generally, as it is important that we do not fall into the trap of fuelling warning fatigue by doing so.

Other developments that were mentioned in the debate include the continued enhancement of the arrangements for handling and disseminating terrorist intelligence. Experts from the intelligence and security agencies and relevant Departments will be sited in an enlarged single joint terrorist analysis centre, acting under the director general of the Security Service. That will further help to weave together existing threads of intelligence to give customer departments an even better, timely, yet coherent picture of the risks to be managed.

I finish by addressing the issue of informing the public. The Government remain committed to informing the public on all safety matters, including the risk of terrorism, but, as the Prime Minister said in his Mansion house speech last November, one of the aims of terrorists is to scare people, disrupt their normal lives, produce chaos and disorder and distort proper and sensible decision making. We must not do their job for them. However, the public have the right to have their concerns addressed and to know, as far as possible, what is being done for their protection.

The Government and the police will always try to make advice on the dangers of terrorism as clear as possible. Public safety continues to be our first priority in all decisions about public information or warnings. If a warning is necessary to protect public safety in the face of a specific and credible threat, we will issue one without hesitation, as well as giving out any further information that will help the public to respond effectively. But those are the only good reasons for issuing information associated with intelligence, since we are not in the business of educating terrorists, jeopardising intelligence operations or sources, or disrupting normal life without very good reason.

We would, for example, have to be careful about concluding—to follow the logic of the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed a step further—that all bars, centres of social life and shopping centres anywhere in the world were to be avoided because they could possibly make very unpleasant targets for terrorists. So we have to treat such matters very carefully indeed.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury welcomed the information given by the Foreign Secretary this afternoon on the improvements to the advice system to ensure that the public can place their trust in Foreign and Commonwealth Office advice to travellers. Such advice is intended to give reassurance, promote normality and provide information so that sensible decisions can be made. A copy of the review of travel advice to which my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary referred has been placed in the Library.

Although I suspect that those in the gap-year generation are probably more familiar with using the internet than anyone else, I am assured that, on calling into an embassy or consulate, it would be possible to obtain a hard copy of the advice as people travel around the world.

We hope that the aims that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has set out for travel advice will also apply to the new dedicated internet site, announced by the Home Secretary today, to provide straightforward UK-focused advice to the public on the terrorist threat and personal protection. Of course, appropriate advice on safety will continue to be provided to the public in advance of the launch of the new website.

I said earlier that information is an essential weapon in fighting terrorism in all its forms; it is, but it is not the only one. I cannot let this debate pass without adding my tribute and that of the Home Secretary and other ministerial colleagues to the work of the intelligence and security agencies and the many contributions that the Security Service, the Secret Intelligence Service and GCHQ make individually and collectively to the safety of our citizens both at home and abroad. Of course, that work is not limited to their intelligence contribution, but involves a range of other protective measures.

Hon. Members present today will be well aware of why the successes of the intelligence and security agencies cannot be trumpeted, but let no one doubt the real difference that they make. I am sure that the whole House joins me in thanking the individuals who make up those organisations. It would also be appropriate to acknowledge the role played by our consular staff around the world and those who have volunteered for the new rapid response teams that were announced earlier today.

I finish as I began by thanking my right hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury, who chairs the Committee, and her colleagues for their hard work. I also thank those hon. Members who have spoken in this mature, constructive and thoughtful debate. If, on reflection, I have missed any specific issue that hon. Members have raised, I promise to write to them about it.

Charlotte Atkins (Staffordshire, Moorlands): I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion, by leave, withdrawn.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With permission, I shall put together motions 3 and 4.

Ordered,

LOCAL AUTHORITIES (HEALTH SCRUTINY FUNCTIONS)

That the Local Authority (Overview and Scrutiny Committees Health Scrutiny Functions) Regulations 2002 (S.I., 2002, No. 3048), Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health (Functions) Regulations 2002 (S.I., 2002, No. 3007) and Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health (Membership and Procedure) Regulations 2002 (S.I., 2002, No. 3038) be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.

GREATER LONDON AUTHORITY (PRECEPT CALCULATIONS)

That the Greater London Authority (Allocation of Grants for Precept Calculations) Regulations 2003 (S.I., 2003, No. 225), be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.—*[Charlotte Atkins.]*

COMMITTEES

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With permission, I shall put together motions 5 and 6.

Ordered,

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

That Angela Eagle be discharged from the Committee of Public Accounts and Mr Siôn Simon be added.

EUROPEAN SCRUTINY

That Roger Casale be discharged from the European Scrutiny Committee and John Robertson be added.—*[Charlotte Atkins.]*

Refugee Centre, Sittingbourne

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Charlotte Atkins.]*

7.46 pm

Mr. Derek Wyatt (Sittingbourne and Sheppey): I thank the House for giving me this opportunity to address the serious issue of the Coniston hotel in my constituency and the workings of the National Asylum Support Service—NASS for short.

First, I should like to apologise to the House. I said sometime in early January on a radio phone-in programme that I was in favour of a two-year moratorium on asylum seekers. Sometimes, on live programmes, we say something that, almost before we have finished the sentence, we know we will live to regret. On reflection, I should have added the words, "Except, first, for bona fide refugees and, secondly, for economic migrants." Of course, what constitutes a bona fide refugee goes to the heart of the current debate about asylum seekers, and we have not reached agreement on what constitutes an economic migrant. Although I would be happy to develop those arguments, this evening is not the time to do so.

I wish to dwell on the decision, taken by NASS, to select the Coniston hotel as an induction centre for 111 refugees and asylum seekers. I have asked questions in the House, as well as tabling two early-day motions. In response to a question that I asked during Home Office questions, the Home Secretary said:

> "My hon. Friend the Minister for Citizenship and Immigration has made it clear today that the procedure and process by which this matter was handled was unsatisfactory and that she has undertaken immediately to put in place a review. She is examining the contractual arrangements and why the letter sent by the local authority chief executive on 3 October last was not replied to. All those matters display an incompetence about which our Administration are doing something, as I have explained in the House before, but, with the new director general of the immigration and nationality directorate, we require a step change in the way that that directorate relates to local communities, responds to local Members of Parliament and displays its competence in dealing with these sensitive issues."—*[Official Report*, 20 January 2003; Vol. 398, c. 6.]

Later, at Prime Minister's questions, the Prime Minister said:

> "Let me make it clear that there has been inadequate and wrong use of the consultation procedures. I entirely understand the concern of my hon. Friend and his constituents. That is why the Minister responsible has tackled the issue."—*[Official Report*, 22 January 2003; Vol. 398, c. 294.]

The consultation period should have begun at the outset. All parties have signed up to that and it has now happened, although I have asked that the decision be taken independently of NASS, as it was at fault in the first place.

Two petitions have been presented over the past six weeks—one to the House and one to the Prime Minister. The first had more than 5,000 signatures and the second more than 7,000. Moreover, as I understand it, more than 4,000 constituents have written to NASS about the Coniston hotel. Swale borough council, largely due to the good offices of Councillor Truelove, has submitted its response, as has the local residents association, SACK, representatives of which came to see my hon. Friend the Minister two weeks ago. May I place on record my thanks to her and her staff for seeing them, the time that she gave them, and the manner and way in which she listened carefully to their arguments. They left the meeting feeling that there was a heart and soul to this government process after all. My response will go in tomorrow, and I sense that this debate is the end of the formal process. I know that the Minister must probably wait not only for NASS's recommendations on the Coniston, but for Swale borough council's legal objections, based on a change of use for the hotel. In her response, perhaps she will let us know when she thinks that she will be able to make a decision, and whether it will be after the legal process has been completed.

First, let me raise my objection to the way in which NASS reached its decision with Accommodata in respect of the Coniston hotel. The Coniston hotel was owned by Mr. and Mrs. Kleczowski. They wanted to sell the hotel, which had been in the family for two generations. They were expecting to sell it to a bona fide hotel group so that it could be improved. They gave instructions to Christie and Co., and on 10 September 2002 a sale was negotiated with Multinational Trading Ltd., with a registered office at P&O distribution unit, 2 Rockware avenue, Greenford, Middlesex. The lawyers acting for the owners were Jarmans solicitors, of Bell house, Bell road, Sittingbourne. The solicitor doing the deal, or acting on behalf of the owners, was Brian Slater. On 13 September, papers were sent to the buyers' solicitors, Jeffrey Green Russell, for the attention of Mr. Benton at 56, New Bond street, London W1. On 15 November 2003, a new company, called Heatherside Ltd., company No. 106771C, with a registered office at St. George's court, Upper Church street, Douglas, Isle of Man, was going to be the potential new owner of the Coniston. Contracts were exchanged on 19 November, with completion fixed for 20 January 2003.

On 7 January, that changed again—this time with a new company and a new set of lawyers. A notice was received from Jeffrey Green Russell, but a contract had been signed with Munro Properties Ltd., care of RBC Trustees (Guernsey) Ltd., of PO box 48, Canada court, St. Peter Port, Guernsey. Their solicitors were stated to be GSC of 31-32 Ely place, London EC1. Accommodata, of which the owners had not heard, never appeared anywhere in the sale document. On 10 January 2003, GSC wrote to the owners direct as the licence holders to say that the applicants would be Paul Greenwood and Ian Michael Richards of Accommodata Ltd., and stated:

> "It has been anticipated that Munroe Properties Ltd. will complete the acquisition on 20 January 2003. The Property will however be operated by Accommodata Limited".

On 15 January 2003, a licensing application was received by Jarmans, the solicitors for the owners, when it first became aware that the new licensing owners would be Accommodata. Finally, on 4 February 2003, the hotel acquisition was completed.

It seems to me that NASS began negotiations with Accommodata well before it owned the hotel—I suspect in the middle of 2002. It had certainly signed a deal with Accommodata to provide an asylum and induction centre by 13 November 2002, with a start date of 29 January 2003. If you will forgive me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I find this part of the process extraordinary. The lawyers for the hotel owners had no idea that it would end up with Accommodata and that it would end up as an induction centre, but NASS did. That is not how a Government agency should be allowed to work or act. You will see, Minister, that the owner of the Coniston—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman has read the Speaker's recent letter, but he is in breach of it in two respects at present. He must not use the second person when referring to another hon. Member. I shall leave him to think about what the other matter is.

Mr. Wyatt: I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and you are quite right.

My hon. Friend will know that the Coniston's former owners did not know until 6 January the intent of the owners, who were finally revealed as Accommodata. Their lawyer, Brian Slater from Jarmans, did not know until four days later, and Slater's partner handling the change of title for the liquor licence did not know for another five days, on the morning of the request at our local magistrates court in Sittingbourne. Our support services in Kent were given less than two weeks to cater for 111 refugees and asylum seekers, yet NASS had begun negotiating with Accommodata perhaps as early as six months before anyone knew that that would happen. Will my hon. Friend tell us, as I asked at our second meeting, whether NASS will put into the public domain its due diligence on Accommodata? I hope that she will tell us tonight that that will be done.

Let me turn to one or two people behind Accommodata. I shall concentrate on three companies in particular. The first is a company that I think was established in 1988 called Buckingham International. By 1993, it had losses of approximately £100 million. We may have to take this with a pinch of salt, but according to *Private Eye*:

> "In the process, offshore Jivraj family trusts and companies in Jersey, Switzerland and the Netherlands Antilles swapped highly priced assets and debt for cash and Buckingham shares in a tax free haven."

The second company, Petersham House Kensington Residents Association Ltd., went into compulsory liquidation. A petition was presented by the directors to the High Court on 10 June 1992, reference 003594. Its directors included N. N. Jivraj and N. G. R Jivraj. Three firms of accountants were reported to the Institute of Chartered Accountants in Milton Keynes, which took four years to reach a deliberation. As the investigation committee at the ICA included members from PKF and Stoy Hayward, it is strange to record that no action was taken. After all, they were two of the three accountants reported to the ICA in the first place, so no surprises there then.

The local council, Kensington and Chelsea, in an unprecedented move, also instituted proceedings. Mr. N. Brydon from the Insolvency Service handled the case, and J. R. Sibley was listed as the official receiver. It may be—this is part of the complication of some of the companies that I am talking about—that PHKRA Ltd. was a subsidiary or owned by another company called Brimtal Ltd. A DTI inquiry into Brimtal Ltd. took place in 1993–94. Apparently, it had committed five breaches of company law, and its accounts had understated losses by £160,000. Peter Joyce, then the chief executive officer of the Insolvency Service, part of the DTI, failed to take any criminal proceedings against the directors. That is despite the fact that from 1981 to 1989 it appears that the company was treated as dormant, although in fact it was trading. It appears that no annual general meetings were held between 1981 and 1989, no accounts were distributed to shareholders, and information to Companies House apparently may have fallen outside the law of the day. A third company, Calfayre Ltd., owners of the 157-bed Holiday Inn hotel in Cromwell road, Kensington went into receivership with estimated debts of £20 million. The joint receivers were Alan Barrett and James Wilding of Price Waterhouse.

Let us move forward to 2000, when Accommodata Ltd. was incorporated on 16 February with an address of 5th floor, Regina house, 124 Finchley road, London NW3, registration No. 04663698, company No. 3926871. Other shareholders included Shallan Ltd. and Zareno Ltd., which are also wholly or partly owned by Nurdin and Nick Jivraj. The last accounts were registered on 31 December 2001, and the next accounts were due on 31 October 2003. As we know, Accommodata Ltd. appears to have purchased the Coniston hotel through Multinational Trading Ltd., then Heatherside Ltd., and then Munro Properties Ltd.

For my peace of mind, will the DTI, the FSA and the Serious Fraud Squad undertake an analysis of those companies, especially Buckingham International? Last Thursday's *Financial Times* ran a leader asking for an independent system of monitoring auditors. I wish that it had also asked for an independent system of monitoring liquidators. The Government need to look at preventing offshore companies registered in tax havens from owning residential properties in the UK. Alternatively, the rules governing those offshore companies' finances should be the same as ours. I could not access the Jivraj's accounts in the Isle of Man or Jersey because their financial rules and obligations hide the information. That cannot be right. The Tories may have sat on their hands for 18 years over that, but our people expect better from the Labour Government.

However much information I put into the public domain, my sense about NASS is that because Accommodata had already worked with it at centres in Leicester and Cardiff, it never undertook an original forensic due diligence examination of the company directors back when it was formed in February 2000. Therefore, when the Coniston was put up for another induction centre, it was already a done deal. I hope that the legal department at NASS is subject to a separate inquiry.

That is enough about NASS—let me turn to the Coniston itself. The Coniston is our only major hotel in Sittingbourne.

Mr. Stephen Pound (Ealing, North): I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend for being his usual generous self and allowing me to intervene. Rockware avenue in Greenford, which my hon. Friend has mentioned, is in my constituency and I have looked into this issue. My investigations have led me in a different direction from that of my hon. Friend. Is he aware that both Migrant

[Mr. Stephen Pound]

Helpline and the Refugee Council have given unequivocally glowing endorsements of the standard of service that is provided by Accommodata?

Mr. Wyatt: That is not the case in Leicester, where I think a High Court case is about to take place.

As I have said, the Coniston hotel is the only hotel in Sittingbourne. The economic report of Swale borough council said that we desperately need another hotel as demand is outstripping supply. Four weeks ago, I started an e-mail conversation with Hammerson, the owners of the Oracle at Reading and Brent Cross in north London. The company has bought 51 acres in the heart of Sittingbourne. No doubt it will want to develop a retail park, a multiplex cinema and an indoor swimming pool—as well as an inlet marina with housing. All that that will do is increase the need for hotel beds and hotel investment.

We need the Coniston. We want people from Hammerson, as well as our current business visitors, to stay and spend their money locally and enhance our local economy. We need the Coniston and we would like it back. We need it most because it is our community hotel. Already, 40 weddings have had to be postponed. Can NASS understand the heartache and disappointment that rearranging those 40 weddings has caused my constituents?

Is it true that NASS neither visited the Coniston before signing the deal with Accommodata nor asked for any economic or social data from Swale borough council? Coniston is not a secure site. Will my hon. Friend confirm that police costs for securing the Coniston have already reached £100,000 in less than two months? Should NASS go ahead with its plans at the Coniston, the police bill, over three years, will be somewhere between £1.5 million and £2 million. Who will pay for that—Accommodata, NASS, Kent county council or Swale borough council? Our citizens have a right to know.

If the Government had asked its top 300 towns and cities to share in the process of accommodating refugees and asylum seekers, we could manage the current influx. Had NASS brought people in Sittingbourne inside the decision-making process, and helped us to lay the issues in front of our citizens, we would have suggested properties and had a mature debate with our stakeholders—including our local churches, which I am sure would have taken a lead. We would have understood these issues better. I believe that if the site had not been our only hotel, we would have welcomed the refugees. Sittingbourne people are decent people. They understand how serious an issue this is for the Government—any Government. However, they have turned against us. They do not fully understand the relationship between the Home Office and NASS; people think that they are one and the same. Consequently, people have lost trust in the process of democracy.

When my hon. Friend the Minister reviews this case, I hope that she will agree that NASS has to be broken up, that it has to be moved from Croydon, and that it needs better management and management systems across all Government Departments. Notwithstanding the costs involved at the Coniston, I hope that it will be given back to our community. After all, it is our only community hotel.

8.3 pm

The Minister for Citizenship and Immigration (Beverley Hughes): I thank my hon. Friend for the way in which he has presented his case and for his courtesy in sending me a copy of his remarks a little earlier in the day. That helped me to ensure that I could answer as many of his points as possible.

As he knows, I have made it clear before that I am deeply unhappy with the way in which NASS failed to maintain communications with Swale borough council during the procurement process for bed spaces at the Coniston hotel. He also knows that I have instituted a review of NASS operations generally and that, since my appointment as Minister, I have accelerated the regionalisation of NASS. That is on track. I regard it as an evolutionary process. We will consider extending functions that can be regionalised as the first wave of regionalisation settles. I hope that it will be successful.

Since 10 January, there have been regular meetings between NASS and the council. In addition, NASS officials have attended two public meetings in Sittingbourne, at which members of the local community were able to raise concerns. My hon. Friend thanked me, for which I thank him. As he said, I was able to meet local councillors and community representatives in Sittingbourne. The meeting was useful and constructive, and conducted in a mature and open way. At the meeting, I made it clear that, although we could not allow consultation to continue indefinitely, I was happy to agree to an extension to ensure that everybody felt that they had had an opportunity to contribute. At that point, residents asked to continue at least until 28 February. As soon as people feel that the consultation has run its course, I will be in a position to receive a report and make a decision. I hope that many concerns can be resolved during discussions between NASS and the council—although we may have to accept that some issues will not be resolved. I will get a full report and I will make the decision on whether or not we will place asylum seekers at the Coniston hotel.

Bearing in mind some of my hon. Friend's comments, this debate gives me an opportunity to set out again what happened during the exercise to procure bed spaces to support an induction centre for those making their applications in the south-east. NASS ran a competitive tendering exercise, in line with standard Government procurement guidelines. There was nothing underhand or secretive about the process. It was done in the normal way. The guidelines require that information on tenders must be considered as "commercial in confidence"—a technical term with which I am sure my hon. Friend will be familiar—until a contract is awarded. However, the need to treat tenders as commercial in confidence does not prevent consultation. As part of the exercise, bidders were told that details of their tender would be passed to the relevant local authority. Letters were sent to chief executives of local authorities in areas where we were looking to procure bed spaces. The letter, while making it clear that the information contained was commercial in confidence, did not prevent information being shared with anyone in the council, or outside the council, whom the chief executive thought it was necessary to supply information to. NASS needed the information to enable it to undertake a full and careful evaluation of all the tenders.

Two letters were received from Swale borough council. I have seen them. They are very short and anyone reading them would see no concerns that they would think that the authors had thought significant. The second letter passed on some information about possible crime and disorder concerns. However, I want to make it clear that those concerns were generalised and did not relate to the possibility that asylum seekers staying at a hotel would engage in criminal activity in the local area. NASS considered the contents of the letters but took the view that there was nothing in them to prevent the hotel from being used as accommodation only. A report came to me and a contract with Accommodata was signed on 11 December. As I have already said, it is my real regret—and I admit that I had assumed that things were happening differently—that while the process was continuing, NASS did not correspond with the council. It should have done. It is also a fact that, once the contract was signed, NASS could have, and should have, engaged more quickly with the council to allay public concerns.

NASS has entered into a contract with Accommodata to use up to 111 bed spaces at the Coniston hotel, as my hon. Friend has said. In turn, Accommodata—which has a licence to operate the hotel but does not own it—has a contract with the owner, Munro Properties, to lease bed spaces there to enable it to fulfil its contract with NASS. I am told that there are other bedrooms at the hotel that are not part of the agreement between Accommodata and Munro. Those are available for use by the public—although I have heard comments from local residents on the feasibility of that use continuing with asylum seekers in the hotel. I understand those points.

I want to assure my hon. Friend and the residents of Sittingbourne that no asylum seekers will be placed in the hotel as a result of the contract between NASS and Accommodata until I have decided whether that is appropriate. However, I cannot stop Munro Properties or Accommodata doing work at the hotel if they want to.

My hon. Friend will know that the purpose of the induction centre concept is to make sure that, at the very earliest opportunity, we make strong contact with asylum seekers when they make their claims and establish a mechanism for that contact to continue We brief them fully on the asylum process and start to prepare them for the outcome that the vast majority of them will face—that their claim will not succeed. We are trying to bring order and rationality to the system and to increase the number of removals of people whose claims do not succeed.

It is envisaged that people will be in the induction centre for a very short time while their fingerprints are taken, their identities are established and they are issued with the new identity cards that we are using for asylum seekers. They will then be dispersed. They do not stay in the induction centre and, as my hon. Friend knows, Kent is not a dispersal area and we have no plans to alter that. There is no suggestion that asylum seekers staying at the Coniston hotel or anywhere designated as an induction centre will be provided with longer-term accommodation in the area while their application is being considered.

My hon. Friend made a number of points about Accommodata as a company. According to my information, this Accommodata Ltd.—I shall shortly come to the other companies that share this name—is owned 50:50 by Shallan UK Ltd. and Zareno Ltd. Both companies provide loans to Accommodata at commercial rates of interest. I am providing this information, because I take my hon. Friend point's about NASS's due diligence appearing in the public domain. This information was revealed by NASS's checks on Accommodata. Accommodata, Shallan and Zareno are all registered in the UK. Accommodata was incorporated as a UK registered limited company on 16 February 2000. It acts as a property manager; it does not own accommodation facilities or associated services.

The background checking process for Accommodata's bid evaluation started in June 2002 when NASS placed advertisements for expressions of interest in providing hotel services in the south-east. In September 2002, along with nine other companies, Accommodata submitted a detailed tender in response to NASS's 94-page invitation to tender document, and NASS then undertook detailed commercial and technical evaluations. Each evaluation took place independently of the other. Accommodata scored very highly compared to the other bidders, and the Consiton proposal was found to be fully compliant in the technical evaluation. In addition, the company was required to provide details of its health and safety policy, insurances, track record and statements of its methods. References were demanded.

My hon. Friend may be familiar with Dun and Bradstreet reports, and they were obtained for Accommodata and for its parent companies. The invitation to tender document also required Accommodata to disclose whether, in the previous five years, any of its directors or the company secretary had been associated with a company that had gone into liquidation, any of them had been liable for bankruptcy proceedings or had been involved with any bankrupt company, whether the company had been subject to a termination of contract due to failure to fulfil contractual obligations and whether the company had been a defendant in a tribunal, civil court case or law suit relating to contractual performance or obligations to employees. The answer provided to all these questions was no, except that in reply to the first question—whether anyone had been associated with a company that had gone into liquidation—it was disclosed that one director, Mr. Somji, had been a director of Primedeck Enterprises, a subsidiary of Shallan, that had gone into liquidation in July 1998.

Accommodata was also required to submit full audited accounts and its bid was assessed with reference to profit, liquidity, the net worth of shareholders, audit opinion and risk rating. As a result of this analysis, it was judged to be a financially sound company. The evaluation methodology provided that, where a tenderer appeared to have breached company law or to have engaged in any other irregularity—for example, failing to submit accounts to Companies House—that would be ground for rejection of the tender unless there

[Beverley Hughes]

were exceptional mitigating circumstances. None of this applies to Accommodata. Contact was also made with other parts of the Home Office to check for any other adverse experience of the company.

I am not here to argue the case for Accommodata; I am simply setting out the standard process of checking that is used throughout Government procurement. That process was applied to the company and I have outlined the results that it revealed. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Pound) for his intervention outlining some of the views of voluntary organisations about the company. My hon. Friend the Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey claimed that a case against Accommodata is pending in Leicester, but we know of no case pending against the company in Leicester, in any other local authority or by anyone else.

Mr. Pound: I apologise for interrupting my hon. Friend the Minister. However, I have a document that shows that, as she will be aware, Accommodata has operated the Leicester International hotel. The east midlands consortium for asylum seeker support offers an equally unequivocal endorsement of the company's operation of the hotel and of the service that it provides in that area. I will happily give her a copy of this document.

Beverley Hughes: I am doubly indebted to my hon. Friend. I thank him for that information and I would be very pleased to see a copy of the document.

I do not know whether this information is relevant but other companies have similar or identical names to Accommodata. There is an Accomodata, an hotel booking website, registered in Tadworth in Surrey, and a New Zealand-based hotel booking shares a similar name. A direct mail provider is based in Indianapolis and an American company provides services to ophthalmologists and similar professionals. Our contractor, Accommodata Ltd. has assured us that it has no links with any of the above companies, but I do not know whether some of the critics of this UK-based company are acting under the mistaken belief that all the companies are one and the same. I understand that Swale council's planning enforcement notice may have been sent to the Tadworth company by mistake.

I wish to make a few general points about our attempts to improve radically the asylum system. We are trying to bring into place facilities that will help us to do that in the way that I outlined earlier. In particular, we seek to keep in contact with asylum seekers. My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North will know that many local authorities, including his own, are already responding by receiving significant numbers of asylum seekers through the dispersal system. I am grateful to them for that. It is right that we try to evaluate mechanisms for receiving and processing asylum claims.

I am grateful, too, to my hon. Friend the Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey for his remarks about the willingness of the residents and the council in Sittingbourne to grapple with that problem. It seems that they simply do not like the proposal that the only substantial hotel in the town should be used for this purpose because residents could not use it as they do now. That point was made at the meeting that I had with local residents and councillors, as was a promise that details would be provided of more suitable accommodation in the area which we could consider. Freda Chaloner, the head of NASS, raised the same point at a public meeting.

In fact, I have to tell my hon. Friend, with some disappointment, that neither the council nor anybody else has come forward with an alternative in the area which might be used to accommodate asylum seekers. It is important that we find accommodation in the south-east, because this is where many people enter the country. It is vital that, metaphorically speaking, we take hold of them at that very early point, and that is why we need induction centres in London and the south-east.

I want to involve local authorities much more in the process of managing asylum seekers, and many authorities tell me that they want to be more involved. However, when we put the question to them, we find in practice that concrete offers of help and support do not appear. We gave other regional consortiums and the local authorities involved in them the chance to be involved in the provision of regionally-based induction centres because local authorities were telling us that that is what they wanted. To date, the offers that we have received amount to 685 bed spaces, when we need a total throughout the country of about 3,500.

Unless local authorities are willing not only to say that they want to be involved and to co-operate but to translate that commitment into practice, NASS and the Government have no alternative but to seek accommodation from private sector providers such as Acommodata. I am speaking to local authorities in general when I say, "We are in your hands." I want to work with local authorities, and there are many reasons connected with their responsibility for local communities why we ought to have been working with them more.

The offer is there, but if it is not taken up by Swale borough council and others, we must provide this accommodation through the private sector, and we will. If Swale council has some alternatives, I would be grateful if it suggested them. Today I asked my official who is responsible for the induction centre programme to make renewed contact with Swale council, which has not, I am told, so far responded to her requests of recent weeks for meetings about this matter. If we are not to use the Coniston hotel, the council should allow us to consider any alternatives in the area.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-three minutes past Eight o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 4 March 2003

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

TRANSPORT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Speed Limits

1. **Ms Julia Drown** (South Swindon): When the new local authorities' guide for the setting of speed limits will be published. [100177]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. David Jamieson): Guidance on the setting of speed limits already exists in the form of roads circular 1/93. The Government are committed to reducing the number of casualties and those killed and seriously injured on our roads caused by excessive and inappropriate road speed. Later this year, we will develop new guidance for setting local speed limits.

Ms Drown: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply, and I urge him to get that new guidance to local authorities as soon as possible. Swindon parents tell me that they would like more factors to be taken into account when considering speed limits. They want speed limits to be reduced, particularly outside schools. Will the new guidance allow matters such as environmental factors, the fear of accidents and things that might encourage more people to walk their children to school to be taken into account in considering speed limits, rather than just the accidents that have taken place?

Mr. Jamieson: I have some good news for my hon. Friend: there is no need to wait for the new guidance. Since 1999, highways authorities have been able to apply 20 mph zones without authorisation from the Secretary of State. Road safety will always be a prime concern of highways authorities when introducing speed limits. However, they can also consider environmental and quality of life issues as well. Reducing the perception of danger encourages people to walk and cycle, particularly on the school run and in the vicinity of schools, which, in turn, improves the quality of life of people, particularly in the rural areas.

Mr. Andrew Mackay (Bracknell): Does the Minister accept that although there is clearly a strong case to reduce speed limits in vulnerable areas, such as outside schools, it is equally important on dual carriageways where there is no possibility of encountering pedestrians to increase too low speed limits, which bring the whole speed limit process into disrepute and can often cause speeding?

Mr. Jamieson: The thrust of what the right hon. Gentleman says is correct. What we are talking about is speed limits that are appropriate to the circumstances, and what we need to consider, particularly in rural areas, is having appropriate speed limits for the circumstances, and ensuring that those speed limits are enforceable is very important. In particular, we need to focus our efforts on those places where there have been casualties and injuries and where people have been killed and seriously injured.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): In encouraging local authorities to determine appropriate speed limits, will my hon. Friend say that they should make that decision on what is appropriate, not on guidance from police authorities, which sometimes mistakenly give the advice, "Don't reduce this speed limit because we haven't got the resources to enforce it."?

Mr. Jamieson: Although the resources available to local authorities have increased very substantially under our local transport plans—most authorities have had two or three times as much money in recent years—it is important, as my hon. Friend says, that those resources are used to best effect and to reduce the number of people killed and seriously injured on the roads. Of course I hope that, whenever those decisions are made, the highways authorities will work in co-operation with the local police.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): I welcome the Government's commitment to reduce the number of casualties on our roads and to introduce guidance on setting local speed limits, so will the Under-Secretary now agree to accept our new clause 21 to the Railways and Transport Safety Bill, setting out a rural road hierarchy and a range of speed limits as appropriate?

Mr. Jamieson: We recognise the hierarchy that the hon. Lady first proposed in her new clause, but the proposals that we first saw would be deeply intrusive in some rural areas in the number of signs and engineering works that would be needed. Of course that would be very costly, and we would have to consider the benefits that any expenditure would achieve to ensure that the cost was reasonable. As I said in a previous reply, we must focus the resources where the need is greatest and where the problems exist. There is very substantial extra funding in local authorities to do that, and we hope that they will direct its use to where the dangers and problems are greatest.

Railways

2. **Mr. Gary Streeter** (South-West Devon): What discussions he has had in recent weeks with the Strategic Rail Authority about journey times to Plymouth. [100178]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. David Jamieson): Ministers have met the Strategic Rail Authority to discuss the Greater Western franchise. First Great Western introduced a three-hour service from London to Plymouth last year. A regular three-hour journey time from Plymouth to London would be welcome, but performance and capacity improvements are a greater priority at present.

Mr. Streeter: I welcome the Minister's reply, but does he agree that, given the obvious difficulty of significantly improving air and road links to the far south-west, the best way to underpin the local economy is to cut journey times by train to Plymouth from London? Will he therefore put maximum pressure on the SRA to agree to a typical journey time of three hours, which has been put to the SRA in its new timetable proposals, so that business people, particularly those from Plymouth, can get to London and back for business meetings in comfort, thus underpinning and helping the local economy?

Mr. Jamieson: I share with the hon. Gentleman the ambition not just for road and air links to be good, but for the rail service to be good, too. Our present aim is also to improve the reliability and predictability of the service. Bringing together the Wessex, the Thames and the First Great Western franchise into a Greater Western franchise in 2006 will allow for better utilisation of track capacity and will ease co-ordination between short and long journey services. I have indicated once previously that the improvements that we will make around Reading will substantially improve the journey times to and from Plymouth.

Mr. Kelvin Hopkins (Luton, North): My hon. Friend will be aware of the contrast between the successful state railways on the continent of Europe and the privatised, fragmented mess that we have over here. Is it not time that my hon. Friend advised the Strategic Rail Authority to imitate what is done on the continent of Europe and make our railways like theirs?

Mr. Jamieson: We are asking the SRA to make sure that the railway provides the services that we want in this country. There will be no turning back of the clock: we want to turn the clock forward to ensure that the railway delivers the high-quality service that the people in this country deserve—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I remind the House that we are discussing journey times to Plymouth.

Mr. Tim Collins (Westmorland and Lonsdale): Will not travellers to and from Plymouth share the assessment of 28 local authorities, 13 of them run by the Labour party, that the cutbacks by the Strategic Rail Authority in rail services are resurrecting

"the spirit of Dr Beeching"?

Mr. Jamieson: The hon. Gentleman is referring to a tiny number of services—less than 1 per cent.—that are there to improve the capacity utilisation of the railways. We must all dwell on what would happen in the very unlikely event of the hon. Gentleman and his party forming a Government. What kind of cuts would they make to our rail service and to the amount of money available for transport, and what kind of impact would that have on services to and from Plymouth?

Mr. Collins: Will not travellers to and from Plymouth also want to know that after two rounds of SRA cutbacks, there will not be a third? Can the Minister commit himself to that?

Mr. Jamieson: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that the services to and from Plymouth and the west country have and are being secured. The policies that we are carrying out will improve the service to and from that particular area. Again, what the people of the west country will dwell on very much is the policies of all three parties in this area. The Liberal Democrats, as well as the Conservatives, are considering certain cuts, and those will be in people's minds.

Buses

3. **Mr. Michael Foster** (Worcester): If he will make a statement on the integration of bus services with other forms of transport in Worcestershire. [100179]

The Minister of State, Department of Transport (Mr. John Spellar): We encourage all local transport authorities to use their powers to promote through-ticketing, better co-ordination of services, improved accessibility, wider availability of information and improved waiting facilities. A new integrated rail-bus ticket named PlusBus has been introduced recently by the bus and rail industries. Although stations in Worcestershire are not currently participating in the scheme, it is expected that it will be extended progressively to cover all major towns.

Mr. Foster: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. One of the biggest obstacles to integrated transport in Worcestershire is the level of bus fares within Worcester city. It is claimed that Worcester city has the highest bus fares in Britain. Will he investigate that claim so that we can put pressure on the county council and the bus company to enable my constituents to pay the lower fares that seem to be paid in other parts of the county?

Mr. Spellar: I am concerned to hear about that. I have been aware of previous problems with local bus services in Worcestershire following a major review of the existing network of services. In addition, Worcestershire county council had approved an additional £400,000 funding to replace some services, and was carrying out its own review of bus service provision in the county. With the additional information provided by my hon. Friend—who is as assiduous as ever on behalf of his constituents—I will investigate those points further.

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid-Worcestershire): I am sure that the Minister will want to pay tribute to what the private train operating companies have done to improve integration between bus and train services in Worcestershire. Does he agree that if we are to get people out of their cars and on to public transport, the integration that really matters is that between car and train? In that respect, will he join me in supporting a

Worcester parkway station to provide decent parking facilities for car users, as none of the Worcester stations has decent car parking at present?

Mr. Spellar: I am not sure whether I am being tempted into making a planning decision. However, on the Chiltern line in Warwickshire there is an extremely successful parkway. The Chiltern line now runs well into Worcestershire and provides an increasingly popular service down to London. That shows how the innovation and enterprise of a number of companies is causing the market to grow. I agree with the hon. Gentleman about car parking facilities; but would add that integrating public transport as effectively as possible will provide people with real alternatives. We will look into that particular aspect.

Railways

4. **Mr. Mark Todd** (South Derbyshire): What measures he has taken to improve access to rail services for citizens of South Derbyshire. [100180]

The Minister of State, Department of Transport (Mr. John Spellar): The Strategic Rail Authority is working to improve rail services across the country. We are supporting Derbyshire county council's local transport plan, which includes the setting up of a rural transport partnership to help tackle transport issues in South Derbyshire.

Mr. Todd: The Minister will forgive my lack of enthusiasm for that modest response. I draw his attention to three projects that would certainly add to the accessibility of rail services in South Derbyshire: first, progress on the east midlands parkway, which has not so far been assisted by the SRA; secondly, the opening of the Donnington loop between Willington and Nottingham, which was commended in the M1 study but has not been proceeded with by the Government; and thirdly, the national forest line between Leicester and Burton, a line which would eventually go to Derby.

Mr. Spellar: I understand the demand for a new parkway station. There is pressure on budgets and, with the east midlands airport parkway, there have been some difficulties in getting agreement among all the parties concerned.

The national forest line used to be referred to as the Ivanhoe line. Strong pressure has come from Derbyshire councils on that issue, which will also require the support of Staffordshire councils. With changing travel-to-work patterns—such as those seen on the Robin Hood line—we acknowledge that the extension of services on to what have traditionally been freight lines, and the expansion of commuter services, can be of considerable advantage in helping businesses in city centres and in providing different work opportunities for people along the routes.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): Last year, it was announced that a new service of 10 trains a day would operate from Matlock to Birmingham, also serving South Derbyshire. That new service has now been cut to two trains a day within three months of coming into operation. Is that a good message to send out to encourage the use of public transport?

Mr. Spellar: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that expansion on a number of routes was found to be detrimental to reliability. When I considered the question of a cut in the service from Derby to Birmingham, I found that the five services an hour had gone down to four services an hour, which it had previously been. The SRA has rightly considered reliability—particularly in the Birmingham hub area—and the ability of all the rail companies to deliver their services. That was the right way to deal with the issue, because reliability is extremely important in developing the railway service. That service will undoubtedly have to be fine-tuned, and I am always prepared—as is the SRA—to consider particular services; but the principle underlying what has been done is absolutely right.

Waterloo Station

6. **Mr. Andrew Turner** (Isle of Wight): What steps he is taking to improve the level and quality of services into Waterloo station. [100182]

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Alistair Darling): South West Trains has ordered 785 new vehicles and Network Rail is upgrading the power supply to allow for that. The first trains should come into service in the spring. The revised South West Trains franchise requires a robust service with fewer cancellations and with more trains arriving at their destinations on time.

Mr. Turner: We have heard about cutback after cutback after cutback but the Secretary of State seems to suggest that things are getting better. In Southampton, there has been a cut not of 1 per cent., which the Under-Secretary suggested, but of 25 per cent. in off-peak services. For well-connected services to my constituency, that represents a cut of 50 per cent. How will that get people off the road and on to rail?

Mr. Darling: As my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary suggested, we have severe problems with congestion on part of the rail network. If the SRA had not taken action to remove off-peak trains, the congestion and severe problems with reliability would continue. The problem in the past, following privatisation, was that more and more trains were allowed on to a network that frankly could not take them.

The hon. Gentleman raised a point about South West Trains, and 74 out of 1,700 services a day have been withdrawn. That will allow for greater reliability and for longer trains with increased capacity at peak times. That will provide a better service. However, if the SRA had left matters as they were, the congestion and lack of reliability would continue. That cannot be in the interests of anyone using the railways.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): The Secretary of State knows that my constituents have recently suffered the body blow of the cancellation of the Bristol to Oxford line and the resulting cancellation of the Corsham station project. Will he confirm the rumours that the service from Corsham through west Wiltshire and into Waterloo is also being challenged by the SRA? *[Interruption.]* Hon. Members are shouting, so I shall repeat my question. Will the Secretary of State confirm that the service from Corsham and west Wiltshire into Waterloo, which it is widely rumoured will be cancelled by the SRA, will not be cancelled?

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): Give him a map.

Mr. Darling: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would have got to Waterloo eventually if he had been given the time. However, I do not know whether that would help with congestion.

The SRA has an obligation to do everything that it can to make trains services reliable. It is doing no one any good at all to continue with a situation in which more and more trains that were advertised did not run on time. They were subject to delays and cancellations simply because the network could not take them. As a result of the changes that are being made—there will be further changes to the timetable from time to time—the SRA is freeing up pathways to allow trains to run particularly at peak times. It is allowing for further and increased turn-around times, so that if trains lose time they can make it up.

If the hon. Gentleman cares to listen for a moment, I shall point out to him that the situation that we inherited in which more and more trains were trying to run down track that could not take them simply resulted in there being more and more unreliability. That is totally unacceptable to the people of this country.

Aviation Fuel

7. **Mr. Simon Thomas** (Ceredigion): If he will make a statement on his policy on reducing the use of aviation fuel. [100183]

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Alistair Darling): As the consultation document made clear last summer, the Government's policy is that the airline industry should meet the costs of its environmental impact and, as part of that objective, it should maximise fuel efficiency.

Mr. Thomas: Is it not the truth that the Government's policy on aviation fuel is all over the shop? The Secretary of State rejected the report from the royal commission on environmental pollution, yet the White Paper on energy says that we must reduce the use of aviation fuel and meet the external costs on the environment of aviation use. If 15 per cent. of global warming by 2050 will be created by aviation use, as predicted by the international panel on climate change, what will the Government do to address that real disaster in the making? Is there not a lesson to be learned from road charging?

Mr. Darling: On aviation, the Government made it clear last summer, when we published the consultation document on airport capacity, that the airline industry should meet the costs of the environmental impact that it causes. The hon. Gentleman must realise that most agreements on the taxation of aviation fuel, for example, are international agreements. It is not open to this country to take unilateral action. Indeed, that would not be effective at all. I know that he is a Welsh nationalist, but surely even he must realise that we have obligations outside our borders. We have made it clear time and time again that the industry needs to meet its environmental costs, and we will shortly be publishing a consultation document to explore how it can better do that while we have regard to our international obligations.

Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Now that congestion charging in London has been successful, will the Government consider being as bold as the Mayor and advocate the extension of congestion charging—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The question should be about aviation fuel.

Norman Baker (Lewes): If the Minister wants the airline industry to meet its costs environmentally in terms of aviation fuel, will he support an EU-wide tax on aviation fuel if it is not possible to secure international agreement? Otherwise, carbon dioxide emissions will double between 1990 and 2010 and a predict and provide policy will disfigure our countryside.

Mr. Darling: There are two points in relation to that. First, on reductions in air fares, even additional taxation would not put air fares back up to where they were. Many of the cost reductions have resulted from the low-cost airlines and others stripping out the costs of their operation. The policy that the hon. Gentleman advocates would not have the effect that he wants.

Secondly, a Europe-wide taxation regime might help in some respects, and it is worth considering, but it would not resolve the problem that would arise in relation to longer-distance flights or aircraft that are capable of flying outside the European Union, loading up with cheaper fuel, then coming back in. That might exacerbate the situation. I would say to the hon. Gentleman, as I said to the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas), that the problem relates particularly to taxation and needs to be resolved as part of an international agreement. Other measures can be taken to improve aircraft engine technology to make engines more efficient and to reduce noise. There have been significant improvements over the past 30 years, and I have no doubt that more will follow. These are all matters that the Government will shortly consider and consult on. We cannot, however, ignore the fact that this is by its nature a highly international business, and it is not as easy as the hon. Gentleman seems to think to resolve the matter, even within Europe.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): The Secretary of State, together with you, Mr. Speaker, and the rest of us regulars on the Edinburgh and Glasgow routes, will have developed a pretty good nodding acquaintance with every cubic metre of the upper atmosphere above Watford, which is pretty expensive in fuel terms. Is part of the problem the shortage of air traffic controllers, and would there be less hanging around over Watford if there were more skilled air traffic controllers?

Mr. Darling: Like my hon. Friend, I, too, have a nodding acquaintance with every inch of sky between Edinburgh and London. He makes a fair point. There are fewer air traffic controllers than there should be, but their numbers are increasing. National Air Traffic Services has plans to recruit more air traffic controllers, which will result in less delay around Heathrow and other airports. I looked at the figures over the weekend, and it is encouraging that delays attributable to air traffic control are decreasing, but an awful lot more needs to be done.

Congestion Charging

8. **Dr. Vincent Cable** (Twickenham): If he will make a statement on the timetable for introducing guidelines on exemptions and concessions in relation to congestion charging. [100184]

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Alistair Darling): We will consult on a uniform minimum standard of exemptions and concessions once we have had an opportunity to consider the experience gained from road user charging schemes in London and Durham.

Dr. Cable: Does the Secretary of State agree that although the congestion charge in London has so far been a considerable success in traffic terms, there are many unfair exemptions deriving from the blue badge scheme? Will he urgently introduce new guidance to deal with cruel anomalies such as the situation faced by 150 thalidomide victims who have been refused exemptions, despite the fact that they are not capable of using public transport?

Mr. Darling: The hon. Gentleman is right that the London congestion charging scheme has worked far better than many people thought that it would. However, as I have said on many occasions, it will take several months to evaluate its effect. Another point that I have often made is that it is for the Mayor to decide which exemptions he wishes to put in place. The way in which the legislation was framed made it absolutely clear that it would be for the Mayor in London, just as it is for local authorities around the country, to decide on the nature of the scheme and its exemptions. When the Government consult on minimum standards, they will be high level and generalised standards to ensure that there are no glaring inconsistencies between local authorities. I would say to the hon. Gentleman, or to anyone else who believes that the London scheme needs refinement in relation to exemptions, that that is a matter for the Mayor to resolve, as the legislation always intended.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Will my right hon. Friend make it clear whether or not the Government support the extension of congestion charging?

Mr. Darling: I made it clear to my hon. Friend's Committee, and many times to the House, that congestion charging is one of a number of options that local authorities can use. Whether it is appropriate for particular towns and cities depends on the local authority. That is how the legislation is drafted. I have also made it clear that I know full well that many local authorities have been waiting to see what happens in London before deciding whether to proceed with congestion charging. As I said last week in relation to congestion charging and other developments, such as the tolling of the M6 when the toll road opens—probably at the beginning of next year—developments are taking place that will allow people to learn from what is actually happening rather than what might happen in theory. That will better inform local authorities and the Government on what measures are workable and acceptable in managing demand for road space.

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): The Secretary of State is trying to absolve himself from responsibility for the exemption scheme. The Government took the power in legislation to impose exemptions and concessions. Why do they not use that power to ensure that the scheme does not inflict so much damage on their policy of social exclusion? The latest report from the social exclusion unit shows that householders who are car owners and in the 20 per cent. lowest range of incomes have to pay 24 per cent. of household income in car taxes. That is unjust. Why do not the Government do something about that in the name of social inclusion?

Mr. Darling: I must say that I had no idea that the hon. Gentleman was bothered about social inclusion. There was not much sign of that when he was a Minister.

On the specific scheme, it has always been the case that it would be up to the Mayor of London to put arrangements in place and to decide the appropriate exemptions. It is his scheme and for him to decide what exemptions are justified. On social inclusion, it is worth bearing in mind that about 90 per cent. of people who come into central London do so on public transport. Many of the remaining 10 per cent. may be in a difficult position, but it is for the Mayor to sort that out. One of the best things that can be done to help social inclusion is to invest in public transport. The hon. Gentleman and his party want to cut public investment by 20 per cent. That would be bound to have an adverse effect on social inclusion.

Railways

9. **Mr Vernon Coaker** (Gedling): What recent assessment he has made of the plans Network Rail have to improve the signalling and track from Nottingham to London. [100185]

The Minister of State, Department of Transport (Mr. John Spellar): None. I understand that the Strategic Rail Authority and Network Rail are working together on a range of strategic measures to include in the midland main line route plan. This will form part of Network Rail's 2003 business plan, due to be published in April.

Vernon Coaker: Given the billions of pounds that are being invested in St. Pancras station as part of the channel tunnel rail link, would not it be sensible to invest a significant amount in the midland main line so that we have a fast link between Nottingham and that part of the east midlands into London? Although there is a need to invest in the west and east coast main lines, many of us in that part of the east midlands think that the midland main line is often neglected when it comes to investment decisions.

Mr. Spellar: I know of my hon. Friend's considerable interest in the subject, which he regularly raises with us. He will be aware of the major transport interchange in the St. Pancras and King's Cross complex. We are keen to encourage development of the midland main line. As for the details, we will have to await the outcome of the work by Network Rail on, for example, signalling, which will no doubt cover the famous Trent signal box.

Mr. Richard Allan (Sheffield, Hallam): Speaking as an hon. Member who represents Sheffield, I add my voice to the calls for the midland main line to be a higher priority. Will the Minister consider doing something about the rolling stock on that route? It is distinctly inadequate and there are frequent cancellations simply because trains are not available.

Mr. Spellar: As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, considerable work is being done on the renewal and replacement of the high-speed train fleet. That is of particular significance to the midland main line and other routes. I must say that when I have used the midland main line, it has been remarkably reliable.

Airport Security

10. **Dr. Brian Iddon** (Bolton, South-East): If he will make a statement on airport security. [100186]

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Alistair Darling): The terrorist threat to UK interests and UK aviation remains a very real one. Heightened aviation security measures have been in place since September 2001 at all UK airports for all airlines operating from the UK and for UK airlines overseas. These are kept under constant review and are amended or supplemented as and when required.

Dr. Iddon: On the police service parliamentary scheme, I recently studied policing at Schiphol and Manchester airports. In the Netherlands, one security force is responsible for all aspects of security at major airports like Schiphol. However, in British airports we have the local police, special branch, the immigration and nationality directorate and Customs and Excise. Even the individual carriers and baggage handlers have their own security people. Is my right hon. Friend as concerned as I am that while there is a lot of good will among those individual forces, there may not be adequate consultation between them?

Mr. Darling: My hon. Friend raises a matter that was acknowledged by Sir John Wheeler, whom the Home Secretary and I asked to carry out a review of airport security. He identified cases in which we could improve the working relationship between the police and others, and we are in the process of doing so at the moment. I would caution against a wholesale organisational change, as that can often lead to people taking their eye off the immediate problem. However, where there are problems concerning organisations not working together as closely as they should, we will deal with them as and when the occasion demands. However, both the Home Secretary and I are concerned that Wheeler's recommendations should be implemented as quickly as possible, and are working to do so.

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): Can the Secretary of State confirm that following a recent new risk analysis, aeroplanes coming in from certain countries can no longer park at the main stand but must park and disembark their passengers away from the stand? If so, which countries are involved? Can the Secretary of State also explain why, 16 months on since the first occasion on which I raised the matter, it is still possible for staff to work airside—the most vulnerable part of the airport—without full security clearance, as long as they are supervised? Does he not accept that supervision can never be 100 per cent. secure? Surely action should have been taken a long time ago?

Mr. Darling: On the first point, I am anxious to be as helpful to the hon. Gentleman and the House as possible, but it would be unwise of me to disclose what is done for operational reasons from time to time. I think that, on reflection, the hon. Gentleman will accept my reasons for doing so. However, I can say that we keep the nature of the threat and the places where it may come from under review all the time. From time to time, it is necessary to do things at Heathrow and other airports to try to control or mitigate that threat. As my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary said a short while ago in a statement to the House, it is neither possible nor wise of Ministers to provide a "running commentary" on what is happening from day to day.

The threat at our airports is real in nature and is likely to continue for a long time. In this country, we have lived under the threat of terrorism from the IRA for some 30 years, and I am afraid that we are going to have to come to terms with living with a different, and in many ways more substantial, threat. It will be necessary for us to take appropriate action from time to time, but it would not be wise of me to maintain a running commentary in public on what we are doing.

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): Will the Secretary of State comment on the illogical situation whereby some airports pay for policing while other expanding, quite large, airports do not? It is not fair competition policy, nor is it fair to the council tax payer that that disparity should endure.

Mr. Darling: It is no doubt one of things that we will look at. My concern, and the concern of my Department, is to make sure that there is adequate policing, no matter what the source of finance. It is for the Home Office to decide the appropriate funding of police forces. I need to be satisfied that there is an adequate police service at every airport, depending on their size and the nature of the threat that may exist.

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): In recent weeks, armed police have been deployed in my constituency to protect the flight path from Manchester airport as a result of the recent scare. Without providing a running commentary, as the Secretary of State said, does he nevertheless agree that it is vital that airport communities be provided with clear information about what is being done, and that we should avoid alarmist statements from members of the Government and others?

Mr. Darling: Alarmist statements, no matter where they come from, should be avoided because they are usually unhelpful. Yes, we will try and keep the public and everybody who has a direct interest informed as much as we can, but no doubt the hon. Gentleman will accept that there can be occasions when information becomes available and action needs to be taken immediately. Sometimes it is overt, sometimes it is covert, but it is not always wise to make a public announcement about what is happening all the time. I should have thought it was obvious to the hon. Gentleman that to reveal what we know, and therefore possibly, by implication, what we do not know, would not help anyone at all.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): We all appreciate the need for tighter airport security, but what is being done to get more X-ray scanners operational? The number of times I have been stuck at Heathrow with huge numbers of people trying to get through one or two scanners is ridiculous. What discussions has my right hon. Friend had with BAA and other airport authorities to tackle the problem?

Mr. Darling: As it happens, I had an interesting discussion about just that matter a couple of weeks ago. The problem at Heathrow, particularly in relation to the domestic departures area, which is probably the one where my hon. Friend was held up, is not a lack of scanners, but a failure to deploy the right number of staff at specific times. It has been a problem at Heathrow since Christmas. There is a system in place to step up the numbers of staff to meet the flow, which is fairly predictable, but on a number of occasions that has not been done. We have spoken to BAA about that. People will put up with the inconvenience of being searched, but they cannot understand why the queue sometimes stretches right out across the concourse because staffing levels are inadequate. It is a staffing problem, rather than a problem with the scanners themselves.

Metronet Bond Issue

11. **Mr. Richard Bacon** (South Norfolk): If he will make a statement about the public bond issue by Metronet. [100188]

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Alistair Darling): The first three PPP contracts were completed with Tube Lines on 31 December. I expect the other two contracts to be completed with Metronet shortly. Metronet plans to raise part of the necessary finance through a bond offering.

Mr. Bacon: Can the Secretary of State confirm that when the disclosure period for the Metronet bond issue starts, there will be full disclosure in line with previous practice; or will it be like the recent PFI bond issued in connection with the upgrading of the A1 in Yorkshire by Road Management Services (Finance) plc, in which important information was blacked out before the documents were deposited at the lawyers Freshfields, so that taxpayers cannot find out what is going on?

Mr. Darling: I am sure that Metronet will comply with all the obligations incumbent upon it in relation to its bond launch. That is what it must do.

Buses

12. **Laura Moffatt** (Crawley): What recent assessment he has made of the impact of modern, reliable bus services on reducing car usage; and if he will make a statement. [100189]

The Minister of State, Department of Transport (Mr. John Spellar): Current and potential bus users consistently rate improvements to frequency, punctuality, reliability and cost as the factors most likely to encourage them to make better use of bus services. Significant increases in patronage, typically between 5 per cent. and 25 per cent., but occasionally significantly more, have followed major improvements on bus corridors. Studies suggest that about one third of new users previously made the journey by car.

Laura Moffatt: My constituents will be greatly heartened by that. We are undergoing a huge programme to introduce the Fastway bus system, which I am glad to say my right hon. Friend visited a few weeks ago. Inevitably, there is much disruption, and my constituents need to know that that disruption will pay off in the long run, and that they will have a better environment and a better way of getting to Gatwick airport, in particular. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the disruption is well worth the effort?

Mr. Spellar: I was very impressed by the partnership between the local council, the county council and the bus company in producing a scheme that they and I believe will be of real benefit to the people of Crawley and will enable Crawley to continue to be an economically dynamic city. It has been encouraging to see that. My hon. Friend can take heart from the increases in patronage that have taken place in other areas where similar systems have been introduced—as I said, between 5 and 25 per cent. That has been a real benefit to existing bus travellers and an encouragement to those who previously went by car to consider the new system as a sensible alternative.

Sir Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): Does the Minister accept that in many parts of the country, particularly rural areas, there is little or no public transport, so cars are essential if people are to have an acceptable form of mobility? Does he agree that if people are to use public transport, particularly buses, there must be adequate park and ride or car parking for those who come from areas where there is no public transport to link up with bus services? What encouragement is he giving to councils throughout the country to introduce more park and ride, so that there is adequate parking for people who have to get to a bus service before they can use it?

Mr. Spellar: Of course, far more people in rural areas now have access to bus services than previously, not least because of various rural bus grants that have been of significant advantage. However, I take the hon. Gentleman's point. As I told the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff), there is considerable scope for park-and-ride facilities that link with either bus or rail stations. That requires proper partnership between local authorities, bus companies and rail companies. In some areas, that is working very well, and some companies are extremely innovative, while others are not moving so fast. We are trying to encourage the average companies to come up to the level of the best. If he has a particular problem in his area that he would like me to address, I shall be more than happy to receive representations from him.

John Cryer (Hornchurch): My right hon. Friend will be aware that in some areas where bus services have been deregulated, largely outside London, the promised increased reliability has failed to materialise. That has happened because some of the operators choose to run buses that are not properly maintained and, in some cases, not even properly cleaned. That has obvious implications for safety as well as reliability. Does that not imply that at the very best we should be considering some extension of public ownership such as that which has already been made on some routes in London, or at the very least an increase in regulation?

Mr. Spellar: Even in London, the buses are run by private companies, although under a different regime. If my hon. Friend believes that companies are running vehicles that are unsafe or not properly maintained, or has information in that regard, the matter should be referred to the traffic commissioners, who are responsible for considering such matters. He is right to say that there are variations in performance. That is exactly why we have established between local authorities and bus companies the Bus Partnership Forum, which is considering a number of the issues that have been nagging away at those bodies for years. It is also starting to thrash out the details and new policies needed to achieve much better practice throughout the country, to the benefit of bus passengers and transport as a whole.

Mr. Boris Johnson (Henley): May I point out to the Minister that there has been a serious reduction in bus routes in south Oxfordshire, affecting the Reading-Goring and Chinnor-Thame routes and several others? May I also invite him to explain why the £20 million rural bus challenge seems to have done very little except make life more challenging for rural bus users? Can he allay the justified suspicions of those who think that that is caused partly by money being cynically skewed away from well run councils in the shires and the south and directed towards badly run Labour councils in the north?

Mr. Spellar: Local authorities throughout the country have had a significant increase in their moneys for local transport plans. I shall, of course, check the increase that Oxfordshire has received. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman should address his remarks to the local authority as to how it spends its money. The rural bus challenge has had a significant effect and made a considerable improvement in many areas. I cannot instantly recall what schemes have been introduced by Oxfordshire county council and whether they have been agreed by us. However, in general, the rural bus challenge has made a significant improvement. More people have been given access to bus services, and the initiative has helped to reduce rural isolation and provide access to shops and employment, as well as health and education facilities.

A1

13. **John Mann** (Bassetlaw): What plans he has to upgrade the A1 in Bassetlaw. [100190]

The Minister of State, Department of Transport (Mr. John Spellar): In line with the Government's policy of reducing congestion and improving safety on trunk roads, there are plans to carry out major improvements at several junctions on the A1 in Bassetlaw. Those include replacement of the roundabouts at Blyth, Apleyhead and Markham Moor with flyover junctions and the provision of a new junction to provide access to Elkesley village.

John Mann: After 30 years of procrastination, my constituents are delighted that we have a Government who are prepared to put in the investment. Indeed, my constituents will be singing and dancing alongside the traffic queues, soon to go. So enthused are they that should the Minister contemplate going further and bringing motorways in as part of that investment, there will be further support. Will he consider the enthusiasm of my constituents in terms of future motorway improvements?

Mr. Spellar: I am sure that I will have the opportunity to do that when I visit my hon. Friend's constituency in just over a week, when the enthusiasm of his constituents will no doubt be manifest.

CABINET OFFICE

The Minister of State was asked—

Ombudsman

20. **Mr. Andrew Robathan** (Blaby): If he will make a statement on the Public Administration Committee's third report, on ombudsman issues, with special reference to the role of the Cabinet Office. [100197]

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Mr. Douglas Alexander): We will study the Committee's report and respond in the normal way.

Mr. Robathan: This report deals, first, with the Hinduja cover up and, secondly, a less known cover up, which was described by the ombudsman as the only occasion on which the Government have refused to accept the ombudsman's findings on a matter of access to Government information. We hear a great deal about freedom of information from this Government, but when it comes to reality there is no freedom of information and one cannot find anything out because they are so secretive.

The report's second recommendation is:

> "We recommend that the Government reconsider its decision to refuse to accept the Ombudsman's findings in the case of Mr Robathan and publish the required information."

Will the Government accept the findings of the Public Administration Committee, which is dominated and chaired by Labour Members?

Mr. Alexander: As I have made clear, the Government will consider the Committee's recommendations and respond formally in the usual way. In the first place, that will, of course, be to the Select Committee.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff, West): I am one of the Members who "dominates" the Public Administration Committee. Will the Minister take note of the fact that the new ombudsman is appearing before us this week? We might want to ask also about press reports that the Government are resisting releasing information on gifts to Ministers, so will he perhaps enlighten us further as to Government policy on freedom of information regarding gifts to Ministers?

Mr. Alexander: The final decision on what is in the report is obviously a matter for the ombudsman, Ann Abraham. I should point out that I had a constructive meeting with the new ombudsman last week in which we discussed the evolving role of the ombudsman. There is the basis there for an extremely constructive relationship.

Correspondence

21. **Mr. John Bercow** (Buckingham): If he will make a statement on steps that he is taking to reduce the time taken by Ministers to reply to Members' letters. [100198]

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Mr. Douglas Alexander): The Cabinet Office issues guidance to Departments on handling correspondence from Members of Parliament. However, it is up to individual Ministers to ensure that their Department responds to all correspondence promptly and accurately.

When that issue was raised with me last month by Members, I wrote to the Cabinet Secretary, who has in turn written to Departments reminding them to ensure that every effort is made to handle correspondence efficiently.

Mr. Bercow: I am grateful to the Minister for that informative reply. Given that the Cabinet Office guidance states that the handling of correspondence with Members of Parliament, peers and the general public is an issue to which the Government "attaches the greatest importance", can he explain to me why the letter that I sent on 7 May 2002 on behalf of my constituent, Mr. Steve Watkins of 72 Embleton Way, Buckingham, on the national health service human resources and payroll system, did not receive a reply from the Minister of State, Department of Health, the right hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton), until 16 January this year? On the assumption that the Minister regards that delay of eight months and nine days as unacceptable, when will he do something about it?

Mr. Speaker: Order. We have only 10 minutes.

Mr. Alexander: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First, I am happy to take that matter up with my right hon. Friend. Indeed, I have already corresponded with him since the last Cabinet Office Question Time in relation to correspondence to the Department of Health. It is important to point out for the benefit of the House the scale of the challenge facing Departments: about 160,000 letters from Members were received across Departments in 2001 and the Prime Minister alone received more than 1 million letters from the general public in 2002.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): Are Ministers encouraged to deal with letters in a number of ways? Some communications are urgent and need swift responses, while others may be more routine. Of course we do not want to wait for as long as eight months for answers to those, but should not important communications be upgraded?

Mr. Alexander: I am sympathetic to that point. Obviously it would be wise to identify the relevant Minister in such correspondence, but the fact remains that we should try to answer all letters as expeditiously as possible. Targets are set by specific Whitehall Departments, and it is on that basis that individual Ministers are responsible, consistent with Cabinet Office guidance.

Mr. Richard Allan (Sheffield, Hallam): As the Minister will know, many organisations have become considerably more efficient by using electronic mail for communications of this sort, in terms of both the time taken to reply and the cost involved. Unless such systems are implemented properly, however, they are worse than useless: e-mails are diverted all over the place, or disappear into the ether. Would the Minister consider commissioning work in his Department to bring together the various players in Departments, Parliament and so on, and to establish whether an efficient system of e-mail between Members and Ministers could be devised for Members who wish to communicate electronically?

Mr. Alexander: I know of the hon. Gentleman's expertise in this area. It is a matter of record that the House has considerably improved its facilities for electronic communications in recent years, which is all to the good, but I will give some thought to the hon. Gentleman's question and then write to him.

Mr. Tim Collins (Westmorland and Lonsdale): Will the Cabinet Office undertake to publish a league table showing how rapidly Ministers respond to correspondence? Will it introduce sanctions so that the worst performing Ministers suffer some penalty, such as the loss of their exemption from the London congestion charge?

Mr. Alexander: That would seem a curious sanction indeed.

The guidance is set by the Cabinet Office, and it is then for individual Departments to set responsive targets. The average Whitehall target is 15 working days. Clearly some Ministers and Departments could do significantly better. That is why, after the most recent Cabinet Office questions, I was keen to ensure that the matter was raised with the Cabinet Secretary, who in turn has raised it with individual Departments.

Lord Birt

22. **Norman Baker** (Lewes): If he will list the subjects on which Lord Birt has advised the strategy unit in the last six months. [100199]

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Mr. Douglas Alexander): Lord Birt was appointed by the Prime Minister as an unpaid adviser under paragraph 51 of the ministerial code. His role is to provide the Prime Minister and other Cabinet Ministers with long-term internal strategic analysis and policy thinking.

Norman Baker: We need more freedom of information. I asked which subjects Lord Birt was advising on, but the Minister did not give me the answer to that question. Why is what Lord Birt is doing such a secret? Is it that embarrassing?

Mr. Alexander: I am well aware of the correspondence between the Prime Minister and the hon. Gentleman about this. I remind him that, in his letter to the hon. Gentleman dated 21 May 2002, the Prime Minister made it clear that Lord Birt provides private internal advice to the Prime Minister and other Cabinet Ministers on a range of issues.

Mr. Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh, North and Leith): Would my hon. Friend be prepared to ask Lord Birt to advise the strategy unit on Government policy on waste? As he knows, the unit recently suggested that the Cabinet Office should conduct a review of the current division of responsibility between the Department of Trade and Industry and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. If Lord Birt would not be the right person to conduct the review, could the Minister ask someone else to do it on behalf of the Government?

Mr. Alexander: Two distinct issues are inherent in that question, but I will certainly consider how we can best deal with the issues relating to waste.

Civil Service

23. **Dr. Alan Whitehead** (Southampton, Test): What plans he has to review whether the requirement that each civil service agency undergoes a quinquennial review of its public sector status should continue. [100200]

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Mr. Douglas Alexander): The Government no longer require quinquennial reviews of executive agencies and non-departmental public bodies. Because our focus is on the effectiveness of delivery of public services rather than on individual structures, Departments are now being asked to look holistically at the contribution that agencies, NDPBs and others make to achieve their delivery objectives.

Dr. Whitehead: Now that the agency system is mature, might this not be the time to review the whole basis on which agencies work, especially smaller agencies? Could the system be refined to match more closely the size and function of an agency, rather than the focus being on the undertaking of reviews?

Mr. Alexander: My hon. Friend will be aware that a joint review of agency policy was recently carried out by the Cabinet Office and the Treasury, and the report, "Better Government Services: Executive Agencies in the 21st Century"—copies are available in the Library—was published in July 2002. On my hon. Friend's specific point about the function of the reviews of agency work, I agree that the challenge is not solely to look at individual structures, but to ensure that the structures that are in place reflect the delivery objectives of the Department. That view is shared by the Cabinet Secretary, who, through his work on advancing performance partnerships, is undertaking significant work in this area.

Points of Order

12.30 pm

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I seek your guidance about the confused messages coming out of the Department for Education and Skills today on university admissions. This morning, the Minister for Lifelong Learning and Higher Education, the hon. Member for Barking (Margaret Hodge), is reported to have said that she was going to set a specific target for the percentage of children from poorer backgrounds going to university. She is reported to have said:

> "I'm actually going to set a target—where we want to get to by 2010."

Several hours later, however, after the intervention of the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, she was quoted as saying that

> "an overall target would be inappropriate and we have no plans to introduce one."

Given that, so far, we have had one message about university admissions from the Prime Minister, a different one from the Secretary of State and two different ones from the Minister with responsibility for higher education, has the Department for Education and Skills requested the chance to make a statement to the House this afternoon, so that we can clear up this terrible confusion on one of the key areas of education policy?

Mr. Speaker: That is not a matter for me.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Have you had a moment to look at the lead letter in *The Times* today, from Professor Sir Bernard Crick, the constitutional expert, in which he compares Ministers' respect for the House of Commons somewhat less than flatteringly with the Government of Lord North's? Against the background of your own repeated statements that Ministers making important announcements should come to the House of Commons first, have you been able to reflect on the Chancellor of the Exchequer coming not here, where he surely ought to be, but to Canary Wharf, to tell us that the costs of any war against Iraq will be met, whatever they are, or on the fact that the *Evening Standard* can refer to the prospect of a rise of 4p in the pound in income tax? If income tax is to rise by 4p in the pound, should not the House of Commons be told first, rather than the distinguished company at Canary Wharf?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman, the Father of the House, applied for an urgent question today. I am rather worried that, when he is refused urgent questions, he tries to raise points of order on the same matters. That is what he is trying to do now. He sought an urgent question to try to bring the Chancellor of the Exchequer to the House, and I refused his request. I need not give any reason for doing so. It is quite improper that the hon. Gentleman should then raise a point of order and try to raise the matter in this way.

Welfare of Laying Hens (Enriched Cages)

12.33 pm

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): I beg to move,

> That leave be given to bring in a Bill to prohibit the keeping of laying hens in enriched cages.

First, may I pay tribute to Compassion in World Farming, whose campaign has inspired this Bill? Secondly, may I say that the Government have done much to improve the welfare of farm animals? They led the way in securing the EU protocol, which gives animals a new legal status as sentient beings rather than agricultural products, as they were previously defined. They have banned fur farming and played a key role in winning an EU-wide ban on battery cages, which is due to come into force in 2012. I am aware that the Government are in the process of consulting on whether to ban enriched cages, and I hope that they will do so. The purpose of my Bill, which has all-party support, is to give Ministers a little prod in the right direction. I was hoping that there would be a Minister from the relevant Department here today, and I am sorry that there is not.

I am sorry to say, however, that as things stand much of the egg industry plans to side-step the ban by going over to the cynically named enriched cages, which, sadly, have not been banned by the EU directive. An enriched cage will give hens just 150 cm—about the area of a postcard—more floor space than a conventional cage. It will contain the same number of hens—usually four—and provide a tiny nest box, a perch and litter for dust bathing, all of which will be woefully inadequate in the tiny space available. The hens will still be unable to turn or to flap their wings, and competition for the nest box is likely to lead to aggression. I defy anyone who has seen it to say that this represents a serious improvement in farm animal welfare.

These so-called enriched cages are little more than glorified battery cages. They have nothing to do with humane egg production, and have been designed principally as a device for getting around the EU ban. They will enrich only the egg producers, not their wretched hens. The 2012 deadline for phasing out conventional cages is, by any standards, generous. Producers have ample time to prepare for it, and what they ought to be doing is investing in perchery or free range systems; indeed, the better egg producers are already doing so.

There are, of course, those who argue that more expensive welfare systems in the EU will lead only to increased imports from countries where EU welfare standards do not apply. I understand this concern, but it need not be the case. Of course, the obvious solution would be for the EU, once its own cage ban comes into force, to ban the importing of cage-produced eggs from elsewhere. I am aware that both the Government and the EU make the pessimistic assumption that the rules of the World Trade Organisation do not allow restrictions on such imports. We should challenge this view. I note that the WTO recently ruled that an importing country may make it a condition of access to its markets that the exporting countries adopt policies of environmental protection comparable to its own. I also note that the EU, which bans cosmetic testing on animals, has recently decided that a ban on the sale of imported animal-tested cosmetics is consistent with WTO rules. I therefore see no reason why the same principle should not be extended to farm animal welfare, and I trust that Ministers will press for this.

[Mr. Chris Mullin]

Whatever the position with the WTO, however, there are other steps that we can take to prevent welfare standards in our egg industry from being undermined by imports. Supermarkets should follow the example of Marks and Spencer and Waitrose in refusing to sell battery eggs, and fast food chains should do the same. Believe it or not, UK branches of McDonald's use only free range eggs. If McDonald's can adopt this principled position, so can other food chains and manufacturers. Where the market goes, industry will follow.

In any case, the cost of change is often exaggerated. Industry figures show that barn eggs cost about 8.5p a dozen more to produce, and free range eggs about 18.5p a dozen more. Given that we consume about 180 eggs per person a year on average, this amounts to about tuppence a head per week for free range eggs, or 5p a head per week for barn eggs. That is not a high price to pay for rescuing hens from a lifetime of misery, or for injecting a little morality into factory farming.

I repeat: these so-called enriched cages are a cynical device designed to undermine the little progress that we have already made towards mitigating the worst excesses of factory farming. Germany has already undertaken to ban them, and if Germany can do without them, so can we. I note that the egg industry is arguing that the Germans can afford to take this principled stand because their industry is migrating across the border into Poland. This overlooks the fact that by the time the ban comes into force in 2012, Poland will be well inside the EU, and the rules that apply to German egg farmers will also apply to Polish ones.

I trust that Ministers will not fall for any of the special pleading coming from the egg industry. Instead of looking for ways round the ban, the industry should put its energy into ensuring that there is a level playing field and expanding the market for eggs that are humanely produced. If they were to do that, they would have the full support of the House and the public.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Mullin, Ann Clwyd, Mr. Tony Banks, Sir Teddy Taylor, Bob Russell, Mr. Gwyn Prosser, Mr. John Horam, Sue Doughty, Mr. Eric Martlew, Mr. Roger Gale, Mr. Bill Etherington and Peter Bottomley.

WELFARE OF LAYING HENS (ENRICHED CAGES)

Mr. Mullin accordingly presented a Bill to prohibit the keeping of laying hens in enriched cages: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 28 March, and to be printed [Bill 65].

POLICE (NORTHERN IRELAND) BILL *[LORDS]* (PROGRAMME) (NO. 2)

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That the programme order of 10th February in relation to the Police (Northern Ireland) Bill [Lords] shall be amended by the substitution in paragraph 2 (conclusion of proceedings in standing committee) for "Tuesday 4th March" of "Thursday 6th March".—*[Joan Ryan.]*

Question agreed to.

Orders of the Day

Communications Bill

[2ND ALLOTTED DAY]

As amended in the Committee, further considered.

New Clause 23

SECRETARY OF STATE GUARANTEES FOR OFCOM BORROWING

'(1) The Secretary of State may guarantee—

(a) the repayment of the principal of any borrowing by OFCOM;

(b) the payment of interest on any such borrowing; and

(c) the discharge of other financial obligations incurred by OFCOM in connection with any such borrowing.

(2) The power of the Secretary of State to give a guarantee under this section is a power (subject to subsection (3)) to give it in such manner and on such conditions as he thinks fit.

(3) The Secretary of State must not give a guarantee under this section if the aggregate of—

(a) the amounts that he may be required to pay for fulfilling that guarantee, and

(b) the amounts that he may be required to pay for fulfilling other guarantees previously given under this section and still in force,

exceeds £5 million.

(4) The Secretary of State may by order substitute another amount for the amount for the time being specified in subsection (3).

(5) No order is to be made containing provision authorised by subsection (4) unless a draft of the order has been laid before Parliament and approved by a resolution of the House of Commons.

(6) Immediately after a guarantee is given under this section, the Secretary of State must lay a statement of the guarantee before each House of Parliament.

(7) Where any sum is paid by the Secretary of State under a guarantee given under this section, he must lay a statement relating to that sum before each House of Parliament as soon as practicable after the end of each of the financial years—

(a) beginning with the one in which the sum is paid; and

(b) ending with the one in which OFCOM's liabilities under subsection (8) in respect of that sum are finally discharged.

(8) If sums are paid by the Secretary of State in fulfilment of a guarantee given under this section OFCOM must pay him—

(a) such amounts in or towards the repayment to him of those sums as he may direct; and

(b) interest, at such rates as he may determine, on amounts outstanding under this subsection.

(9) Payments to the Secretary of State under subsection (8) must be made at such times and in such manner as he may determine.'.—*[Mr. Timms.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

12.42 pm

The Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness (Mr. Stephen Timms): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following: Government new clause 25—*Power of OFCOM to retain costs of carrying out spectrum functions.*

Government amendments Nos. 241 to 243, 256.

Mr. Timms: Clause 1(3) and (4) of the Bill will allow Ofcom to borrow money commercially. That will enable Ofcom to smooth out uneven cash flows that may arise as the result of the unevenness of receipts. New clause 23 will allow the Secretary of State to guarantee Ofcom borrowing to ensure that it is able to obtain the most advantageous terms.

New clause 25 will enable Ofcom to retain out of its spectrum receipts an amount to cover the costs of carrying out its spectrum functions. Clause 390 of the Bill requires amounts received by Ofcom under the Wireless Telegraphy Act 1998 to be paid to the appropriate consolidated fund. In practice, an administrative arrangement will allow the necessary amount to meet the costs of Ofcom carrying out its spectrum functions to be netted-off from those moneys and paid to Ofcom. Under the new arrangement proposed in new clause 25, Ofcom would make a statement of principles, which would be approved by the Treasury, setting out the basis on which it would calculate the costs of carrying out its spectrum functions and retain the necessary amounts accordingly. I hope that the House will welcome that.

Amendment No. 243 requires that Ofcom should include in the account prepared under clause 390(4) the amount retained by it in accordance with any statement of principles it may make under new clause 25, and the cost to Ofcom of carrying out the functions to be covered by that retained amount. Amendments Nos. 241 and 242 are minor consequential amendments.

As a result of the requirements of clause 390 that some of the amounts received by Ofcom should be paid to the consolidated fund, Ofcom will be unable to comply with the duty in paragraph 8(1) of the schedule to the Office of Communications Act 2002 to secure that its revenues are at least sufficient to meet its obligations. Amendment No. 256, therefore, amends paragraph 8(1) to require Ofcom to conduct its affairs so as to secure that revenues from fees and charges which do not fall to be paid to the consolidated fund are at least sufficient to cover the cost of carrying out the functions to which they relate.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): We welcome the new clauses, although we should prefer new clause 25 to go further. If the new clauses are accepted, the Bill will have more than 400 clauses. I hope that the House will recognise that this afternoon's debate brings to an end a lengthy process. Some of us have been engaged in it for the best part of three months, but it has been a happy time. As we progress through the afternoon, we will discover the joy of Government amendments that put into effect changes that we advocated in Committee. That shows that the Committee debate was a constructive process. The past 24 hours has been quite good, as we have seen that all our work did not come to nothing. We are grateful to the Minister for that.

However, if new clause 23 is relatively uncontroversial, new clause 25 addresses an issue that I raised with the Minister in Committee—the extent to which all the income payable to Ofcom could be used to defray some of the costs of its activities, instead of all of it being paid to the consolidated fund. I do not want to delay the House, as there is a lot of business to get through. However, the Minister will recall that I impressed on him my thought that, although I understand that Ofcom would not necessarily have an incentive to impose penalties if it could keep the money, it still seems a mistake for new clause 25(5) specifically to except the imposition of penalties and fines and some of Ofcom's enforcement powers.

We still believe that a lot of activity will be involved in policing the provisions of the Bill and ensuring that Ofcom achieves proper enforcement. The cost of that will still fall on all the organisations that must pay fees and administration expenses to the regulator, as we discussed in Committee.

Although there is not a complete meeting of minds between us on that matter, we are nonetheless grateful that the Government have accepted some of what we said. I hope that the Minister will recall the Opposition argument as the Bill progresses through the other place and when it receives Royal Assent. If I am right about it, we may need to return to the matter in the future.

Mr. Timms: I agree with the hon. Gentleman about the happiness of the past three months. He is right that the House has before it a number of amendments that reflect the discussions that we had in Committee. They deal with matters raised by the hon. Gentleman and other hon. Members, which is how the process should work.

We debated in Committee the matter that the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) raises, and I think that he will welcome the change proposed in new clause 25, as far as it goes. It means that the arrangement will be much more transparent, and that people will be able to see how payments are being used to fund the work that Ofcom needs to do. We disagreed about penalties, for the reasons that the hon. Gentleman set out. I am satisfied that the proposals before the House today are the right ones, and I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's general welcome for the changes.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 24

GRANTS FOR ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS NETWORKS AND SERVICES IN NORTHERN IRELAND

'(1) The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment may, in accordance with this section, make payments to persons engaged in, or in commercial activities connected with—

(a) the provision of electronic communications networks and electronic communications services in Northern Ireland; or

(b) improving the extent, quality and reliability of such networks or services.

(2) A payment shall not be made under this section unless in the opinion of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment—

(a) the making of the payment is likely to achieve—

(i) one or more of the purposes set out in subsection (1); and

(ii) any other purposes prescribed by regulations made by that Department with the approval of the Department of Finance and Personnel; and

(b) the amount of the payment is reasonable having regard to all the circumstances.

(3) Payments under this section shall—

(a) be of such amounts, and

(b) be made subject to such conditions (including conditions as to repayment),

as the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment may determine.

(4) This section extends only to Northern Ireland.'.—*[Mr. Timms.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Timms: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

New clause 24 grants discretion to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment—DETI—in Northern Ireland to fund expenditure on telecommunications infrastructure and for any other purposes prescribed by regulations made with the approval of the Department of Finance and Personnel in Northern Ireland. Under the terms of the clause, DETI will have discretion to support financially the development of a regional telecommunications infrastructure, specifically in respect of the provision of electronic networks and services and improving the extent, quality and reliability of those networks or services. It will enlarge the legal framework for funding such expenditure in Northern Ireland. That is important because of DETI's role in developing a regional telecommunications infrastructure as an integral part of the Government's strategy for broadband, which is being led by my Department.

The Bill already contains a provision, which has been carried over, in part, from the Telecommunications Act 1984, for district councils in Northern Ireland to contribute to the costs of infrastructure. The new clause confers broadly similar powers on DETI and I hope that the House will welcome it.

Mr. Greenway: Northern Ireland Members have pressing matters to address and we wish them success, but I am sure that were they here today, they would want to welcome the new clause. It appears at least to signal an opportunity for the increased roll-out of broadband in Northern Ireland.

When we debate new clause 2 a little later in our proceedings, I hope that we shall conclude that the Government's commitment to the roll-out of broadband in the rest of the United Kingdom will be undertaken with equal enthusiasm.

Mr. Richard Allan (Sheffield, Hallam): I, too, welcome the new clause; it clearly makes sense for DETI to be given the powers to make such expenditure. Although I would not oppose that, I have some questions for the Minister, especially on the relationship of the provision to expenditure in the rest of the United Kingdom.

The notes that the Minister kindly distributed to accompany the Government's many amendments and new clauses stated that the new clause was part of the DTI's broadband initiative. Can he flesh out how DETI's possible expenditure in Northern Ireland would relate to expenditure elsewhere? For example, is the anticipated DTI expenditure to be across England, Scotland and Wales, or is it to be broadly equivalent to the expenditure to promote broadband infrastructure made by the regional development agencies in England and their counterparts in Wales and Scotland?

Can the Minister clarify whether there will be comparability throughout the United Kingdom? We are all interested in the promotion of broadband networks, so it would be helpful to know where the Government imagine that the expenditure will come from. The new clause makes it clear that in the case of Northern Ireland it will come from DETI, but questions remain about the Government's intentions for their expenditure of public money in the rest of the United Kingdom.

Secondly, I want to raise concerns that have been expressed to me about Scottish Enterprise's investment and which may also apply to expenditure in Northern Ireland. Although we all welcome funding for broadband infrastructure from various regional and national bodies, it can have a distorting effect on the market. Concerns are being expressed by some service providers in Scotland that Scottish Enterprise's investment strategy is not ideal for creating the optimal market climate. Targeted investment of that sort can distort the market to the detriment of existing providers who could supply the services that people want without additional investment.

I am fully supportive of regional investment, but I want to put down a marker that regional and national investment within the United Kingdom must be made with the full co-operation of existing providers and complete understanding of the market or it could be counterproductive. The Scottish example suggests that conditions are being created such that internet service providers based in London, because they are being encouraged to enter the Scottish market, could end up with more favourable conditions than internet service providers based in Edinburgh. I hope that our regional investment strategies will not create such anomalies.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): Northern Ireland is largely rural—rather like Scotland, as the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan) pointed out. How will the provision affect rural areas of Northern Ireland? What consideration has the Minister given to the wireless and satellite provision of broadband? He will be aware of the excellent document produced by the Communication Workers Union, which shows that Britain is 20th in the world for the provision of broadband.

I want to pursue the line of questioning taken by the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam. Will there be a distortion in the market? Assuming that the problems of the provision of broadband in rural areas can be overcome, will we find that Northern Ireland becomes a Mecca for the application of broadband while the rest of the United Kingdom is far from being so? The Minister will be aware, from the many hours that we spent on this subject in Committee, that many of us are concerned not only that broadband is not yet available in rural areas in

England but also that it is not available in suburban areas and even some urban areas. How will he ensure that there is no imbalance between various parts of the UK?

Mr. Chris Mole (Ipswich): Will the Minister comment on the fact that although we have the second highest growth rate in Europe for broadband, some locations are still struggling to make their case for broadband to service providers? Does he welcome initiatives such as that announced last week by the regional development agency for my area, the East of England Development Agency, of investment of about £5.8 million of its funds and Government funds to identify for network providers locations where broadband could be promoted? Of the two initiatives announced last week, one was in rural Diss, in Norfolk, and the other in urban Ipswich; both are good examples of the joint initiatives undertaken by the DTI and RDAs.

Mr. Timms: We have had a brief but interesting discussion on the roll-out of broadband and we shall come back to that subject in a later amendment.

I accept the important points made by the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan) about the need for care in the use of public spending on telecommunications infrastructure. I am aware of the case in Scotland to which he referred. There are clear rules about state aid problems and it is essential to respect and comply with them. None of the proposals is in conflict with that.

I agree with the hon. Gentleman that there is a role for public participation in some circumstances. As I said earlier, local authorities can already contribute to the costs of telecommunications infrastructure. The new clause simply allows DETI to do so as well.

It is becoming increasingly clear that such interventions are most helpfully made regionally. My hon. Friend the Member for Ipswich (Mr. Mole) rightly drew attention to the work of the East of England Development Agency. Last week, I visited Birmingham and held similar discussions with Advantage West Midlands. A growing number of interesting initiatives are being taken by the RDAs, using, in part, the £30 million broadband fund provided for them by my Department. Such initiatives help to extend the availability of broadband services to businesses and residential users.

The hon. Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) asked about wireless provision. Several of the EEDA initiatives involve wireless. In rural areas, there will be an increasing use of wireless to extend broadband rapidly to places where it has not yet been possible to upgrade the existing telecommunications infrastructure.

The hon. Gentleman also mentioned satellite provision. SEEDA—the South East England Development Agency—has done some interesting work in subsidising small businesses, so that they can use satellite-based broadband services.

1 pm

I agree with the hon. Member for Lichfield in his statement of admiration for the Broadband Britain campaign, run by the Communication Workers Union. I was present at the launch of that campaign, and I very much welcome the contribution that it is making. Of course things are changing very rapidly. We reached only 1 million broadband connections last October; we are now past 1.5 million, and the number is increasing by in excess of 30,000 new connections a week. So we are certainly no longer in the position that we appeared to be in when the CWU document was published. As my hon. Friend the Member for Ipswich suggested, we have now got the second biggest broadband network in Europe—after only the German network—so a great deal of progress has been made.

Michael Fabricant: Will the Minister take this opportunity to praise BT for reducing the threshold at which it will enable its exchanges when people have registered an interest in it? In many areas, but not all, the threshold has dropped from 650 to 350 people. However, will he use his particular powers of persuasion to ensure that the threshold is reduced to 350 people in all areas, not just some?

Mr. Timms: I very much welcome BT's announcement to reduce those thresholds. Of course, the level at which they are set is a commercial decision for BT. It should be recognised that the cable companies play an important part in extending access to broadband—they still have more than half the market, I believe—and there are about 200 resellers of BT services, so the industry is making a big effort, and I welcome the progress that has been made.

The House generally welcomes the change for Northern Ireland in the new clause, but it is important to underline my agreement with the points made by the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam about ensuring that such a route does not permit inappropriate state aid, and I assure the House that that will not occur.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 25

POWER OF OFCOM TO RETAIN COSTS OF CARRYING OUT SPECTRUM FUNCTIONS

'(1) OFCOM have power to make a statement of the principles under which they may retain any or all of the amounts paid to them in pursuance of obligations imposed by or under the Wireless Telegraphy Act 1998 (c. 6).

(2) Where such a statement of principles authorises the retention of an amount, OFCOM are not required to pay it into the appropriate Consolidated Fund in accordance with section 390.

(3) Principles contained in a statement made by OFCOM under this section must be such as appear to them to be likely to secure, on the basis of such estimates of the likely costs as it is practicable to make—

(a) that, on a year by year basis, the aggregate amount of the amounts retained by OFCOM does not exceed the amount required by OFCOM for meeting the annual cost to OFCOM of carrying out the functions mentioned in subsection (4);

(b) that the amounts retained by OFCOM are objectively justifiable and proportionate to the costs in respect of which they are retained; and

(c) that the relationship between meeting the cost of carrying out those functions and the amounts retained is transparent.

(4) Those functions are—

(a) OFCOM's functions under the enactments relating to the management of the radio spectrum except those specified in subsection (5); and

(b) the function of taking any steps that OFCOM consider it necessary to take—

(i) in preparation for the carrying out of any of the functions mentioned in paragraph (a) of this subsection; or

(ii) for the purpose of facilitating the carrying out of those functions or otherwise in connection with carrying them out.

(5) The excepted functions of OFCOM are—

(a) their functions under section 19(2);

(b) their functions under subsections (1) and (2) of section 147 so far as carried out in relation to the use of the electromagnetic spectrum at places outside the United Kingdom, and their functions under subsection (5) of that section;

(c) their functions under section 150;

(d) their functions under section 153;

(e) their functions under section 163;

(f) their functions under sections 170 to 172;

(g) any functions conferred on them under section 5 of the Wireless Telegraphy Act 1949 (c. 54); and

(h) any function not falling within the preceding paragraphs in so far as the costs of carrying it out are met from payments made to OFCOM by virtue of section 25 or 147(8) of this Act.

(6) A statement under this section may include provision which, for the purposes of the principles contained in the statement and of the preparation of accounts in accordance with section 390(4), requires an amount actually received in one year—

(a) to be treated as referable to costs incurred in that year and in one or more subsequent years; and

(b) to be brought into account, in each of those years, in accordance with an apportionment for which provision is made in the statement.

(7) A deficit or surplus shown (after applying this subsection for all previous years) by an account prepared under section 390(4) is to be carried forward and taken into account in determining what is required by OFCOM in relation to the following year for meeting the costs of carrying out the functions mentioned in subsection (4) of this section.

(8) A statement of principles under this section—

(a) if it is expressed to apply for a limited period, does not apply to any amounts paid to OFCOM after the end of that period; and

(b) in any event, does not apply to amounts paid to them after a withdrawal of the statement takes effect.

(9) OFCOM may revise a statement made under this section.

(10) The consent of the Treasury is required for the making, revision or withdrawal of a statement under this section.

(11) Where OFCOM make or revise a statement of this section they must publish so much of the statement or revised statement as appears to them necessary for demonstrating that the statement or revision complies with subsection (3).'—*[Mr. Timms.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 1

DETERRENCE OF PIRACY, COUNTERFEITING ETC.

'OFCOM may, if they think fit, undertake discussions with, and seek agreement from, broadcasters, producers, service providers and telecommunications companies, in order to assist the deterrence of piracy, counterfeiting and the unauthorised digital transference of moving image material; including in such discussions the promotion of common technical standards in order to facilitate deterrence, prevention, and detection.'.—*[Mr. Chris Smith.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

At the outset, I remind the House of my declaration in the Register of Members' Interests—I am an adviser to Disney. However, this issue spreads much wider than a single company; it concerns the serious and growing problem of the dangers of piracy, counterfeiting, illegal copying and downloading across the internet of audio-visual material. That is already widespread in relation to music, and the music industry has suffered grievously.

The music industry is extremely important to this country. Our share of music production across the globe is about 16 per cent., and the threat to the music content industry from the illegal downloading of material is serious indeed. A recent poll in the United States found that 62 per cent. of the 18 to 29 age group—nearly two thirds of everyone in that age group—had copied or downloaded music or movies across the internet, and three quarters of those knew that it was illegal when they did so. That shows the extent of the problem that exists in relation to music.

Equipment capable of burning pirated material permanently on to CDs is readily on sale. Of course, that is possible in a narrowband environment with music. However, we are moving into a broadband environment, the development of which makes it possible to download not just music, but moving image material across the internet. Indeed, equipment now available in the shops enables pirated moving image material to be burned permanently into DVD form.

It may be instructive to consider what happened last year. In May 2002, "Spider-Man" and "Star Wars: Episode II" were released in the United States. Within seven days of those movies being released, 9 million attempts were made to download them across the internet from pirated copies that had been recorded at pre-release screenings. It is estimated that probably only about 2 million or 3 million of those 9 million attempts were successful in completely downloading the entire movie because in many cases the technology was not sufficiently sophisticated to enable that to happen, but that indicates the extent of the problem, the desire to download illegally and, as technology improves, the possible threat, particularly to the content industries.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): The right hon. Gentleman makes a persuasive case about the amount of illegal material available on the web. However, during debates on the Bill in Committee and on Report, hon. Members on both sides of the House, particularly the Government, have made it clear how little control Ofcom will have over the internet. It is not a regulatory body for the internet, which will remain unregulated on the whole. How will the new clause, or any work by Ofcom, tackle that problem, as it involves the expression of free will through a medium with which we cannot interfere?

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman is running ahead of me; I shall come to precisely that point in a moment. I am arguing not for control over the internet by Ofcom or anyone else, but for the ability of Ofcom to draw together all parts of the industry—both the content and the servicing industries—to identify technological solutions to the problem, but I will come to that point in just a moment.

Of course, the content industries suffer particularly from the illegal downloading of material. The obvious point to make is that, if material can be obtained for free across the internet, people are unlikely to pay for it, so less remuneration goes back into providing the content and it is much more difficult to provide content in the first place in the future.

Mr. Allan: I understand the right hon. Gentleman's concerns for the industry—I hope to catch your eye, Mr. Speaker, and to speak at length on the issue later—but it is helpful to say as we are talking about movies that cinemas are doing better than ever and more money is coming into the contents sector than ever. Yes, people are ripping off stuff by downloading it, but we should not pretend that that is the death of the movie industry quite yet.

Mr. Smith: The point that the hon. Gentleman makes is valid at the moment. The problem is that the technology is in an embryonic state at present. It is still quite difficult to download an entire movie across the internet, but that will not be so for all time, especially as broadband becomes much more readily available throughout the country, as we all hope it will. The ability to download moving image material, not just music and speech, will grow. The hon. Gentleman is right as far as things stand at the moment, but considerable potential exists for the problem to grow much more than it has done up to now.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): I am anxious to establish whether the right hon. Gentleman believes that his proposal is merely necessary, or whether he judges that it is also sufficient. In the light of the concern that he has expressed, and the evolution of technology, does he think that his concerns will be adequately allayed by the passage of new clause 1, or does he believe that the scale of the problem will in due course necessitate an overhaul of copyright design and patent law?

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the European copyright directive is on the table at the moment, and the Minister's Department is actively engaged in developing the legislation that will come before the House in due course about the implementation of that directive. These issues, particularly in the digital environment, are absolutely germane to that work on the development of copyright legislation. My new clause is by no means an entirely sufficient answer to the problem; it is an attempt to raise the issue and to develop some mechanisms for drawing together a cross-industry approach to try to find some answers. I doubt whether we will ever address the issue 100 per cent. If we can move towards that point, however, I will be much happier.

The new clause does not require Ofcom to do anything; it enables Ofcom. If Ofcom, in its judgment of the overall nature of television and film in this country and across the world, decides that it wants to act, under the new clause, it can. Nor does the new clause seek to enable Ofcom to impose anything on any parts of the industry: the telecoms companies, the content providers or any of the service providers. What it enables Ofcom to do is to draw all those parties together into a discussion, and, I hope, into a voluntary agreement to examine what technological standards can be introduced to try to make piracy more difficult. Although technology facilitates the activity, it also provides some of the answers to the problem, through digital signatures, watermarks, tracing the digital origin of material and so on. Those are examples of how technology can come to our assistance in combating piracy, counterfeiting and illegal downloading. To make that possible, we need common standards to be agreed across the industry as a whole. My new clause seeks to enable Ofcom to encourage that to happen.

John Robertson (Glasgow, Anniesland): My right hon. Friend makes a powerful argument. What would he do about companies that, in effect, make and sell the DVDs and music CDs, but also make the equipment that allows copying to be done? How do we combat that?

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. A number of companies are both equipment manufacturers and content providers. I do not think that we can prohibit the manufacture of particular types of equipment. What we can do, however, is remind companies of their responsibilities in this matter. I hope that some of them will listen carefully to what my hon. Friend says.

Michael Fabricant: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for tabling the new clause, which is very important, especially as technology changes. Does he think that all this is a question of hoping to have an effect? Is not the new clause an example of wish over practical application? Does not he think that it is rather wishy-washy? Does he really think that it will change anything?

Mr. Smith: I absolutely think that it has the potential to change things. I do not believe that we bring about change on every occasion by legislating to prohibit or require something. We can bring about change by legislating to encourage things to happen, which is precisely what the new clause seeks to do.

Mr. Bercow: A very Conservative position.

Mr. Smith: In response to the sedentary intervention of the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow), that is not simply the preserve of Conservatism.

1.15 pm

Pete Wishart (North Tayside): Before the right hon. Gentleman moves on from this point, I want to congratulate him on trying to find a technological solution to the problems of counterfeiting and piracy. I suggest to him that that is a long way from coming, and we will need to go a big distance before it is achieved. Does he have any comments about the general cultural environment in which many young people do not regard this activity as a crime and are happy to be involved in it? Does he think that we must tackle that type of culture, too?

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. There is a particular problem with the younger age groups, among whom this activity is regarded as an entirely natural phenomenon, even though, as I mentioned, many of them are aware that it is illegal. It is regarded in a way that is similar to the way that some people regard speeding on a motorway: they know that they should not do it, but they do it none the less. It is absolutely essential to change the culture and to get across the message that this is not a pain-free exercise and that doing it to too great an extent will kill the goose that produces the eggs in the first place. I hope that Ofcom and others can play a role in helping to change the culture in the way that the hon. Gentleman has described.

In proposing this new clause, I am seeking to put down a marker or two and I hope that the Government will accept that this serious issue requires a serious approach. We want as much broadband as possible, as rapidly as possible, in this country, but also want our creative industries, particularly the music and moving image industries, to thrive as they have done in the past and can do in the future. This country is very good at those industries, and long may that remain the case. To put those two things together, we need to achieve the best possible technological answers to ensure that those things can happen legitimately and that the digital reception of moving image material can be properly and legitimately done, rather than illegally done through piracy and counterfeiting.

I want the digital environment and the advent of broadband to be an opportunity for the content and creative industries, not a threat. To turn it into an opportunity, we need to make sure that structures and standards are in place to ensure that that can happen. Ofcom can play a role in making sure that that occurs. The new clause seeks to enable Ofcom to play precisely such a role.

Mr. John Whittingdale (Maldon and East Chelmsford): I start by welcoming the overall thrust of new clause 1, which was moved by the right hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith). We sought to raise this issue several times in Committee. I moved an amendment to clause 3, on the general duties of Ofcom, the intention of which was not vastly dissimilar to that of the new clause. At that time, I expressed some reservations about Ofcom deciding the direction of technological development. I was glad, therefore, to hear the right hon. Gentleman say that his aim is not to allow Ofcom to impose a standard on the industry or decide between competing technologies. That would not be an appropriate role for Ofcom.

The right hon. Gentleman is right to say that the scale of the problem will have to be made clear to Ofcom. Piracy and illegal copying are not new developments—they have been going on for a long time. Nearly 20 years ago, I was a special adviser in the Minister's Department. At that time, we wondered whether a levy should be imposed on blank tapes in recognition of the fact that the vast majority of them were being purchased to record music off the radio or off vinyl albums; almost all those purchases probably breached copyright. The industry accepted that the practice could not be stopped and a second-best solution was offered—a levy on tapes that would be redistributed to the music industry as compensation for lost sales.

One of the limitations of copying on to blank tapes was that the quality of reproduction was not especially good. In addition, people had to buy an album before copying it. Since that time, there have been a succession of technological developments: the replacement of vinyl albums with compact discs of almost perfect quality; recordable CDs; DVDs; recordable DVDs; movies and music being made available on a massive scale through the internet; and MP3 players, which allow one to take music off the internet quickly and to keep it in a convenient format so that it can be reproduced at almost the original quality. All those developments are a huge threat to the music industry. In due course, they will be a threat to the movie industry, too.

In the past we have wrestled with the problem of illegal copying—piracy—by factories that produce counterfeit CDs in China or other countries. The CDs are then brought to this country and sold in car boot sales and elsewhere. That remains a huge problem.

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): The hon. Gentleman may know that the copyright directive, in its post-negotiated form, allows for different countries in the European Union to resolve this issue in different ways—in particular, in respect of video and cassette tapes. The directive allows countries to enforce a levy on blank tapes, but it also says that the levy may be a levy of nothing, because the British Government have insisted that we should maintain the system that allows individuals to copy for their own private use so as to time-shift. When the directive is eventually incorporated into United Kingdom law, would the hon. Gentleman wish us to abandon that tradition or to maintain it?

Mr. Whittingdale: We have moved a long way from the issue of copying on to blank tapes, which is no longer the main problem. I have always regarded the levy as very much a second-best solution. In respect of the current problem, I do not think that a levy is necessarily the solution, and I want to pick up on some of the points made by the right hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury on what could provide a solution.

In the previous Session, the House passed a Bill on copyright theft to strengthen the penalties available to tackle illegal copying. All parties supported its passage, but the problem now is finding the resources to enforce it. Local authorities do not necessarily pay enough attention to enforcing the legislation. The industry has raised that matter with the Minister's Department and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, which may have to get together to come up with a more co-ordinated approach.

The problem has changed from being one of mass reproduction of discs, in factories outside this country, which are imported and sold in car boot sales. The problem is now much more serious, because it goes on in children's bedrooms. Technology now allows young people, in particular, to burn CDs. They do not even have to purchase CDs in the first place; they can download music from the internet using peer-to-peer file sharing programs. That is a quick and simple procedure and it achieves a very high quality.

The root of the problem, to which the right hon. Gentleman referred, is the attitude of young people to the practice. He quoted a survey that shows that a majority of young people are now downloading and copying music and movies, and that the fact that they are in breach of the law does not stop them from doing it. Part of the problem has been the perception that taking music is somehow a right and that the only people who lose out are the big, fat record companies, which can well afford it. To some extent, that perception has grown because of the view that CDs have been priced higher in this country than elsewhere and the view that the record industry has been exploiting consumers. I have never believed that to be true. All the investigations that the Office of Fair Trading and others have conducted have shown that it is not true. However, even if that case was once arguable, it is no longer arguable. The record industry is on its back and one of the main reasons for that is the practice of copying. The really frightening thing is that the situation will get worse.

The right hon. Gentleman referred to an American survey. I understand that the survey concluded that it may now be impossible to save the music industry and that we may have to concentrate instead on trying to protect the film industry, which will be the next to suffer. In some countries, the number of blank CDs sold now exceeds the number of pre-recorded CDs sold. Even in this country, recent figures show that 308 million blank recordable CDs were sold in Britain. The industry estimates that about 128 million of those CDs were used to copy music rather than computer programs—although copying computer programs is not necessarily any better. The figures show the scale of the problem.

John Robertson: Will the hon. Gentleman suggest some answers to the question that I asked my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) about companies that not only make the music and CDs but make recordable CDs and the recording equipment? What should we do with those companies?

Mr. Whittingdale: Sony is probably the best example of a company in that position, and a question does arise about the responsibilities of manufacturers. When DVDs were first launched, regional encryption was used to protect copyright. The intention was that we in this country would purchase region 2 DVDs, and that if we purchased a DVD in the United States it could not be played on equipment purchased in this country. However, Dixons on Victoria street stocks multi-region DVDs—they are everywhere. Manufacturers have produced multi-region DVDs that are designed, I presume, to overcome the protection that the copyright owner has installed.

Mr. Bryant: Someone who perfectly legitimately buys a copy of "The Two Towers" in the United States should have a perfect right to watch it in this country. The attempts to foil the interests of consumers are crazy.

1.30 pm

Mr. Whittingdale: I am sympathetic to the hon. Gentleman's point. I was about to say that the technological solution will always fail. Attempts to counter the problem by trying to build in technological safeguards merely provide a challenge to the hackers and those who seek to get round the safeguards. They will always win. That has happened in a number of cases recently. For example, a court in Norway dealt with the case of someone who was 15 when he developed a computer program to overcome the technology in DVDs that prevents copying. He was taken to court by the copyright owner, but the court upheld his right to do what he wanted with the DVD. That included copying it.

Mr. Allan: For the sake of accuracy, may I make it clear that the person accused in Norway had written the computer program to be able to play his legitimately purchased DVDs on the Linux and not the Windows operating system. That is why the court found in his favour. There was no suggestion that he was copying for resale or anything like that. He merely wanted to watch his DVDs and was smart enough to find a way of doing that.

Mr. Whittingdale: As I understand it, however, the problem was that he made available on the internet the program that he had developed. It was then downloaded by millions of other people who used it not to watch DVDs on a different operating system but to crack the safeguards built into DVDs. That enabled them to copy them, which demonstrates the limitations of technology. Each time that someone develops a new method of trying to safeguard copyright through technology, someone else will find a way round it.

A couple of months ago, I read that the record companies in this country were developing something called Cactus data shield to try to prevent the copying of CDs. That gives rise to the question that the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant) asked. Once people have made a purchase, should they not be allowed to make a copy? I suspect that it will not be long before someone overcomes this technological constraint and finds a way of making copies.

The problem will get worse. At present, one at least has to have an original that has been purchased before one can copy it. The real danger, however, comes from the internet. At present, the copying of music is relatively simple using the normal broadband access that is available in parts of the country if not in others. We shall deal with that issue in the next debate. Even broadband is not capable of providing high-quality movie reproduction, but it is only a matter of time before it will be able to do that.

I visited Dolphin house, which is wired by ntl. It offers much faster access than conventional ADSL technology, and I believe that 2 or 3 megabytes a second

[Mr. Whittingdale]

are on offer. It is possible to log on to a site that streams DVD quality movies down the fibre direct on to the screen. It would obviously be very simple just to record that, and that constitutes the same threat to the movie industry that is currently destroying the music industry. If the practice of logging in free to sites that offer movies becomes widespread, and if those movies can be downloaded rapidly and simply on to a recordable DVD in a bedroom or an office, that will pose real dangers to the movie industry.

Michael Fabricant: I have been following my hon. Friend's remarks with interest. Does he not realise that even now there is a danger resulting from the digital terrestrial and satellite transmission of movies and from digital audio broadcasting? In theory, there is nothing to prevent someone from burning a DVD of something taken off air with digital quality.

Mr. Whittingdale: That is perfectly true. To some extent, it is a question of the desirability of the films involved. The right hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury referred to "Spider-Man" and "Star Wars: Episode II" and it will be some time before they become available on television. Part of the attraction is having a copy on DVD before one's friends have even had a chance to see the film in the cinema. My hon. Friend is right about the threat.

The new clause tabled by the right hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury is welcome in that, if nothing else, it allows us to talk about issues that are of huge importance to the industries concerned. I very much hope that Ofcom will at least be aware and take account of these issues in all its consideration of the development of technology and in its regulation of the communications sector in general. However, if an answer exists, I suspect that it does not lie in regulation by Ofcom. I do not think that it even lies in the technological solutions that we have been discussing.

If there is a solution, it is that of the industry exploiting the internet and viewing it as a new opportunity to make material available. It should try to persuade people to purchase products from internet sites rather than accessing them illegally and downloading material without any payment being given to the copyright owner. The way to do that is by providing added value. The music industry is now examining ways of making music available with all sorts of additional bonuses that come with its purchase from an internet site. The same approach could be adopted by the movie industry.

I have seen research from America that shows that a variety of additional items could be attached to the purchase. For example, additional material can be provided about the making of the product or concessions could be offered on theatre tickets. A variety of bonuses and attractions could be provided and they might persuade people that, rather than break the law and deprive copyright owners, artists and performers of the money to which they are entitled, they should go to a legitimate site that makes available the same product for a small payment. That is a market-based solution and the only long-term solution.

I do not decry the attempts of the right hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury to raise this issue and to get Ofcom to take account of it. I support those attempts, but the new clause will not solve a problem that will increase in the coming months and years. I suspect that the only answer is for the industry to adapt and to try to use the market opportunities in the way that I have suggested. If it does not do that, its future looks very bleak.

Mr. Bryant: I, too, am delighted that my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) has tabled the new clause, but I am hesitant about supporting it. I am broadly sympathetic to the thrust of the issues that he has raised in relation to piracy and counterfeiting. It must be a major concern to any right-thinking person that acts of theft occur on a daily basis as the result of organised crime. My hon. Friend the Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting has been on a number of busts with the police and other organisations in the past three months, and he has tried to point out that the buying of CDs that have been manufactured deliberately to get round the copyright law is clearly wrong and immoral. However, I do not share the apocalyptic version of the future with which my right hon. Friend and the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale) have presented us.

In the debate about piracy, we all too easily forget the role of consumers. As my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Anniesland (John Robertson) pointed out, consumers are bombarded with two messages by the same companies. The first is "Come and buy our wonderful technology, which enables you to tape pieces of music from other sources and put them on to your own CD." The second is that they are engaged in an act of piracy that is wholly illegal and immoral. That presents a difficult problem for consumers. The marketing of some organisations has been downright hypocritical. In fact, when I worked for the BBC in Brussels and I was engaged at some length on the copyright directive, it was almost impossible to find a music or film industry company that was not in some way tied to a business that manufactured some kind of copying machinery or technology.

Pete Wishart: Can the hon. Gentleman not make a distinction between the young person sitting in his bedroom making a copy of a CD for his own use and the mass production of illegally counterfeited and copied products that one sees in marketplaces around the UK?

Mr. Bryant: I am sorry that I am not making myself plain enough, as that is indeed the distinction that I want to draw. It is sometimes not drawn sufficiently clearly in the debate about piracy. My right hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury referred to the 62 per cent. of young people who think that it is perfectly legitimate to download music from the internet without payment. Probably 95 per cent. of the people with whom I was at school at the age of 18 copied "Top of the Pops" on to a cassette on a Sunday evening so that they could listen to it at various times during the week. I see hon. Members around the Chamber nodding, including Conservative Members and the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan)—who as I can remember his constituency will get into *Hansard* for having engaged in that illegal activity.

There is a real onus on the manufacturers, the record industry and the cinema industry to provide a new revenue stream of their own. It is simply inaccurate to say that a digital copy is a perfect copy, as there are many different qualities of digital copy. The hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) said that the cinema is nevertheless doing well at the moment, and my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury said yes, but that will not be the case in future. I suspect that the cinema will continue to flourish owing to the simple fact that often people go to the cinema not only to see a new film, although that is part of it, but because they have a completely different experience as part of an audience in front of a large screen with digital stereo.

Mr. Chris Smith: My hon. Friend is right that it is likely that people will still want to have a night out in front of a big screen at the cinema. All the evidence of the past 20 years, especially at the time when video technology was developing, confirms that, and I would not argue against it. However, he should bear in mind that the technological ability to download movies will rapidly increase, and we shall have to take that into account.

Mr. Bryant: My right hon. Friend is right. I only wish that the capacity to download into the Rhondda valley was available rather swifter, as we seem to have no prospect of broadband technology for some years to come—2007 is the most likely date at the moment. I worry that we are perpetuating a gap between the information rich and the information poor.

Be that as it may, one of my concerns is this: when I was first elected, one of the first things that I did was to ask the Department of Trade and Industry when the copyright directive would be incorporated into UK law. I was originally told that it would be last March, then last July, then definitely by the end of the year—and it is still not quite ready. Major issues need to be resolved if we are to achieve the balance between the rights of the consumer and the individual and the rights of the industry, including the need for competition and for a strong music and cinema industry.

Some of the issues are recondite, but must none the less be swiftly addressed if we are to stand any chance of halting piracy. They include embedded phonograms, the time-shifting of recordings, and incidental reproductions in the many processes that are involved inside a computer of material that would otherwise be seen as copyright. The many exemptions from copyright that exist in this country—for the blind, for the hard of hearing, for libraries, and for many other public interest reasons—are still important, and we need to get the balance right. That is why the new clause is wrong and, furthermore, relates to the wrong part of the Bill. I simply do not believe that handing over such a power to Ofcom would be the right means of ensuring that there is a proper debate about piracy, that we properly strike the balance between the needs of consumers and the needs of industry—

1.45 pm

Mr. Smith: If my hon. Friend does not think that Ofcom is the right place, where is?

Mr. Bryant: My right hon. Friend pre-empts me, and I know that he is not in favour of pre-emption. I would merely say that the Patent Office, which historically has responded only to complaints and to changes in the law, should have a proactive role, and it is undoubtedly where the power should remain. Of course, different elements of the law are implemented in different ways. The private Member's Bill introduced last year by the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) would have ensured that certain aspects of the matter were dealt with much more robustly. That is why I do not support the new clause.

Mr. Allan: I find myself very much in sympathy with the comments made by the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale). I remember that a famous battle of Maldon was fought a couple of millennia ago. The hon. Gentleman said that he did not think that hardware copyright protection was the right way forward. It is in that spirit that I rise to speak, because I am concerned that the thrust of the new clause is in that direction—a direction that has been very much advanced in the United States through measures such as the Digital Millennium Copyright Act 1998 and which is causing huge controversy between people in the industry. That is particularly true in relation to the internet, where people in Europe and in the US often represent different points of view.

We discussed "Top of the Pops" in Committee, and it was bound to raise its head on repeated occasions. I am grateful to the right hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) for giving us another chance to talk about it. Yes, I freely confess that I was a "Top of the Pops" taper in my youth. *[Interruption.]* I am asked whether I drank R. White's lemonade. I was not such a slave to advertising.

Taping represented a system of "try before you buy". The important shift that has occurred in the music context is that the trying is taking place but the buying no longer necessarily does so. In the 1970s we would tape "Top of the Pops", and if there were a couple of songs we liked, we went out and bought them. We bought the vinyl because we liked having the record sleeve to touch—that is the added value that the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford talked about. We have not yet developed a comparable system in the digital world. The problem arises in trying simply to transfer what was done in the analogue world to the digital world. That is why I am sceptical about hardware protection. In the analogue world, one controlled the physical media—vinyl, compact disc or whatever—and had some way of policing them. In the digital world, there are no physical media to control. That creates a raft of problems, and the question is how to address them, not whether they need to be addressed.

There is a particular problem in the audio and music business in that the material can be shifted around and no comparable legitimate channel has yet been established. That is a specific market problem. The industry maintains as its primary distribution channel the traditional retail system whereby CDs cost in the

[Mr. Allan]

range of £10 to £15, but those prices will not stand in the digital world. It is hard to maintain a system under which, effectively, one has two price ranges for the same material—one of £10 to £15 and another that perhaps reflects the real costs of distribution over the digital system, whereby the record company and the artist can still get the same amount of money, but have transferred the costs to the end consumer and taken out the distribution costs, so that the product sells more in the £3 to £5 range. It is therefore essential to develop that second digital distribution channel.

Mr. Mole: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that we need to shift from the ownership of a particular item of music to micro-billing or micro-payment for the rental of an item on demand, be it a video or music track? The challenge is that video-on-demand trials have not competed economically with the comparable physical space model, the video hire shop. Perhaps he would agree that when a video arrives in broadband form for the first time in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant), it should be called "A Fish Called Rhondda".

Mr. Allan: I will not follow up that last point.

Mr. Bryant *rose—*

Mr. Allan: No doubt the hon. Gentleman is about to say that he has never heard that one before.

Different competing models may be successful, and I think we agree on the objectives of finding a successful model.

Mr. Bryant: I just want to say that a fish and chip shop in my constituency is called "A Fish Called Rhondda".

Mr. Allan: I am pleased to hear that.

The hon. Member for Ipswich (Mr. Mole) makes an important point about different competing models. One is the micro-payment at time-of-use model by which the customer pays by usage rather than for obtaining copyright material. I do not think that that is likely to work. The more effective model is to make a reasonable payment to obtain fair use, which is the traditional method. People could then do whatever time, format and space shifting—those are the technical terms—they wanted with the material. For example, they might have an iPod device or a computer for listening to MP3s. That approach is more likely to succeed than micro-payment at the time of use.

Pete Wishart: Surely the problem is lack of regulation of the internet. Records and movies will still be available for free if people place them on the internet. Until we have effective regulation that benefits the companies involved, such ideas and projects will fail.

Mr. Allan: The hon. Gentleman is right to mention the internet. The valid point has been made that by encouraging broadband access we are creating the conditions in which even more piracy can occur. If the Government succeed in meeting their target of millions of broadband users, they will create millions of potential piraters. Who would be liable for that? I fear that the new clause would steer us on the route of making internet service providers responsible for content. I am not convinced that that is right. I would be loth to tell an internet service provider that, as part of its licence condition, it must implement a particular hardware or software copyright protection, just as I would not want the Royal Mail to be prosecuted if people used it to send dodgy pirated videos. In general, the Bill establishes that internet service providers are more like the Royal Mail than a publisher, and that is the correct approach.

The people who should be prosecuted are those who put up the sites. We should go after the publishers of the material, and we can do that under current law. As someone who enjoys music and film, I find it offensive to see people with dodgy videos at car boot sales and people on the street with dodgy CDs. I want to crack down on them. The same is true of abuses of the internet. There is a debate on whether such controls should be extended to other jurisdictions. Certainly, the EU should have a common framework as part of the copyright directive. However, if people are malicious or stupid enough to have a site that says, "Come and get illegal pirated material here", and they have a locus in our jurisdiction, we should go after them under the general law. I do not think that the best way to deal with the problem is to create specific internet law because the legal provisions already exist.

Mr. Whittingdale: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the use of notice and take down is one of the most effective means to date of dealing with the problem? Under that approach, ISPs are made aware that materials are being downloaded from their servers which are in breach of copyright on a large scale. They then have to take some responsibility by removing the site that is making such material available illegally.

Mr. Allan: Absolutely, and more work could be done on that. There are specific issues for internet service providers, which have a legal responsibility in both directions. The problem is more than a breach of copyright material; it also involves libellous material. ISPs do not want people to use their services to publish such things, but they have a contract with the publisher and do not want to be sued for removing material.

The internet industry is rightly asking for greater legal certainty when it gets a request for notice and take down from a member of the music or film industry who thinks that material is illegal. The industry wants that to happen in a sensible, consistent and standardised way so that it does not get requests from every Tom, Dick or Harry. It also wants to be sure that when it responds, its position is governed by legal certainty so that it is not exposed to action by its customers. We could make considerable advances on that and allow something positive to come out of the debate. Improving the notice and take down procedures on copyright material would be welcomed by all the industries concerned. I do not know anyone in the internet industry who is keen to see their mechanisms abused in that way. They want them to be used sensibly, responsibly and legitimately.

As hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber have said, I hope that we can create a proper market for digital material in which artists and record companies receive fair recompense. By introducing over-elaborate physical protection measures for software or hardware, we may accidentally create a bigger incentive for people to go into the illegitimate market. If people cannot have fair use of their legitimately bought material, they will go for the illegitimate material that they can move between different devices.

I hope that we find a sensible approach. The debate is important in the context of Ofcom because the people whom it will regulate are creating the infrastructure over which the material will move. However, I agree with the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford that Ofcom does not have a specific role for dictating what material is transmitted across the internet.

Michael Fabricant: This is one of the rare occasions on which my opinion has been swayed by the debate. Although I welcomed the new clause, I was not keen to include it in the Bill. I now think that it should be included, although I hold by the original view that I expressed when I intervened on the right hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith). The new clause is wishy-washy. Nevertheless, the problem needs to be addressed.

Cable and ADSL are delivering broadband at about 1.5 megabytes per second. My hon. Friend the Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale) mentioned the Dolphin Square experiment, which is delivering broadband at between 2 and 2.5 megabytes per second. I have no doubt that in years to come we will be discussing the delivery of 5 to 6 megabytes per second. At that speed, it would be the same as digital terrestrial and digital satellite television, which makes even more prescient the point made by the right hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury.

People will be able to download entire film productions from the internet. There are grave dangers in trying to define a standard that would provide a block to that. As my hon. Friend the Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford said, 15-year-old hackers will always be able to work out a way to break through that block. The other problem is that the internet allows material to be originated anywhere in the world. We need international agreement because we will have a problem if an internet site originates in, say, the West Indies, where gambling sites are based, or China. The right hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury was right to raise the problem. Although people may prefer to go to the cinema, as the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant) pointed out, there will be a disincentive to creativity if people believe that they cannot maximise their return because their copyright can be breached by individuals downloading their material.

2 pm

Mr. Bryant: We are talking about restructuring the business model used by the audiovisual industry, particularly film and music. One of the expectations inherent in the decision to invest in broadband technology throughout the country is that consumers will spend significantly larger sums, perhaps £50, £60 or £70 a month, on audiovisual services. Is not the important thing to make sure that the money that is going to cable and other forms of digital television is getting through to the creators?

Michael Fabricant: Yes, but it is important that the provision of such audiovisual services should involve a legally or morally binding provision. There was a debate in the Chamber way back in 1900 or 1910 about the provision of books to libraries. Members debated the question of whether authors should benefit from the availability of their books in libraries. Of course they should—if everyone read books from libraries and did not buy them there would be no incentive for creativity—there would be no incentive for authors to write or publish books, unless they simply wanted the gratification of seeing their name in print. Thinking about it, that probably satisfies the desires of most authors but, nevertheless, many of them want some income from their work as well.

I maintain that the issue has to be addressed. I was amused when the right hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury asked, "If Ofcom is not going to assume that responsibility, who is?" That is a good point. Ofcom, whose functions are defined in the Bill, is the ideal organisation to try to produce standards to ensure that digital piracy does not occur. It is all very well for Ofcom to perform that role, but I must enter a great caveat: if it does so in isolation, it will be pointless, as worldwide agreement is needed—*[Laughter.]* I do not know why the hon. Member for Rhondda is laughing from a sedentary position, if that is possible. If someone does not take the first step, there will not be worldwide agreement, so Ofcom should assume that role.

Mr. Bryant: One can, indeed, laugh from a sedentary position.

One problem with the new clause as currently worded is that it is an enabling power that Ofcom may choose not to use. Historically, there has been phenomenal difficulty in getting the organisations listed in the new clause to co-operate and work together. Without a robust power and a duty, Ofcom would not stand a chance of getting anywhere. If the international community has to agree as well, that is cloud cuckoo land legislation.

Michael Fabricant: By saying that such legislation is wishy-washy, the hon. Gentleman amplifies the point that I made in an earlier intervention, but someone has to start somewhere. Of course, he is right. He alluded in his speech to the fact that organisations such as Sony produce movies and music on the one hand and the very equipment that can be used to cut DVDs and CDs on the other. I accept that there is a problem but I repeat that someone has to start somewhere. No doubt, there are organisations similar to Ofcom, such as the Federal Communications Commission in the United States, but Britain ought to have a role too.

Mr. Mole: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. One reason why these technologies have become more pervasive is that they are the by-product of worldwide

[Mr. Mole]

standards groups such as the Moving Picture Experts Group which defines the MPEG standard behind the DVD format and the MP3 music format.

Michael Fabricant: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention.

Going back to the intervention of the hon. Member for Rhondda, of course standards have to be established by the G7 and, beyond that, the World Trade Organisation. The fact that China has joined the WTO is a major achievement, because it was one of the main producers of illegal CDs and DVDs. Some Members may argue, even from the Front Bench, that that is still going on. We do not know whether that is so, but now that China is part of the WTO, at least there is a disincentive against such production and an incentive to obey international copyright law. However, international standards are needed. It is remarkable to hear that there is a peculiar system in which there are regional DVDs. One of the problems with analogue television is that there are different standards. There is SECAM in France—I do not know what that stands for, but many people think that it is "Contrary to the American method". In the United States, there is NTSC, which many people think stands for "Never twice the same colour". In Britain, we have PAL—peace at last. There are different standards. It only costs £190 to go to New York city and buy from Tower Records a DVD that one may not be able to play in the United Kingdom, not because the technology is not standardised but because people have deliberately made a system that is not compatible with other systems.

The problem needs to be addressed, and I congratulate the right hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury on tabling the new clause. I am persuaded that, if not in its present form, such a provision ought to be included in the Bill. If the Minister resists its introduction, I hope that a similar provision will be included when the Bill is considered in another place.

Mr. Mole *rose—*

Michael Fabricant: Before I conclude, I will be generous and give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Mole: The irony of multi-region DVDs is that most manufacturers will sell a multi-regional DVD player in this country because there was a massive market in pirated software to replace the firmware in DVD players to enable people to play DVDs from other regions.

Michael Fabricant: The hon. Gentleman is quite right. Where there is a will, there is a way, and where there is a 15-year-old hacker, he will hack through it.

Mr. Timms: We have had an interesting discussion. The Government certainly believe that copyright theft over the internet is a serious issue for many rights holders. It is essential that those who invest in creative activity can gain a fair reward from their work, whether in movies and music, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) said, or in other parts of the publishing industry. I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for underlining the importance of the matter in new clause 1.

The lead responsibility, as my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant) said, lies with the Patent Office in consultation with the Department of Trade and Industry and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. The Patent Office is responsible for intellectual property, including copyright, in the UK. The DTI and DCMS sponsor the affected industries. It is important not to confuse those responsibilities by suggesting that somebody else might share them.

Michael Fabricant: The Minister is surely not suggesting that the DTI and more especially the Patent Office would pull groups of people together to try to agree international standards?

Mr. Timms: I am suggesting that the Patent Office can and does bring together different parts of the industry. Indeed, the Patent Office acts as the chairman for the counterfeiting and piracy forum, which brings together the relevant interests in the public and private sectors to discuss better co-operation and co-ordination against this crime. In the past year, for example, its members have discussed closer working between affected industries and the police hi-tech crime unit. In addition, the proposals that we have made in the context of the UK implementation of the copyright directive include a new criminal offence in copyright law to apply to those who wilfully make copyright material available on the internet without a licence in the course of business proceedings or on a commercial scale. That will assist enforcers seeking to deal with piracy of digital material.

Different approaches are needed to combat illegal private copying on the internet. The proposals for implementation of the copyright directive would strengthen the action to be taken against those who circumvent technical protection measures or provide equipment or services for doing so, which we discussed. Those are particularly important in the internet environment and provide copyright owners with statutory backing to develop their use of the technology. However, the copyright directive does not mandate the use of particular technology; that is an issue for rights holders to decide for themselves. The fact that recent pirate copies of films were reported to have been traced back to unprotected copies given pre-release to academy award judges suggests that the film industry needs to reflect on its own use of appropriate technology.

The recitals in the copyright directive emphasise the importance of all the parties involved—rights holders, intermediaries and equipment manufacturers—reaching voluntary agreements on standards. That must be the right way forward, not least in view of the inherently international character of the net.

Digital rights management is important for the content industries. We are already working with industry on that as part of the work of the broadband stakeholder group. It is aimed to create an inventory of current content management systems, and to spread wider knowledge about likely value chains and the major economic, legal and technical issues at different points in those chains. A framework is to be set up within which to evaluate the various elements of digital rights management. Much work is going on in this area. I hope that my right hon. Friend will be reassured that we are taking the issue seriously.

The hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan) called for better procedures around notice and take-down for internet service providers. He has given us an example of why, the week before last, he was designated "internet hero" at the annual award ceremony of the Internet Service Providers Association. The e-commerce directive, which we have implemented in the UK, provides a defence for internet service providers as mere conduits. Officials are discussing with internet service providers whether there is a need for guidance on notice and take down—the point that the hon. Gentleman made.

I would not favour giving Ofcom a specific remit in this field, as that would have only tangential relevance to its core remits set out in clause 3(1) or to the functions set out in the Bill or in existing legislation that the Bill will transfer to Ofcom. Of course, there is nothing to stop Ofcom conducting the kind of discussion envisaged in the new clause and proposed by my right hon. Friend. I know that those at Ofcom will read with great interest the discussion that we have just had, and what he and others said in the debate. The issue is one to which the Patent Office is fully committed, in consultation with the two Government Departments. I believe that that is the right institutional lead for policy work in this area, and on that basis I hope that my right hon. Friend will withdraw the motion.

Mr. Chris Smith: The debate has been extremely interesting and valuable. Part of my purpose in tabling the new clause was to ensure that the House had a chance to air some of the issues around the developing problem. Every contributor to the debate recognised that the issue is real. There is a serious problem, and as the hon. Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) said, there is potentially a disincentive to creativity if unauthorised downloading of material takes off in a major way.

Various solutions have been proposed by hon. Members in all parts of the House, highlighting the need to change the culture, as young people in particular see unauthorised downloading as a natural activity; the need to get a move on with the implementation of the EU copyright directive; the need to improve the notice and take down procedures where unauthorised material has been identified; the need to make the legitimate purpose of material more valuable, more desirable, more affordable and more accessible; and the need to make the opportunity to take material legitimately more attractive than the opportunity to take material in an unauthorised way. There may well be some technological answers too, especially if global agreement can be reached. I hope that all the issues raised will be taken into account by the DTI and DCMS, and even by the Patent Office, perhaps.

2.15 pm

That brings me to my final point. I was a little disappointed that the Minister placed such emphasis purely on the role of the Patent Office. One of the reasons for wishing Ofcom to take an interest in this area of activity is that Ofcom has the clout vis-à-vis the parts of the industry concerned. It is Ofcom that will be the regulator of broadcasting and telecommunications. It therefore has considerable muscle to persuade the various parts of the digital landscape to get together and find various means to tackle the problems. Ofcom has that muscle; the Patent Office does not. The Minister says there is nothing to prevent Ofcom taking an interest in this area of activity. I hope Ofcom will take note. As soon as Ofcom is up and running, I hope that it will discuss with the Patent Office how they can work together to develop the lines of attack necessary to make sure that the problem is taken seriously.

With that hope in mind, and with the hope that the matter may be aired in another place, I believe that it will assist the progress of debate if, at this stage, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New Clause 2

DUTY TO PROMOTE NEW TELECOMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGIES

'It shall be the duty of OFCOM to promote competition and reduce regulation in order to secure lower prices and higher quality services for telecommunications consumers and encourage the rapid deployment of new telecommunications technologies, including broadband.'.—*[Mr. Yeo.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

New clause 27—*Creator consultation*—

'(1) It shall be the duty of OFCOM to establish and maintain effective arrangements for consultation about the carrying out of their functions with—

(a) creators, including a person from the United Kingdom music creating community, in the markets for television content supply for independent producers and the public service and commercial broadcasters in relation to which OFCOM have functions; and

(b) creators, including a person from the United Kingdom music creating community, in the markets for radio broadcasting in relation to which OFCOM have functions.

(1) The arrangements must include the establishment and maintenance of a panel of persons (in this Act referred to as "the Creator Panel") with the function of advising both—

(a) OFCOM; and

(b) such other persons as the Panel think fit.

(3) The arrangements made by OFCOM under this section must also secure that the Creator Panel are able to do each of the following—

(a) make arrangements for the carrying out of research into matters appearing to the Panel to be relevant to the carrying out of OFCOM'S duties and the Panel's functions as they think fit;

(b) give advice to OFCOM in relation to any matter referred to the Panel by OFCOM for advice;

(c) publish such information as the Panel think fit about the advice they give, and about the results of research carried out by them or on their behalf.

(4) It shall be the duty of OFCOM, in the carrying out of their functions, to consider and, to such extent as they think appropriate, to have regard to—

(a) any advice given to OFCOM by the Creator Panel; and

(b) any results notified to OFCOM of any research undertaken by that Panel.

(5) It shall also be the duty of OFCOM (subject to subsection (6))—

(a) to provide the Creator Panel with all such information as, having regard, in particular, to the need to preserve commercial confidentiality, OFCOM consider appropriate to disclose to the Panel for the purpose of enabling the Panel to carry out their functions; and

(b) to provide the Panel with all such further information as the Panel may require.

(6) OFCOM is not required to provide information by virtue of subsection (5)(b) if, having regard to:

(a) the need to preserve commercial confidentiality; and

(b) any other matters that appear to OFCOM to be relevant, it is reasonable for OFCOM to refuse to disclose it to the Panel.

(7) It shall be the duty of OFCOM, in the case of any advice or opinion received from and published by the Panel which OFCOM propose to disregard in whole or in part, or with which OFCOM disagree in whole or in part—

(a) to ensure that the Panel know of OFCOM's reasons for disregarding or disagreeing with the advice or opinion; and

(b) to ensure that those reasons are or have been published in such a manner as OFCOM consider appropriate for bringing them to the attention of persons who are aware of the Panel's advice or opinion.'.

Amendment No. 3, in page 3, line 4 [Clause 3], after 'markets', insert 'and the public interest'.

Government amendment No. 215.

Amendment No. 278, in page 3, line 33 [Clause 3], at end insert

'and, in particular, the desirability of encouraging investment and innovation so as to secure the availability to users of electronic communications networks of services of ever greater bandwidth;'.

Government amendment No. 216.

Amendment No. 151, in page 3, line 39 [Clause 3], at end insert—

'(gg) the position of employees in the industry;'.

Amendment No. 187, in page 4, line 3 [Clause 3], at end insert—

'(n) the impact of developments in relevant markets upon creators and performers.'.

Government amendments Nos. 217 to 221.

Amendment No. 188, in page 11, line 24 [Clause 11], at end insert—

'(5A) In appointing persons to be members of the Content Board, OFCOM must also secure that certain members have experience to represent the interests of the creators and producers involved in the programme and music to be included in the services relevant to the duties of the Board.'.

Amendment No. 189, in page 13, line 6 [Clause 12], at end insert—

'(6A) The power of OFCOM to authorise the establishment of a Committee or Panel by the Content Board includes power to authorise the establishment of a Creators Panel, including persons from the United Kingdom music-creating community.'.

Mr. Yeo: It is generally accepted that the rapid introduction of broadband technology in Britain is important to our country. Schools, universities, hospitals, medical practices, businesses and domestic consumers will all benefit from being able to receive and transmit web-based information. The Government, too, have a big interest in the roll-out of the technology. As the Confederation of British Industry stated, broadband is central to the growth of the knowledge-based economy.

Ministers have said that they are committed to a fast and efficient roll-out of broadband. The Government's target is for Britain to have the most extensive and competitive broadband market in the G7 by 2005—a target set by the Secretary of State herself when she was the e-Minister. In pursuit of that, the Government have promised to work to ensure that broadband is accessible in all parts of the country. They claim to have developed a strategy to achieve that goal and to measure our success. Unfortunately, the strategy is not yet working as effectively as everyone would wish. As the CBI points out,

"lack of competition in the telecommunications market has stalled investment in the required infrastructure".

The broadband stakeholder group estimated last November that terrestrial broadband services were still unavailable to a third of Britain's 24 million households. Two out of five people living in suburban areas are still excluded. The proportion of people who can access broadband in rural areas is so small that it is simply described as "significantly lower".

There is immense frustration that the Government are talking a good game while doing very little to deliver on their promises. The CBI states that Britain lies sixth among the G7 countries in terms of broadband connections and that few small and medium-sized enterprises are yet connected. According to the broadband stakeholder group, only one household in 25 is currently subscribing to broadband. Fewer than one household in every 30 that has a computer is hooked up to a broadband service, and in the business community, among firms employing more than 10 people, fewer than one in five has a broadband connection. In January this year, only 1.4 million households and businesses were connected to a broadband service. According to Oftel, Britain has only slightly more than half as many lines connected to broadband per head of population as Germany and just over a quarter as many as Sweden.

Of course, broadband is not yet attractive to everyone. Some users are content with lower speed and a lower price, but broadband offers such potential to enhance knowledge and deliver competitive advantage that I believe that it will not be long before it is as much a part of national infrastructure as the road system, the railways, mains drainage and telephones—

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire): And in a better state.

Mr. Yeo: As my hon. Friend says, we hope that it will be in a better state than the roads or railways.

It is the Government's job to create an environment in which broadband services are widely accessible. A critical part of such an environment is effective competition. The House will be aware that broadband is not synonymous with ADSL—asymmetric digital subscriber line—technology, but can be delivered by ADSL, cable, wireless or satellite. In this country, ADSL is associated with BT, whose subsidiary, BTopenworld, has roughly 50 per cent. of the market of retail broadband services based on ADSL infrastructure.

Technology changes and develops in unpredictable ways, so it would unwise for the Government or even the Opposition to be prescriptive about the form of broadband distribution that is used. In Britain, we are fortunate, as distribution is not confined to BT. Ntl and Telewest also provide cable modem services, although only to a minority of households.

In spite of Oftel's optimistic comments, it is worrying that the Government's targets are still not being met. There is a lack of clarity in the institutional and competitive framework that the Government have created, and their failure to create an adequate competitive environment is damaging. Actions and legislation that seek merely to promote broadband without regard to how that should be done are insufficient. The Government should have a duty to promote competition and reduce regulation.

Mr. Mole: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, in requiring BT to carry out the local loop unbundling exercise, a framework was created for competition in the provision of broadband services in the local loop? The difficulty was that after the delay of carrying out the exercise, there was no apparent demand from other suppliers to act as competitors through the local loop.

Mr. Yeo: The other suppliers might say that that had something to do with the terms of availability. In any event, I do not think that the speed with which BT addressed that objective is a cause for much congratulation. Different people will attribute to a variety of reasons the failure to develop a more competitive market more quickly.

The preamble of the American Telecommunications Act 1996 sets out a purpose that the House should take to heart. I have incorporated the words of that preamble into the new clause. The promotion of competition is an essential ingredient of a successful telecoms policy, especially when one major provider is a former state monopoly. The role of the regulator is to introduce conditions for a fair, open and transparent market, particularly where there has previously been market failure. Regulators must be free from day-to-day political interference and should not form part of the central planning apparatus of government.

Under Labour, Oftel's cutting edge has been eroded and its accountability reduced. Ministers have done that through the creation of the new and separate office of the e-envoy in the Cabinet Office—a typical prime ministerial initiative that owed more to spin and optimism than to analysis or hard work. Like many such initiatives, the e-envoy initiative is not proving conspicuously successful. The House will recall the fanfare that was given when the Small Business Service was set up in April 2000 under a chief executive whom we were told had direct access to the Prime Minister. Two years later, after heavy spending and little delivery, that privilege was quietly withdrawn.

The House will also recall the Prime Minister's endorsement of heady recommendations of the Cabinet Office's performance and innovation unit for the ill-named Consignia. Today's reality is a shrinking post office network, the withdrawal of cash payment benefits and a charge card that post office staff are unable to process. Similarly, the reality of the UK's broadband roll-out under the e-envoy initiative is a constricted footprint and lamentable take-up—the consequence of the Government's conviction that institutions and former state monopolies are better at delivering economic dynamism than commercial undertakings operating in liberalised markets.

The Government's approach can be seen in their grant of £30 million for broadband to the regional development agencies. According to the Secretary of State, her largesse was given so that

> "a digital divide in high speed Internet access does not open up between urban and rural communities."

In Cornwall, the RDA took that as a signal to launch an advertising campaign designed to steer business customers to BT. In the east midlands, the RDA blames the lack of adequate broadband services on the Government's decision to induce telecoms companies to tender large bids for third-generation mobile phone licences. It plans to use its grant on a wired-up communities competition that will take three years to come to fruition. That same RDA blames the failure to provide a broadband service to rural areas on a slowdown in the international IT industry.

The RDAs are the last bodies that the Government should use. The futility of their efforts is illustrated in a test project named RABBIT—remote area broadband inclusion trial—that aims to tempt remote broadband users through a £700 grant to identify alternative sources of broadband supply whose prospects of success are uncertain. Instead of more rabbit stew, the Government should create a more competitive environment to encourage new entrants to the market. They should entrust the regulator with a remit to protect against market abuse until a competitive market evolves. It is for the regulator and not the e-envoy, and certainly not the RDAs, to protect users and consumers of national services and utilities and to stimulate national competitiveness. It is for the regulator to encourage progressive liberalisation of the marketplace to bring about universal access and a uniform and transparent tariff.

My right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young), whom I see in his place, has identified BT's jealousy as an impediment to progress and pressed for greater transparency. Like other former state monopolies, BT honed formidable skills for protecting its interests. It is aware that opening up consumer access to broadband services potentially opens up access to its own competitors. It focuses on how it can meet the demands of the Government and the regulator to expand the service while ensuring that that is done not only at high profit levels, but in a manner that deflects the challenge from competitors.

I believe that the Government should restore the authority of the regulator. The regulator should impose a regime of greater transparency on BT, which should provide clear forward plans for its national ADSL footprint and reveal which exchanges are to be ADSL enabled and how many telephone connections they have. BT should explain the financial criteria and broadband targets by which such decisions are made. It should speed up the provision of unbundled loops and shared line access and the release of wholesale products, and targets should be published for those goals.

[Mr. Yeo]

Without that transparency, the public will be disadvantaged. People cannot plan broadband investment through a cable network or alternatively through wireless or satellite. Business and individuals in rural areas and out-of-town communities are losing out. All that information would help individuals, businesses and community groups to make sensible decisions. It would help firms with competing technologies in broadband supply to fine-tune their investment criteria, attract funding and identify market openings. That information would build market confidence and stimulate competition in both ADSL itself and in respect of alternatives. It would encourage liberalisation of the market, which would lead to expanded choice and lower prices for service users throughout Britain.

Universal broadband access will drive economic growth and reduce rural isolation, and could slow the drift of employment and population to the south-east. It will help businesses large and small nationwide and enhance Britain's competitiveness. Due to the market-distorting actions of the Government, remedial action is needed. The new clause would impose a duty on the Government to promote competition in order to secure lower prices, increase choice and higher quality services for users of broadband services in the UK. I commend it to the House.

2.30 pm

John Robertson: I am delighted to participate once again in the debate on the Bill, and I draw my entry in the Register of Members' Interests to the attention of the House.

Before entering Parliament, I worked for BT for 31 years and, unlike Opposition Front Benchers, I will not try to vilify or undermine BT or the work force, as I have much to thank them for. I shall not interrupt those Members as they do so, as only they can say why they want to mount an onslaught on a company such as BT, and the BBC for that matter. I am also chair of the all-party telecommunications group, so it might be said that I have a passionate interest in the subject.

Next year, Ofcom will replace the existing system of regulation, which dates from the last century. Telecommunications, television and radio developed more or less independently and could therefore be monitored individually. The existing regulatory framework is complex and the pace of convergence is still accelerating.

I draw the House's attention to the Bill's endorsement of interested parties as stakeholders. I am disappointed that employees are not identified as key stakeholders whereas others, such as businesses and consumers, are highlighted as such. At the last meeting of the all-party group, my hon. Friend the Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness and Lord Currie, the new chair of Ofcom, said that they recognise that employees have a large part to play and are, of course, stakeholders in the industry, but nothing in the Bill says so. Consequently, my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Mr. Dhanda) and I have tabled amendment No. 151, which would close a loophole. Employees know the business from the sharp end and have much to contribute.

The communications industry has a number of endemic problems, which need not be the case as they could be addressed by the Bill, thus remedying them in the long term. The industry often fails to focus on key issues for employees—for example, skills levels, appropriate provision for training and personal development, which are not always expensive but are much needed. Those factors, among others, have resulted in difficulties in long-term retention of employees. Furthermore, some companies—in my experience, BT is one—place important emphasis on training and personal development, although perhaps not as much as they used to.

The problem is that when the industry is buoyant, the highly trained employees are head hunted by other companies that place little value on training. The European Union high level taskforce on skills and mobility reports that 80 per cent. of today's skills will be obsolete in 10 years. When such employees, who were once highly skilled, do not undergo sufficient training, that is detrimental to the industry, as employers cannot fill vacancies and a skill shortage becomes apparent. Ultimately, that makes it harder for employees to find alternative employment should the industry slump. I do not want to come back to the House in 10 years and say, "I told you so." That, of course, assumes that I will be re-elected. I hope I am, along with a Labour Government.

Lifelong learning is essential to tackle such shortages and mismatches, which hold back economic development and job growth. Since mid-1999, business throughout Europe has increasingly reported production constraints due to labour shortage. Although I have used these figures before, I shall do so again to illustrate the chronic skills shortage that we are set to see. According to the European Information Technology Observatory, the number of unfilled vacancies in the EU information and communications technology and e-business sectors is expected to rise from 2.23 million in 2001 to 3.67 million in 2003. That is an increase of 65 per cent. If the full economic and employment potential of the telecommunications sector is to be realised, a training responsibility for the sector's employers must be stipulated in the Bill. How else can we expect to fill those jobs in the years to come?

Unfortunately, the amendments to clause 24 tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester and I were not selected, but what applies to that clause also applies to clause 3, and my points on a specific duty on Ofcom regarding the promotion of equal opportunities and training for employees are relevant to it.

The need to recognise employees as stakeholders is obvious, but that training mandate applies only to those working in the broadcasting industry. The communications industry has a key role to play in the development of the national skill stock, but such a mandate is not in the Bill. How can we expect to have "Broadband Britain" without a well-trained and motivated work force? Although I would have liked clause 24 to be amended to extend that duty to cover employees in the telecoms industry, I am pleased that my amendment to clause 3 has been selected. I hope that we can incorporate the issue of employees as stakeholders in the Bill for the reasons that I have stated.

I am concerned that, as the focus is so firmly on competition and consumer interest, the interests of employees could be disregarded. This is an opportune time to address those issues, and I would like Ofcom to have a specific mandate in that regard.

Nick Harvey (North Devon): I shall address my remarks to amendment No. 3, which stands in my name and those of various Members from both sides of the Chamber. I shall also speak to new clause 27 and amendments Nos. 187, 188 and 189.

Amendment No. 3 and Government amendment No. 215 consider the wider public interest beyond that simply of the consumer. An important change is being made to the Bill, which will fundamentally alter what Ofcom is and what it does. The amendments are hugely significant. Last summer, a Joint Committee of the two Houses considered the draft Bill, and one of its recommendations was that the wider public interest ought to be added to Ofcom's general duties. That issue was debated at length in Standing Committee, and I am particularly pleased that Government amendment No. 215 has been tabled. It is important for Ofcom to have a wider perspective and wider duty.

The interests of consumers are important, and it is entirely right that Ofcom will have the duty to protect those interests, where possible through competition, but they are not the same as the interests of the wider public. Indeed, there can be circumstances in which the interests of the consumer may be contrary to those of the wider public.

There are instances in which economic forces can apply a perverse effect, so it is therefore absolutely right that Ofcom should have a wider responsibility. I am particularly pleased that the Government have arrived at that conclusion and have introduced their own formulation, which refers to the interests of the wider community. It will have much the same effect as the wording in other amendments. I am glad also that, having not initially accepted the recommendation made by the Committee last summer, the Government have been persuaded during consideration to reach that conclusion, which will make the entirety of the regime more effective. It will also make Ofcom more effective and make the Bill altogether more successful.

New clause 27 and amendments Nos. 187, 188 and 189 deal with interests of creators, whether they be composers, musical performers or other performers—indeed, creators of every kind. The UK's media creative industries are very strong, and are at the cutting edge of content creation in the communications revolution. Original creative input is a vital ingredient, and often serves as a stimulus for both the production of new services and the improvement of existing ones. Music, for instance, is fundamental to our existing television and radio services, and will become even more so with the arrival of multi-channel television.

The amendments would give Ofcom specific obligations to protect the interests of the creative sector. Given the intended revolution in ownership rules and the potential for greater American ownership of British media interests, British consumers might well not accept huge quantities of American content on our television channels, but I wonder whether they would be able to tell the difference between, say, British and American incidental music. If we are to go on giving creative industries and creators opportunities in the UK media, it will be important for Ofcom to consider their interests and future viability at all times.

The success of individuals and companies in our music industry depends heavily on opportunities for the creation of music for—and, indeed, the broadcasting of music by—national and regional radio and television services. Any reform of the regulatory environment on the scale that we are discussing will have a direct impact on all our creative industries. Composers and music publishers' earnings from the exploitation of music by television and radio exceed £100 million a year. Amendment No. 187 would ensure that our regulatory structures support and have regard to the impact of developments on creators and performers.

Amendment No. 188 suggests that the content board is the obvious part of Ofcom to secure the best conditions for the creation and supply of new creative content. Following the Joint Committee's recommendations last summer, the Government moved swiftly to authorise a review of programme supply, which was conducted by the ITC. That was welcome, but I do not think we should see it as a one-off: we need to keep the issues of programme and content under constant review.

Mr. Greenway: The hon. Gentleman suggests that the creators panel would be part of the content board. As the content board has no real control over or responsibility for the content of the BBC's output, should the panel apply to the BBC? Or is this yet another Liberal Democrat proposal to micro-manage commercial broadcasting but not the BBC?

Nick Harvey: I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's premise. He and his colleagues are preoccupied with the idea that Ofcom has no responsibility for examining the BBC's activities, but that is not the reality that confronts us in the Bill. Of course I think that the content board's creators panel should look at creative issues in the widest possible sense—including, certainly, what goes on at the BBC. The board is the obvious body to look at such issues, which is why I suggest the inclusion of a creators' representative, preferably one with working experience of the creative industries. That would ensure that their interests were not just understood but taken into account in decisions that would have a direct impact on them.

2.45 pm

John Robertson: The hon. Gentleman is, as usual, advancing an excellent argument. Does he agree that the content board should also consider issues involving the various regions and nations?

Nick Harvey: Certainly we should consider creative input in the widest possible sense, which would involve a good deal of national and regional diversity.

Amendment No. 189 suggests that the content board form and convene a panel whose chairman would be on the content board. The Bill would provide for the panel to take account of the creative contribution to broadcasting, and to ensure that the UK maintained its pre-eminent position. The new clause has the same aim.

[Nick Harvey]

I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan) wants to say something about broadband. I hope the Government will look sympathetically on what I have said.

Mr. Parmjit Dhanda (Gloucester): I am glad of the opportunity to speak on the Floor of the House after three months of debate in Committee. I begin by declaring an interest: like my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Anniesland (John Robertson), I have a strong link with Connect, the union for professionals in communications. It helps to fund my researcher, who helps me by researching all aspects of the communications industry.

The Bill covers a wide range of issues, but I want to concentrate on amendment No. 151. My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Anniesland and I tabled it as a result of ongoing investigations of, in particular, the position of employees in telecommunications. We discussed some of them in Committee.

Last year, when I spoke in a debate on Ofcom and declared my support for the creation of a unified regulator, we discussed traditional distinctions between telephony, radio, the internet and television. Those distinctions, which were still evident only a few years ago, have become increasingly blurred. We have seen that one type of equipment can offer the consumer multiple functions. Telecoms companies are exploring the possibilities of broadcasting, while broadcasters are moving into e-commerce and internet service providers are also providing television channels.

I accept all that, but I am worried that telecommunications employees are not mentioned in the Bill. My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Anniesland and I tabled two amendments to clause 24, which were not selected but which sought to establish a clear requirement for Ofcom to provide training and equal opportunities for employees. The Bill already makes such provision for broadcasting employees, but it does not extend to those in telecommunications.

I know from meetings with the Minister and our debates in Committee that the decision to provide for training for broadcasting employees was historical. Such training has existed for many years, but telecommunications employees were excluded because there was no historical provision for training. The fact that I understand that does not necessarily make it right.

The entire Bill was designed to look forward to the convergence of the industry but, in failing to address this particular point, we are missing out by looking backwards at the tradition in broadcasting, rather than to the future. We must ensure that we get the Bill absolutely right. The paving Bill was important because it created Ofcom, but this Bill is all the more crucial because it represents our chance to ensure that the design of Ofcom is absolutely right and that its duties are stipulated in the Bill.

I share the Government's goal to make Britain the most dynamic broadband market in the G7, but we will not achieve our goals without a highly motivated work force. That is the key thrust of the amendment. Regulatory regimes should take account of the interests of employees as stakeholders in the industry. Ofcom should be given specific responsibilities to provide an overview of the employment resource in general, and, in particular, of the health and safety, skill levels, personal development and training of people working in the industry, quality of service provision and of emergency cover.

I speak in support of the overwhelming number of clauses in the Bill, and of the Bill generally, but I am keen to tighten up the areas that could improve it still further. The consultation that took place has given us a good Bill but, to paraphrase the Joint Committee's statement, we can always make a good Bill even better.

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Gloucester (Mr. Dhanda). Like him and the hon. Member for Glasgow, Anniesland (John Robertson), I used to work in the telecommunications industry. That was some 30 years ago, in the Post Office—as it was then called—and the challenges that confronted us then were to remove the electro-mechanical exchanges and to move over to System X. I tried to join a trade union—I think it was ASTMS—but I was drummed out by Clive Jenkins, who described me as a "pin-striped bovver boy".

New clause 2, which was ably moved by my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo), covers a wide range of issues. I want to focus on the last two words in the new clause—"including broadband"—and particularly on broadband in rural areas, which is now emerging as a major political issue. Although I have been critical of BT, it is also right to pay tribute to what it has been able to do over the past 12 months. It has reduced the wholesale price of broadband, introduced a rolling programme of enabling exchanges, and set targets where it has been able to do so. So, although I have been critical, I recognise that BT has been doing what it can.

I recently received a letter from BT's director of public affairs, from which it is worth quoting to illustrate how the company views the issue. It is not "wholly uncritical" of the Government. The letter states:

> "Ovum has calculated that less than $5 per head has been spent by the UK government on supporting broadband infrastructure, compared with $25 in France and $90 in Japan. On that basis, BT's performance in already delivering a wider ADSL footprint in the UK than has been achieved in the USA looks reasonably creditable."

BT therefore has its own dialogue to pursue in relation to its objective to roll out broadband.

I suspect that about 50 per cent. of my constituents cannot get broadband. It is available in Andover and Tadley, and villages such as Oakley and Highclere have recently hit the target and will be enabled in due course. However, some fairly significant small towns and large villages—Whitchurch and Overton, for example—have no hope as yet.

Brian White (Milton Keynes, North-East): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that there are many people who cannot get broadband even where exchanges are enabled, because of old technologies and various other technical problems? Does he agree that it is incumbent on BT to resolve those problems—whether through wireless, broadband or whatever—as soon as possible?

Sir George Young: I agree entirely with the hon. Gentleman, whose energy and initiative in this area I applaud. BT also told me:

> "The average reach for each exchange is 94 per cent. of the population served by that exchange."

The hon. Gentleman is therefore right. Even when an exchange is enabled, some people remain outwith its reach. The advertising campaign has irritated a large number of my constituents. It has urged them to register and sign up for broadband, but they cannot do so. Although I would not describe myself as socially excluded, neither I nor the chairman of BT, who lives quite close to me, can access broadband in north-west Hampshire.

What is the position for people who cannot access broadband? A wide range of opportunities is, in theory, available to them. These people are, however, quite busy, and they take the view that broadband should be available without their having to ring up the South East England Development Agency or contact RABBIT, to which my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) referred. They are not sure that it is really their job to risk their own personal capital by investing in a system for their village. They do not want to take the risk of investing in communication masts. What they really mind about, however, is the uncertainty. If they knew that there was no prospect whatever of getting broadband, they might well consider some of the alternatives, but not knowing whether their exchange might be enabled at some point in the future acts as a disincentive and an understandable deterrent to looking at some of the other options.

Pete Wishart: The right hon. Gentleman might be aware that no rural exchanges are enabled in Scotland. There are none in my North Tayside constituency. May I suggest that what is wrong is the trigger policy that BT has employed to enable exchanges? The trigger level has been set far too high for towns and villages in rural areas. In my constituency, for example, 350 people would be required to sign up in a town of 5,000 to 6,000 people. How can we ever get people enabled when the trigger is set so high?

Sir George Young: My hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk mentioned transparency and openness. One thing that would help this debate would be to have in the public domain more figures showing the actual costs, so that some of the estimates might be challenged and we could see whether the costs were really as high as BT has asserted.

I want to raise with the Minister an issue about which I have written to him twice. I commend his enthusiasm for this subject. He kindly wrote back to me a few days ago in response to a question about the Prime Minister's commitment, made in November, that every school and GP's surgery would be on broadband by the beginning of 2006. I welcome that commitment and I am prepared to believe that the Prime Minister means to adhere to it. I have tried to find out from the Minister how that commitment is to be delivered. What is the mechanism by which the small village schools and the medical centres in the more remote villages in my constituency will be plugged into broadband? Will the Minister direct BT to enable the nearest exchange? Will there be some alternative delivery mechanism, such as fibre optics, wireless or satellite?

This is important because the solution for schools and medical centres is hugely relevant to everyone else in the area, and their not knowing exactly how that commitment will be delivered could result in an obstruction to some of the alternatives that might otherwise be considered. Will the Minister answer the specific question of how he can give a cast-iron guarantee that Overton primary school, for example, will get the service that the Prime Minister has promised it by the end of 2005? Once we have an answer to that question, some of the other questions can be answered. If the solution is to use one particular form of technology, it can be piggy-backed by everyone else in the village, and they, too, can get access to the services that they need. I hope that the Minister will be able to shed some light on that matter.

It would also be helpful if the Minister could commit himself to removing any regulatory obstacles that might confront Ofcom or Oftel in the roll-out of broadband. We do not want unnecessary regulatory hurdles to have to be cleared before we can realise our shared ambition of making this country internationally competitive by having more widely available access to broadband.

Dr. John Pugh (Southport): I am speaking broadly out of sympathy with new clause 2, which calls for a decreased role for regulation, and in support of amendment No. 3, which asks us to take on board a wider public interest. I shall be brief, because I have only one specific concern. I shall then leave the Floor to those who are more expert than I in the ways of the Communications Bill.

I shall concentrate on one specific consumer concern, and on the role of Ofcom and Oftel in addressing it. I have already raised the issue in an early-day motion; it relates to call waiting and telephone queueing systems. We all have experience of being kept waiting, at our own expense, for an answer that never actually comes, and with ringing off in frustration. I have taken up this matter with Oftel, which assures me that it has no powers to address the problem. It looks forward to the Bill's resulting in some codes of practice that will help it to do so.

3 pm

Telephone filtering creates some minor difficulties, but I want to distinguish that issue from call queuing, because although they are related, they create different problems. There are problems with disabled or old people using call-filtering systems when the timing is wrong for them, and there are also problems of access and clarity. I do not want to focus on filtering. Both filtering and queueing are aspects of modern call centres, which were initially introduced as a means of being efficient. Nowadays, they are run predominantly as a way of making a cost saving. We all accept that call centres are the modern sweatshops. We are all familiar with being kept waiting in queues, with endless piped music, with the spurious promise that one's call will be answered quite soon, with the irritating and increasingly common plugs for products that people do not want in the first place, and with the frankly dishonest messages saying that one's call is valued—but never valued enough to be actually answered.

The net effect on the nation is quite appreciable. It is bad for the blood pressure and it leads, I am afraid, to rudeness from us as consumers when we finally get

[Dr. John Pugh]

through to someone who cannot answer the question that we have been waiting for a long time to have answered. There is a massive and unquantifiable cost across the country to individual firms and to individuals themselves. There is also an enormous opportunity cost, in terms of time wasted for individuals and businesses. Apparently, 30 per cent. of calls made to such institutions are futile, with people simply ringing off at a cost purely to themselves.

Mr. Mole: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point, but it is impossible to generalise about call centres across the piece. It is surely down to the business that wants to provide access for its customers to define the standard of customer relationship management that it wants to buy from a call centre or other provider, regardless of which facilities manager is offering the service. An excellent example is the company 24seven, which experienced an overload of calls to its call centre during November's poor weather. The essential question must be: what standard of customer relationship management did it purchase from its provider?

Dr. Pugh: The question is probably simpler than that: what standards should we, as consumers, demand, and how should they be enforced? I recognise that good and bad practice exist, but the latter is currently predominant, and the public expect legislators to do something about it. There is wholesale abuse of the call centre system not simply by the centres themselves, but by people such as ourselves—heaven forbid—who sometimes need to make very long and expensive calls, and who do so on somebody else's telephone. A net effect of all this is substantial profits for the telecoms companies themselves. I should point out that some of these companies number among the serial offenders that profit from such misdemeanours. People are kept waiting, and they pay to be kept waiting.

Everyone recognises this abuse, and they regard it as a big consumer issue. The question is: what precisely is the solution? We need a measure of regulation, and I do not know whether current or foreseen legislation will accommodate it. There are alternative solutions. One could suggest the free market solution, whereby firms that provide a rotten service eventually lose out, but I do not think that that fully addresses the issue. Although firms that keep people hanging on get a bad reputation for call handling, they also make a substantial saving in terms of employee costs.

Secondly, telephone call queues are slightly different from other sorts of queues. One can see a queue in a supermarket and choose to go to another supermarket. One can see a queue at a taxi rank and choose to get the bus home. However, once one is in a call queue, a way out cannot be seen, and to withdraw from it involves a sheer loss.

Thirdly, the telecommunications industry involves a system of dishonest trading. In many cases, people are told that their call will be answered shortly, but in fact it will not be. That is misrepresentation, and at the moment it is not covered by legislation. The fourth reason why a free market solution will not work is because a lot of the calls that one makes are not of a routine character. One has little reason—hopefully—to telephone an insurance line frequently, so one cannot punish such a call centre by not phoning again, given that the reasons for ringing in the first place are far from routine.

The legislation appears to encompass a degree of self-regulation—a code of good practice. I have looked at such codes in this area, and they are wholly inadequate in terms of satisfying consumers that this problem will be dealt with. In any case, a code of good practice would be followed only by good firms; it would not be binding on bad ones.

A third way to resolve this problem—it has been alluded to—is an alternative to the regulation that most of us do not want unless it is really necessary: to hope that technology will so develop that the bad practices that have grown with it will eventually disappear through better technology. Since tabling the early-day motion to which I referred, several organisations that I have contacted have made that suggestion. They suggested that speech-recognition technology might be the way forward and that, some day, we will be able to converse with a mechanised voice at the end of the phone with as much satisfaction as we currently experience when dealing with human operators. A character such as Holly, from the programme "Red Dwarf", will speak to us, and everybody will be able to save money without in any way impairing the service provided to the consumer.

Some people suggest the use of ring-back technology. It is true that, should firms wish to implement it, such technology could be used to enable people to put down the phone yet keep their place in the queue, and to be phoned back at the appropriate moment. That could sharpen up the market, and good firms would undoubtedly adopt such practices. However, I believe that there is a case for regulation. High-volume call centres should, by law, have to advertise their average call waiting times, and they should do so when contact is first made and the phone is picked up. The consumer should have a right to complain to Ofcom and Oftel when those times are routinely exceeded, and Oftel should have the power to warn, and ultimately to penalise, firms that abuse the system. If, after investigation, the problem persists, there should be the potential for Oftel to take action. Such light-touch legislation—for that is all it need be—would save time, money and the nation's blood pressure. I want the Minister to clarify whether current legislation has the potential to incorporate a regulation as solid as this.

Finally, I should like the Minister to clarify a specific point. The winners in all this are the telecoms industry and the telephone companies, and as I said, some of their lines are the principal serial offenders. Is it currently permissible for a call centre firm and a telecoms firm to establish a profit-sharing contract whereby, in return for a discount, the call centre has a real incentive not to answer calls immediately, to mutual profit? That may be the case under current legislation, and I should like the Minister to clarify that point.

Mr. Paice: I am sure that the House is very grateful for an exposition on why the Liberal Democrats do not believe in the market economy. I agreed with little of what the hon. Member for Southport (Dr. Pugh) said, but I want to address my remarks to new clause 2, which was admirably moved by my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo). Although it is common to say so in this place—indeed, it can be construed as a trite statement—I cannot for the life of me see why the Government should not accept the new clause. It is a perfectly reasonable provision, which would simply require Ofcom to ensure the operation of competition. The Government assure us that they believe in competition, but not in too much regulation; however, the reality seems to belie that. Of course, they also believe in broadband, so it seems perfectly reasonable to expect that they will accept the new clause.

My right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young) illustrated more ably than I can the problems of accessing broadband in rural areas. He said that perhaps 50 per cent. of his constituents could access broadband, but I suspect that in my area the figure is more like 15 per cent., if that.

I have spent quite a lot of time over the past few months trying to ascertain how people throughout my constituency can access broadband. The problems are not unique to us, however, but are commonplace throughout rural areas. Extremely remote rural areas are affected, but so are areas such as mine, which abuts Cambridge city.

The Cambridge science park is in the parish of Milton in my constituency, not in the city of Cambridge. It is connected to the Cambridge exchange and is able to access broadband. Absurdly, however, the rest of Milton parish is connected to a different exchange and is not broadband enabled. Milton is only one of the villages—I use the word advisedly, as we are talking about settlements of several thousand people—so affected. Those villages are full of small businesses, many of them at the leading edge of the knowledge revolution and the knowledge-based economy, yet they are not able to access broadband, and many have no prospect of being able to.

Like my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire, I shall not be too critical of BT. It has made some progress in the past year, and has reduced the threshold targets in some exchanges in my constituency, which I welcome. It has introduced thresholds in a couple of exchanges that did not previously have them, and that is a step in the right direction. It is also considering the idea of aggregating different exchanges.

One problem is that many consumers do not know what their exchange is. Many people [illegible]use their exchanges with their STD codes. They do not understand why some people who share their dialling code are able to access broadband when they cannot.

As a result of the inability to access broadband via BT and the fact that there is no prospect of that being possible, businesses and individuals with specialist knowledge are trying to devise their own ways to access the facility, using one of the various systems. In some cases, the villages in my area are partly cabled. The work was done by the Cambridge Cable Co., now part of ntl. That makes the threshold problem harder. If part of a village can access broadband via cable, it reduces the scope for other providers to meet the threshold laid down by BT. However, cable facilities are usually confined tightly to the centre of the villages, and it is highly unlikely that they could be extended.

The upshot is that, in the village of Bottisham—not more than half a dozen miles from Cambridge—a group of people have put together a radio-based system. They lease a single copper line from Cambridge, and their system, which uses radio antennae, now operates through six parishes. These very advanced individuals have achieved this without recourse to a grant from the East of England Development Agency, mainly because in this matter they were ahead of the agency, which had not managed to get a grip. The agency now advocates all sorts of grants, but the people about whom I am talking had already got the system up and running and so received no grant money.

The group did get a small grant from the Countryside Agency, which was very helpful, but parishes now approach the group and ask to join the local network, and no grant money is available to facilitate that. Neither the EEDA nor the Countryside Agency will assist them, because the system already exists. The parish of Little Wilbraham in my constituency wants to join in the system that I have described, but the costs will now be huge, and that seems incredibly perverse.

The Bottisham entrepreneurs put the system together more than a year ago. I arranged for them to meet the then e-envoy, to discuss the problems involved. I hoped that they could pass their experiences on to the Government as an aid to policy. The envoy arranged an appointment at which he could meet my constituents and me, but the Minister, whom I am pleased to see in his place, wrote to me and said that he had taken over the envoy's responsibilities. He was not able to keep the appointment, which was a shame: my constituents were blazing a trail but were unable to present their case to the Minister.

3.15 pm

John Robertson: The hon. Gentleman is making an interesting point, but he is describing what happens when there is competition. People can go against each other, and those in business must compete. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that we should consider the solution that he has outlined? Deutsche Telecom has not had the competition problems that we in this country have encountered. It has done quite well in making broadband access available.

Mr. Paice: I am afraid that I know nothing about the Deutsche Telecom system, so I cannot comment. However, I was not suggesting anything that is anti-competition. I was trying to draw the House's attention to the holes in the Government's policy for promoting broadband. As my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire said when introducing the new clause, the development agencies are acting differently in different regions. My right hon. Friend said that the agency in Cornwall is getting on the back of BT, while other agencies are riding different horses. In the east of England, some people and businesses in my constituency are ahead, as the Bottisham example shows.

My right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire referred to the problem as it affects schools, other public facilities, GPs' surgeries, and so on. The point cannot be over-emphasised. The Prime Minister made his undertaking—although some of us have

[Mr. Paice]

become sceptical about such things—but if he is to fulfil the undertaking, broadband will have to be extended to the very large number of villages that have a primary school. However, there is no present prospect that broadband access will reach those villages. Like my right hon. Friend, I am fascinated to know how the Prime Minister envisages that that will happen.

Mr. Mole: Is the hon. Gentleman aware of the east of England broadband project E2B? For some time it has been placing contracts, with the result that schools in Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire have broadband access.

Mr. Paice: I am very much aware of the project. To the best of my knowledge it has not delivered anything to my constituency, although I stand to be corrected on that. My point is that if the primary school can access broadband, the technology needs to be in the village, as my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire said. Logic implies, therefore, that at least some other members of the community could piggyback on that system. However, that is not yet happening.

I certainly do not want to get into arguments about technology; I am the first to accept that my knowledge is extremely limited. I am primarily concerned about many residents of villages in my constituency who are at the leading edge of the knowledge revolution. Currently, they have to travel to Cambridge, London or elsewhere to work, yet many of them could, and indeed would, work from home at least part of the time. If they could do so, it would comply with many of the objectives not only of the Government but of the House: it would reduce travel, congestion and so on. However, unless those people have access to broadband, they will have to continue to travel to areas where it is provided.

The new clause would enable the Government, through Ofcom, to roll out the provision of broadband far more effectively.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): I agree with my hon. Friend; villages in my constituency, too, could piggy-back and take advantage of the provision of broadband in schools if it was undertaken correctly.

Recent surveys have shown that children—especially younger children—still prefer using books to using the internet. Although we want to ensure that broadband is provided, does my hon. Friend agree that we must also ensure that schools do not completely abandon traditional learning methods?

Mr. Paice: My hon. Friend tempts me to go down a wholly improper path, so I shall resist. However, I am sure that he will understand that I have some sympathy with his point. I am delighted that the sale of books has not been as seriously affected by the development of the internet as many people prophesied.

I have taken enough of the House's time. I wholly support the new clause. Ofcom should have a specific responsibility to accelerate the roll-out of broadband so that a large geographic area and a significant proportion of the population, such as my constituents, can access the latest technology and continue to play their part—as we do in Cambridgeshire—in driving forward the economy of our country.

Mr. Simon Thomas: This is an interesting and important debate. I have three brief comments.

With the support of my hon. Friend the Member for North Tayside (Pete Wishart), I tabled a reasoned amendment to the Second Reading of the Bill. I did so because I believed that the Bill made insufficient provision for the public interest and that it would, over time, so support the principle of competition in the marketplace that it would seriously penalise a great many consumers and citizens. We have heard examples of that in various parts of the country.

Conservative Members may disagree, but I think that competition is failing to deliver what is required by our communities and what the Government say they want to deliver. The Government must address the fact that they are failing to miss their targets for the delivery of broadband and e-technology because the existing competition set-up will not permit them to achieve the necessary roll-out.

I very much welcome the import of Government amendment No. 215 and look forward to the Minister's comments on it. Although I am not yet fully convinced, I think that it has taken on board the questions raised in both the Joint Committee and the Standing Committee about addressing the needs of citizens. Many of us believe that "citizen" is the correct word in this context and that as citizens of the nations of the United Kingdom we benefit from ownership of those things that are done in the spirit of the public interest.

In Committee, we were told that "citizenship" had a particular meaning and that it applied only to nationality and immigration requirements. I am not convinced by that argument. After all, we have education for citizenship in our schools and so on, so surely it is relevant in a Bill dealing with communications. The words "to further the interests of the community as a whole", however, are a significant acceptance by the Government of the points made in the Committee, although I am not sure why the provision continues with the words "in relation to communications matters". In a Communications Bill, why do we have to specify that? It seems a little otiose. However, I shall wait for the Minister to explain.

My second point is related to my first. Members on both sides of the House support the Government in their targets for the roll-out of broadband, but how are we to achieve them? The new clause moved by the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo)—

Mr. Yeo: Is very good.

Mr. Thomas: I agree. The clause is good and it is important. Strangely, however, in arguing for the hon. Gentleman's clause, his hon. Friends argued against pure competition. That is what it boils down to.

New clause 2 is important because it would put a duty on Ofcom to achieve something that, as is accepted, competition itself will not achieve. We will not roll out broadband to every part of these islands purely by using competition alone. We need to ensure that Ofcom works with those competitive providers with the spirit and intention of achieving that roll-out, and that where gaps exist, they will need to be plugged, probably by public investment.

The hon. Member for South Suffolk rightly said that such things are as important as rolling out this country's road, rail, gas and electricity infrastructures. This is our great infrastructure project for the beginning of the 21st century. We need to take it on board in the way that people faced development of the railways in the 1830s and 1840s, although we do not want to replicate the problems with the railways that we inherited from that time.

We need to have more of a sense of national purpose about how we achieve that infrastructure roll-out. For example, it did not take purely private, commercial or competitive companies to provide electricity connections; it took national investment. I want to make the point to the Government that national investment is needed to achieve broadband roll-out, working in co-operation, of course, with the public companies that can achieve it.

John Robertson: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice) hit the nail on the head with his stories about having too much competition?

Mr. Thomas: I am not sure about the phrase "too much competition", but I accept what the hon. Gentleman is trying to say. We have a market that is very attractive to the companies, albeit that it tends to be in the towns, cities and larger conurbations, where they can chase the same customers and play one customer off against the other. We see adverts in the papers, advertising broadband for £29.99, and the next company's price is £27.99. That is frustrating for my constituents, who cannot get broadband at all.

Aberystwyth is the only town in my constituency that is broadband enabled, but there is just one exchange. The important point has been made that broadband is not the same as the standard trunk dialling codes. Those who walk into the town on a market day expecting to be able to buy into broadband when they walk into Currys on the high street simply do not get what they deserve. It is the same as walking into Dixons or Currys and finding digital radio on sale, which people can do in Aberystwyth. Digital radio is a wonderful thing, but it does not come within 50 miles of Aberystwyth. I am not sure what those companies are trying to achieve by putting those products on their shelves. It is very frustrating for the consumer.

BT is still the major provider of telecommunications in Wales. Outside Cardiff and some of the south Wales valleys that have been cable enabled, there is no choice but BT, so I am trying to get the exchange in Cardigan enabled, as it is next biggest town in my constituency, although only 3,000 or 4,000 people live there. I am pleased that BT has agreed that that exchange should be enabled next.

Moreover, after several meetings, BT has decreased the threshold requirement—it is now down to 300 people for that exchange—but we have 71 signed up at the moment, so the gap is still fairly significant. Persuading SMEs to sign up to something when they cannot see the benefits is very difficult indeed.

Cardigan is facing 400 redundancies in two industries over the next year, although we have had an injection of finance from the National Assembly. I should like that money to be used to bridge the digital gap, so that we can invest in things such as broadband. I want Ofcom to be involved in such a public interest consideration, in conjunction with local communities, or with the regional development agencies in England or, in Wales and Scotland, with the Governments of those countries.

We can achieve broadband roll-out in other ways in rural areas—radio is an obvious one and satellite might be brought into play. The National Assembly for Wales has published the Welsh Development Agency's Ubiquity report on achieving broadband roll-out in Wales and, as hon. Members might expect, the targets are very similar to those of the UK Government. Again, delivering services to every school is part of that process.

One of the difficulties, however, is that the 3.8 GHz radio spectrum is about to be auctioned in Wales, as it was not auctioned last time round. The repackaging that has happened has split Wales into three parts, and has placed north, mid and south Wales with significant parts of England. That may not be a bad thing if it means that we can get things moving, but it creates the rather worrying prospect that one part will be successfully sold and auctioned, whereas another part will not.

3.30 pm

The Minister should be in receipt of a letter from Christine Gwyther, the Labour AM who chairs the Economic Development Committee of the National Assembly. The letter outlines the Committee's deep unhappiness about the way in which radio spectrum has been auctioned in Wales, as it is seen as an important weapon in achieving broadband roll-out in Wales. I hope that the Minister will carefully examine the situation in Wales, and that he will look again at how we can assist wireless provision, which will be one of the key aspects of achieving broadband roll-out in rural areas.

I welcome the progress that has been made on this Bill, but I very much hope that Members on both sides of the House will support those who are trying to secure broadband access for some of the most remote parts of the United Kingdom and will acknowledge the need to act in the public interest. We must be aware that competition does not yet show signs that it will achieve that. I hope that the Government will bear that in mind as they try to meet their targets.

Mr. Greenway: While we have been debating these important matters, I understand that Nasser Hussain, the England cricket captain, has resigned following a no result in the Zimbabwe-Pakistan cricket match, and that England are eliminated from the world cup. I hope that, on some future occasion, we might have the opportunity in Government time to debate the issue.

First, I endorse the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) on new clause 2. I suggest to the Minister that nothing in the new clause is in any way at odds with Ofcom's duties under the Bill. On the contrary, all the key elements of new clause 2 are enshrined in the provisions of clauses 3 and 6, which relate to Ofcom's duties. Our new clause has four key elements.

Mr. Timms: I welcome the point that the hon. Gentleman has just made. Will he tell us why the new clause is necessary, because, as he rightly says, the point is already well covered in the Bill?

Mr. Greenway: I cannot tell you, Madam Deputy Speaker, how grateful I am for the Minister's intervention, as that is precisely what I intend to do. He so clearly grasps the point that I need not dwell on it too much.

To explain the point briefly, clause 6 requires Ofcom to reduce regulatory burdens and clause 3(1)(a) requires it to promote competition and to further the interests of consumers—there is no better way of doing that than bearing down on prices and the provision of high-quality services. Clause 3(1)(b) on securing the optimum use of wireless telegraphy must surely include the deployment of new telecommunications technologies.

The Minister might argue, as he did in his intervention, that we do not need the new clause. However, new clause 2 adds something that is distinctly absent from the Bill: the two words that were pointed out by my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young)—"including broadband". This debate has shown not only that all Members on both sides of the House regard this as a crucial issue for their constituents—I can certainly reflect what my hon. Friend the Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice) said about his constituency, which is precisely the position in my constituency of Ryedale. The real point, however, is that there is no specific reference to broadband in the Bill. We hammered away on that issue in Committee because it is a serious omission. The new clause gives the House the opportunity to correct that omission.

Mr. Mole: Does the hon. Gentleman not consider broadband to be a telecommunications technology?

Mr. Greenway: Many of the definitions in the Bill include or omit certain phraseology. We spent a lot of time on Report last Tuesday discussing whether music formed part of local material.

John Robertson: That is an important issue.

Mr. Greenway: It is important, as the hon. Gentleman says.

This debate has shown a growing sense among members of all parties that the provision of broadband is not being taken seriously enough. It is therefore important to make a specific reference to it in the Bill as part of Ofcom's general duties. I will say no more than that, suffice it to say that anyone listening to this important part of our deliberations cannot have failed to notice that, no matter which constituency hon. Members represent or to which political party they belong, there is a sense that not enough is being done to ensure that broadband is made available to more and more of our constituents. The importance that hon. Members have put on this issue makes it inconceivable that the Government would want to resist such a new clause.

I want to deal with the issues raised by the Government's amendments—in particular Government amendment No. 215 to clause 3. Clause 3 sets out Ofcom's general duties, and the Government amendment alters the structure and emphasis of the clause in three important ways. I want to probe the Minister on the Government's thinking, and I would also like him to clarify some points.

The amendment will for the first time impose a principal duty on Ofcom. There were once four duties of equal weight, as given in clause 3(1). However, under the amendment, in addition to Ofcom's duty, in carrying out its functions,

> "to further the interests of consumers in relevant markets, where appropriate by promoting competition",

Ofcom must now

> "further the interests of the community as whole in relation to communications matters."

The new wording replaces three of the four duties in clause 3(1). Those duties were:

> "to secure the optimal use for wireless telegraphy of the electromagnetic spectrum",

> "to secure the availability . . . of a wide range of television and radio services"

and to secure the application of standards. Those three duties have been relegated to a proposed new subsection (1A), which sets out the things that Ofcom is required to secure in carrying out its principal duty. That is a significant departure from the Government's policy up to today, which has been to resist the introduction of a principal duty.

In Committee, the Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting reminded us that the Government's response to the Joint Committee's report stated:

> "'We are sure that the Committee will recognise how important it is that the duties properly reflect the breadth of all OFCOM's responsibilities, both economic and cultural, and follow the proposition set out in the White Paper that each duty is of equal weight.'"

He also said:

> "I strongly believe that we should give a clear signal that no single duty under subsection (1) is more important than another; they are all equally important."

He added:

> "Subsection (6) expressly enables Ofcom to resolve the conflict between duties in the way that it believes to be the best. That leaves it in control of the situation."

He went on to say:

> "The Government have looked long and hard at clause 3, because, like other hon. Members, we recognised that we needed to get it right, and I believe that we have."

Well, there we are—not any more. He has changed his mind. He continued:

> "It covers the breadth of Ofcom's responsibilities and reflects its role as an economic and cultural regulator. I believe that, in respect of the principles on which it is based and its drafting, the clause works for Ofcom and its stakeholders."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee E*, 10 December 2002; c. 74–81.]

As we can see, the Government have radically changed their mind. The phrase

> "the community as a whole in relation to communications matters"

adds a new and somewhat wider perspective to the principal duty than the reference only to consumers and competition. It is considerably different from the present wording of clause 3(1) and relegates certain specific considerations in relation to others that the

Government have hitherto insisted were an integral part of their range of equal duties. Perhaps it is now a case of all duties being equal but some being more equal than others.

Mr. Hawkins: I am delighted that my hon. Friend has alluded to Orwell, because the Government have very much introduced a piece of Orwellian newspeak. Does my hon. Friend have any suspicion about the reason for this sudden volte-face from equal duties to one primary duty? Does he think by any chance that there has been huge influence from Europe and that the Minister's officials did not agree with what he said in Committee and have tried to change the Bill at the last minute in the House?

Mr. Greenway: On this occasion, I cannot go with my hon. Friend's conspiracy theory. The matter was debated at length in Committee. My hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) sadly cannot be here for this debate, but he made several comments about the issues that we are discussing. My hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) agrees with the rest of my hon. Friends to judge by their reaction to my remarks. They have grasped that this change at this very late stage radically alters the architecture of Ofcom's duties in a way that has far-reaching implications for the rest of the Bill.

The second issue that I want to raise is the new duty to maintain a plurality of providers of television and radio. We need clarification from the Minister of the words in Government amendment No. 251 that refer to

> "the maintenance of a plurality of different television and radio services".

That concept has hitherto been excluded from the Bill, but the provision may have a considerable impact on the way in which Ofcom deals with proposed mergers and acquisitions in the sector. The Minister owes us a detailed explanation about how the duty relates to the Government's newly revised framework for media ownership and control.

In Committee, Conservative Members argued that there should be a greater reliance on competition and less reliance on rigid restrictions and limitations. Until today—I am assuming that the amendment will be accepted by the House—we had an underlying move towards greater reliance on competition but with specific limitations and restrictions in place. However, plurality and competition now conflict with the specific restrictions and limitations in the Bill.

We know that the Government have decided that Channel 3 will be allowed to merge into a single company subject to general competition law, and that is a big qualification particularly in respect of television advertising. However, subject to that, the company will be allowed to merge into a single company that is owned by a single person or single organisation. Strictly speaking, that will represent a reduction in the plurality of Channel 3 providers from two main providers, Carlton and Granada, to one, with the smaller providers—Ulster, Scottish Media Group, Channel Television and others—perhaps being subsumed. Who knows whether that will happen even if it is not the proposal now? The Minister must tell us what the proposed new duty for Ofcom would mean for such a process. Is it possible that such a merger would be, after investigation, acceptable in the eyes of the Office of Fair Trading, but then rejected by Ofcom under clause 1(3) on the basis that it reduces the plurality of television providers? That is an extremely important question.

3.45 pm

Other broadcasters have raised similar concerns. The Commercial Radio Association has asked what impact the provision will have on the three-year ownership review process by which the Government have placed such great store. What if a merger were to reduce plurality—that is, the number of different providers of radio and television services—but improve the quantity, quality or range of programme content? The inclusion of the new duty may encourage Ofcom to value plurality for its own sake and to temper the priority that it previously would have given to the availability throughout the UK of a wide range of television and radio services which, taken as a whole, are of high quality and calculated to appeal to a variety of tastes and interests, irrespective of the number of different providers.

Similar questions apply to other scenarios. A purchase by a channel 3 owner or Channel 5, as permitted under the Government's liberalisation and subject of course to competition law scrutiny, would further reduce plurality, as would mergers or purchases involving other providers such as Disney, Viacom or BSkyB. In all instances, even if concerns under competition law were satisfied, the new duty will mean that residual doubts and uncertainties remain. It could give Ofcom the power to veto an acquisition by adding another layer of regulation to an area in which the Government have decided to introduce a more liberal regime. That appears to be taking away with one hand what they have given with the other.

Thirdly, I turn to the new duty to secure the availability of a wide range of electronic communication services—another addition. It would be helpful if the Government could explain why they have seen fit, again at this late stage, to introduce that concept into this part of the Bill. Electronic communication services are one important element in a wide range of matters that Ofcom must deal with, but it is unclear why those services have been singled out for particular attention. To anticipate the kind of intervention that my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath might have made had he not left the Chamber, where did that idea come from? I do not remember discussing it in Committee. It comes as a surprise to us that the Government have made these serious changes, which fundamentally alter the architecture of Ofcom's powers. The explanation in the Minster's letter fails to acknowledge the far-reaching nature of the amendments.

I want briefly to mention two or three other Government amendments. Amendment No. 217 deals with Ofcom's annual report, enabling Ofcom to explain how it has resolved any conflicts between its duties. We discussed that extensively in Committee, and the amendment is welcome.

Amendments Nos. 219 and 220 address matters that we raised in Committee. Amendment No. 219 deals with the problem that we identified concerning wording of the Bill that gold-plates some elements of the directive.

[Mr. Greenway]

Amendment No. 221 is one that I proposed in Committee to help to ensure that there is a real opportunity for self-regulation in advertising. I warmly welcome the fact that the Minister has on consideration accepted that amendment and proposes to include it in the Bill.

Mr. Allan: I am grateful to the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) for giving us the opportunity to discuss broadband. This is the best chance that we have had to deal specifically with Ofcom's role in relation to broadband. I want to pick up on some of the comments made by the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice) and the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young), who conveniently covered all points of the compass between them, and the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas). They raised important points about the way in which broadband is being rolled out.

There is broad agreement on the general thrust of the new clause. However, I add a note of caution about the way in which the market mechanism and the regulation mechanism will work. The experience to date has been that the biggest advance in broadband roll-out occurred with BT's significant price drop on the wholesale cost of broadband services. That was in some doubt. Regulation rightly sets out that BT has a duty not to be involved in loss leading or to use its telephone customers to cross-subsidise its broadband customers. We could have a public policy objective of getting cheaper broadband services and a regulatory framework that dictates that the regulator must prevent that from happening. We have to be aware of the limits of the regulatory framework when it is applied in such a mechanistic way to determine what aspects of a service come from which pot.

The hon. Member for South Suffolk made some good suggestions and was right to mention the transparency of costs. It is important that we understand the cost issues on which Ofcom will make the rulings that were carried out by Oftel. The hon. Gentleman suggested that BT should publish advance plans on its roll-out scheme for enabling ADSL exchanges. It would help to have a public debate on those instead of micro-decisions in individual areas.

It seems that BT has realised that it is better to have 5 million wholesale broadband customers who buy their retail service from the likes of AOL and Freeserve, which have the reach to sell broadband nationally, rather than 500,000 broadband customers who buy both retail and wholesale from BT. Under the old model, BT wanted to maintain the complete value chain by offering retail broadband services. However, there has been a change in leadership and BT is trying to increase its wholesale customers. It has accepted that AOL and Freeserve, as retail customer-facing organisations, may leap over it in terms of numbers, but that is not a problem because BT will make money on the wholesale service.

A specific problem remains, however, with the two products that BT offers: BT Openworld, which is its ISP, and the BT broadband only service, commonly called the bare-wire service. I am sure that all hon. Members have received complaints about the confusion that that causes. There is a genuine consumer issue about BT selling two products that are both called broadband from BT. One is an ISP-based service that is comparable to a service provided by Demon, Freeserve or AOL; the other is not. We need to tidy that up. There are also concerns about the possibility of cross-promotion by BT. People who choose to take their broadband services from another supplier still have a BT line, and I question the appropriateness of BT making a hard sell for its own retail broadband service via the billing mechanism, for instance. I accept that there are regulations that are intended to prevent that from happening, but the industry still raises concerns about the possibility of cross-selling.

The right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire and the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire mentioned the concerns of constituents who live just outside the footprint of the ADSL-enabled exchanges. There was a proposal to roll out broadband primarily by local loop unbundling in which other companies would be responsible for the infrastructure that would deliver the service the last few miles to people's houses. That fell down the list of priorities as the investment climate worsened and the ISPs did not have the cash to deliver the infrastructure. Many of them would now prefer BT to be responsible for all the infrastructure while they concentrate on retail services. However, local loop bypassing, which has a huge potential, is starting to take place, as we have heard, in the village of Bottisham. The hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire referred to the village of Milton outside Cambridge and the fact that Cambridge science park is located there. A large broadband pipe goes into the science park, so it is perfectly possible, as the hon. Gentleman started to say, for it to be made available to other people using wireless technologies. There are some great experiments going on. The Minister was at the ISPs' awards ceremony, where West Dorset Internet, a tiny ISP set up by Tim Snape, won an award as a broadband supplier. The company is extremely imaginative, and has come up with solutions using wireless technology to extend reach. In many areas, such solutions will be more attractive than satellite and other proposals.

However, there are questions about regulation that need to be answered. Do we create a climate that encourages or discourages experimentation? If somebody has a broadband connection in their premises, under their contract they are not allowed to extend it outside those premises. We may need new forms of contract that encourage community groups to enter a community broadband contract. They would pay a fair price for the pipe that goes into the community system, but they would be able to do imaginative community outreach work. The hon. Member for Ceredigion talked about the radio spectrum and later, if we have time, we will talk about recognised spectrum access. A key question about such access is whether people will want a wireless local network and whether it will interfere with satellite systems.

There are also questions about the spectrum sale, auctioning and licensing at the end of the spectrum, where people want to roll out local networks. Ofcom could have a significant role in creating the conditions for people to do more wireless networking or preventing them from doing so.

Mr. Mole: Can I just explore with the hon. Gentleman the difficulty associated with his proposal to aggregate demand at the end of a broadband connection? Such connections are supplied by telecommunications operators based on the nature of expected traffic. It is not expected that users will constantly demand data at the full rate capability of the link. Such traffic will come in bursts. As more users are hooked to the end of a single link, demand is aggregated and traffic becomes continuous, so there are more implications for telecommunications operators' back systems. They can offer product at £29.99 because most of us will demand data, perhaps in large volumes, only for short periods.

Mr. Allan: The hon. Gentleman is entirely right about the technical aspects, with which he is familiar. I am not suggesting that everyone who has a £30 a month connection should link their village into that single connection. I was trying to suggest that there is a role for new forms of fairly priced contract that allow 10, 15 or 20 users to hang off the end of a connection. Ofcom has a role in encouraging, rather than discouraging, the roll-out of the technology. We should applaud the experimentalism of the DIY approach taken by some people such as the Bottisham villagers. We should not encourage people to breach contracts, but we should encourage new uses of the technology and the imaginative search for forms of contract that allow such uses.

However, if people come up with solutions, I fear that they may be knocked back and told by a telecommunications company, "You have to wait two years until we enable your exchange." If a solution is available today, people should be able to have it, because in the meantime they are missing out on huge opportunities. That is particularly true of local companies. The time taken by a local architect's business to upload and download technical drawings is a critical factor in its viability and competitiveness. If it can get quick access today, we should find a way of making that work, instead of being unimaginative and slowing things down.

4 pm

Finally, it is helpful that one of the amendments proposes that broadband should be written into the Bill. However, much of the work being done on broadband is taking place at a community level. The magazine *Computing* has set up a group with which I know the Minister is familiar and which is doing much good work. The broadband stakeholders group has been mentioned. The fact that a huge number of hon. Members have become engaged with technology issues through broadband because the public are asking us to be engaged in such issues means that the debate is far wider.

I hope that as well as thinking about the Ofcom context, the Minister will assure us that he is considering the wider context. I hope that he will continue the dialogue, which has been constructive to date, with the wider industry and will respond positively to imaginative solutions that will enable broadband roll-out to occur much more quickly than would otherwise be the case.

Mr. Timms: I shall begin by speaking to the Government amendments. The Bill is a complex piece of legislation addressing individuals as citizens and as consumers. It is about Ofcom taking responsibility for economic and cultural matters. Ofcom's general duties are crucial to its work, so we have studied particularly carefully the wording of clause 3, how that works with other provisions in the Bill and how it will shape Ofcom's decision making. There was much discussion about that in Committee, there has been discussion in public consultation and it was a major theme of the pre-legislative scrutiny work. We have therefore decided to change the way in which clause 3 is structured to make the position clearer.

Amendment No. 215 and the consequential amendments Nos. 216 and 218 are intended to remove any lingering doubt that the Bill will deliver our policy commitment to safeguard and further the interests of consumers and of citizens. I am grateful to the hon. Members for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) and for North Devon (Nick Harvey) who welcomed that change, which makes the position entirely clear.

The amendment uses the expression "community as a whole" rather than "citizens". There was some suspicion among Opposition Members that the terminology had come from Europe, but I can assure them that that is not the case. We have used the expression "community as a whole" because the word "citizens" in legislation has connotations of nationality, which is not what we want in this context. The new wording meets the concerns expressed by a number of people in the debate over the past few months.

The public policy interests are embedded in the legislation—for example, through the provisions on media literacy and the public service obligations. They are also inherent in the current drafting of clause 3, but we wanted to make the position more explicit. We have now achieved that. We want to be certain that in any circumstance Ofcom will be able to consider the interests of consumers and the wider community without being open to challenge.

The hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) commented on the plurality duty in subsection (1A). The media ownership rules in the Bill will ensure that there are a number of different providers of TV and radio services. The amendment will mean that Ofcom will take plurality as well as diversity into account in carrying out its functions, including reviewing the media ownership rules. That is the key significance of the amendment: it ensures that Ofcom will be able to consider plurality in reviewing the rules. The rules are clear, but because of the change, Ofcom will be able to take plurality into account. Those are significant changes. We already have a good Bill, but the amendments improve it.

Amendment No. 217 follows one proposed by the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley). We said in Committee that we would respond with an appropriate amendment and we have done so. Ofcom will have to make some complex decisions and reconcile tensions between its general duties. The amendment will require Ofcom to include in its annual report a summary of such cases where they are important. That will provide observers with a valuable understanding of how Ofcom's decision making has developed. It will not be unduly bureaucratic for Ofcom but it will help to ensure that it is open and transparent.

[Mr. Timms]

Amendments Nos. 219 and 220 to clause 4 again follow amendments proposed by the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire in Committee. We accepted the principle of those amendments, which bring the sixth of the community obligations set out in the clause—the obligation to encourage standardisation—more precisely into line with the directive.

The hon. Member for Ryedale has already correctly claimed credit for inspiring Government amendment No. 221. I am glad that he has acknowledged that it meets his objectives.

The hon. Member for North Devon spoke to amendment No. 3 and welcomed Government amendment No. 215, which deals with the concern that underpinned that amendment.

On amendment No. 151, the creativity and innovation drive of individuals in the communications industry must be one of the reasons for its success. In telecommunications, television and radio, very able people are working in the UK. That is why we have some world-class businesses. As my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Anniesland (John Robertson) pointed out, the Bill contains provisions relating to employment in broadcasting. Clauses 24 and 327 require Ofcom to promote training, equality of opportunity between men and women and persons of different racial groups and the fair treatment of disabled persons in relation to employment with broadcasters. Those provisions are important in terms of the particular structure of public service broadcasting and in supporting greater diversity in programme making. A particularly large number of freelancers work in the broadcasting industry and there is a need to sustain the level of necessary skills development.

Those are the particular circumstances in broadcasting that have led us to include those provisions in the Bill. We cannot extend them to the telecoms industry, not least because, under the regulatory regime permitted by the communications directives, Ofcom will not have power to impose any such obligations on communications providers. I am not suggesting that the position of telecommunications employees is not one of the most important issues for the industry—it clearly is. However, the responsibilities for employment rights and skills will rest not with Ofcom, but with other agencies and bodies.

I am grateful to my hon. Friends the Members for Glasgow, Anniesland and for Gloucester (Mr. Dhanda) for drawing attention to those concerns. I point out that e-skills UK, which covers IT, telecommunications and call centres, is in the final stages of its development phase to become a new sector skills council. A decision on its application will be considered very soon. It will be an employer-led body that will bring together employers, trade unions and professional bodies in working with the Government to develop the skills that UK business needs to drive productivity and competitiveness in this sector. The Government are very active in that area and my hon. Friends were right to draw attention to its importance. However, the solution rests not with Ofcom, but elsewhere.

For rather different reasons, I also oppose amendment No. 187, which was tabled by the hon. Member for North Devon. I do so not because I do not recognise the essential contribution of creators and performers in producing quality content—I certainly do—but because I believe that requiring Ofcom to consider them in carrying out all its functions would place their interests above the general public interest in high-quality content. That would be a mistake. Regulating for the quality of content will draw on the work of creators and performers for the benefit of viewers and listeners, whose interests must be to the fore.

Clause 257 requires Ofcom to review public service broadcasting, including the quality of programme making and the professional skill applied in making programmes. We are also safeguarding the amount of original production in UK television and strengthening the contribution of the independent productions sector. Those and other specific measures will be more effective and better targeted than the approach taken in amendment No. 187.

New clause 27 and amendments Nos. 188 and 189 propose to give creators a statutory role within Ofcom. Hon. Members who followed the debates in Committee will be aware that the Government are committed to giving Ofcom flexibility to organise itself in the way that best allows it to deliver the objectives that we are setting out in the Bill. We know from experience elsewhere that that flexibility is essential. We need to be careful not to over-specify the way in which Ofcom is organised.

The content board—the only element of the internal structure of Ofcom that is required under the Bill—is there to represent the public interest in the content of broadcasting services. It is not there to represent the interests of any particular group in the industry. That is an important safeguard.

Amendment No. 189 specifies that Ofcom may authorise the establishment of a creators panel, but Ofcom already has the power to authorise the establishment of any committee to advise the content board, so the amendment is unnecessary, as is new clause 27, for the same reason.

Much of this interesting debate has been about new clause 2, which was moved by the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo). The hon. Member for Ryedale assisted the House by pointing out that there is nothing in that new clause that is not already in the Bill, except for the specific reference to broadband. The Bill refers to promoting innovation and encouraging investment—broadband will certainly be the beneficiary of that—but it is important for it not only to address what is undoubtedly one of the most important topics that we face, but to make sense in 10, 20 or 30 years.

Extending the availability of broadband is one of our top priorities, and I welcome the fact that there has been so much interest in that during the debate. I also welcome the growing political pressure on broadband availability. Availability continues to grow, and the point has been made that about 67 per cent. of UK households can access a terrestrial broadband service. That was right about three months ago, but the figure had reached 71 per cent. and rising at the end of last year. It is clear that it will reach 80 per cent. over the next year or two, but the big challenge will be how to get from 80 per cent. to 90 per cent. and over. We are working on that energetically. The point was also made that there are 1.4 million broadband connections in the UK, but that number is increasing at more than 30,000 a week, so we are well beyond it now.

The right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young) asked me some particular questions, and he has been corresponding with me on how public service broadband capability will be achieved. There is the commitment that every school in the country will have broadband by 2006. The capacity will be at least 2 megabytes per second for every primary school and 8 megabytes per second for secondary schools. Those rates will be available symmetrically, which means that the discussion goes beyond what ADSL can deliver at present.

It would not be sensible, however, for me to announce from the Dispatch Box precisely how that will be determined—how Overton primary school, for example, should be connected up. Equally, it would not be right for us to say to Overton primary school, "Go away and work it out for yourself." It is increasingly clear that we can make such decisions and plan a strategy for achieving public sector broadband connectivity right across a region.

There are already regional broadband consortiums in education and we are considering how to bring the health service into the aggregation arrangements at regional level. Although scepticism has regrettably been expressed from the Conservative Benches about the effectiveness of the regional development agencies, we are seeing in a growing number of RDAs some imaginative and effective initiatives that will deliver broadband connectivity in every area that we are considering.

Mr. Allan: The Government have the strategy of aggregation of Government broadband demand and a lot of faith is being placed in the fact that they have made the clear commitment that they will achieve a connection for Overton primary school, or wherever else, in the expectation that other people can work from it. Is the Minister confident that the combination of Treasury rules and the way in which Government have to tender for services will allow them to draw up contracts with added public benefit, or will the Government end up with tight contacts saying, "If you want the cheapest price, to Overton primary school and no further."?

Mr. Timms: I am confident that we will be able to achieve suitable contracts. There is work to be done, but we are doing that work and I am confident that we can deliver. Of course, the Prime Minister also articulated a commitment that every school would have internet access. We have delivered that commitment, and we will deliver this one as well.

The hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire made some interesting points about Bottisham, about which I have heard a good deal in the past couple of months. I regret that it was not possible to have the meeting envisaged—if I remember rightly, the e-envoy was due to visit in the autumn—but I welcome further discussion of what is happening there. Perhaps there might be a visit as well, at some point.

4.15 pm

There is much to be done, but I do not think we need to amend the Bill. I agree with what has been said about the importance of competition: we need competition to drive broadband into every part of the country, just as it has driven mobile communications into every part of the country. That is, of course, the basis of the Bill. The regulator will have all the powers that the hon. Gentleman advocated, as his colleagues who sat through the Committee stage will tell him; but we want the legislation to last, and I therefore think our current formula is right.

The hon. Member for Southport (Dr. Pugh) mentioned the severe problem of call centre queueing. Clause 124 allows Ofcom to act against any person who persistently misuses a network service to cause annoyance, inconvenience or anxiety, or increased blood pressure. The measure is aimed principally at those who make calls, but I suppose that in an extreme case consideration could be given to its use against a recipient such as a call centre. The hon. Gentleman's aspirations could be met by the Bill, although whether that will indeed be possible may be debated elsewhere.

Mr. Yeo: This has been an excellent debate, whose breadth reflects that of the Bill itself.

I join my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young) in acknowledging the efforts made by BT over the last year to speed up access to broadband. Perhaps I did not make that clear earlier. My right hon. Friend spoke of the difficulties experienced by rural communities, and mentioned the Prime Minister's proposal to connect schools. The Minister seems unwilling, or possibly unable, to explain exactly how that will happen. I only hope that his confidence will be borne out in practice.

The constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice) is not unlike my own. Its problems are typical of those in rural areas, and the prospects of any real progress are bleak for some of his constituents in the more remote villages.

The hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas), with whom I had the pleasure of visiting Caernarfon recently, described his frustration at the inadequate access to broadband in his constituency. I welcome his recognition that broadband is part of the infrastructure. I dare say his constituency is about as well served as mine by some of the transport infrastructure as well. Let us hope that broadband will not follow that model.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) explained, I thought rather eloquently, why the new clause was necessary. I am sorry that the Minister did not entirely accept what he said. My hon. Friend made a number of powerful points about other issues, on which I will not comment except to say that I did not think all of them were dealt with adequately by the Minister.

I welcomed the support of the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan) for the new clause. I hope it will be reflected in the Lobby shortly. I particularly welcomed his recognition of the need for more transparency.

[Mr. Yeo]

The Minister spoke of the continuing progress in extending broadband. I acknowledge that the figures are increasing more quickly than they were, but for many people that is not enough. Not even the promise of a visit from the Minister will satisfy all broadband users.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 176, Noes 288.

Division No. 98] **[4:18 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, rh James
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Barrett, John
Beith, rh A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James *(Beverley)*
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr. Liam
Francois, Mark
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gidley, Sandra
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hammond, Philip
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hogg, rh Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lamb, Norman
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Mackay, rh Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
Mercer, Patrick
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Portillo, rh Michael
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Randall, John
Redwood, rh John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tredinnick, David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Weir, Michael
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wishart, Pete
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Mark Hoban and Angela Watkinson

NOES

Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, John
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnham, Andy
Byers, rh Stephen
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, rh Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet

Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Farrelly, Paul
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Galloway, George
Gardiner, Barry
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hodge, Margaret
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hoon, rh Geoffrey
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jamieson, David
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, rh Tessa
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kelly, Ruth *(Bolton W)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S.
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lammy, David
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leslie, Christopher
Lewis, Ivan [illegible]*ury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Morgan, Julie
Morris, rh Estelle
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh John
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stinchcombe, Paul
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Ivor Caplin and
Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe

Question accordingly negatived.

New Clause 12

RESTRICTIVE COVENANTS AFFECTING FREEHOLD PROPERTY

'(1) This section applies where by virtue of a restrictive covenant the owner of any premises is restricted, either absolutely or to any extent—

(a) in choosing electronic communications services or a supplier of such services, or

(b) with respect to any other electronic communications matter.

(2) Where this section applies, the covenant, to the extent that it restricts the owner of premises as mentioned in subsection (1)—

(a) if it requires (expressly or otherwise) the consent of any person to be obtained before anything to which the restriction relates is done, shall have effect as if it required that consent not to be unreasonably withheld; and

(b) in any other case, shall have effect as if it required the consent of the person entitled to the benefit of the restrictive covenant to the doing of anything to which the restriction relates not be unreasonably withheld.

(3) Subsections (5) to (7) of section 130 shall apply in relation to a restriction falling within subsection (2) of this section as those subsections apply in relation to a prohibition or restriction falling within subsection (1) or (2) of section 130.

(4) Section 392 applies to the powers of OFCOM to make orders under this section.'.—*[Mr. Whittingdale.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

4.30 pm

Mr. Whittingdale: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 103, in page 119, line 14 [Clause 130], leave out

'for a year or more'.

No. 104, in page 119, line 18 [Clause 130], leave out

'for a year or more'.

No. 105, in page 119, line 27 [Clause 130], leave out subsection (4) and insert—

'(4) A provision falling within subsection (2)(a) or (b)—

(a) if it requires (expressly or otherwise) the consent of any person to be obtained before anything to which the provision relates is done, shall have effect as if it required that consent not to be unreasonably withheld;

(b) in any other case, shall have the effect as if it required the consent of the lessor, licensor or other party to the agreement to the doing of anything to which the provision relates not to be unreasonably withheld.'.

No. 106, in page 119, line 30 [Clause 130], leave out from 'with' to end of line 31 and insert 'an electronic communications matter'.

No. 107, in page 119, line 38 [Clause 130], leave out paragraphs (a) and (b) and insert

'with respect to any matter by virtue of which it falls within subsection (1) of (2).'.

No. 108, in page 119, line 44, [Clause 130] at end insert

'of his choice (so that he is not confined to selecting a person with an interest in any premises or to a person selected by such a person).

(5A) The question whether consent has been unreasonably withheld in any case falling to be determined in accordance with subsection (5) shall be determined by OFCOM.

(5B) Where OFCOM has made such a determination, proceedings for breach of any provision of a lease or other agreement falling within subsection (2), which consists of or includes failure to obtain consent before doing anything to which that provision relates, shall not be instituted or continued in any court.'.

No. 109, in page 119, line 45, [Clause 130], leave out subsection (6).

Government amendment No. 234.

Amendment No. 110, in page 120, line 23, [Clause 130], leave out subsection (9).

Amendment No. 102, in page 347, line [illegible]5 [Clause 399], at end insert—

'(3A) Before making an order under subsection (2) appointing a day for the coming into force of section [restrictive covenants affecting freehold property], the Secretary of State shall consult OFCOM and such other persons as appear to the Secretary of State to be appropriate'.

Mr. Whittingdale: New clause 12 and the associated amendments relate to the provisions dealing with restrictions in leases and licences. In the main, they are covered by clause 130, which we have not discussed yet because of the Government's timetable motion in Committee.

The new clause and the amendments would extend choice to people who cannot put up satellite dishes or aerials on their properties. At present, many people in leased and rented properties are prevented from obtaining television and telephony services from the provider of their choice because of restrictions in their leases or tenancy agreements. Owners of freehold properties caught by restrictive covenants also suffer from the same problem.

For example, I understand that people living in Milton Keynes cannot put an aerial or satellite dish on their houses, whether they own or rent them. In essence, they are forced to get their television from ntl, the cable company. Milton Keynes residents are thereby denied a choice that they might want to make, and are dependent on one provider. As illustrated by the demise of Aberdeen Cable, when people were left without telephony, that can lead to unfortunate consequences.

Landlords, landowners and property developers sometimes impose the restrictions that I have described, for a variety of reasons. They may consider that installing a satellite dish could damage the fabric of a building, or make that building a less desirable place to live. In other cases, however, the imposition of such conditions may merely be force of habit. Restrictive covenants often find their way into standard leases and other freehold agreements and are put forward by the lessor or vendor, or his solicitors, with no real consideration as to their necessity, only the desire to retain control over the premises.

Obviously, lessees and owners can try to have such restrictions removed, but unless the landlord, or those with an interest in the covenant, willingly agree—in which case, why were the restrictions imposed in the first place?—the process of removing them can be extremely slow, expensive and cumbersome, and might even involve the Lands Tribunal and arcane bits of law.

Michael Fabricant: For the exclusion of doubt, will my hon. Friend confirm that the new clause does not apply to conservation areas, such as those in Lichfield and other parts of the country, where, due to the antiquity of the buildings, a satellite dish would be undesirable on the main elevation?

Mr. Whittingdale: If my hon. Friend will allow me, I shall deal later with circumstances in which it might be deemed reasonable to apply such restrictions. If it was reasonable, we should certainly not argue for their removal. I hope that provides my hon. Friend with some reassurance.

In general, lessees and owners will want to continue to live in their accommodation so they are not likely to want to upset their neighbours or irritate their landlord by breaching leases or covenants. Given the risks and bureaucracy involved, and the wish not to cause too much trouble, lessees and owners are often denied a choice of supplier for television or telephony due to such restrictions. Indeed, in future that might lead to a challenge under article 10 of the European convention on human rights. That has not yet happened, but it is possible to envisage circumstances in which it might.

Such restrictions could be extremely unhelpful in respect of the Government's declared objective of digital switchover—the time when it will be possible to switch off analogue television. They could also affect another Government objective, which we have just spent considerable time debating, of achieving higher levels of broadband penetration and internet access. For example, if a householder was unable to receive digital terrestrial television and there was no cable in the street, he would be unable to switch over to digital television unless he was allowed to erect a satellite dish.

Although clause 130 deals with those restrictions and it certainly has good intentions, it does not go far enough to give lessees and tenants true freedom, in practice, to choose their television or telephony supplier and to make it easier for them to exercise that choice. In particular, it does not address the issue of restrictive covenants in freehold property. That is the purpose of the new clause.

I also want to speak to amendments Nos. 103 to 110, which relate to the position of lessees. Clause 130 permits lessors not to grant the occupier's request to consent regarding any relevant restriction, provided that the lessor does not act unreasonably. That point deals with the concern expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant). It seems an appropriate balance between the rights of lessors and lessees, but how can we determine whether the lessor is acting unreasonably? Subsection (5) addresses that question, but it does not actually specify who should make the determination. The assumption must be that the matter would be for the courts, even though the clause does not specify that. So the result may well be that it is necessary to undertake fairly protracted and perhaps expensive judicial proceedings to secure the lifting of a restriction.

Clause 130 therefore maintains a situation in which the onus is placed on the lessee or tenant to request the lessor's waiver of a restriction. However, it turns an absolute restriction into only a qualified one, the contractual effect of which is that if the lessor withholds his consent unreasonably, it puts him in breach of contract. That does not give the lessee carte blanche to proceed as though the restriction were not there. Instead, the lessee would need to take action against the lessor for breach of contract via judicial proceedings, which, as I have said, could well be protracted and costly. As a result, many lessees may decide that such action is too troublesome to pursue.

We therefore suggest that a simpler and less daunting process is needed, and amendment No. 108 would amend clause 130(5), so that the question whether or not something is unreasonable is determined by Ofcom in accordance with that subsection and, where Ofcom acts, proceedings should not need to take place in the courts. So if Ofcom decided that a lessor has unreasonably withheld his consent, the lessee may proceed as though the consent had been given and that would not put the lessee in breach of his contract with the lessor.

Amendment No. 108 would also amend clause 130(5) to introduce the element of choice of supplier in line with subsection (1). Without that amendment, the lessee could not be denied access to an electronic communications network or service, but he may have no choice at all as to his supplier.

Amendment No. 105 would simplify clause 130(4) in relation to subsection (2) and, in particular, tie subsection (4) to the concept of electronic communication matters. Amendment No. 106 is rather more limited, but it is designed for the same purpose. It would ensure that subsection (4) used the same wording as subsection (2), to which it relates. As I have said, subsection (4) refers to "an electronic communications service", whereas subsection (2) refers to "an electronic communications matter".

I understand that, in subsection (2), it is envisaged that restrictions may apply to a broader range of matters than the choice of service provider, which is dealt with in subsections (1) and (3). Electronics communications matters are defined in subsection (7) and include, for example, the installation of aerials or satellite dishes and associated cabling. In some cases, that will affect parts of a property that are not occupied by a lessee—an issue that is dealt with in subsection (4). So clause 130(4)(b) has to be amended to give practical effect to subsection (2).

Amendment No. 107 would simplify subsection (5), by deleting the duplicating references to electronic communications matters and electronic communications services in paragraph (a) and (b) and tying that subsection to the relevant paragraphs in subsections (1) and (2).

Amendments Nos. 103 and 104 remove the references to "a year or more" in subsection (2). Given that subsection (1) contains no equivalent minimum requirement on the length of the lease in respect of restrictions relating to services, it is difficult to understand why such a requirement should be imposed under subsection (2), which deals with electronic communications matters. It would be helpful if the Minister could explain the rationale for that discrepancy between the two subsections.

As I said at the start, restrictive convenants are often imposed in freehold agreements, and there is no justification in our view to treat them differently from leases. That is the purpose of new clause 12, which would introduce similar arrangements to those in clause 130 to prohibit restrictions in covenants affecting freehold property.

Finally, amendment No. 102 would place on the Secretary of State a requirement to consult those people who appear to be appropriate before clause 130 comes into force. Therefore, I hope that the Government will look kindly on those suggestions.

Mr. Timms: First, I wish to say that Government amendment No. 234 will amend the Bill to take account of Scots law, by adding the Scots law terminology in relation to the definition of a lease contained in clause 130.

4.45 pm

In relation to the other amendments tabled by the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale), I shall start by outlining briefly the purpose of the clause. Essentially, it re-enacts, with some updating and improvement, section 96 of the Telecommunications Act 1984, which was aimed at stopping landlords using restrictive terms in leases unreasonably in relation to the running of telecommunications systems or access to telecommunications services by lessees. That provision has now been extended to include restrictions that limit a lessee's choice of electronic communications service provider to their landlord or a person selected by their landlord. It is intended to follow, as far as possible, what is currently provided for under existing

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[Mr. Timms]

telecommunications licences, which will, of course, cease under the new general authorisation arrangements in the Bill.

In relation to tenants' access to electronic communications services, clause 130(4)(a) and (b) deal with restrictive provisions in leases or premises arrangements, as they apply to things done inside a building, or for purposes connected with a provision to the lessee of such services. It is drawn widely to make it unlikely that any kind of electronic communications matter of any relevance to the lessee could fail to be caught by one or other of those subsections. With the amendment to the definition of electronic communications apparatus that I propose to move today, that would include restrictions relating to the installation of apparatus such as satellite dishes when such installation was connected with the provision of an electronic communications service to a lessee. I believe that the clause in its current form is sufficient to ensure that tenants' right of access to electronic communications services, and their freedom of choice in relation to their supplier, is not unreasonably curtailed by their landlord.

Let me deal in a little more detail with the amendments one by one. Amendments Nos. 103 and 104, as the hon. Gentleman explained, would apply the clause to leases or premises-related agreements running for any period of time, as opposed to only those of a year or more. The restriction of a year or more follows section 96 of the Telecommunications Act 1984, which is a reasonable threshold at which the clause should bite. It is consistent with what was on the statute book previously. Under amendment No. 108, the key principle, as the hon. Gentleman explained, would become not just freedom to secure access but freedom of choice of supplier. I am not against the substance of that broader principle, but I am not certain that a change in the principle is needed. The removal of unnecessary restrictions on a lessee's choice of supplier is already adequately addressed in the clause. If I am missing something in that regard, I would be interested to see a little more detail on the issue. The two new subsections added by the rest of the amendment would make a significant change in assigning to Ofcom a role that would otherwise fall to the courts in considering the test of reasonableness. My view is that the courts should consider the test, and that that is not an appropriate role for Ofcom.

Amendment No. 109 directly addresses the concern raised by the hon. Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant). It would remove the power that Ofcom has under subsection (6) to exclude any kind of restrictive provision from the scope of the clause. That would be wrong for the reason that he suggested: there could be occasions when restrictions are reasonable, such as preserving the character of a conservation area. No previous experience exists of how these provisions will work, because the provision of the Telecommunications Act on which the proposal is based was never brought into force. Perhaps it would therefore be wise to retain the current flexibility to make exemptions, for the reason that the hon. Gentleman stated, and to see how that works.

Amendment No. 110, by deleting subsection (9), would apply the clause automatically to any lease or agreement granted or entered into before the commencement of the section, as well as to new ones. It is an important safeguard that Ofcom has the discretion to determine whether the section should have effect in relation to any pre-existing leases. I therefore suggest that the power needs to be retained.

I can understand why the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford has proposed new clause 12. It would extend clause 130, which applies to leasehold and similar tenures, to cover any restrictive covenants affecting freehold property. There would certainly be logic in extending the arrangements in that way, but we have to be cautious. Making changes in property law is a hazardous undertaking, affecting the rights of property owners—possibly significantly. Changes made with the best of intentions may have quite unintended consequences. I can understand the argument for making changes, but I am not sure how serious and pressing the issue is in practice. However, if we were to make changes, they would need to be carefully and fully considered and consulted on. The hon. Gentleman may accept that that would take significantly longer than the time that will be available to us during the passage of this Bill.

The hon. Gentleman raises interesting points and there is potential for extension in future. The best reassurance I can give him is that we will review this issue in our review of the working of the new provisions in the Bill.

Mr. Whittingdale: I am grateful to the Minister for his response. Of course, I accept that tinkering with property law should be approached with some trepidation—although clause 130 does, in fact, tinker with some property law. If there are problems to do with freeholds and restricted covenants, the Minister may reconsider the issue if we are able to supply specific instances. That also applies to some of the other points in our amendments to which the Minister responded.

I am disappointed that the Minister does not want to streamline the procedure by giving the responsibility to Ofcom rather than the courts. I can understand why he prefers the courts, but there is no doubt that that will act as a disincentive in some ways. Nevertheless, the Minister's remarks have been helpful in clarifying the Government's intentions. At this stage, we will not press this new clause and the other amendments in the group. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New Clause 19

NATIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEES

'(1) It shall be the duty of OFCOM to establish and maintain National Advisory Committees for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

(2) The Chairman and membership of these committees shall be appointed by the Secretary of State.

(3) In making such appointments in respect of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, the Secretary of State shall seek nomination from the Scottish Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales and the Northern Ireland Assembly respectively.

(4) The National Advisory Committees may consider and advise on all aspect of OFCOM's work in respect of their individual territories.

(5) The National Advisory committees may issue such recommendations to OFCOM or the Secretary of State with respect to their territories as they see fit.

(6) The National Advisory Committees shall produce an annual report on their activities.'.—*[Pete Wishart.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Pete Wishart (North Tayside): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

Amendment No. 206, in page 3, line 48 [Clause 3], at end insert

'including through representations made by the devolved administrations of Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland'.

Amendment No. 207, in page 4, line 24 [Clause 3], at end insert—

'(6) In performing their duties under this section OFCOM shall have a duty to consult with the National Assembly for Wales, the Scottish Parliament and the Northern Ireland Assembly over matters of specific concern to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.'.

Pete Wishart: We consider new clause 19 and amendments Nos. 206 and 207 to be modest and reasonable. They would ensure one thing—that the devolved institutions are fully engaged in the new environment that will be established once the Bill is enacted. We were disappointed that the devolved institutions were, in effect, locked out when the Bill was published. The new clause and the amendments seek to address that deficit, but they fall way short of our ideals and ambitions for broadcasting in Scotland—the full devolution of broadcasting powers to the Scottish Parliament, as initially envisaged in the Scotland Act 1998. Of course, we realise that we will not achieve that; what we want to achieve with the new clause and the amendments is that the distinct broadcasting and media environment in Scotland is addressed.

After all the consideration of this Bill—whether in discussions of the draft Bill, in pre-legislative scrutiny, or in the Standing Committee—this is our last opportunity to ensure that the devolved institutions have a voice in the new broadcasting regime. We were immensely disappointed that, when the Ofcom board was established, it contained no representatives from Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland. We could not secure a place at the top table. If broadcasting could not be devolved, we should have been given the second-best option: a place at the top table for all the nations of the United Kingdom.

The establishment of the new Ofcom board has resulted in a diminution in our influence in the broadcasting regime. Previously, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland had a place on the Independent Television Commission, just as we had a place on most of the regulatory bodies. We were confident of progress on this issue, because we had powerful and influential friends who supported us. First among them was Scotland's First Minister, Jack McConnell. He was rightly concerned that the "cultural and democratic dimension" of Scottish broadcasting be protected under the new regime. He was so concerned that he wrote twice to the Secretary of State for Scotland, but he did not even get a reply on either occasion. When he eventually received a reply, he was fobbed with the offer of places on the content board and the consumer panel, and with a vague pledge to establish Ofcom offices in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Like us, the First Minister agreed that Scottish listeners and viewers should be represented at the highest possible level to defend aspects that are peculiar to Scotland, such as devolved and regional television programmes, our national and regional news coverage as well as the Gaelic service and our dynamic media sector. He was convinced that they needed protecting, and rightly so. However, is it not a pity that his London-based colleagues could not be convinced? Is it not a pity that Scotland's champion in the Cabinet could not be convinced and was working not for the Scottish interests but against them? More than anything, that convinces us that the Scotland Office and the Secretary of State's post should be abolished and that the money secured should be put into front-line services in Scotland.

I read the transcript of the Committee proceedings, and I do not know whether it was better to be involved in the Committee or to read the report. However, I saw that six Labour Members were on the Committee and none of them supported the case for an enhanced role for Scotland in the new broadcasting environment. All of them supported a diminished role for Scotland.

Given that we shall experience a diminishment in our influence in the new regime, we tabled the new clause and amendments to try to get not the best solution for Scotland and not even the best solution for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom context; we seek a very poor third choice, which is simply that the devolved institutions have a role in the workings of Ofcom. Instead of being enabled to, Ofcom should be compelled to establish national advisory committees in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. We want better integration between Ofcom and the devolved institutions.

As a matter of good practice, Ofcom should consult the devolved bodies anyway, and I understand that David Currie has had communications with the devolved Assemblies. However, the Bill should make it clear that that should happen and Ofcom should receive direction on the type of consultation that it should have with the devolved Governments. Amendments Nos. 206 and 207 try to deal with that point.

Amendment No. 207 states:

"Ofcom shall have a duty to consult with the National Assembly for Wales, the Scottish Parliament and the Northern Ireland Assembly over matters of specific concern to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland."

What on earth is wrong with that? It is not as though we are asking the Scottish Parliament to compel Ofcom to do anything in particular. We do not even say that Ofcom must agree with the Scottish Parliament. The amendment merely asks for Ofcom to consult the Scottish Parliament. I do not see the problem with such a demand.

New clause 19(1) states:

"It shall be the duty of OFCOM to establish and maintain National Advisory Committees for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland."

The committees would assist Ofcom with its work in the devolved institutions. They would review its work and suggest ways forward in the nations of the United

[Pete Wishart]

Kingdom. We also ask Ofcom to produce an annual report for consideration by the devolved Governments. The committees would be independent of Government and would be appointed by the relevant Secretary of State. That would introduce an element of citizenship—an issue that my hon. Friend the Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) constantly raises—in Ofcom's working, and that must be welcome.

Our proposals are sensible and reasonable. As I have said, Scotland has a distinctive broadcasting environment, so it is sensible to have a distinct body that could communicate and advise about the distinct issues that will arise within the nations of the United Kingdom. The new clause and amendments simply seek to establish that Ofcom would operate under the Bill in ways that would replicate or extend the pattern of representation that we had in the past.

Mr. Simon Thomas: My hon. Friend has support from an unexpected quarter. I have with me the Welsh Assembly Government's current position on the Bill that was dated January 2003. The Welsh Assembly Government are, of course, a Labour-Liberal Democrat Assembly Government, but the document states:

> "Along with the Scottish and Northern Ireland Executives, the Assembly Government asked for a designated member for Wales on Ofcom's central board. This was rejected. The lack of a designated member for Wales effectively reduces Wales's voice at the UK level and denies Wales an all-important part in the strategic leadership role of the board."

Surely, if an Assembly Government asks for something from a Government in Westminster with the same political complexion, we should expect some leeway and an agreement to be hammered out. Why has that not happened?

Pete Wishart: I wish that I could answer my hon. Friend's question. Perhaps the Welsh Assembly Government were desperate to fall in line with what was requested from Scotland, which was almost identical. I understand that a similar request was made from Northern Ireland. What I do not understand—I share my hon. Friend's exasperation—is why it was rejected here. Why did Labour members of the Committee object? That baffles me entirely.

5 pm

Mr. Alan Reid (Argyll and Bute): I draw the attention of the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friend to the fact that the Governments in Scotland and Wales are of a different political complexion from the Government here. There are Liberal Democrat Members in those Governments, which is why they are better.

Pete Wishart: I wish that I could concur with the hon. Gentleman, but he will excuse me if I do not endorse that view.

All we are asking is to be given the level of representation that we have under the existing regime. These modest amendments attempt to address the rebalancing between the nations of the United Kingdom and the establishment of the Ofcom board. It is neither the best solution nor the second best—it is a poor third solution, but at least it would do something to ensure that the nations of the United Kingdom have a voice in the new communications regime.

John Robertson: I had intended not to take part in this debate, but merely to make interventions, but the hon. Member for North Tayside (Pete Wishart) threw out a line and I bit. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman is not being very friendly given that I am about to support much of what he said. The fact that there were so many Scottish Labour Members on the Committee meant that Scotland was well represented. The hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) will testify to the fact that we spoke together on many clauses. My hon. Friend the Member for Western Isles (Mr. MacDonald) and the hon. Member for Ceredigion spoke about Gaelic and Welsh language matters. It is therefore somewhat disingenuous to say that we did not do our bit for Scotland or, for that matter, Wales or Northern Ireland—I spoke about Northern Ireland myself.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): It was a pleasure to have the hon. Gentleman on the Committee, but it would be fair to say that altogether the six Scottish Members probably spoke for about one hundredth of the time. As the Committee had only 26 members, they should have spoken for 25 or 20 per cent. of the time.

John Robertson: After an intervention like that, it is probably not surprising that we did not speak for longer, unlike Conservative Front Benchers, who overdid it by repeatedly labouring the point on many occasions.

I accept the basic argument that it is important that the regions, not only Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales, are represented as nations. In Committee, we had the argument about regions and nations. It is important to have such recognition. Opposition Members may remember, however, that we also argued in Committee about the size of Ofcom. Ofcom is a completely different kind of body from previous bodies such as Oftel. If it represented everything in terms of regions and nations, as well as every single aspect of communications in the tier 1 hierarchy, its size would be unworkable, to say the least.

The hon. Member for North Tayside is right that David Currie said that he would look favourably upon Scotland and the other two nations when he considered the makeup of committees for the regions, and he has stated that he will consult the Scottish Executive on that matter. That answers some of the hon. Gentleman's questions. He will not get everything that he wants, but the Ofcom chairman is making the right noises. It is not fair to say that there is a diminished role for Scotland within Ofcom, given that five bodies have been incorporated into the one. I should like a Scot and someone from each region to serve on the board, but that cannot happen. It is not right to claim that because Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland are not represented, the system is unfair. We account for only one ninth of the population, so if there are fewer than nine people on the board, someone has to suffer.

Mr. Simon Thomas: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says. However, in the Standing Committee on the Office of Communications Act 2002, which established

Ofcom. I tabled an amendment to increase Ofcom's membership from nine to a figure to be determined by the Secretary of State. What does the hon. Gentleman have to say about the relationship between the devolved Administrations in Scotland and Wales and Whitehall? It is a much-vaunted relationship and we are told that a Labour Executive in both places leads to a better working relationship. So when those Executives say not once, not twice, but three times that they want such changes to be included in the framework of this Bill, does he not think that we, as UK MPs who legislate for the UK as a whole, should listen to them?

John Robertson: As I said, not everyone can be included on the Ofcom board. It is for Ofcom to decide whether to appoint a Scot, a Welshman or an Irishman. The board would have to be bigger if the devolved Parliaments were to be represented. We had a long discussion about Ofcom's size in Committee. It was originally going to have only three members. We cannot continue to increase it because it will become cumbersome and will not work. We want less regulation, not more. A bigger board would mean more people to put forward ideas and a greater number of arguments. That would stop it reaching a reasonable decision. A regional board could deal with local decisions. David Currie was happy to have that arrangement. In fact, he insisted that it was important and it is being considered.

Scotland has diverse communication and entertainment needs. It is important that we are represented at a certain level, but if a Scot, a Welshman and an Irishman serve on Ofcom, eight ninths of the country would be represented by only two people who could also be Scottish, Welsh or Irish. It is not the nationality that counts; what matters is that Ofcom works and the interests of Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and all the regions of England are well looked after. That is the most important thing.

Mr. Alan Reid: I support new clause 19 and amendments Nos. 206 and 207. It is correct that Ofcom is a UK-wide regulatory body, because it is self-evident that broadcasting and communication affects the whole of the UK. However, some aspects of broadcasting affect Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland differently from England, so it is also correct that the system of advisory bodies, consultation and representation proposed in the amendments should be included in the Bill. For example, the political and news coverage in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland is different because of the presence of the devolved Parliaments and Administrations in those countries. In addition, Scotland will have the Gaelic media service and Wales will have various Welsh language services. We need to take care of those different concerns in Scotland and Wales.

Rural issues affect Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland much more than they affect England. I accept that the difficulty of accessing broadband is also a problem for rural areas of England, but the low population density in Scotland means that the problem is more prominent there. The sparsity of population in the highlands makes it difficult to persuade BT to enable exchanges for broadband. The threat of the analogue switch-off affects far more people in the highlands of Scotland than elsewhere, as many villages in highland glens surrounded by high mountains rely on self-help relay schemes to receive television signals.

Because of those issues and similar ones, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have different needs, and I hope that the Government accept the amendments. I do not see how they can possibly oppose the system of advisory bodies, representations and consultations that they propose. Surely, that is good Government practice, so I hope that the Government will accept them.

Mr. Timms: In Committee, a similar amendment to new clause 19 was eloquently moved by the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) and debated, but he could not persuade us of its merits. My hon. Friend the Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting pointed out to hon. Members at the time that it is essential to bear in mind the fact that the vast majority of Ofcom's functions and responsibilities do not relate to devolved matters. I appreciate that there are areas of overlap with devolved matters, but measures are in place to ensure that the interests of the nations and regions are taken into account. There is therefore no need for committees such as those proposed in the new clause.

Mr. Simon Thomas: I should like to make two points. First, there is a material difference between these amendments and those that I tabled in Committee, where I proposed that those bodies review Ofcom's work. The Minister will note that my hon. Friend the Member for North Tayside (Pete Wishart) is not making such a proposal—the committees would be advisory and would not deal with statutory legislation.

Secondly, how would the Minister react if the Welsh and the Scottish Executives set up their own bodies, as they are perfectly entitled to do, to provide advice on Ofcom's work in Wales and Scotland? That would be

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. That is getting rather lengthy for an intervention. I think that the Minister has got the point.

Mr. Timms: The matter is entirely for those Executives. However, the House should acknowledge the fact that the Bill specifically addresses those concerns. The hon. Member for North Tayside (Pete Wishart) spoke about the devolved Administrations having a diminished role, but that is not the case at all, and is a mistaken characterisation of the Bill. We have included a specific provision, clause 1, which requires Ofcom to establish and maintain offices in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England. The hon. Gentleman referred to a vague provision; clearly, he has not read clause 1, which includes specific requirements. The content board and the consumer panel will have designated members who can represent the interests of people in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, as set out in clause 11. Ofcom has started to look for people to fill those positions.

My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Anniesland (John Robertson) referred to the fact that we are exploring consultative arrangements to support the national representatives on the content board and the consumer panel, and there will be discussions between officials, devolved Administrations and Ofcom.

[Mr. Timms]

Ofcom will also agree memorandums of understanding with the relevant Secretaries of State on issues such as consultation on national appointments; the holding of regular meetings with the devolved Administrations; and the production of an account in Ofcom's annual report of its activities in the nations. The Bill now fully addresses the concerns that the hon. Member for North Tayside and others have expressed in debate.

On amendment No. 206, Ofcom is already required under clause 331 to have regard to the different interests of the various parts of the UK in carrying out its duties. The clause ensures that Ofcom will bear those interests in mind throughout its deliberations. The Bill does not specify how those interests may be expressed, but it will be possible for the devolved Administrations, along with others, to make representations in their chosen form and for Ofcom to take them into account. There is no need to include in the Bill the specific provision proposed in amendment No. 206. Of course it is tempting to believe that Ofcom should be expanded to include a person to address each of the concerns specifically. In reality, Ofcom as a whole should address those concerns, and the Bill provides for that.

5.15 pm

Pete Wishart: There seems to be a general misunderstanding about what we are trying to secure through the amendments. We want to improve the relationship between the devolved institutions and the Ofcom board. We are not asking for anything more than that. It is reasonable to suggest that for good governance there should be a proper relationship between the devolved institutions and the Ofcom board, and I do not see why there should be any objection to that.

With regard to the number on the Ofcom board, I do not find the argument of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Anniesland (John Robertson) convincing. Perhaps we should further reduce the number of Scottish MPs—I am sure that that would go some way towards improving the representation of Scotland. It is a ridiculous argument that representation would be improved by making a smaller body that does not take account of the interests of the different nations and regions of the United Kingdom.

To suggest, as the Minister did, that we do not have a diminished role is utter nonsense. We had a place on the ITC board; we had a place on the other national regulatory boards; we do not have a place on the Ofcom board. That represents a diminution of our role and our influence in the new broadcasting regime. The Minister shakes his head, but how can he say—

Mr. Simon Thomas: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. When the Minister summed up his case, he said that the matters in question were not devolved, so why should there be representation for Wales? The hon. Member for North Tayside (Pete Wishart) pointed out that we had such representation. If it was okay pre-devolution for Wales and Scotland to be represented on those bodies, why is it not okay post-devolution?

Pete Wishart: As always, the hon. Gentleman makes a good point. The Minister will have to consider that. We had a place pre-devolution. Now, somehow, because we have a Parliament and national assemblies, our role is diminished. I do not understand the Minister's argument. All the amendments seek to do is establish a proper relationship between the devolved institutions and the Ofcom board. I am disappointed that the Minister cannot accept that, so unfortunately we shall press the matter to a Division.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 47, Noes 415.

Division No. 99] **[5:17 pm**

AYES

Allan, Richard
Barrett, John
Beith, rh A. J.
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Burnett, John
Burnham, Andy
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Caborn, rh Richard
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Chidgey, David
Cotter, Brian
Cummings, John
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Doughty, Sue
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Annabelle
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gidley, Sandra
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harvey, Nick
Heath, David
Hepburn, Stephen
Holmes, Paul
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lamb, Norman
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
McLoughlin, Patrick
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Moore, Michael
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
Öpik, Lembit
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Quinn, Lawrie
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thurso, John
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Viggers, Peter
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Weir, Michael
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Worthington, Tony
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Pete Wishart and
Mr. Simon Thomas

NOES

Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Amess, David
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Arbuthnot, rh James
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bacon, Richard
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Barnes, Harry
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Bellingham, Henry
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*

Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnett, John
Burnham, Andy
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Byers, rh Stephen
Cairns, David
Cameron, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Cash, William
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chaytor, David
Chope, Christopher
Clapham, Michael
Clappison, James
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Collins, Tim
Colman, Tony
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cousins, Jim
Cran, James *(Beverley)*
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Fox, Dr. Liam
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Francois, Mark
Gardiner, Barry
Garnier, Edward
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Gummer, rh John
Hague, rh William
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hammond, Philip
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Healey, John
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hendry, Charles
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, rh Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hunter, Andrew
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, rh Adam
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, rh Tessa
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kelly, Ruth *(Bolton W)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lammy, David
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leigh, Edward
Leslie, Christopher
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, rh Mrs Helen
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lilley, rh Peter
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Loughton, Tim
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIntosh, Miss Anne
McIsaac, Shona
Mackay, rh Andrew
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Malins, Humfrey
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Maples, John
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
Mercer, Patrick
Michael, rh Alun
Milburn, rh Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Morris, rh Estelle
Moss, Malcolm
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, rh Paul *(Torfaen)*
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Portillo, rh Michael
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken

Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Randall, John
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Redwood, rh John
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rooney, Terry
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruane, Chris
Ruffley, David
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sayeed, Jonathan
Sedgemore, Brian
Selous, Andrew
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Shepherd, Richard
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Soames, Nicholas
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh John
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stinchcombe, Paul
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Streeter, Gary
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Tredinnick, David
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynie, Andrew
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Walley, Ms Joan
Walter, Robert
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Whittingdale, John
Wicks, Malcolm
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Wilshire, David
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Gillian Merron and
Mr. Fraser Kemp

Question accordingly negatived.

New Clause 20

Duty Relating to Disabled Users

'It shall be the duty of OFCOM to encourage electronic communications network operators and terminal equipment manufacturers to cooperate in order to facilitate access by disabled users to electronic communications services.'.—*[Mr. Simon Thomas.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Simon Thomas: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

Amendment No. 209, in page 61, line 44 [Clause 61], at end insert—

> '(e) apparatus for endusers with disabilities, which is capable of being used in connection with an electronic communications service.'.

Amendment No. 70, in page 136, line 23 [Clause 149], at end insert—

> '(d) the need to ensure sufficient spectrum is available for the transmission of audiodescription, a textbased teletext service and other services designed to meet the needs of disabled people.'.

Amendment No. 71, in page 137, line 35 [Clause 151], at end insert—

> '(6) In exercising his powers under this section, the Secretary of State must have regard to the need to ensure sufficient spectrum is made available for the transmission of audiodescription, a textbased teletext service and other services designed to meet the needs of disabled people.'.

5.30 pm

Mr. Thomas: New clause 20 is intended to ensure the implementation of a key facet of the European Union framework directive—the importance of regulators encouraging network operators and terminal equipment manufacturers to co-operate in order to facilitate disabled users' access to electronic communication services. We need to bridge the gap so that disabled people are not denied access to mobile phones, digital radio or digital television simply because the equipment does not meet their needs.

Electronic networks and services that cannot be accessed because the equipment at the user end fails to meet the user's needs is a bit like a train that, although fully accessible, cannot be boarded by disabled people unless steps are provided at the station. Deaf and deaf-blind people cannot gain access to emergency services if no usable text terminal is available, or if the equipment is available but prohibitively expensive. All of us who use mobile phones regularly should consider how difficult it would be for us to use them, or to use digital radios, if we could not read the visual display and there was no audio alternative. It is now possible for visual displays to be read out in audio form by computer software, but we have not been able to extend that to more portable IT products such as mobile phones.

Amendment No. 209 is intended to give the Secretary of State power to consider terminal equipment for people with disabilities in determining the scope of universal service. It goes to the heart of the Bill. We have a universal service provision, and it is important for that to include such equipment. Ofcom would have a duty to promote inclusive design, and to take account of the small number of people who may not ever be reached by a completely liberalised telecommunications market because of their disabilities.

This is not the first time that we have considered these matters. Until the 1990s, BT was obliged to ensure that its telephones met the needs of, for instance, people with hearing impairments with inductive coupling. I understand that in Denmark text phones are readily available to deaf, deaf-blind and speech-impaired people through Danish Telecom at subsidised prices. Last month the Government acknowledged the importance of that principle when they backed the establishment of an advisory committee on disability access by the European Commission's communications committee. It will consider the whole issue of terminal equipment, along with other aspects of access for disabled people.

The new clause and the amendment tabled in my name are important, as are the amendments tabled by the hon. Member for North Devon (Nick Harvey). I am sure that he will wish to speak to those amendments. It is important, even at this fag-end of our discussion of the Bill, that we take the opportunity once again to ensure that the needs of disabled people are debated on the Floor of the House of Commons and that we properly consider the matter. I hope that the Minister's response will be as positive as possible, so that we do not need to divide the House on this issue, and so that we will know that the Government have listened to the lobbying by people with disabilities of us, as Members of Parliament and, more importantly, of the Minister as the representative of the Government here tonight.

Mr. Greenway: I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in support of new clause 20. The hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) will recall that, as early as our third sitting in Committee, I was the first to raise the concerns of the disabled, the blind, the partially sighted and the hard of hearing. The hon. Gentleman makes the point that I was trying to make in Committee, which is that it is all very well for the Government to rely on clause 3(3)(i), which places a duty on Ofcom to have regard to the needs of disabled persons and those on low incomes, but many elderly people—let alone those who are partially sighted—find telecommunications equipment extremely difficult to use. We had an interesting discussion in Committee about how we could better encourage equipment manufacturers to have regard to the needs of the disabled—and, especially, of the elderly—when designing items such as the zappers that help us to get the maximum use from our television sets, videos and so on.

The hon. Member for Ceredigion has hit on a good point in his amendment, in that it would require Ofcom merely

> "to encourage electronic communications network operators and terminal equipment manufacturers to co-operate".

There would be no intense obligation. Having discussed this issue on a number of occasions in Committee, and notwithstanding the direct reference to the needs of the disabled, the elderly and those on low incomes in the Bill, there remains the overwhelming sense that a little more needs to be done. For that reason, I hope that the Minister will be able to say something in his reply to the hon. Gentleman that will encourage us to feel that Ministers might decide, if not here today but in the other place, to go a little further. The organisations that represent the people about whom we are concerned feel that more needs to be done, and their voice needs to be heard. I hope that the spirit of what the hon. Gentleman has suggested will commend itself to the Minister.

Nick Harvey: I wish to speak to amendments Nos. 70 and 71. The future provision of audio-description, accessible teletext services and other services for disabled people will depend entirely on an adequate spectrum allocation. If that does not happen, any provisions that might be put into the Bill, now or subsequently, risk being made redundant simply by the lack of a joined-up spectrum policy. We are not talking about a vast amount of spectrum. Audio-description, for example, can be delivered very efficiently. It would not do to have the delivery of key services jeopardised by a lack of adequate foresight. The amendments would tackle this issue by ensuring that the Secretary of State and Ofcom had such issues at the forefront of their mind. Rejecting the amendments out of hand, however, would send the very negative signal to disabled people that their rights and needs were not being given adequate priority.

Michael Fabricant: I rise in broad support of all of the amendments, but I want briefly to raise one specific point. In the light of the comments of the hon. Member for North Devon (Nick Harvey), the Minister will be aware that clear audio can and ought to be provided, as long as sufficient spectrum is made available. However, we in the United Kingdom have a specific problem with our type of television equipment, which can make reception of cable and digital terrestrial clear audio impossible, partly because of the way in which Nicam is transmitted. Again, Ofcom could be made to knock heads together on this issue, and I hope that the Minister will be fairly active in that regard.

Mr. Timms: I welcome the close interest that has been taken in this Bill by people with disabilities and their representatives—the Royal National Institute of the Blind has been particularly active—through the recent lobby and through letters and calls to Members of the House, who have passed on those concerns to us. We are committed to an inclusive society in which everybody can play a part, and we have honoured that commitment in the Bill and in the framework that we are setting for Ofcom.

At the heart of everything that Ofcom will do are its general duties, which are set out in clause 3. Clause 3(3)(i) requires Ofcom to have regard to

> "the needs of persons with disabilities, of the elderly and of those on low incomes".

That central duty places the needs of people with disabilities at the heart of the Bill, and of Ofcom's responsibilities.

Mr. Simon Thomas: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Timms: I will give way very briefly.

Mr. Thomas: I am grateful to the Minister. He has just mentioned the current content of the Bill, but how will Government amendment No. 215—which we passed earlier, and which imposes on Ofcom a duty in terms of the community as a whole—impact on disabled people?

Mr. Timms: The real comfort for people with disabilities is the specific reference in clause 3(3)(i), rather than the changes that we discussed earlier.

The Bill provides for the Secretary of State to make an order setting out the universal services to be provided throughout the UK. We have already launched a

[Mr. Timms]

consultation on a draft order, which requires that all reasonable steps be taken to ensure that special measures are widely publicised, taking into consideration the needs of disabled users. We are extremely keen that people with sensory impairments be able to take advantage of all the benefits of digital television through improved access to services. The provision of subtitling, signing and audio description greatly enhances their opportunities, and allows them to benefit from the advances being made in television.

Clause 295 requires Ofcom to draw up, publish and maintain a code that gives guidance on the extent to which television services should promote the understanding and enjoyment of programmes by people who are deaf, hard of hearing, blind or partially sighted. The clause establishes targets for at least 90 per cent. of Channel 3 and Channel 4 programmes to be subtitled, for 80 per cent. of programmes on other channels to be subtitled, for 10 per cent. of programmes to be audio-described, and for 5 per cent. to be translated into sign language. I heard what the hon. Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) said about clear audio, which is also an important point.

On new clause 20, we have supported the work of the regulatory committee—set up under RATTE, the telecommunications terminal equipment directive—in investigating ways of improving access to equipment for the disabled, and we will continue to support that work. There could be further technical issues relating to network standards and specifications that would touch on Ofcom's responsibilities. Where such issues arise and, where Ofcom can play a useful role by encouraging such co-operation, I am confident that its existing duties will ensure that it does play such a role. I hope that hon. Members will gain some reassurance from that.

Amendment No. 209 seeks to add to the matters that could be covered by the Secretary of State's order under clause 61 by including apparatus for users with disabilities. However, adding terminal equipment to that list would be outside the scope of the universal services mandated by the directives. The Secretary of State would have no power to require equipment to be provided as part of those services, so we cannot accept that amendment.

Amendment No. 70 is not needed to achieve its desired effect. The mechanism to ensure that Ofcom will have regard to the needs of persons with disabilities—and in particular to the benefits that they will get from the provision of audio-description, signing, subtitling and text services—is already in place.

I have drawn the widespread concern about these matters to the attention of the chairman of Ofcom, the noble Lord Currie. He has emphasised to me how seriously Ofcom will treat these concerns, and that it will organise in order to deliver effectively on its very important responsibilities to disabled people. That intention is ground for considerable encouragement among the many people who have raised concerns about this issue in recent weeks.

5.45 pm

Mr. Simon Thomas: I welcome the Minister's comments about the present chair of Ofcom and the way in which that body has been charged with a social responsibility towards people with disabilities. Provision of the equipment is useful not only for disabled people but for a wide range of people, including the elderly, as the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) suggested. It is important that we put pressure on manufacturers, as new clause 20 suggested, to encourage them to improve their practice.

I am sure that the Minister will remember discussing similar amendments in Committee. We were told that a conference had been held, but nothing happened. Blame can be laid at all doors, but we must ensure that the matter does not stagnate for years simply because nothing has changed so far. The Minister has confirmed that Ofcom should continue to knock heads together to ensure that progress is made. The DTI and the DCMS do not always have their eye on the ball on this issue, but Ofcom can concentrate on it so that the needs of disabled people are considered at all times.

In the light of what the Minister has said, and the fact that we need to progress to another set of important amendments that would affect people with disabilities, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New Clause 22

LIMITS ON OWNERSHIP OF NATIONAL DAILY AND SUNDAY NEWSPAPERS

'.—(1) It shall be the duty of the Office of Fair Trading to exercise their powers under this section to secure that, within a period of one year after the coming into force of this section, no person runs more than one national daily newspaper and no person runs more than one national Sunday newspaper.

(2) In pursuance of the duty specified in subsection (1) the Office of Fair Trading may issue an enforcement order which may provide for—

(a) the division of any business (whether by the sale of any part of the undertaking or assets or otherwise);

(b) the division of any group of interconnected bodies corporate;

(3) The provisions of Part 3 of the Enterprise Act 2002 (c. 40) shall apply to an enforcement order under subsection (2) as if that order were an order under section 86 of that Act.

(4) In this section the expression "runs a newspaper" shall be construed in accordance with Part 1 of Schedule 2 to this Act.'.—*[Mr. Mullin.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

New clause 26—*Reviews and report by OFCOM on compliance with Press Complaints Commission Code of Practice in context of newspaper mergers*—

'After section 44A of the Enterprise Act 2002 (c. 40) (additional investigation and report by OFCOM: newspaper mergers) there shall be inserted—

"44B Further investigation and report by OFCOM on compliance with Press Complaints Commission Code of Practice

(1) This section applies where—

(a) the Secretary of State has given an intervention notice in relation to a relevant merger situation; and

(b) the intervention notice mentions any newspaper public interest consideration.

(2) OFCOM may, within the period required by the Secretary for a report under section 44A, give a report to the Secretary of State on the compliance of newspapers affected by the relevant merger situation with the Press Complaints Commission Code of Practice.

(3) Any report given under subsection (2) shall contain OFCOM's advice on the relevance of any information about the compliance of newspapers affected by the relevant merger situation with the Press Complaints Commission Code of Practice to any newspaper public interest considerations mentioned in the intervention notice concerned and which is or may be relevant to the Secretary of State's decision as to whether to make a reference under section 45.

(4) For the purposes of carrying out their functions under subsections (2) and (3), OFCOM shall, from time to time, review the operation of the Press Complaints Commission Code of Practice.

(5) In this section—

"the Press Complaints Commission" means the body first established in 1991, and

"the Code of Practice" means the Code of Practice issued by the Press Complaints Commission in December 1999 and any subsequent revision of that Code (including any such revision of the Code after the coming into force of this section).".'.

Amendment No. 163, in page 319, line 33, leave out Clause 365.

Amendment No. 73, in page 320, line 6, at end insert—

'(2C) The need for transparency in the capital and control structures of businesses that run a local or national newspaper is specified in this section.".'.

Amendment No. 164, in page 320, line 7, leave out Clause 366.

Amendment No. 74, in page 320, line 23, leave out 'or (2B)' and insert ', (2B) or (2C)'.

Amendment No. 165, in page 320, line 30, leave out Clause 367.

Amendment No. 166, in page 321, line 11, leave out Clause 368.

Government amendments Nos. 279 to 289.

Amendment No. 167, in page 322, line 40, leave out Clause 369.

Amendment No. 75, in page 322, line 46, leave out 'or (2B))' and insert ', (2B) or (2C))'.

Amendment No. 76, in page 323, line 8, leave out 'or (2B)' and insert ', (2B) or (2C)'.

Amendment No. 168, in page 323, line 11, leave out Clause 370.

Amendment No. 77, in page 323, line 21, leave out 'or (2B)' and insert ', (2B) or (2C)'.

Amendment No. 78, in page 323, line 29, leave out 'or (2B)' and insert ', (2B) or (2C)'.

Amendment No. 169, in page 323, line 38, leave out Clause 371.

Amendment No. 79, in page 324, line 7, leave out 'or (2B)' and insert ', (2B) or (2C)'.

Amendment No. 170, in page 324, line 17, leave out Clause 372.

Amendment No. 171, in page 325, line 30, leave out Clause 373.

Amendment No. 80, in page 325, line 34, leave out 'and (2B)' and insert 'to 2(C)'.

Amendment No. 81, in page 325, line 40, leave out 'and (2B)' and insert 'to 2(C)'.

Amendment No. 172, in page 326, line 7, leave out Clause 374.

Amendment No. 173, in page 326, line 25, leave out Clause 375.

Amendment No. 174, in page 327, line 1, leave out Clause 376.

Amendment No. 82, in page 327, line 7, leave out 'or (2B)' and insert ', (2B) or 2(C)'.

Amendment No. 175, in page 327, line 16, leave out Clause 377.

Amendment No. 83, in page 327, line 25, leave out 'or (2B)' and insert ', (2B) or 2(C)'.

Amendment No. 176, in page 328, line 3, leave out Clause 378.

Amendment No. 177, in page 328, line 12, leave out Clause 379.

Amendment No. 178, in page 473, line 1, leave out Schedule 16.

Government amendment No. 290.

Mr. Mullin: New clause 22 is a simple clause that invites the Office of Fair Trading to specify, within a year, that a national newspaper corporation or individual proprietor shall be permitted to own only one daily and one Sunday newspaper, and should put all other newspapers on the market. It should appeal to anyone who agrees with me that the free flow of information is the lifeblood of democracy.

Both the main political parties, when in government, have—I was going to say paid lip service to—expressed their support for the principle of pluralism and democracy. The Labour Government's consultation on media ownership stated in 2001:

> "We want a plurality of voices giving the citizen access to a variety of views."

It ruled out a dependence on the marketplace or competition to deliver that principle, continuing:

> Competition law is not designed to deliver diversity and plurality in the media."

Amen to that. The Conservative Government, in their consultation on media ownership in 1995, stated:

> "A free and diverse media are an indispensable part of the democratic process. Special media ownership rules are needed therefore to provide safeguards necessary to maintain diversity and plurality."

By some inexplicable oversight, the Bill contains nothing that gives expression to those lofty principles, at least as far as newspapers are concerned. The purpose of the new clause is to make good that omission. The proprietor most affected—although not the only one—would be Mr. Murdoch, who owns about a third of our national newspapers, as well as a satellite television company. He would be required, under new clause 22, to choose between *The Times* and *The Sun*, and between *The Sunday Times* and the *News of the World*. Everything else would have to go on the market.

[Mr. Mullin]

I do not want to exaggerate: the new clause would result in only a modest gain, given the long queue of unsavoury characters that forms whenever a national newspaper comes on the market, but it is right in principle. If we wanted to go further, we could lay down a few ground rules that applicants for the ownership of a national newspaper might have to live up to. The new clause is just a way to start the ball rolling. It has the merit of simplicity, and I commend it to the House.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush (Mr. Soley) will get a chance to say a few words about new clause 26, which I strongly support. It would require Ofcom to report on whether newspapers involved in mergers have complied with the Press Complaints Commission's code of conduct. Like my new clause, it is very modest. I know—because he tabled amendments to that effect that were not selected for debate—that my hon. Friend wanted to go a wee bit further, and require Ofcom to report from time to time on the newspaper industry's compliance with its own code of practice.

The House should be aware that the code of practice is the industry's own; it was not laid down by the House or someone else. That shows how very modest new clause 26 is. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House went a bit further the other day when he suggested that the industry's code of practice should be entrenched in law, with penalties for breach. I thought that that was very interesting. Given that it comes from such a senior member of the Government, I have no doubt that it will be taken very seriously.

However, all that is beyond the modest scope of new clause 26, which is in keeping with the modest ambitions possible in the short time available. I have no doubt that, if it ever came to pass, it would trigger all the usual hypocrisy about the threat to freedom of the press. As we all know, however, we do not have a free press in this country; it is owned by a handful of corporations and rich men. On the whole, they are shameless in their abuse of the power that they have.

I shall end what I have to say in respect of new clause 26 with something that I hope will help my hon. Friend the Minister. I have dug out of the excellent account by Mr. Max Hastings of his life and times at *The Daily Telegraph* a passage relating to the PCC. I know that the Minister will find it of interest. Mr. Hastings wrote that some British newspapers flourish on habitual indifference as to whether what they print might be true or not. He went on to name the editor of the *People* as one of the editors of the titles to which he was referring, I think because the latter was an adjudicator on the PCC. Mr. Hastings said that those editors were invited to take their turns as members of the PCC, but that the commission was diminished by the participation of journalists, who should be perceived as being beyond the pale. Perhaps he had in mind Mr. Paul Dacre, who plays a major part in the Harmsworth lie machine and who also sits on the PCC, impartially arbitrating on complaints.

Brian White: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Mullin: I hope that my hon. Friend will forgive me, but I want to allow my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush time to catch Mr. Deputy Speaker's eye.

Mr. Hastings goes on to say that the PCC will never deserve much regard from the public as long as it appears willing to justify obvious excesses by some of the newspapers which pay its bills. There we are. All that is grist to the mill of new clause 26. I support new clause 26, and I invite the House to support new clause 22 as well.

Mr. Whittingdale: In respect of new clause 22, I agree with the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) that we need plurality and diversity, but our newspaper industry already has those qualities. We certainly have diversity and plurality of voices: almost every conceivable opinion is represented somewhere in the British press.

The hon. Gentleman singled out Rupert Murdoch and News International. He is right: the new clause would require News International to divest itself of either *The Times* or *The Sun* and of either *The Sunday Times* or the *News of the World*. However, the effects would not be restricted to that. The proprietors of the *Daily Express* would have to choose between the *Daily Express* or the *Daily Star* and between the *Sunday Express* or the *Daily Star Sunday*. The proprietors of the *Daily Mirror* would have to divest themselves of either the *Sunday Mirror* or the *Sunday People*; and if the *Daily Record* is, as it believes, a daily newspaper, they would have to choose between the *Daily Mirror* and the *Daily Record*. It is arguable that the *Evening Standard* is a national newspaper, so the proprietors of the *Daily Mail* would have to divest themselves of one or the other.

That may all come as welcome news to the hon. Member for Sunderland, South, but I suspect that there would not be a vast queue of people who wanted to acquire newspapers and that his proposals would be likely to lead to fewer newspapers and thus less diversity and plurality—the very objectives that he wants to promote. If every proprietor were allowed to own only one paper, the result could be that they would all move roughly towards the sector where they would attract most readers and the hon. Gentleman might end up with a dozen or so versions of the *Daily Mail*. I cannot believe that he wants that.

The new clause tabled by the hon. Member for Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush (Mr. Soley) is clearly intended to bring the Press Complaints Commission under some form of statutory control. The hon. Gentleman has spoken of the desirability of that in the past. The new clause is clearly a backdoor method for giving Ofcom, which is a Government regulator, a say over the regulation of the press.

I do not defend the PCC in every instance. It has made mistakes, but I have always believed that self-regulation of the press is infinitely more desirable than Government intervention or control. The new clause would be a slippery slope; it would be a move towards Government intervention and statutory interference in the freedom of the press. I welcome the fact that the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry is now present because she made it clear in the newspapers this morning that she was opposed to statutory press regulation. She will thus be opposed to the proposals made by the hon. Member for Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush.

We remain concerned about provisions that give Ofcom some say over newspaper mergers. Our amendments would remove from Ofcom any advisory role to the Secretary of State over newspaper mergers. The Office of Fair Trading and the Competition Commission have had a long-standing role in advising the Secretary of State on whether mergers are likely to lead to a substantial lessening of competition. Their considerations cover, in large part, a number of the matters on which it is proposed that Ofcom would advise the Secretary of State. Involving Ofcom in that process is thus unnecessary. In fact, it is more than unnecessary; it is dangerous. Ofcom would be given the role of advising the Secretary of State on the accuracy of news presentation and freedom of expression. For the first time, a Government body would have a role in examining the content of newspapers.

I accept the fact that the Government have assured us that the provisions do not represent a first step towards Government intervention in the content of the press, but that is not how the industry views them. The issue has brought together interests right across the spectrum. Last week, Mr. Andrew Neil wrote:

> "Give Ofcom this power and it will be the end of British press freedom as we know it."

Although I do not always share Mr. Neil's rather colourful descriptions, and that statement goes a little further than I might want, he raises genuine concern that the measure would allow a Government body to begin to adjudicate on questions of newspaper content and editorial freedom of expression. That is a dangerous step, so we believe that it would be far better if the clauses on newspaper mergers were removed from the Bill. Ofcom is a body established to regulate the electronic communications industries—

It being Six o'clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER, *pursuant to order [10 February], put forthwith the Question already proposed from the Chair.*

Question accordingly negatived.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *then proceeded to put forthwith the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that hour.*

Amendment proposed: No. 163, in page 319, line 33, leave out Clause 365.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 123, Noes 335.

Division No. 100] **[6:01 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, rh James
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David

Burt, Alistair
Cameron, David
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James *(Beverley)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*

Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Fox, Dr. Liam
Francois, Mark
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hogg, rh Douglas
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howard, rh Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Leigh, Edward
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lilley, rh Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Mackay, rh Andrew
Malins, Humfrey
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
Mercer, Patrick
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*

Page, Richard
Paice, James
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Randall, John
Redwood, rh John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Waterson, Nigel
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Mark Hoban and Angela Watkinson

NOES

Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Baker, Norman
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, John
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, rh A. J.
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz

Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnett, John
Burnham, Andy
Burstow, Paul
Byers, rh Stephen
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David

Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Ewing, Annabelle
Farrelly, Paul
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Harvey, Nick
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, rh Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, rh Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jamieson, David
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
[illegible] Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
[illegible]l, rh Tessa
Jo[illegible], Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kelly, Ruth *(Bolton W)*
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lamb, Norman
Lammy, David
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leslie, Christopher
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, rh Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Julie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Öpik, Lembit
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Pugh, Dr. John
Purchase, Ken
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salmond, Alex
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stinchcombe, Paul
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Timms, Stephen
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watts, David
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Weir, Michael
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wishart, Pete
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Fraser Kemp and
Gillian Merron

Question accordingly negatived.

Remaining Government amendments agreed to.

Order for Third Reading read.—[Queen's Consent, on behalf of the Crown, and Prince of Wales's consent, on behalf of the Duchy of Cornwall, signified.]

Mr. Simon Thomas: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is written on the Order Paper, and you have just said, that the Queen's and the Prince of Wales's consent is to be signified on Third Reading. I am still finding my way round this place; I know that the Queen's consent is needed for primary legislation, but I did not know that the Prince of Wales's consent was needed, too. I would appreciate an explanation of why that is needed on Third Reading of this Bill.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Public Bill Office will be able to give the hon. Gentleman a definitive answer. I believe that it pertains to the Duchy of Cornwall.

6.15 pm

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Ms Patricia Hewitt): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third Time.

All of us in the House care passionately about the health of our country's communications and media. The media industry is unique. Its products, if we can call them that, tell the world who we are. Its outputs help to shape our culture, our identity and our values. It is vital to our democracy and the preservation of a free society.

However, the communications and media sector is also changing extraordinarily fast. It took 38 years for radio to reach just 50 million people; it took 13 years for television to reach the same number; it took just five years for the internet to get to that stage. No doubt, it will be even less for the next development. As technology advances, we are all bombarded with smarter, faster ways of keeping in touch and accessing services and content. The combination of creativity, innovation, technology and entrepreneurial flair is a driving force in our economy. The creative economy and the creative industries are sectors in which the United Kingdom is in the lead. We are determined to keep it that way.

This is a strong Bill. It has undergone extensive consultation and scrutiny and I have been greatly encouraged by the consensus that exists on so much of what it proposes. The Joint Committee chaired by Lord Puttnam, which reported last summer, made an excellent contribution to our work. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport and I said when the report was published, the Committee took a good Bill and made it better. The scrutiny and debate that we have had in the House have made it better still.

Mr. Mullin: With all due respect to my right hon. Friend, does she not think that it is a rather large omission that at no stage in Committee or on Report has there been any discussion of the ownership changes that the Bill will make to ITV? Furthermore, there has been only the barest minimum of discussion on the changes to Channel Five. Are they not major omissions?

Ms Hewitt: My hon. Friend makes a very important point. That very issue was set to be debated in Committee, but I regret to say that Liberal Democrat Members did not get up in time. They were not there in Committee first thing in the morning to move their amendments. Last week, we had more than five hours for the first day of Report, but the amendments on that subject were not reached, simply because other Opposition Members chose—as was their prerogative—to use the time to debate the BBC.

As my hon. Friend is aware, there have also been extensive opportunities outside the House—in numerous conferences in which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport and I have taken part—for all the issues to be aired. It is a pity that they were not dealt with in Committee or on Report, but that was not my choice.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): Although I recognise all the reasons that my right hon. Friend has outlined, will she accept, as I have said on a previous occasion, that there is anxiety among Labour Members—I do not know how many—about the issue raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin)? That anxiety will not go away. Although there may have been plenty of debate and discussion outside, it does not alter the fact that it should have taken place here in the Chamber of the House of Commons.

Ms Hewitt: As I have said, Opposition Members were between them responsible for the fact that the issue was not debated in the Chamber. I have no doubt at all that it will be debated extensively in another place. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport and I have said on numerous occasions, I also have no doubt that it will be debated inside and outside the House. By opening our media sector further to foreign investment, we will strengthen it. I am very much bearing in mind the fact that, among other things, we would not have Classic FM in this country were it not for the foreign investment that was made available when the City of London and other investors would not provide it.

I am grateful for the constructive approach that Opposition Members have generally taken. I hope that for the most part they feel in their turn that the Government have listened to their views and have taken action on many of the issues that they raised.

The Bill is founded on solid principles. It is about ensuring quality in broadcasting and safeguarding the wider interests of the whole community at a time when new technology is changing very fast. It is about delivering real benefits to consumers through competition and safeguarding their interests through an independent panel to advise Ofcom. And, of course, it is about developing a dynamic, competitive communications sector in which our businesses flourish.

The Bill contains provisions over which, as my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) reminded us, there has been disagreement and about which there will be further debate. We shall continue to listen to that debate and to welcome improvements.

Mr. Mullin: May I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to a paper by Professor Michael Tracey that was prepared for the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust?

[Mr. Mullin]

Michael Tracey is an American professor at the University of Colorado who, having studied what has happened to American television since the market was allowed to let rip under Ronald Reagan, describes what we are proposing as

"as wrong-headed as it's possible to be without being totally insane".

Ms Hewitt: I have not had the pleasure of reading that paper; I look forward to receiving it from my hon. Friend. What we are doing is opening our market to greater investment, but at the same time, and based on the review of content that we commissioned, strengthening content regulation. I believe that we will have the best of both worlds, with both programme quality and investment increasing.

Let me mention some of the improvements that we have made to the Bill during its passage through this House. Ofcom's general duties are crucial in determining how it will operate, so they need to be right. I am pleased that we have tabled and agreed amendments that give greater certainty and clarity to Ofcom and its stakeholders and make it clear that Ofcom has a duty to further the interests of the wider community, as well as those of consumers. In response to the Independent Television Commission's review of the programme supply market, we have toughened up the powers that we had already proposed for Ofcom on content regulation, and we have put in place production quotas to ensure that we keep the vitality of our independent and our regional production industry.

We have tightened the definition of television licensable content so that it only covers, and can only cover, services that consist of radio and television programmes that are available for reception by the general public—in other words, so-called push technology. In that way, we exclude the internet—a point about which several hon. Members were particularly concerned, because it is pull, rather than push, technology. We also exclude the press, because obviously newspapers are not television or radio.

We are keen to go on listening and to continue to improve the Bill in line with the core principles that my right hon. Friend and I have set out, but there are some areas where we believe that the Bill is already right.

Mr. Robathan: Perfect?

Ms Hewitt: Perfectly formed, as the hon. Gentleman suggests.

Mr. Robathan: The Secretary of State may recall—I am not sure whether she was here at the time—that on Second Reading, when we were told that the Bill was already perfect, I offered hon. Members a wager that at least 100 amendments would be tabled. *[Interruption.]* I am told that there have been more than 200. Indeed, I was poised to speak on 81 before the guillotine came down—those are 81 Government amendments that have not even been discussed. *[Interruption.]*

Ms Hewitt: I am being reminded that the hon. Gentleman is not a licensed bookie, so he is treading in dangerous waters. I am sure that he would not want to criticise us for taking serious account of comments that have been made by Conservative Members and by the Joint Committee. We have been happy to table amendments to ensure that improvements are made, but it is clearly impossible to propose changes to the merger regime as it affects newspapers without attracting not only criticism, but extraordinary accusations of censorship and control freakery. We have had overblown remarks from some commentators and suggestions that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport and I are divided—a bad cop, good cop act. That is rubbish. My right hon. Friend and I, and our ministerial and official colleagues, have been at one throughout our deliberations on the Bill. Indeed, it is the product of a unique piece of team work between two Departments. I welcome that and we are both proud of it. Unfortunately, accusations of censorship and control freakery will always gain column space. So let me set the record straight.

My right hon. Friend and I have taken every opportunity, publicly and privately, to give assurances that nothing in the Bill is designed to allow censorship of the press or could allow censorship of the press by the front or back door. Nothing in the Bill would extend content regulation to newspapers. On the contrary, and in distinction to some of my hon. Friends, we are committed to the self-regulation of the press by the Press Complaints Commission.

Mr. Clive Soley (Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush): I urge my right hon. Friend not to spend too long on that subject because she has no one to argue against. The vast majority of people accept that no one is attempting to suppress the press. The only exception to that is the press themselves. Let us not spend too much time on that, because we might give credence to their argument.

Ms Hewitt: My hon. Friend makes an important point, but given the misinformation that has been circulating in authoritative sections of the press, it is worth spelling out our case again.

The clauses on newspaper mergers will protect the public interest when newspaper titles change hands. There is nothing new in that. Ministers have been taking decisions on newspaper mergers for more than 30 years. The only role for Ofcom will be to give open and honest advice to help Ministers make those decisions. Ofcom itself will not make any of the decisions. Similarly, there has been considerable debate in the House, most notably last week, on the BBC. Again, our position on the BBC within Ofcom is equally clear. The BBC is a charter body. It has a special relationship with Parliament because of the licence fee. Our policy in the Bill is properly balanced. It ensures that the BBC maintains its independence and unique relationship with Parliament while bringing it within the overall regulatory structure and ensuring that it fulfils its responsibilities as the major public service broadcaster in our country.

For many hon. Members, the Bill is like an old friend, but we should not allow our familiarity with it to detract from the impact that it will have on the sector and, for reasons that we all understand, our public and democratic life. In Ofcom we have created a new organisation with a new vision and remit that will ensure that the digital future in the extraordinarily fast-changing world of communications and media brings benefits to us all as citizens, consumers and members of the business community. The Bill is in excellent shape and I commend it to the House.

6.29 pm

Mr. Yeo: May I begin by welcoming the Secretary of State to the Chamber? I think that it is the first time that we have enticed her to the House during the lengthy proceedings on the Bill and, indeed, the preceding paving Bill. I am not sure of the reason for her coyness, unless there was a wafer-thin difference between her and her right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport which she is now eager to deny. I had hoped for an earlier opportunity to have a debate with the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, and I regret that, even at this late stage, she could not fill many of the gaps that arose in our proceedings.

I shall reiterate our procedural concerns. The Bill is wide-ranging and comprehensive, and contains about 400 clauses. [HON. MEMBERS: "More now."] That is true—the Bill has considerably more clauses now than it did before Second Reading. The Secretary of State said that scrutiny has made a strong Bill better—a sentiment that would make a strong man weep. The Government have prevented much scrutiny from taking place, as the timetable for consideration of the Bill was grossly inadequate. More than a quarter of the clauses were not debated at all in Committee. At a time when the effectiveness of parliamentary scrutiny is frequently criticised for its inadequacy, it is extremely unsatisfactory that much of the Bill has not been properly examined in the House. I hope that the business managers will take note when timetables for future Bills are considered.

Mr. Mullin: We could have got on better if the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues had not frittered away several hours the other day talking about the BBC and matters that the Bill does not touch on.

Mr. Yeo: That intervention ill behoves the hon. Gentleman, who voted for the programme motion in the House.

Mr. Mullin: But we could have made better use of the time.

Mr. Yeo: On the contrary. I shall come to the BBC in a moment, but there can be few more important issues to debate in relation to the Bill than one to which the Opposition responsibly devoted a significant amount of time.

I hope that there will be an opportunity in another place to examine some of the 100 or so clauses that were untouched in the Commons, including clauses on nominated news providers and the content of licensed providers. Regrettably, the issue of foreign ownership was not considered in Committee, but we broadly support the Government's position, which is why we did not consider it a priority to initiate such a debate. However, the Secretary of State rightly pointed out that the inattention of Liberal Democrat Members prevented those provisions from being scrutinised, and I am sure that that will be noted in constituencies that the Liberal Democrats will be struggling in two years' time to defend. This is an issue that attracts much attention outside the House, and it would have been interesting to hear the debate had it occurred. The extent to which the Bill as originally presented needed improvement is reflected in the colossal number of amendments tabled by the Government. I dare say that that saga has not ended, and that more amendments will be tabled in another place.

Turning to the substance of the Bill, we have supported its provisions throughout. We believe that it is right to establish a new regulator, Ofcom, and support the general liberalisation of the communications and media industries. We certainly do not underestimate the scale of the challenge facing Ofcom. It must maintain a light touch; it must be accountable and transparent; it needs to be flexible in responding to a rapidly changing market, as the Secretary of State said; and it must not act as a gold-plater of European Union directives. The media and communications industries represent two of the greatest businesses of the 21st century, and are businesses in which Britain has many natural advantages, including a good record of innovation; a large pool of entrepreneurial and creative talent; the English language; a country in which people like to live and work—

Mr. Bryant: The BBC.

Mr. Yeo: The hon. Gentleman is a former BBC employee, so it is not surprising that he is pushing its interests. He does so on many occasions in the House.

Mr. Robathan: Pension?

Mr. Yeo: My hon. Friend has raised the issue of the BBC pension fund, and I hope that if he contributes to the debate later he will go into more detail, as he is clearly an authority on the subject. I have not heard that the BBC pension fund has closed to new entrants, or attempted to revise benefits for existing members, but I may have missed that in the papers.

In this country, we could and should excel in the media and communications industries, but if we are to do so, Ofcom must not over-regulate. There remain a couple of issues of concern. We support the moves that the Government have made to relax media ownership rules, though we believe that Ministers should be bolder and sweep away all the remaining vestiges of the special restrictive regime that has hitherto applied to the industry. The existing competition laws are sufficient to address any concerns that may arise and to protect any interests that need to be looked after. I remind the House that when the Broadcasting Act 1996 was debated, Labour Members on the then Opposition Benches supported my hon. Friend the Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale) in his efforts to remove unnecessary restrictions on cross-media ownership. What a pity that, so far from seeing the light in the intervening six years, the blinkers are on and hon. Members are reverting to a more traditional Labour position.

The relaxation of the ownership rules should extend to ITN, so that ITV could if it wished own its own news provider, just as the BBC and Sky do. I favour a

[Mr. Yeo]

situation where there are three competing news providers in the market. I recognise that ITN has regional strengths to which Sky does not aspire, and I hope all three organisations will flourish, but I do not believe that special controls will help that. Indeed, special ownership controls could jeopardise that desirable objective.

I turn briefly to the issue of newspapers, which was covered so eloquently and forcefully by my hon. Friend the Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford in the previous debate. I reiterate that we do not believe there is a role for Ofcom in relation to newspaper mergers. We share many of the concerns expressed by the newspaper industry and we hope that those will be considered carefully in another place.

Another substantial flaw in the Bill is that, despite extensive argument, the Government remain obdurate in their attitude as regards the BBC. There is no justification for separating the BBC from the rest of the industry, as the Bill continues to do. To say that is not to criticise the BBC governors, who performed a unique and valuable role in the past. It is a recognition of the change in the industry. The BBC governors should still have a role in the future, but it is a new and different one, analogous in some respects to the role—

Mr. Bryant: If the hon. Gentleman consulted some of his colleagues, he might find that those who have worked for the BBC in the past did not necessarily always argue the BBC's cause in Committee. Does he accept that the governors have a considerable way to go to prove their independence, but that the best way of conducting that debate is through the process of charter renewal, not in the context of the Bill?

Mr. Yeo: I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman. I do not impugn the independence of everyone who previously worked for the BBC—only a proportion of them. On the charter, it would be wrong to wait until charter renewal and the debate that is just starting up to decide the matter—wrong because we are unlikely to have the chance of primary legislation on this scale in the House within that period. I understand why people may think that the concern overlaps with the debate about charter renewal, the way to deal with it is to introduce provisions into the Bill that come into force at the time of the new BBC charter. That would be a simple solution that would command widespread support.

The crucial need is to bring the BBC into line with other broadcasting organisations with effect from the earliest possible date and certainly not later than the date of the new charter. That would leave the BBC governors with an important role, in some respects analogous to that performed by non-executive directors at Channel 4.

The success of Ofcom and the effectiveness of the Bill will be judged by whether the Government's claim to favour a light regulatory touch is borne out in practice. Competition between providers supplying well-informed consumers with goods and services in a liberalised market is the best form of regulation. I hope that in 10 years' time, Ofcom will be a smaller body than it will be when the Bill becomes law. In this context, the example of another super-regulator, the Financial Services Authority, is not entirely encouraging.

New technology, if applied properly, can empower consumers. It can promote markets where none have previously existed. Digital switchover makes it possible for television to be priced differently in the 21st century than hitherto. In charting a course for the future of the industry, bearing in mind that Parliament is unlikely to have the chance to legislate again on this scale in the near future, we must not be prisoners of the past. Almost two decades have passed since the Peacock report held out the eventual prospect of progress towards a full broadcasting market. I hope that nothing that Ofcom does will impede the progress that could now be made.

Another criterion for assessing the success of the new regulator will be whether the way in which consumers access television 10 years from now is more like what occurs in the marketplace that exists for books or magazines—a marketplace in which viewers pay for what they watch when they want to watch it and not for much else. I hope that Ofcom will facilitate a move away from a present position, in which all television viewers pay a highly regressive tax to a single and very privileged broadcaster, regardless of whether they consume any of that broadcaster's output.

In conclusion, the Opposition still have significant reservations about aspects of the Bill. We hope that further improvements will be made in another place. In particular, I look forward to the Government accepting proposals to allow the National Audit Office immediate opportunities to scrutinise the BBC. I hope that that will not be long delayed. However, we have no substantial quarrel with the main principles of the Bill and will continue to support it on Third Reading, as we did on Second Reading.

6.41 pm

Nick Harvey: The Government are right to say that the Bill has improved during its long gestation in terms of public consultation and the scrutiny that it received in the House both last summer through the Joint Committee and in the Standing Committee proceedings that we have just completed. Nevertheless, nobody should take the view that the Bill is perfect. Parliament should be realistic about how near to perfection we can make a Bill that deals with a sector like this.

The genesis of the Bill was the speed with which technologies in the various markets that the new regime will cover were converging. Of course, since that time, there has been a significant change in market conditions and some of the progress towards technological advances that was occurring has slowed considerably. The climate now is very different from the climate a relatively small number of years ago. However, we do not know at what speed things will change, including in other markets elsewhere in the world, which will also impact on developments here in the UK.

When we started out on the paving Bill, my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) asked on Second Reading what such regulation of the sector was for and why Ofcom would carry out its role. The amendment to which the Government agreed today that put into Ofcom's remit consideration of the wider public interest rather than the more narrow focus on consumer interest provided through competition changes significantly the answer to the question that he asked on that occasion. I believe that Ofcom will be significantly better equipped to set about defending the interests of the public as a whole as a result of that amendment.

It will not be Ofcom that determines the speed with which broadband rolls out—and neither will it be the Government or the House. It will largely be the market that will deliver on the aspirations, which I think are probably shared across the House, for broadband technologies to spread as quickly as possible. Certainly, hon. Members in all parts of the House have spoken up on behalf of rural areas and other areas that are not enticing economic prospects for those who are rolling out the technology. It is to be hoped that, during the passage of the Bill, we have given that development the best chance and the fairest wind that we can. How Ofcom now takes on its role will determine how successful that is.

Ofcom will have a very demanding task—of that there is no doubt. The initial task of bringing together the five regulators will be a challenging one, but the real work will begin once that initial process of absorption has taken place. A great deal is expected of Ofcom and it will be doing its work with relatively new legislation. That is why it may be premature for the Government to have organised or facilitated at the same time a revolution in the ownership regulations that would more naturally have followed on the occasion of the first three-year review. Nevertheless, it seems that the Government are determined to head down that path.

There are still particular aspects that I hope will be examined in another place, because although we have made significant progress in improving the Bill, I firmly believe that we could make further improvements. I especially hope that the ITN question, which the Conservative spokesman has just touched on, will be addressed. ITN is hampered by the regime in which it operates, and it needs to be set free as a matter of certainty from the shackles that prevent it from operating as effectively as it could if we are to safeguard the existence of three competitive news networks.

I hope that we have the rules for the future of commercial radio about right, although I am not entirely confident of that. A lot of ground has been given to the commercial radio lobby, which protested too much when seeking more ground than it has been given. I also hope that the safeguards that have been built into the legislation prove adequate to prevent local radio from being sacrificed so that it becomes proxy national radio, as we have seen in other countries.

We must hope that Ofcom uses the considerable powers that we are putting at its disposal and that it shows more relish for picking them up and applying them than did some of its predecessor bodies. Expecting the legislation to be perfect it is not a reasonable aspirational benchmark to set ourselves, but its slow evolution means that it is as good as we are likely to get. I hope that the House of Lords goes over those crucial issues and puts right a few anomalies that remain. That having been said, the Bill is necessary and worthwhile, so we shall support it on Third Reading.

6.46 pm

Mr. Mole: I am pleased to participate in the debate, even though perhaps I come late to it, although not at the fag end, as the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) said. I declare my interest: before entering Parliament, I worked for BT for 17 years and I am a member of Connect, the union for professionals in communications. I add my voice to those who have been struggling to make it clear that the Bill is about more than just broadcast and print media issues. Indeed, over time, those issues will become less important.

Although the Bill talks a good talk about convergence of different strands of electronic communication, it addresses the broadcast and telecommunications streams separately. It is, of course, welcome that the Bill enacts the operation of Ofcom—a regulator that will span the whole sector—as that will allow markets to be regulated with a common approach as technologies continue to converge. An example might be appropriate.

For many years, I have enjoyed the occasional bit of jazz. Jazz FM is an excellent easy-listening jazz station that operates in the London area. However, I can now receive it at home not just through conventional FM radio broadcasts, but on the Freeview digital television platform and by webcast over a broadband ADSL telecommunications network. Better than that, I can access 91 different jazz radio stations via the internet. Indeed, via that route I can access 2,000 radio stations across all genres. The critical issue here is that different elements of the regulation regimes, and none, will apply to all three delivery routes.

Therein lies the dilemma for the Government. As the technology increasingly shifts from push to pull—I welcome the Secretary of State's comments, although I struggle entirely to understand how some of those separations can be maintained into the future—individual consumer choice grows and content regulation becomes less appropriate. Why should programming be regulated across the watershed if it is available by video on demand or, indeed, at the video rental shop, 24 hours a day? As the Government seek to negotiate with the industry on self-regulation of video on demand, I just observe that the comparative economic model for video on demand is not broadcast TV, but Blockbuster or similar video retailers.

Let us suppose that I am watching interactive television involving two media. Some content may be received via broadcast digital television, and some via a telecommunications network. Which regulation will apply? The dividing lines become increasingly blurred. What can be guaranteed is that many of the problems that must be addressed by the Bill, and indeed by Ofcom, have not yet been thought of. It would therefore be entirely inappropriate for the Bill to be too prescriptive.

The examples I have given tell us something about the pace of change in these markets, and should also tell us something about the framework that the Bill seeks to operate. If our economy is to benefit from the potential that technological development can offer, regulation must be as light as possible. I should like to know whether the Government have accepted the Joint Committee's view that a "light touch" approach should not be commended to Ofcom. I am a natural sceptic when it comes to the effectiveness and accountability of regulators, and the history of Oftel's operation features, in many instances, an attempt to micro-manage

[Mr. Mole]

individual businesses rather than providing a comprehensive framework offering a level playing field to all operators.

In the past I have been concerned about the regulator's intervention in telephone apparatus supply, and I fear that the new framework may feature the same style. Given that such apparatus has been available in every high-street store for many years, and given that safety and connection standards issues are covered by statutory instruments, what interest should the regulator take? That looks like the heavy hand rather than the light touch. If the light touch is not possible, however, proportional intervention should be the order of the day.

I welcome the Government's wish to see the open and transparent operation of Ofcom, and, like my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Anniesland (John Robertson), I welcomed David Currie's appearance at the meeting of the all-party parliamentary group on telecommunications the week before last. I hope that the Government will listen to those who suggest that the "significant market provider" approach could be further enhanced. Given the speed at which products and services are developing, Ofcom should be required to review that approach at least once every two years. There should be standards of promptness, requiring the regulator to ensure that reviews and investigations do not unnecessarily delay the introduction of new services.

The regulator must also be robust in dealing with spurious allegations from competing service suppliers. All too frequently, Oftel allowed itself to become embroiled in litigious warfare between operators. That did nothing more than delay the conferring of benefits to consumers in the form of innovations and new service developments.

This is a difficult area in which to regulate—and, because of its global nature, the internet will remain impossible to regulate. The Government have done well to consult widely and to tackle the issues realistically, and, despite my fear that the pace of change may return us to them sooner rather than later, I commend the Bill.

6.53 pm

Michael Fabricant: They say that familiarity breeds contempt, but I cannot say that I have contempt for this Bill, although we all served three months in Committee, some of us served about a month on the Committee dealing with the paving Bill, and still others served on the Committee dealing with the scrutiny Bill—although I do not have that claim to fame. It cannot be said that the Bill has not received a huge amount of consideration.

Along with my Front-Bench colleagues, I support a Bill that was driven strongly by changes in technology. Digital developments have brought about the convergence of technologies, and it is right for the various institutions that currently govern broadcasting and other bodies to converge into one overriding body, the Office of Communications.

Nevertheless, I have a few caveats. Members will know, because I have reminded them on several occasions, that I used to work in broadcasting, mostly radio, before I came here. When I first applied for a licence—in Brighton, back in the 1980s—it became apparent—*[Interruption.]* Some Members heard this during the Committee stage, but it is worth repeating. *[Interruption.]* I do not want to delay matters because other hon. Members want to speak. It is worth repeating that radio took a minor role in the old Independent Broadcasting Authority, and it is extremely important that—as when the IBA was broken up and become the Independent Television Commission and the Radio Authority—radio does not now become a small part of the Office of Communications. It is important that radio should be allowed to thrive.

My second point, which has been discussed at great length and is very important, relates to the BBC. The Government like to claim that they are at the heart of Europe and that the European Union always listens to Governments, yet, time and again, Chirac and Schröder seem to be putting up two metaphorical fingers to the Prime Minister. A similar degree of negotiating skill seems to be apparent when it comes to the Government negotiating with the BBC because, once again, the BBC has got its way. It will not fall under the auspices of the Office of Communications, and I think that that is wrong. Even though the BBC often makes the right judgment when people complain about it, it is right and proper that it should not be seen as its own judge and jury. As I said in Committee—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I must say to the hon. Gentleman that such remarks were probably better made in Committee. The new clauses concerning the BBC have not been added to the Bill, and this is a Third Reading debate in which we should concentrate on what is in the Bill.

Michael Fabricant: The Office of Communications will have responsibility for the BBC under tiers 1 and 2. In that respect, the BBC will have protection but, oh dear, what a shame that it will not have protection under tier 3!

The Secretary of State spoke about the encouragement of the independent broadcast sector, and she was absolutely right to do so because there is still a quota in BBC television for independent production. Sadly, however, BBC radio will not be controlled by such a quota. That is an anomaly, and I hope that it will be addressed when the Bill goes to another place.

The issue of disabilities has been raised by hon. Members on both sides of the House. The Secretary of State herself said that she wished to see people with disabilities involved in the broadcast media, both as broadcasters and—if they can be—as listeners and viewers of radio and television stations. The Secretary of State was right to point that out, but there is more to be done in that area. I would like to commend the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas), who has consistently pressed this point, both on the Office of Communications Bill and the paving Bill. The Government should take on board more of those arguments and include them when the Bill goes to another place.

John Robertson: Just to help the hon. Gentleman get to the end of his speech, would he agree that one thing that is missing from the Bill is music? I have spoken about this on many occasions, and I know that the matter will be dear to his heart. Does he agree that it should be considered in another place and that we should get the word "music" into the Bill?

Michael Fabricant: I would like to agree with the hon. Gentleman but I would be ruled out of order. I cannot talk about music on Third Reading because it is not in the Bill.

This is an important Bill, and it will be good for the future of the United Kingdom. However, it is not a perfect Bill. There is still room for improvement, and I hope that such improvement—including full control of the BBC—will occur when it goes to the other place.

6.59 pm

Mr. Soley: We have little time left on this Bill, but I wanted to speak now, if I may. One of the major things missing from it—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I feel that I must almost apologise to the hon. Gentleman.

It being Seven o' Clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER, *put the Question, pursuant to Order [10 February].*

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 119(9)(European Standing Committees),

PROTECTING THE FINANCIAL INTERESTS OF THE COMMUNITIES

That this House takes note of European Union Documents No. OJ C295, Vol. 45, European Court of Auditors' 2001 Annual Report, and No. 10625/1/02, the Commission's 2001 Annual Report on protecting the financial interests of the Communities; and supports the Government's continuing efforts to promote measures to improve financial management and combat fraud against the European Community's financial interests.—*[Derek Twigg.]*

Question agreed to.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6)(Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

WILDLIFE AND COUNTRYSIDE

That the draft Code of Guidance on Sites of Special Scientific Interest: Encouraging Positive Partnerships, which was laid before this House on 5th February, be approved.—*[Derek Twigg.]*

Question agreed to.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6)(Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE

That the Local Government Finance (England) Special Grant Report (No. 112) on Special Grants for the Local e-Government Programme, a copy of which was laid before this House on 3rd February, be approved.—*[Derek Twigg.]*

Question agreed to.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6)(Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

ECCLESIASTICAL LAW

That the draft Grants to the Churches Conservation Trust Order 2003, which was laid before this House on 28th January, be approved.—*[Derek Twigg.]*

Question agreed to.

PETITIONS

A120 Trunk Road Improvements

7.1 pm

Mr. Ivan Henderson (Harwich): I should like to congratulate the *East Anglian Daily Times* on organising this petition, and on its ongoing campaign to support the dualling of the A120. I should also like to thank the more than 2,000 members of the public who signed the petition.

The petition states:

The Petition of the *East Anglian Daily Times* and of the residents of the Harwich constituency declares

That improvements to the A120 trunk road between Harwich and Little Bromley should be a priority, and that this work is imperative for the safety of road users, for the region's economy, and for the status of Harwich as a prime gateway to Europe.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions to prioritise improvements to the A120 international trunk road between Harwich and Little Bromley.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Community Pharmacies

7.3 pm

Bob Spink (Castle Point): Community pharmacies are part of the very fabric of our society. They are the front line of primary care, and they do much—and can do much more—to take the burden off general practitioners. They are not retailers; they are health care professionals. The proposals of the Office of Fair Trading would damage the most vulnerable people. Deregulation would hurt, not help, the consumer, and set back the pharmacy service by 10 years. Pharmacies should be planned at local level by primary care trusts.

[Bob Spink]

The petition states:

To the Honourable Commons of the United Kingdom, Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled.

The Humble Petition of Ms Tracy Trevillion, Mrs. Dorothy Best and others of like disposition sheweth

That local communities are best served by local, community-based pharmacies, and that the OFT's recommendations to abolish the "control of entry" regulations would seriously damage local pharmacies.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your Honourable House shall urge the Government to reject proposals that would allow unrestricted opening of pharmacies able to dispense NHS prescriptions, and to preserve local pharmacies and safeguard their continuing provision of services to local communities.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

To lie upon the Table.

Transmission Masts

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Derek Twigg.]*

7.3 pm

Mr. Richard Spring (West Suffolk): I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to introduce this evening's debate, and I am grateful to the Minister for being here to reply. The debate concerns mobile telecommunication masts—a subject that is of concern to many hon. Members. It is certainly of concern to a number of my constituents, who have written to me on numerous occasions relaying their fears that those masts have a detrimental effect on their heath. It is becoming an issue of such importance that Mast Sanity, a pressure group that pushes for further regulation on the erection of masts, has organised a demonstration for this coming Saturday against what it calls the

> "continued widespread abuse of Planning and Insensitive siting of Mobile Phone Masts too close to homes and communities across the UK."

I note that we have had several Adjournment debates on the subject in the past. I do not want simply to reiterate all the old arguments, as much of the scientific data is well summarised in the Stewart report, which remains the standard work on the subject. Nevertheless, following the report's recommendation for further research, a research programme, called the Link mobile telecommunications and health research programme, was set up to look into the possible health impact of mobile telecommunications. Following calls for research applications, I understand that the programme is to undertake research into the possible health impact of mobile phone base stations and masts. That new area of research will be unique as it will be a series of human volunteer studies. The volunteer group is to consist of individuals who attribute symptoms of acute ill health to their exposure to emissions from base stations.

According to industry figures, more than two thirds of the total population of the UK use a mobile phone. The growth in the mobile communications sector in the past 15 years has been remarkable and is set to continue. That creates pressure because of the demand for mobile phone services. I fully appreciate the somewhat schizoid view of many people, which is to find mobile phones indispensable in their lives, but to dislike the often intrusive communications structures.

Mobile phones will simply not work without the supporting infrastructure of the masts. There has been a huge increase in the number of masts being erected across the country, and my constituency has not escaped that trend. Their siting causes genuine problems, on which I wish to focus my comments. I want to ensure that my constituents are able to enjoy the benefits that flow from a greater choice of service providers and a broader range of services, but not at a price of risking the health of those who live near transmission masts.

The Government have something of a dilemma of their own. In view of the popular hostility towards mobile phone masts, further regulation is demanded by the public and by local councils, but the Government are also committed to encouraging the development of new technologies such as mobile phones, and have sold the licences for radio spectrum for third generation mobile phones for £22.5 billion.

My interest in the issue has been prompted by constituents' very real concerns. One concern is the siting of a telecommunications base station and relevant equipment on and around a water tower in a residential area in the town of Haverhill. Such has been the negative impact that the area has seen a resulting loss of property values. Another concern arises in an area of high population density, close to three schools. Since the transmission mast was erected, close to a number of neighbouring properties, residents within a large circumference around the mast have experienced unexplained headaches, tiredness and a general feeling of ill health. A constituent of mine, Mr. Mark Wheal, has lived at the same address for 30 years, but since the erection of the transmission mast he has suffered from some of the symptoms that I have just described and has even had—I am appalled to say—an epileptic seizure. Mr. Wheal tells me that he has never suffered from such health problems before.

There have been masts on the aforementioned water tower since 1995. Another constituent of mine, Mr. John Insole, who has been a distinguished Haverhill citizen, has suffered from a number of health problems and has told me the remarkable story of his aunt, Mrs. Doris Barnes. She came to live with Mr. Insole for four years, right next to the water tower. After being diagnosed as suffering from a series of small strokes, she became housebound, needed 24-hour care, and was given just three months to live. That of course became an intolerable strain on Mr. Insole and his wife, and Mrs. Barnes went to live in a nursing home outside the town. Incredibly, within a fortnight, she was well, could cope with everyday tasks, and lived for another four years.

All of those distressing problems have been ascribed by local residents to the erection of transmission masts nearby. Additionally, there are now clear instances of interference in radio and television programmes. They are, to say the least, highly irritating. In those circumstances, it would have been inconceivable for me, as the local Member of Parliament, not to respond.

Although the Stewart report has been discussed endlessly, and although it represents the current conventional wisdom, I wish briefly to comment on it. It is fair to say that its conclusions are subtle, complex and rather confusing for many people. Simply quoting the report's conclusions will do nothing to allay the fears of residents living near the masts in Haverhill that have caused so much controversy.

In my experience, telecommunications companies have always tended to quote the basic conclusion of the expert group in the report. It states:

> "We conclude that the balance of evidence indicates that there is no general risk to the health of people living near to base stations on the basis that exposures are expected to be small fractions of guidelines. However, there can be indirect effects on their well being in some cases."

Later, though, the report states:

> "There is now scientific evidence, however, which suggests there may be biological . . . effects occurring at exposures below these guidelines . . . We conclude that it is not possible at present to say that exposure to RF radiation, even at levels below national guidelines, is totally without potential adverse health effects, and that the gaps in knowledge are sufficient to justify a precautionary approach."

Professor Stewart concluded that the evidence was not decisive either way. As a result, he recommended the use of the precautionary principle in the siting of transmission masts. In particular, he recommended that the masts be situated away from schools and other places where young people, who may be more susceptible to the signals emitted by masts, might gather.

I therefore very much welcome the new study, as it will focus entirely on base stations. There is a great deal of research into the use of handsets, but there is a clear need to look at health risks from mobile phone base stations. It is my understanding that this is the first study to look at people who think that they are ill, and at the masts themselves. Until now, there has been a struggle to research the effects of masts on health, because so many devices produce electromagnetic fields—including electricity cables and household equipment—which makes it hard to separate one device from another.

By using volunteers who specifically cite masts as the cause of their illnesses, the new research will avoid that. Even so, for the spirit of the Stewart report to be applied, there needs to be much greater local accountability, and more stringent controls on the siting of masts.

I acknowledge that there has been a partial movement in that direction since the Stewart report was published. Masts up to 15 m high are now subject to longer periods of consultation, so that they are exactly the same as applications for planning permission. Even so, the prior approval procedures still apply. They are not subject to a full planning clearance procedure. There is a narrow requirement that schools should be consulted, but there is no obligation to meet the requests of schools if they choose to make them. Therein lies a paradox.

Crucially, however, the law does not allow local authorities to adopt a precautionary principle approach of their own. Ultimately, what will happen is that, if authorities defend the interests of local residents and reject the application, they will do so knowing that it is highly likely that, under the current guidelines, the mobile phone companies will ultimately win on appeal. That appeal will include the award of costs against the local authority. Alternatively, the authority could choose to give in, even though that might be very much against the wishes of the people who elected councillors to represent them.

Both district councils that embrace my constituency, St. Edmundsbury borough council and Forest Heath district council, support me in bringing this matter to Parliament. I have received letters to that effect from the leader of St. Edmundsbury borough council and the chief executive of Forest Heath district council. The concerns apply in the whole area covered by those councils and beyond. They both favour, as I do, new powers being given to local authorities that are more directive as to where masts may or may not be placed. A mechanism whereby broad grounds of public anxiety are accepted as a legitimate reason for turning down an application needs to be considered, and the effective loophole currently provided by the 15 m height cut-off should be addressed.

[Mr. Richard Spring]

In a letter to me, the chief executive of Forest Heath district council very much supported the line of thinking that I have outlined and expressed that view in the following terms:

> "In the context of this summary of the current position, I am able to confirm on behalf of Forest Heath District Council that we would welcome your proposed change to the existing arrangements. This would ensure that local planning authorities have a discretionary power to oversee/control such development for the benefit of their residents.
>
> In seeking to bring about this important amendment, my council would also like to consider the possibility of revising PPG8 to allow LPAs to regard health issues as a material consideration when addressing any proposal to install a telecommunications mast." I should add in passing that this has been a very live issue among the residents of Newmarket, also in my constituency. Similarly, the leader of St. Edmundsbury borough council indicated his preference for the location of transmission antennae in the non-residential parts of Haverhill.

I hope that the Government will consider such moves, especially given the results of the study. They would give local authorities more flexibility and give councillors the right to balance the arguments about the location of transmission masts. With all the attendant concerns about health and other risks, the time has come to move on. If, through the debate, I can help to do that, I know how much it will be appreciated by so many of my concerned constituents and their elected local councillors.

7.17 pm

The Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness (Mr. Stephen Timms): I congratulate the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) on his initiative in raising these matters with the House.

There are many different uses for radio communications, most of which need some kind of transmission mast: television and radio, business communications, the utilities, the emergency services, point-to-point links for the fixed telephone network and the ubiquitous mobile phone network, to which the hon. Gentleman referred. All those uses are vital to our way of life and are important for our economy.

Due to the enormous and ever-increasing demand for mobile communications, their transmission masts most often cause public concern. The UK has nearly 50 million subscribers, approaching 80 per cent. of the population, making us the third biggest mobile market in Europe. More than 30 million UK subscribers use a pre-paid mobile package. That means that the benefits of mobile phones are available to all and reach every sector of society. The technology is inclusive, which was not envisaged when the developments were originally introduced. It is convenient and adds to our safety and comfort.

The technology is of vital importance for the whole economy. Industries depend on communication on the move; transport, haulage and distribution would stop without it. M-commerce—mobile commerce—is an increasingly important element of the economy.

In terms of value added, the Office for National Statistics estimates that the mobile sector contributes £18 billion, or about 2 per cent. of gross domestic product. To put that in perspective, that contribution is about the same as that made by the entire automotive sector. Furthermore, it is growing by 10 per cent. a year—in an industry that started only 15 years ago.

The industry is competitive. In addition to the five mobile operators, 250 licensed companies offer national or international services. The UK is certainly Europe's most competitive communications market.

The world's major telecoms operators, service providers and equipment manufacturers are almost all resident in the United Kingdom. They are attracted by our strengths in technology, innovation and design, the highly deregulated marketplace and the attractive business environment. A lot of them have their worldwide research and development headquarters in the UK as well. We are a world leader in technological development in mobile telecoms, particularly in new wireless technologies, but if we want to have communications, as the vast majority of people do, we must have the infrastructure to support them.

To ensure usable national coverage, there needs to be a national network of base stations and masts. Steps are being taken to minimise the number of masts to cover any area. Buildings or other physical features will block or deflect radio waves, so by placing a mast on a tall building it is possible to cover a wider area than a mast at street level. However, there is another limit: every base station can handle only a certain number of calls at a time. The more the usage, the greater the number of base stations needed to cover a given area, so masts are most common in urban areas.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the desirability of locating masts in non-residential areas, but, as coverage in urban areas is desired, masts have to be sited there as well. Network sharing makes a valuable contribution to minimising the number of masts needed because different operators can use the same mast, but it has limitations.

Yesterday was a significant milestone in the development of mobile communications. Along with Italy, the UK became the first major market in Europe to roll out a third generation service with the launch of 3 by Hutchison 3G—one of the companies that bought a licence after the licence auction. I am certain that many hon. Members will soon be sporting their 3G phones and that one of the first things that they will wish to do is download the video message of welcome that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has recorded.

The 3G network operates at a higher frequency than the current 2G network, so although it can carry large amounts of data, its range is shorter than that of 2G. Operators are reusing 2G sites for 3G, but some extra masts are inevitably required to fill in gaps in the coverage. As the new entrant to the market, 3 has taken all the available opportunities to share mast sites with other operators and to use existing structures whenever it can, but it has had to build up its network from scratch.

Some people may ask why it was felt necessary to bring in an additional mobile operator, with all its extra masts, when we already had four operators. The advantage of our policy in encouraging a new entrant is an increase in competition. We are already seeing the positive benefits of that policy, despite the problems in the mobile communications market caused by the high-tech downturn. Strong competitive pressure has ensured that all five UK operators are committed to rolling out next-generation networks in this country.

The new entrant, 3, has to ensure that its launch is a success; it does not have an existing 2G network to fall back on. That puts huge pressure on the other four operators to follow suit or suffer damage to their competitive positions. Roll-outs of 3G throughout Europe have been delayed, but by less in the UK than elsewhere. One of the other operators has publicly announced that its 3G roll-out elsewhere in Europe is on hold, but it is pushing ahead in the UK; it cannot afford to delay because of the UK market's competitiveness. The economic benefit of mobile communications is widely recognised and would not be disputed, but the hon. Gentleman has raised a fair concern about health issues, and I want to say a little about that.

In 1999, my right hon. Friend the then Minister for Public Health, who is now the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, set up the independent expert group, chaired by Sir William Stewart, which the hon. Gentleman mentioned. The group called for written evidence and held a number of public meetings. The Stewart report was published on 11 May 2000. As the hon. Gentleman rightly says, it is the definitive work on this subject. It contained recommendations based on a thorough review of the available scientific data on the health effects, and it took into account the evidence that was received.

The report's key conclusions have been referred to and read by the hon. Gentleman. It concluded that the balance of evidence indicated that there is no general risk to the health of people living near to base stations on the basis that exposures are expected to be small fractions of the levels in the guidelines. It recommended a precautionary approach to the use of mobile phone technologies until much more detailed and scientifically robust information on any health effects becomes available. It went on to recommend that an independent research programme should be carried out, along with an audit of emissions at locations close to the most sensitive sites, such as schools and hospitals.

The Government welcomed the Stewart report and we accepted the advice on the need for a precautionary approach and on the establishment of a research programme. The mobile telecommunications health research programme was established in 2001, and about 18 research projects are now running. The hon. Gentleman has referred to a new piece of work that is being conducted. As new results emerge, we will pay very close attention to them. If any evidence exists, beyond the anecdotal, of problems in this area, we will pay particularly close attention to it.

The Stewart report recommended an independent audit of base stations, which is being taken forward by the Radiocommunications Agency. That has focused initially on schools in particular, and will be looking at some other sensitive sites, too. The results of its second year of surveys were released last month, and are available on the Radiocommunications Agency's website at www.radio.gov.uk. The findings are reassuring. The study has so far examined mobile phone masts at 200 sites across the UK, looking at school and hospital sites. The readings showed emission levels ranging from hundreds to million of times below international guideline levels, which are set independently by the International Commission for Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection, usually abbreviated to ICNIRP. Even the highest reading was only one two-hundred-and-seventy ninth of that limit. Undertaking health-based research on exposures from mobile phone masts is not straightforward, because, as the hon. Gentleman pointed out, levels of exposure are difficult to isolate from other exposures. Drawing together the advice of the Stewart report and the measurements in the audit programme, however, shows conclusively that there are certainly no grounds for any kind of moratorium on base station installations.

We also take environmental concerns very seriously. Our policy is to facilitate the growth of new and existing telecommunications systems while keeping the environmental impact to a minimum. Site sharing, as I have mentioned, is one way of doing that. Camouflage or otherwise making the mast less obtrusive is another. Two thirds of masts are located on existing buildings, on street furniture, or in rooftops and the like. The mobile operators are working with the Council for National Parks on developing ways of ensuring that masts and equipment fit in with the landscape in national parks and areas of outstanding natural beauty, for example, through use of local materials in construction. After a slightly uncertain start, I am told that masts disguised as trees are now very convincing.

Network sharing has been successful on a limited basis. For the Hebrides in Scotland, funded by a European Union grant, O_2 and Vodafone agreed jointly to provide the islands with mobile coverage by sharing their networks. Fewer base stations were needed as a result, but each operator had to compromise on its coverage plans. Sharing on a larger scale could reduce competition between networks and could be against the interests of the consumer. O_2 and T-Mobile are planning a degree of network sharing in rural areas for their 3G networks, although that is subject to approval by competition authorities. In urban areas, the technical limitations to which I referred mean that more antennae are needed to provide enough capacity to meet the demand of people in those areas. Network sharing therefore looks unlikely to be practicable.

That is not to say that mobile operators can do what they like or site masts where they please. They have a voluntary code of practice, while our planning guidance note on telecommunications sets out the framework for local planning authorities and for operators. The code of practice was adopted in 2001 with the "Ten Commitments to best siting practice". The key elements are: improved consultation with communities and planners; better information on sites and on use of sites through, for example, site sharing; compliance with internationally recognised guidelines on emissions; and financial support for more independent research.

The initiative has three aims: improving transparency in the process of building mobile networks; providing more information to the public; and increasing the role of the public in the siting of base stations. Those commitments are being put into practice in consultation with local government and community stakeholders to ensure that they are fully workable. The industry is taking this issue seriously—reflecting the level of public concern that the hon. Member for West Suffolk spoke about.

[Mr. Stephen Timms]

The code is the operators' commitment to greater transparency and consultation. In addition, my Department's Radiocommunications Agency, in co-operation with the operators, has developed the "Sitefinder" database of mobile phone base stations. It is on the internet and gives members of the public the opportunity to get details of the location and operating characteristics of all outdoor mobile phone base stations in the United Kingdom. It is well worth a visit; its address is www.sitefinder.radio.gov.uk.

Dealing with planning applications and the location of telecommunications equipment is a matter for the local planning authority. The hon. Gentleman referred to policy planning guidance note No. 8, which sets out the policy on different aspects of planning with regard to telecommunications developments, including masts and other equipment. PPG8 was updated in 2002. The main changes were: to update guidance to take account of developments in telecommunications technology and the growth of the telecommunications industry; to update guidance to take account of changes to the permitted development rights that apply to telecommunications code system operators; and, in particular, to provide advice about taking account of health considerations in making planning decisions on telecommunications development.

Transparency and consultation are key to the guidance note. It strongly encourages operators and local planning authorities to participate in annual discussions about roll-out plans for an area; it calls for pre-applications discussions with the authority and other local and national interested bodies; and it stresses the importance of discussions with schools or colleges that are near to a proposed development. The aim is that there should be no surprises.

The guidance note recognises the environmental concerns and it encourages operators to adopt innovative design solutions to help telecommunications blend as much as possible into the local landscape. It also encourages them to share sites where appropriate. A key element is the expectation that masts and installations should be kept to the minimum consistent with the effective operation of the network.

I will end by quoting PPG8 on planning and health. It says that

"it is the Government's firm view that the planning system is not the place for determining health safeguards. It remains central Government's responsibility to decide what measures are necessary to protect public health. In the Government's view, if a proposed mobile phone base station meets the ICNIRP guidelines for public exposure it should not be necessary for a local planning authority, in processing an application for planning permission or prior approval, to consider further the health aspects and concerns about them."

There are also another two paragraphs on the subject.

We acknowledge the concerns that the hon. Gentleman has expressed, which are reflected widely in our communities. We have made a number of changes to take account of those concerns, and a programme of research is in place. We will consider very carefully any new information that emerges as a result of that work.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-seven minutes to Eight o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 5 March 2003

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

TRANSAS GROUP BILL *(BY ORDER)*

Order for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time on Wednesday 12 March.

Oral Answers to Questions

OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

The Deputy Prime Minister was asked—

Housing Licences

1. **Dr. Brian Iddon** (Bolton, South-East): When he plans to bring forward legislation to license (a) rogue landlords and (b) houses in multiple occupation. [100648]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Tony McNulty): As announced in the Queen's Speech, the Government intend to publish a draft housing Bill this Session. The Bill will, among other measures, include powers for local authorities to license landlords in areas of low demand and introduce the mandatory licensing of houses in multiple occupation. Following consultation on and pre-legislative scrutiny of the draft Bill, the Government intend that it should be introduced to Parliament at the earliest possible opportunity.

Dr. Iddon: That, of course, is good news, but what help can my hon. Friend give local authorities such as Bolton metropolitan borough council, the regeneration schemes of which are often blocked by non-compliant landlords, whose houses in multiple occupation attract prostitutes and their associated drug dealers?

Mr. McNulty: I fully appreciate my hon. Friend's concerns. We have made it clear that, before the housing Bill is introduced, we will introduce pilot projects from June 2003 to help local authorities tackle the problems as effectively as possible, using the portfolio of existing powers under legislation. I am happy to tell my hon. Friend that the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is engaged in serious negotiations with Bolton metropolitan borough council to ensure that it is one of the five pilots.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): Will the Deputy Prime Minister or any other Minister have to make a declaration under the ministerial code of conduct if such a Bill is introduced?

Mr. McNulty: As ever, the hon. Gentleman continues to bore the House, and the answer is no.

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): We have exactly the same problems in Stoke-on-Trent. This legislation cannot come quickly enough, as we have neighbourhoods that are being blighted by the activities of absentee landlords. Will my hon. Friend look favourably on a pilot project in Stoke-on-Trent, so that we can take action in advance of the legislation?

Mr. McNulty: I welcome my hon. Friend's welcome of the housing Bill. We have spoken before about the difficulties in Burslem and Stoke, and I will happily carry on talking to her specifically about how regeneration, housing and low demand fit together across a range of projects.

Housing (South Swindon)

2. **Ms Julia Drown** (South Swindon): What steps he is taking to ensure that there is adequate affordable housing in South Swindon. [100650]

The Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. John Prescott): The Government have provided £6.5 million via the Housing Corporation for an accelerated housing development programme in Swindon that has delivered some 650 affordable homes since 1999, including a 46-unit scheme for key workers, Isambard House. Clearly, there is a lot more to do, which is what our statement on sustainability, recently made to the House, is designed to achieve.

Ms Drown: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that reply. A serious need exists for more affordable housing in Swindon, yet developers object even to providing the Government's minimum—that 30 per cent. of homes must be affordable—and say that it is an unjustified and onerous demand and contrary to Government circular 6/98. A fear also exists that asking for more than 30 per cent. will put off developers from making any proposal. Will my right hon. Friend make it clear that we should listen to people on housing waiting lists, and not to developers making spurious objections? Given that places such as London and Oxford are going for 50 per cent. affordable homes—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

The Deputy Prime Minister: I sympathise with a number of my hon. Friend's points. There is a clear need for more affordable homes, but unfortunately it was not achieved in the recent planning for housing in her area. She will well appreciate, however, that the private and the public sectors negotiate the proportion of social housing or affordable homes within a planned development: it is not set at 30 per cent. The Mayor of London has suggested 50 per cent. or 30 per cent., and we are discussing how we might maximise the proportion of affordable homes.

David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden): The Deputy Prime Minister has in the past stated his belief that shortages of low-cost social housing are caused by the actions of property companies abusing the right-to-buy scheme. As a result, he has proposed to cut discounts available to council tenants throughout the south of England. That does not yet include Swindon—it has a local election in May, which I am sure is not relevant—but, undoubtedly, if housing pressure continues, it will do so. Will he explain how this discount reduction will stop right-to-buy abuses in property companies?

The Deputy Prime Minister: Our study of abuses of the right to buy identified 42 areas in which we wish to apply the reduction in the discount. In those areas, particularly one or two in London, the huge discount attracted a number of people to offer to buy with the local authorities or to buy on behalf of the tenant, with the local authority, to take advantage of selling at a higher price later. That is what we have discovered in our surveys, and that is why we have reduced the discount.

David Davis: Interestingly, the Deputy Prime Minister referred to a study because, before he began his latest attack on the right to buy, the Government commissioned a report from Heriot-Watt university on the supposed abuses of the policy. The report was supposed to be published in January, but it has not yet been formally released. We now know why. It shows that council tenants use property companies because they cannot get a mortgage on their house or flat. It should be obvious to anyone with even limited financial acumen that, for poor families, the lower the discount, the harder it is to get a mortgage. Therefore, the effect of cutting the maximum discount first from £50,000 to £38,000 and now to £16,000 will be to drive many poor people into the arms of property companies—the opposite of what the right hon. Gentleman says he intends. Will he now reconsider this policy, which will not make available any more houses and will harm the interests of all council tenants and the least well off in our society?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I am not aware that that is a problem in Swindon, but I can tell the right hon. Gentleman that, in the 42 areas that we have identified and in respect of which we will lay an order tomorrow, more people have applied to take advantage of the schemes that I have proposed for reducing the discounts.

I must apologise. I thought that the Heriot-Watt report had been published, but I am now advised that it will come out tomorrow with the statutory instrument.

Regional Government

3. **Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger** (Bridgwater): If he will make a statement on regional government in the south-west. [100651]

The Deputy Prime Minister: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister asked for responses by 3 March from the south-west and the other English regions outside London on the level of interest in holding a referendum for an elected regional assembly. We are now evaluating the responses.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: The south-west area multi-modal study—the SWARMMS report—is now slopping around in the south-west, but it is doing nothing for my constituency or for that of my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Mr. Flook). An unelected, unaccountable regional assembly is administering it. When will the Deputy Prime Minister take the report back under control, so that it will bring benefits to the south-west?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I think that the regional assemblies have been quite successful. *[Laughter.]* I take as one indication of that the active participation of Tory councillors on the assemblies. In fact, more than 160 Tory councillors sit on the boards. They think that they are doing a good job, and we will retain them. No doubt the referendum will provide people with a good opportunity to state whether they want to go further and have a regional referendum. The indications are that well over 60 per cent. of people in the south-west want to have a referendum.

Jim Knight (South Dorset): I am keen to make the regional assembly for the south-west accountable through the introduction of an elected regional assembly, but there is some concern in the region, which is fuelled by the Conservative party, that that may spell the end of the shire counties. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the Government are neutral about whether county councils could form the basis of unitary authorities following the introduction of regional government?

The Deputy Prime Minister: We have made it clear that we do not want three layers of administration. If people in a region choose to have a referendum, they will decide in that referendum whether they want regional government. Before they make that decision, they will receive an indication on what type of local government structure will apply. The local government body will consider the matter and recommend whether and how the unitary authority system will operate alongside regional government. If people vote for that, clearly the county council structure, as we know it, will change.

Mr. Hugo Swire (East Devon): In the event of the eminently sensible people of the south-west wishing to have nothing to do with an elected regional assembly, will the Deputy Prime Minister enact a framework by which we can get rid of the unelected regional assembly and return the money that it spends to the taxpayers of the south-west? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. There is too much conversation in the Chamber, which is unfair.

The Deputy Prime Minister: If the people of a region choose to have a referendum and then reject the idea of regional government, it is clear that the concept will not apply. It will be a decision for people in the region. On the question of whether the assembly that is in place at present would remain, it is my judgment that it should, along with the regional development agency. I note that the hon. Gentleman did not ask for the abolition of the regional development agency.

High-performing Councils

4. **Linda Perham** (Ilford, North): What additional freedoms and flexibilities he plans to make available to high-performing councils. [100652]

The Minister for Local Government and the Regions (Mr. Nick Raynsford): Last November, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister published detailed proposals for extending freedoms and flexibilities to local government in the context of the comprehensive performance assessment. Those authorities categorised as excellent will enjoy substantially less ring-fencing, a dramatic reduction in obligations to produce plans, a three-year inspection holiday and participation in the innovations forum, which will explore new ways of delivering better public services.

Linda Perham: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. Sadly, my Tory-run local authority, the London borough of Redbridge, will be unable to take advantage of those freedoms and flexibilities because it has been criticised by the Audit Commission for patchy achievement against five budget priorities. What action will he take to ensure that councils that have had their weaknesses identified and are setting a very high council tax despite receiving above-inflation Government grant receive clear advice and support so that there is better financial management of their budgets in future?

Mr. Raynsford: I assure my hon. Friend that the purpose of the comprehensive performance assessment is to encourage improvement in the performance of local authorities. We have put arrangements in place to assist authorities with capacity building and a series of other measures that are designed to tackle weaknesses. I am sure that her authority will benefit from that in the same way as other authorities that have had disappointing results from the comprehensive performance assessment.

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): Is the Minister aware that Hertfordshire county council received the highest score on comprehensive performance from the Audit Commission under the exercise carried out at the behest of his Department, yet it received the lowest increase in grant of any county council? Council tax payers in Hertfordshire face an increase of 18 per cent. as a result of the Government's scandalous treatment of the south-east. Does that not show that, whether it is local government services or university admissions, this Government punish excellence in the name of cack-handed socialism?

Mr. Raynsford: I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman can say that with a straight face, because he was a Minister in the Department in the last years of the Conservative Government. During that period, grants to local government were cut by 7 per cent. in real terms. That was his record. Hertfordshire county council has received an increase of 3.9 per cent. from this Government. That is Labour putting money in, whereas the Tories threaten cuts.

Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): Do the flexibilities that my right hon. Friend is considering include discretion over passporting of expenditure and the ability of councils to borrow, as with the new ideas for foundation hospitals?

Mr. Raynsford: My hon. Friend's authority, which had a good assessment in the comprehensive performance process, can expect to benefit from significant freedoms. I am pleased that its discussions with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills have produced an amicable and satisfactory outcome. I am sure that the authority will want to continue to drive forward the excellent services that it has prided itself on delivering in Croydon.

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): New freedoms are welcome, but does the Minister realise that by threatening to cap councils the Government have egg on their face yet again, because in opposition they opposed Conservative capping? Are the record council tax rises the fault of this Government, with their control-freak approach to local authorities, whereby Ministers ring-fence much of the grant money? Rather than capping, would it not be much fairer to put a small income tax rise on the very wealthy and cut council tax bills by £100?

Mr. Raynsford: We have ended the crude and universal capping that the previous Government adopted. Would the hon. Gentleman ignore entirely a 55 per cent. council tax increase by an authority that cut its council tax by 25 per cent. in an election year? Would he do nothing about that? The Government believe that it is right to take a responsible approach to council tax. We are giving extra freedoms and flexibilities to local government, but we also believe it is right that local government be prudent and responsible. Some of the authorities controlled by the Liberal Democrats and certainly by the Conservatives have taken a less than responsible view of council tax setting this year.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): Does my right hon. Friend accept that although Burnley council would always want greater freedom and flexibility to tackle the problems that it faces, the No. 1 thing that it needs is more finance and resources to get on top of those many problems?

Mr. Raynsford: I very much agree with my hon. Friend about the importance of resources, which is why I am sure that he will welcome the Government's decision to allocate an increase of 12.6 per cent. to Burnley council, which faces difficulties and is benefiting hugely from the Government's grant distribution system.

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster): Will the Minister give an assurance that those councils that were deemed excellent in the recent review will be exempt from any proposed capping?

Mr. Raynsford: We have already made it clear that we do not intend to cap authorities that have an excellent or good rating under the comprehensive performance assessment. However, it is incumbent on authorities that aspire to be good and excellent to be responsible in the organisation of their financial affairs. I am sure that the Audit Commission will want to keep a close watch on all authorities, including those that are good and excellent, to ensure that there are sound budgeting standards and that the temptation to manipulate the council tax for political purposes does not get the better of some authorities' judgment.

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): Has the right hon. Gentleman had an opportunity to look at the record of the high-performing councils, which in the past 10 years have had some of the lowest increases in council tax? This year, their increases are among the highest: the only thing that has changed is the grant formula. When that was announced in December, the right hon. Gentleman said that it was a generous settlement and there was no need for council tax to rise. He accused me of scaremongering for suggesting that band D council tax would be £1,000 for the first time, and that there would be double-digit inflation. Given that we were looking at the same figures, why was I right and he hopelessly wrong?

Mr. Raynsford: The people who are hopelessly wrong are the hon. Gentleman's own local authority, which has just admitted that it made an error and managed to double count £3.7 million. He would do better to talk to Essex county council about getting its figures right instead of lecturing us.

Low-cost Housing

5. **Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield): If he will make a statement on his Department's policy on the provision of low-cost housing in (a) the south-east and (b) the midlands. [100653]

The Minister for Social Exclusion and Deputy Minister for Women (Mrs. Barbara Roche): All regions, including the south-east and the midlands, will benefit from the increased funding for affordable housing announced in "Sustainable Communities: Building for the Future", which my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister presented to the House on 5 February.

Michael Fabricant: Does the Minister agree that it is important to minimise exhaust fumes and other forms of pollution? What percentage of low-cost housing will be built within half a mile of available work rather than on green fields?

Mrs. Roche: As the hon. Gentleman knows full well, the purpose of the communities plan and sustainable housing is to incorporate the growth in jobs. We are looking at areas of high demand and are making sure that we have plans for the future. Let me tell the hon. Gentleman that I was delighted to announce the communities plan in the south-east with the Conservative leader of Ashford council.

Mr. George Stevenson (Stoke-on-Trent, South): Will my hon. Friend comment on the enormous benefit of the Pathfinder project to areas in the midlands such as Stoke-on-Trent, where it provides more low-cost housing, regenerates housing stock and brings a sense of development to the housing market in north Staffordshire?

Mrs. Roche: I am extremely pleased that my hon. Friend has raised that issue. It is essential that we try to regenerate those areas, and that aim goes hand in hand with our work in growth areas, which is why we are making an additional £500 million available. My hon. Friend's constituency will certainly benefit from that.

Parish Councillors

6. **Mr. Stephen O'Brien** (Eddisbury): If he will make a statement on the number of parish councillors who have stood aside because of the parish council code of conduct. [100654]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Christopher Leslie): The Standards Board for England and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister have been informed of 95 resignations by parish councillors unwilling to accept the code of conduct out of a total of more than 70,000 parish councillors across England.

Mr. O'Brien: The Minister's answer is proof, if proof were needed, of the Government's cynical contempt for the integrity and selflessness of hard-working parish councillors, often with years of non-political public service, who are the backbone of our rural communities in particular. Will the Minister now account for the Government's actions to my constituents, particularly Councillor Brian Smith of Tattenhall and district parish council, where 12 of the 15 parish councillors have resigned or are stepping down because of the monstrous code of conduct? Will the Government now revise the code, given that it is an attack on rural communities in particular and shows contempt for their approach to selfless public service?

Mr. Leslie: Only 0.1 per cent. of parish councillors cannot live with the basic concept of a register of members' interests. It is an important component of local democracy, just as it is of national democracy. Parish councils need to be seen to be objective and working in accordance with basic democratic principles. I do not believe that a register of members' interests is too much to ask.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): I am a parish councillor. Does my hon. Friend agree that the standards of probity in parish councils are higher than in any other area of local government? Is it not a tad over the top that there are tighter restrictions on parish councillors, who may spend £7 per head of their population, than on Ministers, who may spend £7,000 per head? Will he admit that we could have it a little wrong?

Mr. Leslie: My hon. Friend's argument is wrong. We believe that parish councils are important and should be accorded significant respect and status. That is why we wish to extend the basic principle of a register of members' interests to parish councillors, just as one applies to all democratic layers of government in our country.

Local Government

7. **Mr. Ken Purchase** (Wolverhampton, North-East): What assessment he has made of the ways in which the comprehensive performance assessment will improve performance of local government. [100655]

The Minister for Local Government and the Regions (Mr. Nick Raynsford): The comprehensive performance assessment outcomes for county and single-tier authorities were published on 12 December 2002. We are currently working closely with local government to ensure that councils build on their CPA assessments to achieve real improvements in the quality of the services they deliver.

Mr. Purchase: Does my right hon. Friend understand that very few local authorities have confidence in the assessors? Does he know that one of the assessors for Wolverhampton council was a Lib Dem councillor from another authority? Can he see the irony of allowing a representative of a party constantly and consistently rejected by the voters of Wolverhampton to pass judgment on that council? Will he take steps to ensure that no such nonsense is repeated, in order that we may have greater confidence in the process?

Mr. Raynsford: The vast majority of local authorities have welcomed the CPA, especially the peer review element, which has involved other councillors and council officers from other authorities contributing towards the assessment. We see that as an important part of the process. The crucial purpose of the assessment is to improve the quality of services. I am pleased that Wolverhampton council has been speaking positively about how it can improve its services in the light of the comprehensive performance assessment.

Social Exclusion Unit

8. **Mr. Gareth Thomas** (Harrow, West): If he will set out the social exclusion unit's plans over the next 12 months. [100657]

The Minister for Social Exclusion and Deputy Minister for Women (Mrs. Barbara Roche): My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister today announced two major new unit projects. The unit will work across Government to look at what more needs to be done to help people in the most deprived areas move into work, and to prevent social exclusion among adults with mental health problems.

Mr. Thomas: I warmly welcome that announcement. Will my hon. Friend ask the unit to undertake further work on the institutional, financial and legal barriers that still face social entrepreneurs who want to set up social enterprises to help in the regeneration of their communities? [*Interruption.*]

Mr. Speaker: Order. The House is far too noisy.

Mrs. Roche: My hon. Friend raises an important point. We should certainly examine barriers to enterprise. The House will be interested to know that the rate of business start-ups is 10 times higher in the best parts of the UK than it is in the most deprived areas. Social entrepreneurs can make a magnificent contribution to neighbourhood renewal and regeneration.

Mr. Gary Streeter (South-West Devon): Does the Minister agree that one of the greatest causes of social exclusion is the misery and poverty caused by drugs in our society? After six years of a Labour Government, why do heroin addicts in Plymouth still have to wait two years to get access to treatment?

Mrs. Roche: I would be very pleased to discuss with the hon. Gentleman any problems that he is encountering in his constituency. As I am the Minister with responsibility for homelessness policy, which can sometimes, but not always, have a connection with drugs, particularly in respect of single homelessness, I have taken a keen interest in this area. I can tell him that very good progress is being made with the work of the drug action teams, but I shall certainly consider the issues in his constituency.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [100633] **Mr. Henry Bellingham** (North-West Norfolk): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 5 March.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): Earlier this morning, we concluded the Northern Ireland negotiation, which I hope will allow a final and durable settlement. I met the Russian Foreign Minister at 8.30 this morning and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I will have further such meetings later today.

Mr. Bellingham: Last Wednesday, the Prime Minister said that people should go to university on the basis of their merit. On Monday, his Minister for Lifelong Learning and Higher Education said that she would set specific targets for children from poorer backgrounds. Can he now clear up this confusion once and for all and assure pupils in my constituency that their university applications will be based on merit and transparency, and not crude social engineering?

The Prime Minister: Of course, it should be based on merit and the ability of students, but I hope that the hon. Gentleman will also agree that we should do everything that we possibly can, subject to what I have just said, to widen access to our universities, because it is also important that we allow children from working class and poorer backgrounds the chance of a first class, quality university education.

Roger Casale (Wimbledon): St. Helier hospital in south-west London has leapt from a zero to a two-star rating and has just taken delivery of ultra-sound equipment for cancer care. Does my right hon. Friend agree with Merton council and local campaigner Stephen Alambritis that such improvements make a good case for keeping the hospital open? Does not the case of St. Helier show that, through reform, we can improve the health service where those reforms are backed up by investment and not undermined by the 20 per cent. cut on expenditure proposed by the Conservative party?

The Prime Minister: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend that it is important that we recognise that the extra investment going into our national health service is delivering real results for the people of this country, including, incidentally, 40,000 extra nurses since the last general election. There could be nothing more disastrous than a 20 per cent. cut across the board—the policy of the Conservative party.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): Will the Prime Minister confirm that, even if Saddam Hussein destroys all his al-Samoud 2 missiles, he will still be in material breach of resolution 1441 because of his failure to disclose his chemical and biological weapons?

The Prime Minister: Yes, that is obviously right, since he has to disclose and destroy the entire chemical and biological weapons programme.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The Prime Minister confirms that Saddam Hussein is in breach of UN resolution 1441, so will he now confirm that, unless Hans Blix reports to the Security Council on Friday that Saddam Hussein has co-operated fully, including the full disclosure of his chemical and biological weapons, there will be a vote on the second resolution early next week?

The Prime Minister: The exact timing of any vote is a matter that is still under discussion, but yes of course it is the case that if Saddam Hussein fails fully to comply, there should be a vote in the United Nations. I hope very much that the United Nations supports the position that it set out in resolution 1441 last November, which called upon him to have full, unconditional and immediate compliance. It is plain at the present time that he is not in such compliance.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The fact that Saddam Hussein remains in material breach means that military action is more likely. Will the Prime Minister therefore spell out exactly what is happening in the no-fly zone? Is it not now the case that British and American planes are making pre-emptive strikes on targets that would threaten our ground forces rather than just our aircraft? Surely that represents a substantial change in existing policy. Would not the Prime Minister help his own case if he more frankly spelled out to the British people what is exactly and really going on?

The Prime Minister: No. The position on the no-fly zones remains exactly the same as that set out by the Defence Secretary earlier. Let me make a point in addition to those that I made a moment ago. Conflict could be avoided even now in one of two sets of circumstances. The first is that Saddam complies fully and unconditionally. Let us spell out what that means: accounting for the thousands of litres of anthrax, the hundreds of tonnes of precursor chemicals, the thousands of special munitions for chemical and biological warfare and the 1.5 tonnes of VX nerve agent, and giving proper access to Iraqi scientists and experts for interview. Thirty-four requests for such interviews have been refused. Of those granted, nine have been on Iraqi terms, not those that the inspectors set out. Saddam must therefore comply fully and absolutely.

The second alternative is that he leaves. Those are the only two ways of avoiding conflict, but either route could prevent it. To those who claim that we are hell bent on conflict, I say that it can be avoided if Saddam does what the United Nations and the international community demand.

Mr. Gareth Thomas (Harrow, West): While I recognise that my right hon. Friend's priorities are understandably elsewhere, may I encourage him to view enthusiastically the prospect of Government support for a British bid to host the 2012 Olympics? It would be based on, but not exclusive to, London. Apart from the obvious benefits to British sport, will he recognise the considerable benefits to British business, jobs and the acceleration of east London's regeneration?

The Prime Minister: We entirely recognise the potential benefits of the Olympics bid. The Government will make their decision shortly. It is important to acknowledge, as my hon. Friend said, that people in London are fully behind the bid.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): When the Prime Minister says that he hopes that there will be a vote at the United Nations on a second resolution, is he implying that if no vote is held, Britain will still go in with the United States and military action against Iraq will follow?

The Prime Minister: No. I simply say that it depends on Saddam's compliance. If he is not complying, a resolution will undoubtedly be put to a vote.

Mr. Kennedy: Will the Prime Minister clarify his comments of last week? Can we have a guarantee that before any military action involving British troops is taken, there will be an opportunity for a debate and a definitive vote in the House?

The Prime Minister: The Foreign Secretary spelled that out clearly in the debate. He said that, subject to the caveat that we have always expressed about the security of troops, the decision should be put to the House. I accept that, but with the greatest respect to the right hon. Gentleman, it is a matter not of process or procedure, although that is important, but of whether he, as well as us, is prepared to uphold resolution 1441, which everyone said that we should uphold.

In the past few days, I have spoken to many world leaders and discussed the issue with them. Not a single leader or official of any Government disputes the fact that Saddam is not currently complying. Everyone accepts that he is not, that he is not co-operating properly and that he is a threat. Resolution 1441 stated that he had a final opportunity to disarm voluntarily and that he had to co-operate fully, unconditionally and immediately. Everybody accepts that he is not doing that. Surely the right hon. Gentleman should join me in urging people to vote for the second resolution.

Mr. Eric Joyce (Falkirk, West): The Prime Minister is aware that progress in Northern Ireland often appears to be a matter of two steps forward and one step back. After his discussions last night, what are his hopes for progress in the coming weeks?

The Prime Minister: It was a detailed and good set of discussions over two days. It is possible that we have reached the basis for the final breakthrough to resolve all the outstanding issues of the Belfast or Good Friday agreement. It has to be done on the basis of a complete cessation of all paramilitary activity and implementation of all remaining parts of the agreement by the Governments and other parties. I think that there is real hope for that breakthrough, but the discussions over the next few weeks will tell us whether that hope is well founded. I hope that it is, because I truly believe that the one thing that people in Northern Ireland know—let me spell it out again—is that there is no way in which the agreement is going to be renegotiated: it is either implemented or we do not have the peaceful future in Northern Ireland that we all want to see.

Q2. [100634] **Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington): Does the Prime Minister recognise the figures of 12 per cent. and 50 per cent.? Twelve per cent. is the average council tax increase and 50 per cent. is the proportion of trusts that have either fiddled or misreported their waiting list figures. Which figure gives the Prime Minister the greater cause for concern?

The Prime Minister: First, in relation to council tax, the hon. Gentleman will know that as a result of the funding that the Government have put into councils not a single council anywhere is getting anything less than an above-inflation increase. I believe that that is the first time that that has happened.

Secondly, of course we deplore any inaccurate accounting that the Audit Commission found. However, I point out to the hon. Gentleman that the Audit Commission also found that in the case of the vast majority of trusts that were not the subject of its report the figures are plainly accurate and right. Furthermore, we have a situation whereby there is not a single waiting list national indicator, in-patient or out-patient, that is not better than it was in 1997.

Jim Sheridan (West Renfrewshire): My right hon. Friend may be aware of BT management's proposals to outsource some 700 call centre jobs to India. May I ask him to use his good offices to discourage BT and any other like-minded employer from exploiting the low-wage economies of the world, particularly at the expense of British jobs? In the name of being British and of the morality of being British, that sharp practice has to be outlawed. Will he consider introducing legislation that would do so?

The Prime Minister: I am afraid that I cannot say to my hon. Friend that it would be right to introduce legislation to outlaw it. Obviously we hope that as many jobs as possible are kept here in this country. I point out to my hon. Friend, however, that it is partly as a result of the way in which the economy has been managed and the labour market is run that we have a better position on unemployment and employment in this country than does virtually any other major country.

Q3. [100635] **Mr. Richard Bacon** (South Norfolk): Can the Prime Minister say what principle makes it right to have a referendum on the single European currency, but wrong to have a referendum on the European constitution, which is of even more importance for the future of this country?

The Prime Minister: I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman. The principle is the same as that which led, for example, to there not being a referendum on the Maastricht treaty. *[Interruption.]* I am sorry to bring back happy memories among Conservative Members, but that is correct. We have laid out very clearly the reason why we will have a referendum on the single currency. It is a big decision for the whole country and it is right that there should be a referendum. It is not the case that there was a referendum either on the Single European Act 1986 or on the Maastricht treaty.

Q4. [100637] **Mr. Iain Luke** (Dundee, East): The Prime Minister may be aware of early-day motion 770, which was signed by many Scottish Labour Members, advocating the advantages to Scottish and to UK business of an early entry into the euro zone. Given Sir Edward George's comments yesterday about it being more advantageous than it was a year ago to consider entry to the euro, will the Prime Minister give an assurance that there will be no fudging of the Chancellor's five economic tests and make a pledge to call an early referendum to take Britain into the heart of Europe and of the European monetary system?

The Prime Minister: Tempting though it is to speculate, I am afraid that I must simply repeat to my hon. Friend that the tests have to be completed by June and that those tests will of course be done on the basis of the assessment that we have already set out.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): Presumably the Prime Minister does not want to agree with the chairman of the Audit Commission, who said that some hospitals

"have lost sight of the priorities"

and

"put the meeting of government targets before patient care."

The Prime Minister: Of course hospitals should not do that, but the chairman of the Audit Commission also said that he thought that the maintenance of targets was an important part of making sure that the health service operated properly.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The Prime Minister gave the same excuses 15 months ago when the National Audit Office produced the same report as the Audit Commission has today, and nothing has changed. His comments show that the culture of fiddling the figures goes right the way to the top. Today, the Audit Commission said that more than 90 per cent. of trusts gave inaccurate information on waiting lists. It said that some hospitals are

"offering appointments to patients at short notice and then, when they are unable to attend . . . resetting the 'clock' measuring their waiting times to zero."

Will the Prime Minister explain why, after he has been in charge of the health service for some six years, the Audit Commission chairman now says that it is under-managed and over-bureaucratised?

The Prime Minister: First, it should be pointed out that we actually asked for this report from the Audit Commission because of the earlier report from the National Audit Office. Secondly, it was a report on 41 out of 300 trusts. Thirdly, it is extremely important that we do have targets for the health service. Of course the right hon. Gentleman is going to say that the whole of the health service is in chaos and crisis, and not offering proper treatment. That is because it is the desire of the Conservative party to run down the national health service, because it wants to cut its funding. The truth is that the record investment in the health service is delivering real results for people. It is delivering reductions in waiting times and in waiting lists; it is delivering more doctors and nurses, and more hospitals. Actually, the vast majority of people in the national health service get a decent level of health care from it. The right hon. Gentleman's alternative, which is to push people out into the private sector, may be fine for a few at the top, but it would be disastrous for the vast majority of users of our national health service.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Instead of the Prime Minister trying to say what others might do, why does he not take responsibility for what he has failed to do? He should admit that he is raising taxes on hard-working people to fund a system that puts Government targets before patients' health, and which now has more bureaucrats than beds. Patients know that, whatever the Government say, they cannot believe a word that the Government produce. Is it not time that the Prime Minister apologised to the thousands of patients whose operations have been cancelled because of his political meddling?

The Prime Minister: Let us indeed not take what I say, then, but consider, for example, what the secretary of the Society of Thoracic Surgeons said just a day or two ago about cardiac services. He said that people are now working

"in an environment where waiting lists are plummeting; where the number of trainees in cardiac surgery has doubled; where new cardiac centres are being built and existing centres modernised and expanded; and where the results for heart surgery continue to improve and are better than in most of the developed world".

That is what is actually happening in our health service today. Of course it is the case that, as I said, the right hon. Gentleman needs to run down the health service. He has got to say that the extra money going into the health service is not necessary, but he should talk to people in the health service. They know that it needs the extra funding that is going into it: that is what is producing the extra nurses, and the results on cardiac surgery. When we came to office, 60 per cent. of cancer patients were seen within two weeks, but that figure is now well over 95 per cent. That is where the money is going—on better national health service care.

What the right hon. Gentleman has said yet again, in his opposition to what we are doing in April, is that the extra money that we would put into our national health service, he would take out. He would then add to that through 20 per cent. cuts across the board. *[Interruption.]* He and his hon. Friends can say what they like, but in the end that is the choice before the country, and I believe that this country will choose the national health service.

Andy King (Rugby and Kenilworth): I hope that, after Question Time, my right hon. Friend will accept two CDs made by constituents of mine. They want to pass on to him a message about the proposed large international airport in Rugby, and the message is clear: no airport here. Indeed, that is the message not just from Rugby, but from across the midlands. I hope that my right hon. Friend will enjoy listening to the CDs in his leisure time.

The Prime Minister: I am sure that the CDs will make a fascinating listen. I hear exactly what my hon. Friend says. He will know that the consultation period is running for consultation on airports, and we have got to take account of all the representations made. He has made his point very strongly, and we will of course listen to it.

Q5. [100638] **Mr. Adrian Flook** (Taunton): Will the Prime Minister confirm that he wants all hospitals to be foundation hospitals, or has he decided this week that he cannot fight a war on two fronts?

The Prime Minister: As the Secretary of State for Health has made very clear, provided that hospitals meet the criteria, we want as many foundation hospitals as possible. It is right that we have freedom for those hospitals so that they can provide a good service for national health service patients. However, it is not just reform and freedom that they need—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. There should not be so much shouting.

The Prime Minister: I must point out to the hon. Gentleman that it is not just freedom and reform that the NHS needs, it is money. The difference is that the Conservative party is not prepared to support the extra investment that is an essential part of getting reform to work.

Q6. [100639] **Mr. Huw Edwards** (Monmouth): Does my right hon. Friend agree that fear of detection is one of the most powerful tools in the fight against crime? Will he join me in congratulating Gwent police on having one of the highest detection rates of all the police forces in England and Wales, contributing to a 17 per cent. reduction in crime? Will my right hon. Friend consider the current funding formula to ensure that Gwent police are able to have a visible police presence—not only in deprived urban communities but in rural areas such as Usk?

The Prime Minister: I am sure that Gwent will apply to—and, I hope, receive help through—the rural policing fund. My hon. Friend is right to point out that crime in his area is falling. There are also record numbers of police officers in this country today; we have more police officers than we have ever had before. That is essential in the fight against crime and it is one reason why so many police forces round the country are being successful in reducing crime.

Derek Conway (Old Bexley and Sidcup): Is the Prime Minister aware that the pensioners of Old Bexley and Sidcup face not only a decrease in their incomes but a Labour council and Labour Government imposed council tax increase of 17 per cent.? What message does the Prime Minister have for the excellent headmistress of Marlborough school—a special school in Sidcup working with children with severe and profound mental and physical handicaps—who now faces a £65,000 shortfall in her budget and a real risk of losing excellent, experienced teachers because of the Government settlement? Will he consider such problems? This is not just about facts and figures; there are real problems for children who have the greatest need in our society.

The Prime Minister: I will of course look into the situation that the hon. Gentleman has outlined. However, what he is saying, in effect, is that his school and his council need more money. It is for that very reason that we have put in such a large increase to the local authority budget; and it is for that reason that we are increasing the amount of investment in schools by a record amount. I say to the hon. Gentleman that, if the school has difficulties, it would, I think, react very adversely to a policy of having 20 per cent. cuts across the board.

Q7. [100640] **Julie Morgan** (Cardiff, North): Is my right hon. Friend aware that today sees the launch of the first annual report of the Children's Commissioner for Wales? The existence of the post has already made a great deal of difference to children in Wales. What plans does my right hon. Friend have to introduce a children's commissioner in England?

The Prime Minister: We are studying carefully the Welsh example and the results of having a children's commissioner there. We have always set out why we believe that the situation is different in England. We have also had the Laming report in the intervening stages and we are considering our response carefully.

Q8. [100641] **Mr. David Laws** (Yeovil): I want to come back to the issue of foundation hospitals. Will the Prime Minister tell us whether he agrees with the Secretary of State for Health, who said in a speech last month that he was in favour of freeing such hospitals from the constraints of central Government and capital rationing—in other words, from the controls of the Chancellor of the Exchequer? We have the benefit of having both the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Secretary of State for Health here today, so will the Prime Minister confirm which of them he is backing in this long-running Government dispute?

The Prime Minister: As I said a moment or two ago, it is important that we get as many foundation hospitals as possible, based on the criteria that we have set out. However, just as I would say to the Conservatives that they are failing the country by failing to support extra investment, I would say to the hon. Gentleman that he and the Liberal Democrats are failing the country by failing to support the necessary reform. On this side of the House, our position is that we need investment and money in our health service.

Q9. [100642] **Mr. David Stewart** (Inverness, East, Nairn and Lochaber): My right hon. Friend will be well aware of the importance of research and development in Britain, particularly in developing industries such as aquaculture. Will the Prime Minister join me in expressing disappointment at the decision of the Sea Fish Industry Authority to close down the Ardtoe research facility in my constituency with the loss of 17 jobs? Will the Prime Minister agree to meet me and a delegation of research scientists to try to keep this vital facility open?

The Prime Minister: I am aware of the position of the Sea Fish Industry Authority and I know that Ministers from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Scottish Executive are prepared to meet my hon. Friend. If that meeting is unsatisfactory to him, I will be happy to meet him myself. We recognise the important role of aquaculture and the importance of research in the United Kingdom.

Gregory Barker (Bexhill and Battle): Now that the IMF has joined the swollen ranks of those who can see that the Chancellor is incapable of balancing the nation's books, what advice is the Prime Minister giving to his neighbour in Downing street? Should he put up taxes even further or cut public spending?

The Prime Minister: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman raised the economic record of the Government. Let me tell him what the IMF report also said. It said that

> "UK economic performance has remained enviable".

It also said that

> "the economy appears to have weathered the global slowdown relatively well"

and that

"the UK public finances are among the strongest in the G7".

It is thanks to the Chancellor that we have the lowest inflation, lowest unemployment and lowest interest rates for years and years. We all remember the Tory days of 3 million unemployed, 10 per cent. interest rates and disaster for the British economy.

Q10. [100643] **Lynne Jones** (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Would at least nine affirmative votes in the Security Council for the so-called second resolution tabled by the US, UK and Spain give clear—I emphasise the word "clear"—legal authority for war against Iraq? What difference would the use of what my right hon. Friend describes as the unreasonable veto make?

The Prime Minister: First, let me assure my hon. Friend that we will always act in accordance with international law. Secondly, in relation to the resolution, we are confident of securing the votes for that resolution and we will carry on working to that end. We are doing that because we believe that it is important that the UN, having declared a position on Iraq, follows through and maintains that position. I know that my hon. Friend opposes our position on the matter, and I do not disrespect that—she is perfectly entitled to do so. However, I know that we both agree that the authority of the UN is important. If that authority is to be upheld, it is important that what we said last November is implemented. If it is not, the effect on the UN—apart from the effect on the international situation—would be disastrous.

Q11. [100644] **Dr. Jenny Tonge** (Richmond Park): Is the Prime Minister aware of the deteriorating situation in the occupied territories? Is he also aware that since 1980 the United States of America has vetoed 14 resolutions of the Security Council on the middle east? Does he consider those vetoes reasonable or unreasonable?

The Prime Minister: I simply point out to the hon. Lady that the UN resolutions are not just in respect of Israel, but of the Arab world and the Palestinians, too. In relation to the Palestinian territories, what is happening there is appalling, but the only way out of it that will maintain all the UN resolutions—not just those on Israel, but those on the Palestinians and the Arab world—is to get a peace process going again in the middle east. All I can say to her is that this country will play its full part in that, but in the end the only way to avoid the terrible tragedy that is happening to the Palestinians—and, indeed, to innocent Israeli civilians who are also dying—is to ensure that we get a proper peace process back on track. We will certainly do all that we can to facilitate that.

Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): Three weeks ago in the United States the Under Secretary of Defense told the US Foreign Relations Committee how Iraq would be administered in a post-conflict situation. He said that an office of reconstruction and humanitarian assistance had been set up under General Garner. He invited contributions from UN organisations, aid agencies and coalition partners, and said that coalition officials would account to the US President through Donald Rumsfeld and General Franks. Is not it unacceptable that our aid agencies and UN organisations should respond to the US President? Is our policy that—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman should know how to ask a brief question. Will the Prime Minister try to answer?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes an important point. All sorts of people may have made statements about the matter, but I shall tell my hon. Friend exactly what is happening. At present, we are in intensive discussions, with the US and others. Indeed, part of my discussions with the Russian Foreign Minister this morning was about how we make sure, if there is a conflict, that we take the greatest care of the subsequent humanitarian situation in Iraq. I have no doubt that there will have to be a substantial UN involvement. That is what we are arguing for and what we want to see. I believe that that will be the outcome. Therefore, rather than speculate about what might happen, I assure my hon. Friend that we will declare those plans to people as soon as we have them properly worked out.

Q12. [100645] **Andrew Selous** (South-West Bedfordshire): The Prime Minister has just told the House that everyone accepts that Iraq is a threat, but many of my constituents tell me that they are still unclear about the direct threat and risks to the UK as a result of not disarming Iraq. What would the Prime Minister say to them?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is right to ask that question, as people do ask it. I think that the threat of leaving Saddam Hussein armed with weapons of mass destruction is twofold. First, it is that he begins another conflict in his region, into which Britain as a country would inevitably be sucked, with all that that means. Alternatively—and I think that this is a powerful and developing threat that the world must face—the risk is that states such as Iraq, which are proliferating these chemical and biological weapons of mass destruction, will combine in a way that is devastating for the world with terrorists who are desperate to get their hands on those weapons to wreak maximum destruction.

The events of 11 September, of course, changed many American minds about the threat, but they should also change all our minds. Surely everyone accepts that, had the people involved been able to cause even more death and destruction, they would have done so? My worry is that, when there are nations that proliferate, trade and develop this stuff, and terrorist groups that are desperate to cause maximum destruction, the world has to stand firm. The matter has come to a point over Iraq. If we do not stand firm over Iraq now, we will never be able to deal with the next threat that encompasses us.

Points of Order

12.32 pm

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The House will be aware that the Chancellor of the Exchequer today announced that he intends to deliver his Budget statement on 9 April. You will be aware, Mr. Speaker, that that is the day before the date on which the House is due to rise for the Easter recess. I hope that all hon. Members will agree that it would be entirely unacceptable for debate on the Budget to be curtailed or postponed until after the recess. May I therefore ask whether you have had any indication that the Easter recess will be postponed, so that the customary four days of debate will take place immediately after the Budget? The House must be able to discuss the Budget's implications for the black hole in the Government's finances, the imminent and substantial rise in taxation, and the burgeoning pensions crisis—all of which lie directly at the Chancellor's door.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am as concerned as everyone else about the Easter recess. However, the Leader of the House will answer business questions tomorrow—*[Interruption.]* Order. It would be more appropriate for hon. Members to put that matter to the Leader of the House tomorrow. *[Interruption.]* Order. What I am trying to say is that it is not a matter for me.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I wish to raise a matter which, if I may say so, is even more important than the Easter recess. That is that 9 April is right in the middle of the election campaigns in Scotland and Wales. Either the Chancellor has forgotten about that—which seems unlikely, as he is frightened of losing the elections—or he is showing breathtaking arrogance. My point of order for you, Mr. Speaker, is that a previous Government ended up losing in the Scottish courts when they tried to abuse the local electoral process in Scotland, never mind the parliamentary one. Is not the Chancellor in danger of ending up in exactly the same position?

Mr. Speaker: In a sense, the hon. Gentleman answered his own questions. That matter is not for me—it is for the Scottish courts.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. If the Leader of the House knows the proposed dates for tomorrow, surely he must know them today. Why cannot the right hon. Gentleman—who is in his usual place—share with you and the rest of the House the Government's proposals, so that right hon. and hon. Members may know as soon as possible, then perhaps follow up the matter in business questions tomorrow? Following the intervention of the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond), there are severe implications for the rules governing the politicisation of the run-up to elections and they should be fully considered. When will we get proper guidance? Why do we have to wait?

Mr. Speaker: I think that the Leader of the House wants to come in on a point of order.

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Having said that it would be more appropriate to make the announcement at business questions, you will forgive me, I hope, if—in response to the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth)—I share with the House the information that I intended to announce tomorrow. That may be for the convenience of right hon. and hon. Members, so that there is no mystery about it.

It is standard procedure that there should be four days of debate following the Budget statement. It would be our intention to make sure that the House will have the opportunity to debate the Budget over four full days. The right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) is correct that it would be wrong to delay. That was never our intention. We shall therefore be tabling a motion for the House to sit on the Friday of that week for a day's debate on the Budget. The Budget debate will continue until the Monday of the subsequent week—14 April—when it will conclude. There will be, as always, four days' debate on the Budget.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. It will be the first time that there has been such a partitioning of the Budget debate, with its deferral until April. That seems to coincide with the changes made to the sittings of the House. Will you please investigate the relationship between those changes and the appalling decision to defer the Budget debate?

Mr. Speaker: This is in danger—*[Interruption.]* Order. This is in danger of turning into a debate. The hon. Lady asked me to look into the matter. Perhaps I will look into the matter. That would be the best way.

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I hope that it is not on the same subject. Is it different?

Lembit Öpik: My point of order refers to the talks on Northern Ireland over the past two days. Given that some Northern Ireland parties have not seen the full content of that which was agreed—certainly the Opposition parties in this House have not done so—is there any mechanism that would cause the Prime Minister or the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to come to the House to make a statement on what has been agreed for our consideration?

Mr. Speaker: Perhaps that is something that the hon. Gentleman could raise in business questions tomorrow.

POLICE (NORTHERN IRELAND) BILL *[LORDS]* (PROGRAMME) (NO. 3)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Orders [28 June and 29 October 2002],

That the programme order of 10th February in relation to the Police (Northern Ireland) Bill [Lords] shall be further amended by the substitution in paragraph 2 (conclusion of proceedings in standing committee) for "Thursday 6th March" of "Tuesday 11th March".—*[Mr. Woolas.]*

Question agreed to.

Orders of the Day

Local Government Bill

[1ST ALLOTTED DAY]

As amended in the Committee, considered.

New Clause 10

LOCAL RETENTION OF RATES

'(1) In Schedule 8 to the 1988 Act (non-domestic rating: pooling), in paragraph 4 (rules for calculating authorities' non-domestic rating contributions), before subparagraph (5) there is inserted—

"(4A) The rules may include provision for such deductions as the maker of the rules thinks fit for the purpose of enabling an authority to retain part, or all, of so much of the total payable to it in respect of the year under sections 43 and 45 above as exceeds an amount determined for the authority by or under the rules.

(4B) Subparagraph (4A) above shall not apply in the case of a special authority.

(4C) Subparagraph (2) above shall have effect subject to subparagraph (4A) above.

(4D) The consent of the Treasury is required to the inclusion in regulations under this paragraph of provision under subparagraph (4A) above relating to England."

(2) In paragraph 5(6) of that Schedule (contribution to be calculated after end of year and certified by Audit Commission)—

(a) before the word "and" at the end of paragraph (b) there is inserted—

"(ba) if it is an authority in England notify to the Secretary of State, and if it is an authority in Wales notify to the National Assembly for Wales, the amount of any deduction that in accordance with provision under paragraph 4(4A) above is made in calculating the amount mentioned in paragraph (a) above," and

(b) in paragraph (c), for "and the amount" there is substituted ", and the amount or amounts notifiable under paragraphs (b) and (ba) above,".

(3) In paragraph 5(6A) of that Schedule (Audit Commission to send copy of certification to Secretary of State or National Assembly for Wales), after "the amount" there is inserted "or amounts".

(4) In section 99 of the 1988 Act (regulations about English billing authorities' collection and general funds), after subsection (3) there is inserted—

"(3A) The Secretary of State may by regulations make provision—

(a) for the sharing among a billing authority and major precepting authorities, in accordance with prescribed rules, of an amount equal to all or part of any deduction that, in accordance with provision under paragraph 4(4A) of Schedule 8 below, falls to be made in calculating the billing authority's non-domestic rating contribution for a financial year;

(b) for requiring a billing authority to inform, within a prescribed period, any major precepting authorities of any amount that falls to be shared under provision under paragraph (a) above and of the effect of the rules governing its sharing;

(c) as to the manner in which any payments which fall to be made by a billing authority by virtue of any provision under paragraph (a) above must be made;

(d) as to the period within which, or time or times at which, any such payments or instalments of such payments must be made; and

(e) as to the recovery (by deduction or otherwise) of any excess amount paid by a billing authority in purported discharge of any liability arising by virtue of any provision under paragraph (a) above.

(3B) The rules that may be prescribed under paragraph (a) of subsection (3) above include (in particular) rules that require a billing authority, when making an estimate under that paragraph, to disregard amounts that fall to be shared under provision under subsection (3A)(a) above."

(5) In section 97 of the 1988 Act (English billing authorities: principal transfers between funds), after subsection (4) there is inserted—

"(4A) Where in accordance with regulations under section 99(3A) below a billing authority is required to share any amount, it shall transfer from its collection fund to its general fund so much of that amount as, in accordance with the regulations, it calculates to be its share."

(6) In section 99(1)(b) of the 1988 Act (regulations about liabilities of English billing authority under section 97(1) or (3) to transfer sums from its collection fund), for "or (3)" there is substituted ", (3) or (4A)".

(7) In section 38 of the Local Government (Wales) Act 1994 (c. 19) (council funds for principal councils in Wales), after subsection (9) there is inserted—

"(9A) The National Assembly for Wales may by regulations make provision for the sharing among a new principal council and major precepting authorities, in accordance with rules specified in the regulations, of an amount equal to all or part of any deduction that, in accordance with provision under paragraph 4(4A) of Schedule 8 to the Local Government Finance Act 1988 (local retention of rates), falls to be made in calculating the council's non-domestic rating contribution for a financial year."

(8) In subsection (10) of that section (provision that may be included in regulations under subsection (9))—

(a) for "The regulations" there is substituted "Regulations under subsection (9) or (9A)", and

(b) in each of paragraphs (d) and (e), after "the liability mentioned in subsection (9)" there is inserted "or any liability arising under subsection (9A)".

(9) In that section, after subsection (11) there is inserted—

"(12) In subsection (9A) "major precepting authority" has the meaning given by section 39(1) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.".'.—*[Mr. Raynsford.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

12.39 pm

The Minister for Local Government and the Regions (Mr. Nick Raynsford): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss Government amendments Nos. 19 to 23.

Mr. Raynsford: New clause 10 will provide for local authorities to retain some or all of the growth in business rate revenue for their areas. The proposals will allow us to introduce a scheme along the lines that the Chancellor announced in his 2002 pre-Budget report. The scheme will increase the incentives for business and local authorities to work in partnership, to maximise local economic growth and regeneration, while at the same time governing additional resources to address local priorities.

Any scheme introduced will generate additional revenues from increases in the tax base generated by local authorities successfully encouraging growth and not from increasing the tax on existing business. The money raised would be genuinely additional to local authorities and they will be free to decide how to spend it. The scheme will allow local authorities to keep only revenues associated with any growth in the business rate tax base and will not replace the current business rate pooling system. The business rate pool acts to reduce the unfairness of business rates and to ensure that revenues are distributed more equitably.

New clause 10 provides for a scheme in England, with rules set by the Secretary of State, and for Wales, with rules set by the National Assembly for Wales. The provision also allows the Secretary of State to implement arrangements for sharing the retained rates revenue between different tiers of authority. That will allow us to balance the need to furnish incentives to encourage business development with providing additional resources to the tier of authority that faces increased cost following business development. It is not the Government's intention that the new scheme should serve to reward only authorities that are already doing well, at the expense of declining areas. We are looking at a range of options to get the best distributional fit, with each local authority receiving an incentive that is relevant to them, while keeping the scheme as simple as practical.

We have also made it clear that local authorities will not bear the downside risk of a declining business rate tax base. We are considering options that will allow local authorities to benefit from the scheme, even though they are in economic decline, should they manage to slow the pace of that decline.

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): On that point, will the right hon. Gentleman explain how on earth the Government will be able to measure relative economic decline and whether the actions of a local authority have managed to slow it?

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman anticipates what I am about to say. We shall be consulting on the options, including the distributional consequences, in the summer. These are important issues and it is right that they should be considered by a range of people. We certainly expect there to be full and thorough consultation before detailed arrangements are put in place. There are technical points and issues of fairness that need to be addressed, as the hon. Gentleman rightly highlighted.

The provision is sensible and will allow for a new introduction—a new arrangement that will incentivise local authorities and help to build a better relationship between local authorities and business.

Amendments Nos. 19 to 23 are all consequential. I commend the provisions to the House.

Mr. Philip Hammond (Runnymede and Weybridge): If my interpretation is correct, new clause 10, as the Minister for Local Government and the Regions has presented it, is an attempt to give local communities a stake in economic development in their areas. However, we should make it clear that, although the phrases "economic regeneration" and "economic development" were used in the ministerial statement published last week and in the Treasury document, we are actually talking about new buildings—new physical development and infrastructure.

The provision takes a new and interesting approach to fighting nimbyism by recognising the contribution to that syndrome of a lack of immediate fiscal benefit to the community from new developments. The Government are taking an interesting initiative, which is broadly welcome.

However, the new clause is only a small beginning. Will the Minister explain whether the Government intend to extend the principle? If I correctly interpreted the real underlying purpose of the provision, which the Minister may not have heard because he was busy conferring with his colleagues, and it gives communities that suffer the burden of new development some fiscal stake in the benefits from that development, are the Government considering extending that principle to council tax receipts? Could new housing development add to the fiscal benefits enjoyed by a community? That might make it easier for the Government to secure the support, or at least the acquiescence, of local communities in their attempt to impose the housing objectives that the Deputy Prime Minister has outlined over the past few weeks.

Regulations will determine the detail of the measure, and I was expecting the Minister to be rather more forthcoming in his opening remarks. I was expecting to be scratching through my notes with a blue pen because the Minister had answered the questions that I had intended to put to him. The House is being asked to add the new clause while knowing almost nothing at all about the detail of the proposals.

12.45 pm

Mr. Edward Davey: I might be anticipating the hon. Gentleman's speech, but does he agree that it is probably not appropriate to make this tax change using secondary legislation?

Mr. Hammond: The hon. Gentleman will remember that the Minister gave a pledge on Second Reading that the Government intended to make draft regulations available to the Committee before the regulation-making powers in the Bill were considered. The Minister has made no apology to the House for the fact that there are no draft regulations in this case, although we are of course considering the new clause for the first time. Indeed, I place on record the fact that, by and large, the Minister lived up to the commitment he made on Second Reading, and the Committee received a continuous supply of draft regulations, which greatly informed and enlightened the debates on those regulation-making powers.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): My hon. Friend will know that I was not one of that privileged, small group of hon. Members who were considered suitable to serve on the Committee, and I am anorakishly but legitimately concerned about the opportunity for all right hon. and hon. Members to debate such matters on the Floor of the House. Does he agree in that context that we need to know whether the regulations will be subject to the affirmative procedure or to its negative counterpart?

Mr. Hammond: My hon. Friend—who would, indeed, have been a fine addition to the strength of Standing

[Mr. Hammond]

Committee A—takes a great interest in the distinction between the negative and affirmative procedures, and it would be extremely useful if the Minister could clarify that point in responding to this short debate.

We are dealing with a slight gap in the armament of scrutiny, as we have had the benefit of the regulations only in relation to other parts of the Bill. The Minister talks about a consultation exercise in the summer, but it is simply not good enough that the House is being asked to agree to the new clause without any draft regulations or explanatory notes and, therefore, any indication of the Government's intentions. Are we talking about 5, 50 or 95 per cent.? Once again, we are being asked to vote for a pig in poke in agreeing to the new clause. Will the Government make anything available before the Bill is considered in the other place?

I should like to pick up two points from the very limited information that we have at the moment, which consists of the Treasury's pre-Budget statement, last week's ministerial statement, which repeated a chunk of it, and the Minister's contribution today, which repeated a chunk of that. It is clear that local authorities will retain a portion of new non-domestic business rates, but the statement refers to growth in the business tax base. It is not clear to me whether the Minister is contemplating that only a portion of that growth in the tax base attributable to new buildings will be included in any percentage to be retained, or whether he expects that revaluation increases—perhaps representing a general uplift in an area's economic tone—will be included in the amount from which a proportion will be retained.

I should like to understand a little more about the phrase "additional increases", which was used in the Treasury statement and, I think, repeated in the Minister's statement. I understand the term "additional non-domestic rates"; I understand the term "increases in non-domestic rates", but I do not understand the term "additional increases in non-domestic rates". I suspect that the Minister has in mind that there will be an amount of increase that the local authority must first achieve without receiving any retained percentage, and that only the addition above that increase will attract the retained percentage. Those are the kinds of things that we need to understand if we are to make an informed judgment about what the Minister proposes. Without draft regulations or any statement of Government intention, it is simply not possible for us to form a clear opinion.

Nevertheless, on the face of it, any empowerment of local authorities to keep even a portion of the non-domestic rate is welcome, and, I might say, in stark contrast to the Government's approach on capital receipts, which reduces the flexibility of local authorities. On a closer reading of the ministerial statement, however, I have one or two concerns about how straightforward the process will be.

Mr. Davey: Before the hon. Gentleman moves to a detailed analysis of this proposal, will he clarify that, in principle, the Conservatives are in favour of part of the increase in the business rate being kept locally? Can he explain how that is consistent with previous Conservative policies? It may be, but, for the benefit of the House, will he elaborate the exact Tory position?

Mr. Hammond: The hon. Gentleman and I have had these enjoyable exchanges on many occasions during proceedings on this and other Bills. It is our position that increasing local autonomy is right, and that genuinely community-based local government is the right approach. To the extent that it can be prudently done within the overall fiscal framework, the maximum possible autonomy should be accorded to local authorities.

The phrase in the Minister's short written statement of 25 February that has given me concern is the following:

> "We are looking at a range of options to get the best distributional fit, with each local authority receiving an incentive that is relevant to them, whilst keeping the scheme as simple as practical."—[*Official Report*, 25 February 2003; Vol. 400, c. 9WS.]

Anyone who has looked at a Government scheme relating to local government finance will know that "as simple as practical" must have a different meaning from the one that it would have to the layman. Could what at first looks like a welcome devolution of power back to local authorities, to allow them to keep a tiny fraction of their non-domestic rate income, be a complex system of specifically tailored incentives to local authorities to deliver on a specific Government agenda—in this case, facilitating the development of business property and infrastructure in the area? If that is how it works in practice, with different targets, thresholds and criteria for different councils, it will effectively be another piece of ring-fencing whereby local authorities get an additional slice of money only if they comply with a specific Government agenda and deliver on specific Government targets. The Minister shakes his head to imply that that is wholly wrong, but we simply do not know, because he has told us virtually nothing about this measure. We need to know how it will work, and how we can know that it will be fair and not just another mechanism for redistribution to the Government's favoured authorities.

Mr. Bercow: It certainly appears that the fog of confusion descending on this subject is becoming deeper by the moment. If moneys are to be shuffled back and forth in an uncertain way and in accordance with a labyrinthine formula, what assessment has my hon. Friend made of the principles on which calculations of entitlement to interest will be made?

Mr. Hammond: I can tell my hon. Friend with absolute honesty that I have made no assessment at all of that matter.

Mr. Bercow: Has the Minister?

Mr. Hammond: I suspect that the Minister, with the substantial resources available to him, is also not in a position to make any such assessment, precisely because we lack many of the relevant details about how the scheme will work.

Let me pick up on something that the Minister said in his brief contribution at the outset of this debate. To paraphrase, he said that this was genuinely new additional money and was not intended to interfere with the existing pooling system for national non-domestic rates. I do not profess to be an expert on local government finance. Indeed, one of the Minister's predecessors many years ago once remarked to me that only one person in his Department genuinely understood local government finance, and he was about to retire.

Mr. Bercow: It is like the Schleswig-Holstein question.

Mr. Hammond: As my hon. Friend says, it is like the Schleswig-Holstein question, often posed and never resolved.

The Minister says that this additional money will not interfere with the pooling system. I presume, however, that there is only one pot, and money that does not go into that pot because it is effectively top-sliced to the retaining local authority will not be there for distribution to other local authorities. That could have several consequences. The amount of NNDR received by all other local authorities that do not achieve the Government's threshold may be reduced, and Government grant, under the formula grant process, may be increased to make up the gap. If that is the case, perhaps the Minister could say so clearly. If that is not the case, taking anything out of the NNDR pot must reduce the amount for redistribution to other authorities.

The only other alternative is that there are no other authorities, and the so-called incentive scheme is so structured—or tailored, as the Minister calls it—that every authority gets to retain a slice of its NNDR, in which case the effect may be minimised, although that will make it difficult to see the benefits of the scheme. Can the Minister give a pledge, here and now, that grant will make up the shortfall in the NNDR pot available for redistribution as a result of top-slicing for retention by local authorities? The grant that is retained will therefore be genuinely additional to the total amount of money—council tax receipts, plus formula grant, plus NNDR redistributed—that that authority would have received had it not been for the top-slicing that the scheme involves. If the Minister can give that assurance, he clearly has the details of the scheme in his mind, if not on a piece of paper. Why has he not been able to share those details with the House?

I turn to a specific question, which I apologise for asking, as it is the kind of question that one would ask properly in Committee. When the Government introduce new clauses on Report, however, we must ask such questions on the Floor of the House. Proposed new subsection (3B) of subsection (4) of the new clause, which inserts new words into section 99 of the 1988 Act, refers to

"rules that may be prescribed under paragraph (a) of subsection (3)".

I take that to mean subsection (3) of section 99. I have obtained the intranet print of the Local Government Finance Act 1988, and, although I find subsection (3) in it, I find no paragraph (a). Is that a typographical error? Does it mean to refer to the proposed new subsection (3A) to be inserted by the new clause? Perhaps the Minister will clarify that specific point when help comes to hand.

The principle of local retention is welcome, but it must be a genuine additional resource and not just a redistribution from one authority to another. The Government have said that no authority will suffer from negative business rate growth, but they have not said that none will suffer from the reduced size of the total NNDR pot for redistribution. Will the Minister give that assurance today?

The Treasury document and the ministerial statement have sounded alarm bells, and we need to see the regulations before we know whether their sounding is justified. I hope that the Minister will be able to explain why he cannot provide even an indicative outline of the Government's intentions in the way that he has done for some other clauses. Will he make a commitment today that such an outline will be available when the Bill reaches the other place?

1 pm

We will not oppose the new clause, but I hope that a substantive debate on the issues will be possible in the other place or, if for any reason that is not possible, when the regulations are laid. I still hope that we will be able to persuade the Government that the provision should involve a small first step to devolution of financial autonomy back to local authorities. The rest of the Bill certainly does not deliver that.

Mr. Edward Davey: The new clause puts me in a bit of a quandary. I want local authorities to have extra autonomy for their spending and local taxation, so allowing local authorities to retain part of the growth in the business rate is clearly a welcome step. However, the sheer complexity of the scheme that is likely to emerge from the consultation is mind-boggling, and not just in terms of working out how the increase will be measured but, as the Minister has acknowledged, in terms of working out how we will assess the relative economic decline of an area that does not have a growing business rate tax base. We will also have to assess whether there had been a reduction in the pace of that decline because of local authority action. All that shows just how complex the proposal is.

We should give credit to the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond). He talked about how the policy would sit alongside the pooling of the uniform business rate. If the Minister answers the hon. Gentleman's question in the affirmative and if it appears that grant will be paid back into the pool to compensate for any loss of rate proceeds, the grant side of the scheme will also be complex. One can imagine the regulations that will have to be introduced. We now realise why they were not ready for consideration by the House today.

We should be worried about complexity in taxation matters. The Government have made the whole tax system far more complicated, and that has put huge extra compliance burdens on businesses and individuals. The provision will place an extra compliance burden on local authorities, and we must try to work out whether the extra financial autonomy that will be gained as a result of this timid devolution of financial power is worth the extra complexity. The House and local authorities will have to consider that balance. Our conclusions will depend on their assessment of whether the proposal is a sensible way forward.

[Mr. Edward Davey]

Because of the complexity, I wonder where on earth the scheme came from. As the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge pointed out, it appeared in the Chancellor's pre-Budget report, so does that mean that it came out of No. 11 Downing street and the Treasury? It is a fiendishly complicated and clever scheme of the type that the Chancellor is very good at dreaming up. Did a certain Ed Balls help the Chancellor to dream up the scheme in the back of a cab or in a pub? It has that sort of feel. It does not appear that the policy has gone through rigorous analysis in the civil service. It is rather bizarre.

I am glad that the Government are committed to consulting widely with the Local Government Association and many other stakeholders. The consultation will have to be pretty extensive and involve the consideration of detailed proposals. I hope that we will have an early sight of any draft regulations before we scrutinise them in the House.

As I said in an intervention on the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge, I am concerned that, because we know so little about the proposal's eventual form, the House will be asked to provide primary legislative agreement and will be able to consider the detail only in a Statutory Instrument Committee. The proposal will probably involve hundreds of millions of pounds, and the figure is likely to grow over the years. Therefore, one would normally expect to debate such a matter in a proper Standing Committee. Since I became a Member of the House, I have had the fortune or misfortune to serve on more than seven Finance Bill Committees. They consider tiny and minor tax changes, and we spend hours in a full Standing Committee debating the merits of tax change that is worth just a few million pounds. Although the Minister pumps this up as a major tax change, he says that it will be suitable for consideration in a Statutory Instrument Committee. I have problems with that, so I hope that he will try to convince me that this is the right route for the House to take.

I also want to probe the logic behind the Government's proposal. It seems that the Conservatives have now changed their position, so we can now all agree that it is right that local authorities have, to an extent, more control over business rates in their areas. Would it, therefore, not be logical to go further than the Government propose? Ever since the Government nationalised the business rate, Liberal Democrats have argued that there is a case for denationalisation and for handing back the control of rates to local authorities. We would do that fully and completely and not in the partial and minor way envisaged by this proposal.

Will the Minister reflect on our suggestion? He may try to keep his counsel, but he will know that the Government have set up the balance of funding review. That review is relevant to the debate, because it will examine how much of a local council's budget should be raised through local taxes and how much should come from central Government grant. The presumption is that the review will try to shift the balance so that more of a local authority's revenue comes from local taxes. Clearly, this proposal would be a small step in that direction.

Mr. Hammond: And the 55 per cent. council tax rises.

Mr. Davey: The hon. Gentleman refers to the huge rises in council tax, and he is right. Unfortunately, they may be part of the shift, though not a very welcome one. It is such an unfair tax.

However, before I am called to order, Mr. Speaker, I shall move on to the point that I was about to make. The Government have set up the review and, if they wish to change the balance, surely the business rate is one of the ways they could do that. Businesses are often in two minds about such a suggestion. In the past, they were worried that some local authorities would behave unwisely, levy too high a business rate and undermine economic activity. I presume that is why the Tories nationalised the business rate. I suspect that the proposal is framed in such a complex manner in an attempt to avoid that problem.

Other business people—and sometimes the same business person in the same conversation—will argue that, since the business rate was nationalised, their links with the local authority have been weakened. The dialogue between businesses and local authorities has been significantly reduced. That is certainly the experience in Kingston, the borough containing my constituency. Although local authorities have tried to overcome the problem of reduced dialogue, the fact that we no longer have a locally raised business tax has got in the way of an important partnership.

The Government talk about building up that partnership. Given the logic of that and of this provision, will the Minister tell us whether the Government have contemplated going even further to the full denationalisation of the business rate? It could be a local business rate that is based on properties or, as the Liberal Democrats propose, it could be based on land values. I commend our proposal because by widening the tax base to include undeveloped land, we would reduce the business rate burden on existing businesses.

I hope that the Minister will explain why he is taking a partial route. We are minded to support the new clause because it will give a little extra financial autonomy to local authorities, but we want to see the details before we sign up to it in the other place and agree to the regulations that will follow.

Mr. Raynsford: We have had a useful debate on an important issue. I appreciate the generally positive response of the hon. Members for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) and for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey). I agree with the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge that it is right to explore ways in which we can give greater freedom and flexibility to local government. In fact, that is one of the great themes running through the Bill. Therefore I was a bit disappointed at his churlish remarks about other freedoms, such as borrowing, trading and levying charges on discretionary charges, all of which are included in the Bill. The hon. Gentleman's Government took more from local government than any other in recorded history. He should surely recognise and acknowledge this Government's steps to give greater discretion to local authorities. However, I welcome a sinner who even partially repents and I am delighted that he feels able to support, at least in principle, our proposal to allow some measure of local discretion over additions in value, created through either development or local authority actions, to enhance the non-domestic rate base.

Mr. Hammond: The Minister emphasises the word "additions". I hope that he will say what is meant by additional increases. He also refers, however, to actions that are due to the local authority. Will some Government official determine which bits of economic growth are due to the work of the local authority and which are due to the work of the market?

Mr. Raynsford: I will deal with those matters. Let me start with the philosophic principle behind the policy. We do not believe that those areas where there is an increase in the non-domestic rate base should automatically get the full benefit; nor do we think that those areas that have a much harder task to retain industry and investment and to attract new investors should not get the benefit, because they face far greater difficulties. It is right to have a regime that genuinely rewards additional increases to non-domestic ratepayers but does not penalise those authorities that succeed in stemming decline when an authority would otherwise face economic problems. The issue is difficult and we have not yet finalised our proposals.

We have not published regulations because the scheme is in its early stages. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge for his kind remarks about our willingness to try to make regulations available on all other matters covered by the Bill, but the scheme's proposals have just been made, following the Chancellor's announcement, and we intend to hold a full and thorough consultation, beginning in the summer, on how it will operate. The scheme will inevitably be complex. Difficult issues need to be addressed and we want to ensure that there is a full debate.

Mr. Edward Davey: I agree that areas that are experiencing a relative economic decline with a falling business rate tax base should not be penalised and that the system should be asymmetric, but I cannot get my head around trying to measure different speeds of decline and what actions have been taken by whom—the market or the local authority—to change those speeds of decline. I understand why the Government want to help those areas, but is that the right mechanism?

1.15 pm

Mr. Raynsford: It is the right way to help those areas. Authorities should have an incentive. The hon. Gentleman mentioned the importance of creating closer links between business and local authorities. We are keen to do that in many ways. He knows that the business improvement district arrangements are a specific attempt to create closer links between business and local authorities. We believe that the incentive scheme will do exactly that. It would be perverse, however, as I think he acknowledged, if those authorities that have a much harder task to attract new investment and to expand their non-domestic rate base were prevented from benefiting from the scheme, especially if any huge effort that they put into encouraging good relations with business and attracting new investment is offset by a general trend of decline in the area's economic prospects.

We want a scheme that allows such efforts to be rewarded. I accept that that will be difficult. A baseline will need to be established which is founded on principles that will be the subject of full consultation. It will need to reflect the starting point against which any increases or reductions can be measured. The mechanisms will need to be agreed and the measurements will also be the subject of fairly detailed discussion.

Mr. Hammond: Can the Minister clarify whether he means a growth in the tax base, by which I mean the base of property, some of which may be empty, that has rateable value, or growth in the rates received? In other words, does an empty factory that is filling up and starting to pay rates count as growth?

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman raises an interesting question. We relate growth to the rate base. We do not want short-term variations, as a result of premises being empty for a short time, to distort the arrangements. There will clearly need to be rules to govern what should happen if there is a significant increase in the tax base but no overall increase in the rates derived.

Before I go into the detail, let me explain how we will ensure that information about the proposals is made available in the most comprehensive way to help discussion. We will provide notes for consideration in the other place, setting out our broad policy intent. They will outline a number of options on the scheme's detail. They will not take the form of a draft set of regulations because it would be premature to draft regulations before the consultation is complete, especially as the consultation is designed to tease out some of the complexities that may have to be addressed and to enable us to reach the right formulation. We intend to provide Members of the other place with more detailed information about our policy. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will recognise that that is in keeping with the spirit that we have adopted throughout the Bill's consideration.

The hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge asked whether we would extend the principle to the council tax. The answer is no, because the council tax is raised in such a way that the local authority receives the revenue raised. It would be bizarre to have an incentive when there is no question of them not receiving whatever council tax is due to them. The scheme is a response to his Government's action to ensure that non-domestic rates are not locally available other than in exceptional circumstances. As I said, we want to provide an incentive to local authorities to attract additional investment. The scheme will give them an additional bonus and it would be inappropriate to apply it to council tax.

The hon. Gentleman also asked whether regulations would be made by affirmative or negative resolution. We intend to make them by negative resolution but, to pick

[Mr. Raynsford]

up on what the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton said about statutory instruments, that will only take place after a full discussion that is based on the consultation. That will allow the issues to be examined in great detail not just by Members of Parliament, but by a wider public. We all recognise that it is important to have full consultation on the scheme.

Mr. Hammond: I am disappointed that the Minister said that the regulations will be made by negative resolution. Can he assure us that if they are laid before the House and are prayed against by the Opposition he will use his influence with the business managers to ensure that a proper debate on such a negative resolution is held?

Mr. Raynsford: I know that the Opposition tend to pray against almost any regulations, but it would be right and proper to have a full debate on those particular regulations. I would use any influence that I may have to assist with that aim, as there is every reason to debate those important matters. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will approach the matter in the spirit of constructive engagement that has characterised previous exchanges, and will seek to improve the scheme and ensure its effective implementation.

Mr. Edward Davey: I do not understand why the Government do not want to introduce the regulations using the affirmative procedure. Is there a reason why they cannot take that route, as it would appear to be the most appropriate one, even though there may have been prior consultation with groups outside the House?

Mr. Raynsford: I do not believe that it would be appropriate or precedented. I repeat that there should be a full discussion during the course of the consultation. I extend to the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton the undertaking that I gave to the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge—if Opposition Members are concerned about the detail of the regulations and would like an opportunity for debate, I shall certainly use my influence to ensure that that is possible.

May I move on to the important issues raised by the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge? He asked for clarification of our intention that there should be growth in the tax base. He is right that the key is growth in the non-domestic rate base. If that were just the result of a general uplift, as I have suggested, it would just be a buckshee gain for authorities that may have done nothing at all or even have pursued policies that worked against business investment in their areas. That would not be fair or appropriate if other authorities with much greater difficulties put huge effort into trying to attract business to their areas. Equally, if the scheme was limited to areas of new development, areas that have great difficulty in attracting new development would be penalised, so it must take account of authorities' ability to maintain investment and retain and enhance businesses that might otherwise have left their areas. The scheme would certainly not be restricted to new development, although that would obviously qualify, as it would bring additional rate value to the area.

I should make it clear that the increases are additional—it is not a question of simply top-slicing the existing national non-domestic rate. A baseline will be important in ensuring that we are talking only about additions that are available under the scheme. If the whole national non-domestic rate pot was treated as a basis for the scheme and top-sliced, irrespective of whether there had been enhanced value, that would diminish the value of the scheme. The aim is to establish an agreed baseline; to continue with the national non-domestic rate and pooling arrangements, as I have already said; and to allow the additional value achieved through the kind of initiatives that I have described to be reflected in the scheme, permitting authorities to retain that additional value.

Mr. Hammond: I am not entirely sure how the scheme will work. My understanding is that all national non-domestic rates went into the pot for redistribution, so I am not sure how the Minister will ensure that the pot is the same size after he has allowed some authorities to retain some non-domestic rates. Will he explain that again for those of us who have not been quick enough to grasp it the first time? Is he saying that there will be an annual ratchet? Does a local authority that scores a bit of additional tax base and retains 10 or 20 per cent. accumulate a certain sum forever, or does the ratchet mean that next year it has to run further up the escalator to get anything? Finally, is the Minister saying that there will be no losers, and that every authority will either be in the same position or will be a winner?

Mr. Raynsford: The answer to the last question is yes. I have already said that there is no intention to penalise authorities. This is an incentive scheme designed to give an additional benefit to authorities that have either successfully enhanced their non-domestic rate base through positive initiatives or have been able to stem the decline in that base through effective partnership with the private sector.

The hon. Gentleman asked some interesting questions about the period for which the benefit lasts. We are discussing those issues ourselves at present, and they will be the subject of consultation. There are some interesting policy issues. When there is a revaluation, a rebasing will obviously be needed. If an authority has the prospect of getting the benefit immediately after a new revaluation, but would lose it if the addition came before the revaluation, that would be a perverse incentive. We certainly do not want perverse incentives to affect the timing of schemes to attract new development. Our aim is to ensure that there is a reasonable time in which authorities can derive benefit from the addition, but clearly it cannot be indefinite, as that would involve a curious change in the tax base over a period of years. If any increase accumulated at any point in time there would never be any rebasing. We believe that there must be a rebasing; there must be a period in which authorities can secure the benefit; there must not be scope for perverse incentives. All of that, as hon. Members will understand, will be the subject of full consultation.

Mr. Hammond: As the Minister attempts to answer my questions, it is becoming apparent that the scheme will be an incredibly complex mechanism. Can he give the House an order-of-magnitude figure for the sums of money we are talking about? I would caution him against going down a complicated route if, in fact, we are talking about small sums of money. Can he give us an idea of the budgeted figure for the total amount of retained national non-domestic rates?

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman is making the mistake of assuming that the scheme has already been worked out in fine detail. I have made it clear to the House that it is an exciting proposal introduced by the Chancellor towards the end of last year. It has considerable benefits and advantages, which Opposition Members recognise, and we are keen to ensure that there is a full and thorough consultation during which the scheme can be discussed, refined and improved before we introduce regulations giving effect to it. There is no rush—we are not rushing to introduce the scheme in the near future, and do not anticipate it being in force before 2005, so there is plenty of time for the full discussion and debate that we should rightly have. If we had not proposed the scheme now, and if there is not an appropriate legislative vehicle in the next couple of years, that opportunity may have been lost. It was therefore right to make provision for it in the Bill. At the same time, we accept that the scheme is in its early infancy and needs to be developed and refined.

As with all matters of local government finance, we will need to establish an appropriate balance between fairness and complexity. If the scheme becomes too complex, it simply will not be worth the candle. On the other hand, if it is seen as rough justice and some of the downsides that we talked about earlier seemed likely to happen, that would undermine confidence in the scheme. That is why we will need arrangements that give the incentives that I described and give a local authority a reward for a reasonable period, but do not produce a distortion over time or perverse incentives. Those are the kind of issues that we will need to explore in the consultation.

1.30 pm

Mr. Hammond: I understand the need for consultation and the fact that these are complex matters, but I find it alarming that the Chancellor is proposing a scheme of incentivisation, apparently without any idea of what sum has been budgeted to pay for it, so the Minister can give the House not the faintest idea whether we are talking about £10 million, £100 million or £1 billion across all local authorities. Could that rather casual approach to the public finances be the reason why the Chancellor will have to borrow £24 billion in the coming year and £35 billion the year after?

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman is in danger of getting away from the subject of the Bill. As a result of the prudent management of the country's public finances, we are able, uniquely among major developed countries, to undertake the substantial investment in public services that the Government are delivering. It is sad that the Opposition are committed to a 20 per cent. cut in public service expenditure, which would decimate the public services that we are discussing.

Mr. Edward Davey: This seems to be a little debate about some new power that may never be used, as it is such a dog's breakfast. Let me pose another problem to the Minister, so that it can be considered even before the consultation document is written. The business rate tax base could suffer from a cyclical effect: some businesses could come into an area, pay rates for two or three years, and then move out. There is a degree of variability within a particular valuation period, adding further complexities to those that we have discussed. There is a final complexity with which the Minister failed to deal in response to an intervention from the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) with respect to the central pot. Although it may not be top-sliced, it will lose additional funds because they will go into the scheme under discussion.

Mr. Raynsford: If the hon. Gentleman thinks about it, he will realise that if there is an appropriate mechanism—I shall not anticipate what precisely that might be, because as I said, these are issues that need to be discussed and finalised following consultation—to avoid the short-term cyclical effects that he describes, and to ensure that there is genuine reward for effort to achieve an increase in the tax base without short-term fluctuations, that will make the scheme simpler. If it followed all the short-term movements that he describes, it would be an inherently more complex scheme. The contradiction that he thinks he has found does not exist. It is possible to have a scheme that is relatively straightforward—not totally simple; I accept that these are complex matters—which removes unnecessary complexity and which has the advantages that I described.

The hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge asked about section 3A(a) of the Local Government Finance Act 1988. I am pleased to tell him that there is a section 3A(a), and I shall read it to him. It states:

> "The Secretary of State may by regulations make provision as regards any financial year—
>
> (a) that a billing authority must estimate at a prescribed time in the preceding financial year and in accordance with prescribed rules whether there is a deficit or surplus in its collection fund for the year and, if so, the amount of the deficit or surplus".

Mr. Hammond: Does the Minister happen to know when that was inserted into the Local Government Finance Act 1988? Alarmingly, given that we have to depend on these things, the intranet edition of that Act was prepared on 20 September 2000, so I must assume that the provision to which the Minister refers was inserted subsequently.

Mr. Raynsford: I shall ensure that the hon. Gentleman gets a full answer to that question. I can assure him that section 3A(a) exists.

The hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton began by saying that he was in a bit of a quandary. That is a normal place for Liberal Democrats to be. Let me reassure him that he just about got there in the end, recognising that the measure is positive and deals with devolving greater financial responsibility to local authorities. We do not agree that there is a case for devolving the entire national non-domestic rate to local determination, for a number of reasons that we can explore on another occasion. We have already debated the matter.

[Mr. Raynsford]

The balance of funding review that we are initiating soon will look at a range of issues, and I have no doubt that some people may wish to raise the issue in that context. No doubt the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues will continue to press the matter, but there are not just serious technical issues relating to fairness because of the considerable disparity in the non-domestic rate values area by area; there are genuine worries on the part of business, which is not at all attracted by the idea of relocalisation. I have stressed that we are keen to encourage good working relationships between local authorities and business, and we see our proposals as one way of achieving that. I hope that the necessary new clause and the appropriate amendments will be added to the Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 14

STANDARDS COMMITTEES AND MONITORING OFFICERS: DELEGATION

'(1) In Chapter 1 of Part 3 of the Local Government Act 2000 (c. 22) (conduct of local government members), after section 54 there is inserted—

"54A Subcommittees of standards committees

(1) A standards committee of a relevant authority may appoint one or more subcommittees for the purpose of discharging any of the committee's functions, whether or not to the exclusion of the committee.

(2) Subsection (1) does not apply to functions under section 55 or 56.

(3) A subcommittee under subsection (1) shall be appointed from among the members of the standards committee by which it is appointed.

(4) As regards subcommittees appointed under subsection (1) by a standards committee of a relevant authority in England or of a police authority in Wales—

(a) regulations under section 53(6)(a) and (c) to (g) may make provision in relation to such subcommittees, and

(b) sections 53(7), (8) and (10) and 54(4) and (6) apply in relation to such subcommittees as they apply in relation to standards committees.

(5) As regards subcommittees appointed under subsection (1) by a standards committee of a relevant authority in Wales other than a police authority—

(a) regulations under section 53(11) may make provision in relation to such subcommittees, and

(b) section 54(5) and (7) apply in relation to such subcommittees as they apply in relation to standards committees.

(6) Subject to any provision made by regulations under section 53(6)(a) or (11)(a) (as applied by this section)—

(a) the number of members of a subcommittee under subsection (1), and

(b) the term of office of those members,

are to be fixed by the standards committee by which the subcommittee is appointed."

(2) In Chapter 5 of that Part (conduct in local government: supplementary), after section 82 there is inserted—

"Delegation by monitoring officers

82A Monitoring officers: delegation of functions under Part 3

(1) This section applies to functions of a monitoring officer of a relevant authority in relation to matters referred to him under section 60(2), 64(2), 70(4) or 71(2).

(2) Where the monitoring officer considers that in a particular case he himself ought not to perform particular functions to which this section applies, those particular functions shall in that case be performed personally by a person nominated for the purpose by the monitoring officer.

(3) Where a deputy nominated by the monitoring officer under section 5(7) of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 (nomination of member of monitoring officer's staff to act as deputy when monitoring officer absent or ill) considers that in a particular case he himself ought not to perform particular functions—

(a) to which this section applies, and

(b) which, by reason of the absence or illness of the monitoring officer, would but for this subsection fall to be performed by the deputy,

those particular functions shall, while the monitoring officer continues to be unable to act by reason of absence or illness, be performed in that case personally by a person nominated for the purpose by the deputy.

(4) Where functions to which this section applies are to be performed by a person nominated under subsection (2) or (3) who is an officer of the relevant authority, the authority shall provide the officer with such staff, accommodation and other resources as are, in the officer's opinion, sufficient to allow those functions to be performed.

(5) Where functions to which this section applies are to be performed by a person nominated under subsection (2) or (3) who is not an officer of the relevant authority, the authority shall—

(a) pay the person a reasonable fee for performing the functions,

(b) reimburse expenses properly incurred by the person in performing the functions, but only to the extent that the amount of the expenses is reasonable, and

(c) provide the person with such staff, accommodation and other resources as are reasonably necessary for the person's performance of the functions."

(3) In section 5 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 (c. 42) (designation etc. of monitoring officers), after subsection (7) there is inserted—

"(7A) Subsection (7) above shall have effect subject to section 82A of the Local Government Act 2000 (monitoring officers: delegation of functions under Part 3 of that Act).".'.—*[Mr. Leslie.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Christopher Leslie): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): With this it will be convenient to discuss Government amendments Nos. 31 and 32.

Mr. Leslie: New clause 14 is an important proposal concerning standards committees and monitoring officers in local authorities and makes two important changes in the regime governing the conduct of local councillors introduced in part 3 of the Local Government Act 2000.

The first important change allows standards committees of local authorities to create sub-committees. That is necessary because if standards committees are to consider reports of alleged misconduct, it would be fairer and more consistent with human rights for a small tribunal—say, between three and five people—to constitute the tribunal, rather than the full standards committee.

Mr. Hammond: I do not disagree that a smaller committee may be convenient, but I would be fascinated to know where in the Human Rights Act or the European convention on human rights the Minister finds any reference to the size of the tribunal.

Mr. Leslie: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman asks me that. Article 6 of the European convention on human rights states that everyone is entitled to a fair hearing. Some standards committees have 19 members, so there is a risk that such a tribunal would be too large and the case would turn into a show trial. A large tribunal could be intimidating to some members whose case was being considered. Case law suggests that we should make sure that the opportunity for a fairer hearing for those cases is available. We need to make the change in primary legislation so that the regulations can follow.

The second change allows monitoring officers of local authorities—those in local councils who will do the job of investigating—to delegate the function of carrying out the investigation. The provision is needed because monitoring officers can have other responsibilities in local authorities, especially smaller local authorities—for example, they may be the local council's principal legal adviser. On occasions monitoring officers may, therefore, have been involved in the very matters to be investigated, possibly having given informal advice earlier to a councillor under investigation. To avoid conflicts of interest, the new clause provides an explicit power for a monitoring officer to delegate those functions to another person.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): In recognising the importance of what the new clause proposes on standards committees and monitoring officers, may I ask whether such provision is not all the more necessary in view of the scandal at Westminster? What steps, if any, are the Government taking to get Lady Porter to pay the £26.5 million that the House of Lords has stated that she owes to the London borough of Westminster? Is it not essential that the Government regard that notorious scandal, and Lady Porter's refusal to pay despite her huge fortune, as a matter of concern?

Mr. Leslie: My hon. Friend tempts me to discuss that case in general terms, but, sadly, I do not think that it would be appropriate for Ministers to take on the role of the Standards Board for England and the auditors in respect of that case. As he will know, it is for Westminster city council to pursue any financial matters on its doorstep. We shall see how the council manages to do that job.

I was speaking about the second important change that the new clause makes. Such changes are known as section 66 regulations, under the Local Government Act 2000, and many locally elected councillors who serve on standards committees, including a number of independent members who have given up their time to do so, have been waiting for some time for changes to complete the standards regime process and allow cases that can be best dealt with locally to be handled at local council level.

Mr. Edward Davey: One problem that local authorities experience with standards committees is dealing with an awful lot of trivial, silly and frivolous complaints, often made on partisan grounds, from people in all parties. Will the new clause help to reduce the number of such complaints? If not, when will the Government tackle that problem?

Mr. Leslie: As the hon. Gentleman knows, claims and counter-claims in politics are, I am afraid, inherent in the nature of the business. There is obviously a need to ensure strong guidelines for dealing with frivolous or vexatious claims, especially if they can be dismissed very quickly. Nationally, the Standards Board for England has been carrying quite a burden in terms of the number of complaints, many of which are very minor, if not irrelevant. The board is setting up processes to ensure that it can quickly dispatch its business and clear people against whom spurious allegations have been made.

Introducing regulations to ensure that a national standards board no longer considers every single complaint and allowing complaints to be quickly delegated to a local level, where they can be dealt with equally speedily by the local standards committees, is the best way of proceeding. I do not think that it would be possible to write into primary legislation some definition of spurious allegations, as the matter is very complex, but it is best and most appropriate that local standards committees can make that judgment.

Mr. Davey: Is not part of the problem the fact that various councillors and members of the public can make such allegations cost-free? As they stand to lose nothing, there is almost an incentive in some areas for people to make vexatious claims. The situation may be difficult, but if the Government are prepared to consider complex powers on local retention of rates, they should put their mind to this matter, which is causing real problems and wasting a lot of office time and taxpayers' money.

Mr. Leslie: I hear what the hon. Gentleman is saying, but the tribunals in such cases are not the same as industrial tribunals, where the complainants themselves may have an expectation of compensation in making a complaint against some wrong that was done personally to them. Although cost awards might be appropriate in such cases, I do not believe that they are appropriate in the more civil situation in which complaints are made on the basis of standards and ethics, whether at a national or local level. I believe that we can strike the right balance by giving guidance to standards committees, so that they can dispatch their business efficiently. Indeed, the Standards Board for England is likely to issue guidance across the board on the questions involved, not least of which is whether monitoring officers can delegate functions to other officers.

1.45 pm

As I said, local councils are eager for the local arrangements to come into effect. They now have strong standards committees with independent members, and these workable rules will allow them to get on with the job appropriately should the circumstances arise. I hope that the new clause and amendments will be agreed to.

Mr. Hammond: I shall be brief.

We agree that most cases of misconduct are best resolved at local level. To the extent that the new clause seeks to remove impediments to the underlying intentions framed in the Local Government Act 2000, it is welcome. That prompts the question of why it was tabled on Report rather than being included in the original Bill or tabled in Committee. Will the Minister clarify that point, which is not a last-minute one, as concern has been expressed about it for some time?

There is also concern that the need to correct deficiencies arising from an Act that was passed only two years ago highlights the dangers of excessive legislative load, inadequate time for parliamentary draftsmen and the curtailed scrutiny and consideration that Bills often receive. I fear that the consequence of that lack of time will be that the Government will have to introduce an increasing number of measures to correct defects in legislation passed only relatively recently.

I am grateful to the Minister for giving me his interpretation of article 6 of the European convention on human rights and the way in which it militates towards a smaller rather than a larger tribunal. He spoke about a tribunal of three or four people and cited the example of a committee of 19 as excessive in terms of that article. It might be reassuring if he would confirm that he does not regard 12 members as excessive for a properly constituted tribunal in the terms of article 6. It could have serious ramifications for our legal system if he feels that 12 is excessive,. I look forward to his comments.

I must again take a few moments of the time of the House to make a couple of drafting points of the type that would have been made in Committee if the same provisions had been considered there. New section 82A(4) to the Local Government Act 2000, as set out in the new clause, provides that where the

"person nominated . . . is an officer of the relevant authority"

he will be afforded

"such staff, accommodation and other resources as are, in the officer's opinion, sufficient to allow those functions to be performed."

Where a third party is nominated to carry out the functions, however, subsection (5)(c) provides that he will be afforded

"such staff, accommodation and other resources as are reasonably necessary for the person's performance of the functions."

The criterion of being "reasonably necessary" is a rather better one than is provided in subsection (4). It is an objective criterion and I cannot see any obvious reason why a local government officer should be deemed able to determine the resources that he needs for himself, apparently without any qualification of reasonableness, while a third party is afforded only those resources that are reasonably necessary. Perhaps the Under-Secretary would like to examine that with a view to ascertaining whether, when the Bill reaches the other place, it could be amended to apply the "reasonably necessary" criterion in both cases. I have no other substantial points to make about the new clause.

David Winnick: I support the new clause, which is necessary. I work on the assumption that most local government business is conducted honestly and I have no reason to believe otherwise. Clearly, a monitoring system is essential; I wish that one had existed previously. If such arrangements had been in place some years ago, the scandal at Westminster council could have been avoided. It is no good the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) disliking remarks that reflect badly on his party; they cannot be avoided.

Mr. Hammond: It is not a question of my disliking the hon. Gentleman's comments. I should simply be grateful if he extended their scope to include all the scandals in Labour-controlled authorities in the past 20 or 30 years.

David Winnick: It is up to Conservative Members to do what they consider appropriate; I am dealing with a specific issue.

If we believe that councillors' behaviour should be above board, it is essential to provide some guidelines. We know the district auditor's findings for Westminster council: 250 council properties in eight marginal wards were sold purely to try to obtain Conservative votes. That was unlawful, and that is what the district auditor found.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

David Winnick: In a moment.

The most important point is that the House of Lords found last year that Westminster council's conduct was unlawful. The highest court in the land concluded that Lady Porter's actions were unlawful. The sum involved is £26.5 million plus interest. When the issue was raised with the Conservative Government, the then Prime Minister and other Ministers said that they did not want to make a judgment or any comments until the legal process had been exhausted. That has happened. It is unfair that councillors can be surcharged, albeit small amounts, when the former leader of Westminster council can get away with not paying £26.5 million.

Mr. Hammond: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We are discussing an amendment to an Act that was passed in 2000, long after the events that the hon. Gentleman describes. Are they relevant to the debate?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order for the Chair. However, I say to the hon. Member for Walsall, North (David Winnick) that we are considering changing structures, and not individual cases. I believe that he has made the point that he wanted to make and gone far enough down that road.

David Winnick: I am grateful for your guidance, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I shall give way shortly to the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner), who wanted to intervene earlier, but I want to make the point that if the structures had been in place at the time, the scandal that I mentioned would probably not have occurred. I therefore do not understand why the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge is so upset. I should like him to condemn from the Dispatch Box Lady Porter's refusal to pay the money involved.

Mr. Andrew Turner: My comments may be superfluous in view of your guidance, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I merely wanted to say that if the structures had been in place in the 1940s, Herbert Morrison might not have vowed to build the Tories out of London.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Hon. Members are straying further and further from the new clause. We should revert to it.

David Winnick: I simply ask my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary to condemn what occurred and say whether he is reasonably satisfied that the new arrangements would prevent the sort of scandal that happened in Westminster. Preventing such scandals is essential for maintaining standards in public life. I also hope that the Conservative spokesman will condemn Lady Porter's refusal to pay the money involved. It is a simple request and I hope that it will be fulfilled.

Mr. Edward Davey: The Local Government Association has considered the new clause and given it cross-party support. That is relevant to our debate and decision on it.

I was disappointed by the Under-Secretary's reply to my intervention. He said that the provisions will not tackle the problem of vexatious complaints and that he is not minded to deal with that. He should reconsider.

There is no problem with the specific proposals and I add my support to the comments of the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond). Proposed new section 82A(4) refers to staff being sufficient "in the officer's opinion". I, too, believe that that should be subject to a reasonableness test. Officers might decide that they wanted a suite of accommodation and a range of support staff. Although an officer's decision could probably be reviewed, the process would be costly and time-consuming. It would be much simpler if we added the word "reasonable" in the appropriate place to ensure a balance and that taxpayers' money is not wasted.

Mr. Andrew Turner: Does the hon. Gentleman remember that, in Committee, the Under-Secretary implied that reasonableness was built into almost any provision in any legislation? I am not sure whether he is currently operating on that basis. If so, it prompts the question of why "reasonable" appears in some places but not in others.

Mr. Davey: Indeed. That is why the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge and I made that point. The hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) will have noted that the phrase "reasonably necessary" appears in proposed new section 82A(5)(c). There appears to be some confusion among those who drafted the Bill and in the Minister's thinking. That is a small point and we do not want to press the new clause to a Division because of it, but I hope that the Minister will accept it and ensure that the measure is corrected before it appears on the statute book.

Mr. Robert Syms (Poole): I endorse the comments of the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey). Sub-committees are sensible because they can deal fairly speedily with any allegations against someone. People are busy, and convening a full committee can prove difficult. I therefore believe that the new clause may speed up justice in the case of a complaint. That is sensible.

The point about vexatious and frivolous complaints is significant. There are approximately 20,000 councillors in Britain but, given that number, scandals are rare. All parties have occasionally been touched by scandal, but few councillors are locked up in jail. Some are, but most are honest and diligent.

Under the current structure, party political groups tend to level complaints on a tit-for-tat basis. For example, a row happens in the council chamber and a complaint is made to the monitoring officer or the standards committee. I had experience of local government a few years ago and I have contacts today. I am always surprised by the frivolity of the complaints. One party starts, the other responds and the complaint keeps going. Guidance should include a reporting system to enable us to identify frivolous or vexatious complaints. They waste much time and effort in local government, which has many better things to do.

I am sure that monitoring officers will be pleased that they can delegate their functions. Some find themselves in the political position of being bombarded by complaints from various groups. They will be pleased to pass on their responsibilities when they can do that.

Matthew Green (Ludlow): The hon. Gentleman mentioned spurious complaints by councillors from both sides. I know of at least a couple of councils where senior officers used the threat of reports to the monitoring officer to try to keep their councillors going down the route that they would like. I am afraid that we see far too much of that officer-led situation in councils. Is the hon. Gentleman aware of any similar circumstances?

2 pm

Mr. Syms: I was not aware of that, although the hon. Gentleman makes a good point.

This sours relationships in local government and takes up an awful lot of time. The Minister said that the national committee has many frivolous matters referred to it. That should be made clear. Even if there were not to be a system of fines, there should at least be some system of monitoring and naming people who level frivolous or vexatious complaints, especially if they have a track record of levelling complaints that are not upheld.

Mr. Leslie: We have covered a large number of issues in a short time, which I welcome. In response to my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (David Winnick), I agree that there were several serious cases historically that led to the Government taking a strong

[Mr. Leslie]

decision to make structural changes in relation to improving standards and ethics in all levels of public life, not least in local government. Several cases gave grounds for laying the foundations for some of those changes. In the case of Lady Porter, it was the auditor who concluded that there had been scandalous misconduct in that authority. That is well known and on the record. My hon. Friend made the point extremely forcefully.

David Winnick: The Minister will know that that decision has been upheld by the House of Lords, the highest court in the land. As I said, Lady Porter owes £26.5 million plus interest, and she is obviously finding outlets in various parts of the world so as not to have to pay the money owing to the London borough of Westminster.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. May I repeat to the Minister what I said to the hon. Gentleman when he addressed the House—that I would rather he did not pursue that matter any further?

Mr. Leslie: The matter stands on the record, then, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) raised a number of issues. First, he asked why these changes were not anticipated at an earlier stage, perhaps in Committee. We have here a completely new regime for identifying misconduct, carrying out investigations, conducting hearings, imposing sanctions and so forth. The regulations governing the regime need to provide for fairness and efficiency across the wide variety of circumstances that might arise in each different local authority. That makes the regulation process somewhat complex. The need for the changes that we propose was identified following extensive consultation that we undertook, particularly last summer. We tabled the amendments in response to issues that were identified by the Standards Board for England and by monitoring officers and standards committees around the country.

The hon. Gentleman asked me to clarify whether 12 people were too many for a tribunal or, indeed, a jury. It was certainly not my intention to suggest that that number was excessive. I was trying to explain in a more sophisticated manner that it is important locally that standards committees have the opportunity to set up sub-committees so that the nature of the tribunal can most appropriately reflect the nature of the allegation in question.

The hon. Gentleman made a well-spotted point in noting that the new clause contains differing descriptions of the resources that can be allocated to monitoring officers who are undertaking an investigation and those that can be allocated to people who are delegated the function as a third person and who will have the resources that are "reasonably necessary" rather than simply sufficient to perform the function. That provision is there because it would not be right to give someone who is not an employee of an authority the automatic right to specify what resources the authority should provide. A situation involving a council employee, with the normal constraints in respect of ensuring that they have the necessary resources, differs from that involving somebody, say, from a neighbouring authority having a blanket right. That was the rationale behind the different phrases in the new clause, but I shall certainly look at that issue again to check that it does not give rise to any problems.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) for helpfully pointing out that, in general, the reasonableness test under the Wednesbury principle should also apply to any activities and judgments of public officials. That point was also raised by the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey).

The hon. Member for Poole (Mr. Syms) made some important points about spurious or frivolous cases. It is important in any political situation that we allow complaints to go forward and that we do not put hurdles in their way. Although he may feel that too many cases concern allegations that are not well founded, some are genuinely and earnestly made, and we should not inhibit them. However, we also have to strike the right balance in ensuring that spurious complaints that are proved to be such can be dismissed quickly. In terms of inter-party banter, the public are pretty sophisticated and well able to make their own judgments about such allegations.

These are important provisions for raising standards in the ethical structures in local government and I hope that they can stand part of the Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 3

USE OF HOUSING CAPITAL RECEIPTS—RESERVED PORTION

'(1) This section applies to capital receipts paid to the Secretary of State pursuant to section 11(2)(b).

(2) The Secretary of State shall pay to each local authority which makes a payment to him of a capital receipt pursuant to section 11(2)(b) a special grant equivalent to fifty per cent. of such capital receipt paid to him for the use by the local authority solely for the purposes of—

(a) defraying the cost of capital works to any building or land in relation to which the local authority is or has been subject to a duty under section 74 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 (c. 42); and

(b) securing the provision of housing within the local authority area by a registered social landlord in respect of which the local authority shall have the right to nominate the occupier.

(3) Any grant which falls to be paid by the Secretary of State pursuant to subsection (2) above shall be paid in the financial year in which the Secretary of State receives the payment from the local authority pursuant to section 11(2)(b) in relation to which the grant becomes payable.'.—*[Mr. Hammond.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Hammond: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

New clause 6—*Empty homes*—

'.—(1) The information obtained in relation to council tax on empty homes shall not be used to require the owner of an empty property that is in reasonable repair to give up the freedom to enjoy and manage that property as the owner wishes.

(2) Any amount raised by levying Council Tax on an empty home will be retained by the billing Authority and there shall be no substitution of any grant, subsidy or money due from central Government as a result of such a change.'.

New clause 7—*Housing Revenue Account*—

'.—The Secretary of State shall make an annual report to Parliament on the operation of section 90 (under which a local housing authority is required to pay to the appropriate person an equivalent amount of the Housing Revenue Account subsidy in [illegible] negative figure occurs) stating—

(a) for each local housing authority—
  (i) the amount involved, and
  (ii) the amount by which rents in that authority would rise because of the operation of this clause; and

(b) to which local housing authorities he has made payments as a result of their Housing Revenue Accounts being in deficit and how much their rents are reduced because of the operation of that section.'.

New clause 16—*Repayment of overhanging debt*—

'The Secretary of State shall make an annual report to Parliament detailing—

(a) the amounts paid or contemplated to be paid pursuant to sections 40 and 41; and

(b) the effects of such payments on rents in relation to the voluntary transfers of council housing'.

Amendment No. 43, in page 5 [Clause 11], leave out lines 38 and 39.

Amendment No. 44, in page 5, line 38 [Clause 11], leave out

'equal to the whole or any part'

and insert

'up to a maximum of 50 per cent.'.

Amendment No. 4, in page 48, line 31 [Clause 92], leave out subsection (1).

Amendment No. 35, in page 48, line 34 [Clause 92], leave out subsection (2).

Amendment No. 36, in page 73, line 12 [Clause 125], leave out '92(1)'.

Mr. Hammond: This group of new clauses and amendments addresses one of the key issues of the Bill, which was discussed in some depth in Committee—at least, in as much depth as the timetable motion permitted. The Government say that the Bill is about delivering freedoms and flexibilities to local authorities, but their actions on capital receipts, the associated debt and local authority housing grant demonstrate exactly the opposite as far as prudent, debt-free authorities are concerned. In fact, the whole approach of the first part of the Bill, mirroring the Government's conduct of their own finances, is to abandon prudence, to punish debt-free authorities and to encourage borrowing, while increasing the power of the Secretary of State in the allocation of funding by expropriating the capital receipts of local authorities from right-to-buy sales, as clause 11 seeks to do.

The Select Committee that considered the Bill in draft—one of the early examples of the draft Bill procedure—recommended that clause 11 be deleted. The Government have rejected that recommendation, which represents an early defeat for the concept of consideration of Bills in draft. We have seen draft regulations in relation to clause 11, and they have been much discussed. We know that the Government intend to sequester 75 per cent. of the capital receipts that local authorities receive from right-to-buy sales and 50 per cent. of those obtained from other transactions. The Government use language such as "pooling" and redistribution. Their notes on the clause talk about taking this money in order to redistribute it. However, nobody reading the Bill will find any reference to redistribution or pooling; they will find that the 75 per cent. tax on local authority capital receipts has to be

"paid to the Secretary of State".

Clearly, these moneys will not be available to the surrendering local authority, but what assurance do we have that they will represent net additional money at all? The Treasury, as we all know, has its own little local difficulties. It is far from apparent to me that when the Treasury and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister formulate the overall local authority finance settlements for next year and the two subsequent years, all the money that has been skimmed off in this way will be treated as an additional resource, rather than as a substitute resource for money that would otherwise have been made available to areas in need, from central Government funding.

Mr. Edward Davey: The hon. Gentleman and I agreed on many aspects of this issue in Committee, but can he clarify whether, compared with the previous regime, the change that the Government propose will hit only debt-free authorities? The previous regime—it was a Conservative one—prevented many local councils from keeping their own capital receipts. Under the Conservatives, non-debt-free authorities had to pay them to the centre.

Mr. Hammond: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his expression of general support. Indeed, I am glad about that because he has added his name to new clause 3, so we would expect him to support it. He is right, of course, that the principal burden of clause 11 falls on the 34 debt-free authorities.

Mr. Raynsford: It falls on 18 authorities.

Mr. Hammond: In saying that, the Minister is arguing that it is debt-free authorities with housing stock that the provision hits most substantially. However, it is my understanding that it will impact on indebted local authorities, to the extent that the Government do not choose—as they are empowering themselves to do through other provisions in the Bill—to pay off their debts for them.

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman tries to draw a distinction between debt-free authorities that have housing stock, and those that do not. How can housing authorities that do not have any housing stock possibly benefit from capital receipts from house sales?

Mr. Hammond: Of course they cannot benefit from capital receipts from housing sales—I was merely trying to contend with the Minister's constant chuntering from a sedentary position. I referred to 34 authorities and he replied with 18, and I was perhaps second-guessing some rationale for his figure. My understanding is that 34 debt-free local authorities will be particularly

[Mr. Hammond]

affected by these measures, but if the Minister has a different view, he will doubtless make his point in due course.

The Government argue that not all local authorities in receipt of capital receipts have chosen to reinvest them in housing assets, and to a limited extent that is true. That is called local decision making, but the power in the Bill is a power to tax local authorities, not an obligation to pool and to redistribute, over and above existing housing capital funding.

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid-Worcestershire): As one of those who did not have the privilege of serving on this Bill in Committee, I wonder whether my hon. Friend can explain a little about the retrospective nature of the Bill's provisions. Wychavon district council, which is in my constituency, sold its housing stock some five or six years ago and repaid all its debts. It now has a substantial cash balance. Does he have any concerns about the Bill's implications for authorities such as Wychavon?

Mr. Hammond: My hon. Friend raises an interesting point. *[Interruption.]* The Minister is chuntering from a sedentary position again. He seems to have an obsession with saying what I am about to say before I can say it.

Mr. Raynsford: I am trying to help the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Hammond: I am grateful to the Minister for his assistance. I do not think that clause 11 will pose any threat to those receipts, but I draw the attention of my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) to the concern of many local authorities with positive capital balances that changes in the funding formula, and in the general tenor of the Government's approach to local authority finance, present the constant threat that unjust account will be taken of those capital funds, in such a way that the grant funding available to those authorities will be reduced.

The existing system of housing capital funding is itself being scrapped, of course—a point that I shall return to in a moment. The Government's second argument is that the stock that is being sold was originally financed centrally. Well, perhaps it was, but many debt-free authorities have received negative housing subsidy for years. It is their tenants' rent and their council tax payers' tax that has, over generations, built up the equity that exists in the housing stock that they are disposing of today—through investment, improvements, maintenance of stock, and repayment of debt.

2.15 pm

So both the Government's arguments fail. If one believes in local democracy and the freedoms for local authorities that Ministers laughably proclaim this Bill is about, reinvestment of capital receipts from right to buy should be a local decision. The equitable ownership of the assets lies with the local community, not with the Secretary of State. The sequestration of one community's assets, even if for redistribution to another, is the antithesis of responsible and empowered local government. It is just another crude attempt by the Government to reinforce the clear thrust of their local government finance policy: to snatch from those authorities wicked enough to be prudent, well run, low taxing and debt free, in order to bail out the hopeless, the feckless and the profligate. That policy will result in average band D council taxes for the coming financial year on the homes of ordinary hard-working families in England exceeding £1,000 for the first time—a point which my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) has made.

Debt-free local authorities currently have the freedom to reinvest—or not, as they choose—their receipts from capital disposals. They, of course, will bear the brunt, but I should be grateful if the Minister would touch on the complex issue of how this measure impacts on indebted authorities. I am ready to stand corrected, but my understanding is that the notional income from set-aside receipts offsets the notional cost of the underlying debt that financed the assets that gave rise to those receipts. The Government seem to be recognising that problem in this Bill by taking powers to themselves to clear local authority debt; indeed, we shall be discussing overhanging debt in a moment. However, it appears that a local authority that has debt will have its receipts not set aside—blocked, in essence—but sequestered by the Government. It will be dependent on the largesse of the Secretary of State to clear its paper indebtedness, at least. Perhaps the Minister will clarify how that process works when he winds up the debate.

As ever, in Committee we approached this issue in the spirit of constructive compromise. We tabled amendments that recognised the Government's agenda, while resisting the extent of the asset grab that they proposed. We tried to reduce, or to limit, the percentage of the capital receipt that could be taken by the Secretary of State. We tried to ring-fence part of the local authority receipt for reinvestment in housing and regeneration within that local authority area, thus addressing one of the Government's principal purported concerns. I am afraid to say, however, that all that was in vain. The Government proved determined to attack the freedoms of debt-free authorities, and to undermine the right to buy from all sides. That is demonstrated in this Bill, which allows deduction of local authority housing and regeneration investment before the tax is calculated for other capital receipts, but not for right-to-buy receipts.

If we set clause 11 in the wider context, it is apparent that the Government are putting together a system whereby they sequestrate 75 per cent. of capital receipts from right to buy. At the same time, the right to buy itself comes under attack, in the form of a reduction in discounts, and in a clear policy agenda that seeks to limit the opportunities for ordinary hard-working families to benefit from right to buy.

Secondly, there is the introduction of a discretionary grant system, whereby the Secretary of State will pay off local authorities' indebtedness where he sees fit. Thirdly, we are all aware of the abolition of the local authority social housing grant—a measure that was well trailed but that all local authorities, without exception, understood was intended to come in on 1 April 2004. With some horror, local authorities have become aware—although they have yet to receive the courtesy of direct information from the Office of the Deputy Prime

Minister—that local authority social housing grant will, in fact, be withdrawn on 1 April 2003. They became aware of that by being copied in on a letter from officials in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister to the Housing Corporation on 8 February 2003, just three weeks before they were required by law to have set their budgets. That has caused chaos. It smacks of political vindictiveness or fiscal panic on the part of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. The Minister is shaking his head, so no doubt he will be defending the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's lamentable performance in communicating with local authorities about the abolition of local authority social housing grant on 1 April 2003. Taken together, all those facts add up to a very curious idea of freedom and flexibility.

Mr. Edward Davey: The hon. Gentleman has probably seen today's written ministerial statement by the Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, on the local authority social housing grant. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that this episode suggests a degree of incompetence in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister that is extremely worrying? It is clear that local authorities did not expect the grant to be phased out until April 2004. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the announcement that it will be phased out in 2003 has, in many areas, left plans for developing more affordable homes in utter chaos?

Mr. Hammond: The hon. Gentleman is right. The announcement left councils reeling just a couple of weeks before they were due to present their budgets. There has been no clear indication of what the transitional arrangements are to be. There has been an indication that there will be transitional arrangements, but no information has been offered to allow individual authorities to assess which of their schemes will be eligible for the arrangements and which will not. That has led to what I can only describe as outrage among local authorities. The offence has been compounded by the utter discourtesy of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in copying in local authorities on an e-mail from an official to the Housing Corporation. There was no effort to follow that up by direct communication with the local authorities. When I contacted the office of the Minister responsible for housing immediately after this fiasco had become known to me, I was told that there would be no chance of any direct communication in the following week—the week when the House was in recess—and that the earliest that any communication would be made would be in the week the House resumed. To my knowledge, nothing has yet gone out to local authorities.

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire): My hon. Friend may know that Test Valley borough council is one of the many councils to have been caught up in this. The council has written to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. Does my hon. Friend agree that the only satisfactory transitional arrangement would be one that put the local authority back in the position it thought it was in before the communication went out?

Mr. Hammond: My right hon. Friend is right. A number of local authorities have suggested to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister that the only fair transitional arrangement will be one that recognises all projects that were in local authorities' financial statements and plans at or around 10 February. From the financial information that I have seen on the amount of money available for transitional arrangements, it is clear to me that the Government will not allow anything like all of those projects to slip under the wire.

Matthew Green: In the information on the transitional arrangements—which has been placed in the Library today—it is clear that, instead of the £500 million provision that had been expected for this year, debt-free authorities will find that their provision has been graciously increased from £175 million to £275 million. Instead of a year, they are being given an extra three months—up to 30 June—to get schemes, together with their planning permission, through. That will allow some schemes to go ahead, but the statement by the Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, says:

> "We do however need to ensure that the funding limits are not exceeded. If the total claims submitted by 30 June exceed the money available, the Housing Corporation will prioritise schemes with the Government Offices in terms of their contribution to the regional housing priorities."

In other words, if the limit is exceeded in my area, it will be the Government office for the west midlands that decides who will get the go-ahead.

Mr. Hammond: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, who is absolutely right. I have not seen that statement, and I query why it should be necessary for Ministers to table, only this morning, written ministerial statements that are obviously relevant to today's debate. When that sort of thing happens, hon. Members do not have the opportunity to examine them and discuss them with local authorities. I know from copied correspondence that I have seen that many local authorities have already invested substantial amounts of money and time in projects that will certainly not clear the hurdle that the hon. Gentleman has just informed us has been set in the written ministerial statement. That is a very serious matter. Not only its substance but the way in which it has been handled do no credit at all to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. The Minister for Local Government and the Regions is not, of course, directly responsible for such matters; I am sure that he would have handled them in a way that was not so grossly discourteous to local authorities. He will know that this debacle has done a great deal of damage to the relationship between his Department and local authorities.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): Does my hon. Friend feel that, because of the state of the public finances, the actions that have been taken smack of late intervention by the Treasury? Virtually no analysis has been done of the effect of these proposals on councils, which can only move at a certain pace with future housing developments. The whole approach destroys any idea of legitimate expectations.

Mr. Hammond: My right hon. Friend is right. As he points out, local authorities have been placed in an impossible position. They have been planning, spending, making progress with projects and preparing

[Mr. Hammond]

their budgets, only to find that many of their activities have been put under a shadow on very short notice and without any official notification.

The signals from Government are utterly confusing. At the beginning of February, we heard the Deputy Prime Minister batting on about the need to build more affordable housing. In some areas, the need to build more affordable housing and to develop sustainable communities is desperate. At the same time, local authorities—which believed that they had been doing precisely the bidding of the Government in negotiating with their registered social landlords and in working up schemes to provide precisely such affordable and sustainable housing developments—have found that the rug has been pulled from under them without even the courtesy of a phone call. They have been left to pick up the pieces and, in many cases, the costs that they have already incurred.

The Government have given us a curious idea of what freedom and flexibility mean. They seem to mean that the Government take one's assets, cut off one's entitlement to grant funding for one's social housing programme, and replace that funding with grants that are at the discretion of the Secretary of State. At worst, that is open to any kind of gerrymandering; at best, it represents a huge increase in bureaucracy and a loss of local autonomy and accountability, as local authorities are forced to supplicate at the altar of the Deputy Prime Minister for funding for regeneration and social housing schemes.

Clause 11 hands the Government an £800 million pork barrel that is financed by council tenants and council tax payers. That may be why the hon. Member for Dagenham (Jon Cruddas), who I am pleased to see is here, was able to vote with the Government in favour of clause 11, even though his own local authority—Barking and Dagenham—will be the single biggest loser, losing £12 million of capital receipts. Perhaps he has been given an assurance that the Secretary of State's largesse will extend to Barking and Dagenham, and his council will not be out of pocket. So much for the Secretary of State's open-minded and objective approach to funding decisions.

2.30 pm

Mr. Andrew Turner: Does my hon. Friend agree that the Minister's body language may tell us more than his words? *[Interruption.]* He is now trying to appear open and wise. When my hon. Friend makes a point with which the Minister disagrees, he smiles like a crocodile and shakes his head vigorously. However, when my hon. Friend makes a point with which the Minister cannot in honesty disagree, such as the remark about the promises to the hon. Member for Dagenham (Jon Cruddas) or about the Treasury's intervention in the social housing grant, the Minister hunches up, buries his nose in his papers and scribbles notes.

Mr. Hammond: I do not have the expertise that my hon. Friend obviously possesses in the analysis of Ministers' body language. This particular Minister's body language is usually smiling, and I find it difficult to read anything into that, although I have discovered that smiling does not necessarily indicate agreement with or approval of what is being said. I look forward to my hon. Friend's continued interpretation, as I may find it helpful.

New clause 3 is a further attempt at compromise, following the attempts that we made in Committee and that were rejected by the Government. I am delighted that the Liberal Democrats have decided to support the new clause. It proposes that the Secretary of State should pay a mandatory special grant for social housing provision and repairs to housing stock, equivalent to 50 per cent. of what is received under the provisions of clause 11. Effectively, new clause 3 provides that 25 per cent. of right-to-buy receipts would remain in the hands of the local authority, with no restrictions on its use; 37.5 per cent. would come back to the authority in a ring-fenced special grant to be spent on social housing and repairs to stock; and 37.5 per cent. would go to the Secretary of State for redistribution, if he is generous, or to be swallowed up into the Chancellor's black hole, if he is ungenerous. More than half the receipts would remain with or return to the local authority. That is a compromise position that any reasonable Government would accept. Unless the Minister will accept it, all we have on offer from him is a set of transitional arrangements that reject the arguments in principle against this centralising measure.

During the debate in Committee, we touched on the question of receipts other than in the form of cash—in particular, in the form of nomination rights. For example, a local authority might transfer assets to a registered social landlord in exchange for nomination rights to the tenancies in those assets. The Opposition amendment in Committee proposed that such receipts should be excluded from the sequestration process.

The Bill would require local authorities to value such nomination rights and pay a levy to the Secretary of State, in cash, on receipts that have not been received in cash. That would present serious problems for local authorities. To the Minister's credit, he recognised that that was not the Government's intention, but he did not accept the amendment because he noticed many loopholes and possibilities for evasion by local authorities of his taxing plans. He said:

> "I cannot give the hon. Gentleman an absolute guarantee that we will be able to produce revised regulations in time for Report stage, but that is only because of the considerable number of other pressures under which we are working."

There is obviously too much legislation. He continued:

> "I undertake to write to the hon. Gentleman, setting out our thoughts on how we might address this conundrum and I will copy that letter to all Committee members."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 28 January 2003; c. 145.]

I am wary of accusing the Minister of not having written to me, because I did so once before and returned to my office to find the letter on the doormat. However, I have not received a letter, and I have spoken to some hon. Friends who are also not aware of having received one. I see from the body language of the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) that he has not received one either—*[Interruption.]* Well, I see it from his raised eyebrow language.

We needed to see how the Government intended to deal with the issue before we returned to the subject on Report. In the absence of any revised draft regulations, we needed at least to have the Minister's thoughts set out for us. If he has not been able to set them out in writing, perhaps he will take a little extra time and trouble to set them out in detail when he replies to the debate.

The second issue that I wish to raise with the Minister is the situation relating to new towns. Currently, the sale of stock transferred originally from the Commission for the New Towns or English Partnerships to new town local authorities is subject to a clawback, equivalent to 75 per cent., to English Partnerships. The Minister will know that there was a debate last week in Westminster Hall to which his colleague, the Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, the hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. McNulty), responded. In that debate, I raised the following question. The Government's response to the Select Committee's report on new towns, their problems and future, states:

> "English Partnerships will discuss with the individual local authorities the issue of assets and liabilities, including clawback. In some circumstances, and with the agreement of the Treasury, English Partnerships might waive clawback or transfer the right to receive clawback to the respective local authority."

I asked the Under-Secretary how that process interfaces with the arrangements that are now being put in place for the Secretary of State to take 75 per cent. of all capital receipts, and I wish to put the same question to the Minister. The irony is that the new towns have long campaigned for the abolition of clawback on the basis that it would give them equal treatment with all other authorities. They will have equal treatment, but only by subjecting all other authorities to the clawback under which the new town authorities have laboured for so long.

Will the clawback waiver by EP actually operate and, if so, will the receipt that the local authority obtains be subject to the clause 11 sequestration process? If so, English Partnerships will give, only for the Secretary of State to take away. That would be a meaningless exercise. If what the Government said in their response to the Select Committee's report stands, and the new towns are exempt from the process by the waiver of clawback in specified cases, it represents a large and partisan hole in the Bill. After all, all but one of the new town authorities are controlled by the Labour party. I would be concerned if the Government were introducing a different regime for the new towns compared with all other authorities, effectively exempting some Labour-controlled authorities from the pain that they are inflicting on all other authorities. I look forward to the Minister's response on that issue.

New clause 6 is an attempt to probe the Government on the recently announced power of forced letting. It seeks to prevent information from council tax records being used as a base for a programme of forced lettings of empty property. I have two questions for the Minister. Will there be an appeal mechanism for anybody whose property is subjected to the proposed enforced letting process? Will a person who does not wish to become a landlord have the right to require the local authority to compulsorily purchase a property identified for compulsory letting?

The Government's proposals on compulsory letting represent a massive infringement of the rights of private property. The Government and Labour Members are very keen on the human rights agenda, but they cannot pick and choose from it. One of the rights guaranteed by the European convention is the right to private property. Will the Minister confirm that the Government have received specific advice that the compulsory letting of private property with no option to require its compulsory purchase would not breach rights under the convention?

Mr. Edward Davey: Will the hon. Gentleman say more about why the Conservatives are so against compulsory leasing, when previous Conservative Governments have introduced legislation to promote compulsory purchase? Will he explain the difference, as he sees it?

Mr. Hammond: I hope that all hon. Members would find any notion of compulsion slightly unsavoury, as I do. It is always better if these things can be done without compulsion. Clearly, however, compulsory purchase powers will be needed in some cases. The owner of a property may require a local authority to acquire the property, but that is different from the owner being legally required to become a landlord when he does not want to, and having no option to require the local authority to purchase the property. The distinction is clear. I hope that the Minister will explain the Government's intentions in the matter.

New clause 6(2) would establish that empty home receipts should go to local authorities rather than directly to the Government. At present, £160 million in such receipts goes to the Government, and the new clause would bring the procedure into line with what the Government propose in respect of second homes. It would also bring the procedure into line with the incentive system that the Government have extolled in relation to new clause 10.

New clause 7 relates to clause 90, which deals with negative housing revenue account surplus. The explanatory notes say that the subject is "not well understood". That is masterly understatement. The Minister will do well to find anyone who understands the concept at all, although my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young) may be one of the few in the House who qualifies.

Clause 90 requires a local authority to pay any negative housing revenue account subsidy to the Secretary of State. The notes say that that represents no change, and that it is required simply to deal with changes in the treatment of rent rebates.

Mr. Raynsford *indicated assent.*

Mr. Hammond: The Minister, in his customary helpful fashion, confirms that.

Members of Parliament are required to be suspicious, and new clause 7 therefore would require the Secretary of State to report to Parliament about the amounts paid in negative housing revenue account subsidy to him by each local authority. That would allow the House to see what the distribution effect is and, I hope, corroborate the Minister's assertion that nothing has changed.

New clause 16 addresses clauses 40 and 50. As part of its centralising approach, the Government must deal with the question of local authority indebtedness, in respect of stock whose sale receipts are to be sequestered

[Mr. Hammond]

by the Secretary of State. This is a matter for indebted, not debt-free, authorities. Currently, indebted authorities have to set those receipts aside, but the Government are proposing a tortuous system: the Secretary of State will take the receipts, and then the loans will be repaid, on behalf of the local authorities, by the Secretary of State. However, as I understand it, that repayment will remain at the Secretary of State's discretion.

The powers to make the regulations appear later in the Bill. They are framed specifically to give the Government the power to make different regulations applicable to different types of authorities, or to authorities in different areas or regions. That strikes me as an especially dangerous power for the Government to have. Again, it is the antithesis of genuinely local government and proper local financial controls. It would give the Secretary of State huge power, and the ability to exercise largesse towards favoured local authorities.

New clause 16 would force the Secretary of State to report to Parliament the amounts paid under clauses 40 and 41, and to assess any effects on rents in respect of transferred properties. For example, local authorities that discover that the Secretary of State is not likely to clear their debts may have to hold out for a higher price so that they can continue to service outstanding indebtedness. I hope that the Minister will respond to that point.

Liberal Democrat amendments Nos. 43 and 44 are essentially another way to address the iniquity of clause 11. I hope that the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) will throw his weight behind new clause 3, and not find it necessary to press amendments Nos. 43 and 44 separately. However, if he does press the amendments, we will support him in any vote that is held.

Amendments Nos. 4 and 35 deal with clause 92. The clause limits the effect of section 24(3) of the Housing Act 1985 so that it applies only to Wales, but clause 92(2) allows the Welsh Assembly to abolish it for Wales also. I assume that that is a gesture to the principle of devolution. However, the Government say that the proposal is about enabling authorities to comply with the Government's rent restructuring policies in England. The amendments have been tabled to give the Minister an opportunity to explain the policies in a little more detail, and to explain why clause 92 is needed.

2.45 pm

My understanding of section 24(3) of the 1985 Act is not that uniform rentals—or fixed percentages for public-sector rents by comparison with private-sector rents—have to apply across the country, but that there should be an equivalence of proportionality, in a local authority area, between public sector and private sector rents across different types of dwelling. That is surely sensible. Wages in the labour market in an area are linked to local market conditions, and local private sector housing market rents are also a function of the local market conditions. My intuition is that it is appropriate to have a consistent relationship between public sector and private sector rents in an area. I readily accept that that relationship might have to be very different in areas of high demand and high prices from what it should be in areas of low demand and low prices.

In the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis), for example, registered social landlord rents are notorious for being higher than market rents. In many other areas—and my own constituency is one of them—RSL rents obviously have to be substantially lower than comparable private sector rents if the affordable housing market is to function. However, it is not clear why the Government need to use clause 92 to remove section 24(3) of the Housing Act 1985 in relation to England, and to give the Welsh Assembly the power to remove that section in respect of Wales.

Amendment No. 36 is a consequential amendment that does not need to be discussed.

The combined effect of the sequestration of capital receipts under clause 11, the power of the Secretary of State to distribute them as largesse to favoured authorities, changes in the local authority social housing grant, the arrangements for discretionary repayment by central Government of overhanging debt, and the Government's meddling with the formula funding grant, as well as the general thrust of their policy in respect of local authority financing—all those factors undermine the autonomy of debt-free authorities and give the lie to the Government's claim that the Bill is about freedoms and flexibilities. It is about increasing central Government control and the patronage power of the Secretary of State. It is about penalising the prudent to bail out the profligate. It is about disempowering local communities and undermining true financial accountability. It is about politically motivated hostility towards the freedom that right to buy gives ordinary working families. It is about transferring receipts from local authorities and the south-east—where most right-to-buy receipts arise and where affordable housing is desperately needed.

Clause 11 is bad. The Select Committee that considered the draft Bill recommended that is should be scrapped but the Government refused. New clause 3 makes a bad clause less bad and I commend it to the House.

Mr. Edward Davey: I agreed with much of what was said by the Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond), so I will speak for fewer than the 45 minutes taken by him. As we support and can unite behind new clause 3—which addresses some of the problems created by new clause 11 and the pooling of capital receipts—and one or two other amendments tabled by Conservative Members, we shall not press our amendments to a vote.

The Government shifted their position on pooling significantly in Committee and in respect of the local authority social housing grant—today, they have changed position again. One might say that that shows flexibility on their part but to those of us who have witnessed the charade, the Government's incompetence is exceptionally worrying. It is a shame that the hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. McNulty) is not in his place, because it is increasingly clear that he is not getting a grip on issues that are his responsibility. Debt-free authorities—having worked within a particular framework for many years and managed their assets properly—are now being penalised. Under pressure from arguments in Committee, the Government have brought forward a transitional arrangement package. It does not go nearly far enough, but it shows that the Government know they got it wrong.

Equally, the sustainable communities plan contained the mistake of proposing that local authority social housing grant should be abolished from April. The Government realised the damaging effect that that would have on many housing authorities—including those of the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young) and my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Green).

Matthew Green: Shropshire district council has a £4 million social housing programme for next year, using the last of its capital, which it must try to rush through in three months, including planning permission. If too many councils throughout the country do the same, it will still be at the discretion of the region to decide whether they may proceed or to prioritise something else. If that happens, it will be a scandal.

Mr. Davey: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. The Government say that they are thinking about long-term strategies for sustainable communities, but they present policies that fall apart under initial scrutiny. A few weeks after announcing them, the Government try to patch up their collapsing framework. I hope that the Minister can assure the House that his Department's continual mistakes are not repeated.

New clause 3 seems to address the problems of clause 11 and is offered to the Government as a compromise. In Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Sue Doughty) made a powerful speech outlining that the likely effect of the proposals on her debt-free authority and others would be to prevent them from dealing with the key issue—recognised by the Government in their sustainable communities statement—of a shortage of affordable housing. New clause 3(2)(b) will ensure that grants repaid to authorities could be used to secure social housing. We explored that issue in great detail in Committee and the Government admitted that that was the case. New clause 3 enables the Government to put into practice their intention, so loyal Labour Members should support it.

New clause 6 is a bit of a curate's egg. I can support the second part but subsection (1) is bizarre, in that it goes against what was said by Conservative Members on the Select Committee that examined the problem of empty homes— when that matter was the responsibility of the then Department for the Environment, Transport and the Regions—and reported on the need to improve the quality of information. We are passionate about that issue because there are more empty homes in every region of this country than there are homeless people in every region of this country. If that huge resource were used properly, the homeless problem could be tackled quickly, cheaply and in a sustainable way.

The Select Committee said that there was a need to improve the accuracy of data on empty homes, particularly in housing investment programme returns, and to use geographical information systems to enhance the quality of information—something on which the Government are now moving. The Committee reported also a problem about the way in which council tax data could be used. The Information Commissioner took one view and Poole borough council obtained counsel's opinion that council tax data could be used for the purpose. The Committee sought clarification and called on the Government to end the confusion and bring forward legislation.

The Government have done so in the form of the Bill, but I wonder where the hon. Members for Mole Valley (Sir P. Beresford), for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling), for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh) and for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin) are to be found, because they agreed to the Select Committee's report, in direct conflict with new clause 3. I hope that Conservative Front-Bench Members will sort out their position.

3 pm

The Conservatives may say that new clause 6 is tightly drawn because it relates the use of such data only to the notion of compulsory leasing, a proposal that was aired in the sustainable communities plan, which we shall have to debate on another occasion. We support the Government on those proposals, provided that there are appropriate safeguards, such as those for compulsory purchase.

Mr. Hammond: What safeguards would the hon. Gentleman propose?

Mr. Davey: It would be completely wrong for there to be no safeguards and I shall give the hon. Gentleman an example. Recently, I discussed with Jonathan Ellis, the chief executive of the Empty Homes Agency, the profile of people who leave their properties empty. The picture is mixed. Some of those people are extremely wealthy; they have a huge property portfolio and have never quite got round to dealing with it. They are absentee landlords and they simply do not bother. Others, however, are elderly and do not have enough money to maintain their property. They may be asset rich but they are income poor. They do not want the hassle of getting involved with bureaucracy. Other elderly people may be sick; they may suffer from dementia and have gone into a care home so they did not get round to putting their property to rights and letting it.

Such cases must be managed appropriately and the legislation must ensure that no local authority could treat such owners insensitively.

Mr. Raynsford *indicated assent.*

Mr. Davey: I am glad that the Minister agrees.

Such provisions should not, however, prevent us from adopting a public policy whereby empty properties are used to tackle homelessness. The Conservatives should agree. They may point out, rightly, that many empty properties are in the state sector, but that is true of only 10 per cent. of empty homes in London and the south-east. Of course, even that is too much and the problem needs to be tackled. We need to hold the Government and local authorities to account for that.

[Mr. Davey]

In my constituency, however, 90 per cent. of empty homes are in the private sector. Yes, local authorities could do a better job by using voluntary agreements. They could promote best practice and provide grants to repair and renovate homes so that they could go back on the market. Local authorities could act in partnership with private letting companies to ensure that owners receive a rental income. However, there is a question that the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge will have to face up to, because it is not covered in new clause 6. If best practice is adopted and there is an empty property strategy, if grants are offered and people are given support to use their assets, is there to be no backstop? If a person has a property that is desperately needed, should not the community take measures to put it back into useful possession? It would be difficult, even on libertarian grounds, to argue against that.

Mr. Hammond: We already have a well established procedure for compulsory purchase of property where it is required for a public policy purpose. The Government are significantly extending the scope of such procedures. My view, however, is that compulsory purchase is a different order of imposition on the rights of private property than compulsory leasing. Compulsory leasing requires an individual to finance the capital cost of an asset, of which the Government then dictates the use. That seems quite different from compulsorily purchasing a property where it is required for a public policy purpose.

Mr. Davey: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me an early opportunity to put right the Conservatives' flawed economic logic. The point is that the property owner will keep the asset, so that must be less damaging than compulsory purchase. We have not yet seen the final proposals, so the hon. Gentleman may have a point, but the idea currently being debated by the Empty Homes Agency and others is that the rental income will be shared with the owner. Indeed, it will all go to the owner once the state's costs have been met; for example, the costs of repair, renovation and administration. The proposals could be extremely beneficial for property owners. This is potentially a win-win situation.

Mr. Hammond: If it was in their interest, owners could do those things themselves.

Mr. Davey: In many circumstances, people have neither the competence nor the capability to do that for a variety of reasons. I look forward to future debates with the hon. Gentleman when I can give him some concrete examples. I urge him to talk to the Empty Homes Agency, which has commissioned a MORI poll of the type of people whom we are discussing so that we have a true profile. That information will be important in getting the measure right.

It is important to safeguard people's property rights, but it is wrong that there should be whole streets where properties are left empty—there is one such street in my constituency in an area of highly priced properties—when there are such huge homelessness and housing problems. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge keeps saying "Compulsory purchase". That is the illiberal position. The Liberal position is to go for compulsory leasing.

Mr. Hammond: If the hon. Gentleman would accept that there must be an option for a person who is compulsorily required to lease to require the authority to purchase his property, he may overcome my objection. Would he support such a safeguard?

Mr. Davey: That is a sensible proposal in principle and I hope that the Government will give it serious consideration. We might need a different regime to ensure that the system was slightly quicker than some of the compulsory purchase procedures, but the House should debate such matters to ensure that we get the legislation right. I hope that Conservative Members will at least agree that it is vital to use such resources, especially where there is high demand for housing and we need to tackle homelessness.

New clauses 7 and 16 require reports on housing revenue accounts and overhanging debt. We have no problem with that and I shall not rehearse the detailed and technical arguments with which we dealt in huge detail in Committee. We have some concerns about the way that the Government are going about housing revenue account reforms. As some of the money could go to the Secretary of State and would not be ploughed back into housing in local authorities, it is important to monitor the Government's policy. New clause 7 would do that, so we support it.

There were fierce debates in Committee about the Government's overhanging debt proposals. Following the views of the Select Committee and of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, I argued that, in effect, the Government were giving local authority tenants an extra incentive to opt for a housing transfer. There was some discussion of how the analysis was to be carried out and the Minister has written to me about that issue. However, I am still not convinced that an extra bribe is not being proposed. The Liberal Democrats are not against stock transfer. In many cases, it is appropriate and we have argued for it, but the key public policy issue is that stock transfer decisions should be based on a level playing field for different types of landlord. We fear that the Government's proposals will skew the balance in favour of stock transfer simply because they have failed to win some stock transfers.

The Government's analysis is wrong. Where stock transfers were lost, it was not because there was no bribe, but because the actual proposal did not make sense and tenants were right to vote against it. Where the proposals are put to tenants in a way that makes sense to them, they vote for them. I suggest that new clause 16 is right and that the clauses on housing issues are wrong.

I said that I would touch on the local authority social housing grant because it is crucial to these issues. I want to reiterate the shock and anger in many communities. People have been labouring away—whether in public sector housing authorities, registered social landlords or other stakeholders—to try to put together proposals, often with private developers, to build affordable housing on the back of the promise that local authority social housing grant will be part of the financial package. Suddenly, the Deputy Prime Minister told the House in the middle of February that those people could not have the grant on which all their work had been done and on the basis of which their money had been invested. That was an absolute catastrophe.

We are not over-emphasising the problem: affordable homes will not be built, and we are experiencing one of the biggest crises in respect of the shortage of affordable homes probably in the past 100 years. So not enabling proposals that are already halfway down the pipeline to go through seems not only wrong, but to go completely against the thrust of the Government's policy.

Matthew Green: Is not the reality that the Government are effectively saying that they are not interested in those affordable homes because they are not in their priority areas? The reality is that South Shropshire will need 1,400 affordable homes by 2011. With the abolition of that scheme, one of the main ways of delivering that will have gone, and the regional body will say that places around Birmingham, or somewhere like it, have priority and people in South Shropshire should not have any social housing funds. Rural areas have very real needs, and the fear is that they will not receive the funding that they used to get because they are not one of the Government's priorities.

Mr. Davey: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. The problem is that the Government are trying to centralise housing policy over the regions and pick certain areas, and they do not like some areas. They are taking money from all debt-free authorities of whatever political persuasion, and they are taking the local authority social housing grant away from them, too. The Government are trying to control the nation's housing policy from Whitehall, and that cannot be right.

We are finding—this affects my hon. Friend's part of the country—that the Government sometimes put ceilings on the number of affordable houses that can be built. The councils and communities in those areas would be prepared to see more houses built, but that is being stopped by central Government. That seems to be nonsense.

I hope that the Government will not leave this issue, especially the local authority social housing grant, at the statement that we received today from the Minister. Frankly, so far as we can tell from the statement, the available grant will be cut by £225 million next year, so fewer affordable homes will be built. That is why I refer the Minister to early-day motion 824, which my hon. Friends and I tabled last night. We did not realise that we would have such an effect—a written ministerial statement being produced the very next day. Obviously, we have more influence than even we had imagined. Unfortunately, the ministerial statement does not go as far as our early-day motion, so I hope that the Minister will look at it again.

My final remarks relate to new clause 6, on empty homes, the first part of which I have been very critical. I shall end on a more consensual note by telling the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge that the second part of new clause 6 is very laudable, and he will know that not only do we support it, but the Local Government Association supports it. The hon. Gentleman would like local authorities to be able to keep the council tax receipts where they decide to get rid of discounts on empty homes. That seems very sensible—it has been Liberal Democrat policy for many years.

3.15 pm

The Government might say, "Well, we've gone some way. We have given councils the power to end the discounts on empty homes. Isn't that a good thing?" Well, I am afraid that that is only half the cake. Allowing local authorities to keep the revenue that they thereby raise would enable them to get a much greater hold on the housing issues in their areas. However, siphoning off that revenue not only gives poor incentives to local authorities, but prevents that policy from having an even more powerful effect on the housing situation. If the Minister does not like the first half of new clause 6, I hope that he will see some merit in the second half.

I have spoken for longer than I had intended, so I shall simply end my speech by saying that new clause 3 would make a major improvement to the Bill and it therefore deserves the support of not only Conservative Members and the Liberal Democrats, but other hon. Members on both sides of the House.

Mr. Raynsford: We have had a long debate, with two speeches—one lasting about 45 minutes, the other 25 minutes. It would be nice to think that I could get through this quickly because my analysis of the two contributions is that they were both erroneous, but the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) was slightly less wrong than the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond). If one speech was only half the length of the other, there is clearly some merit in keeping comments short.

Let me try to focus on the various issues. This is a complex range of housing matters. New clause 3 mirrors a number of amendments tabled by the Opposition in Committee. Like them, it would remove significant resources—some £600 million—from the funds that will be allocated to all authorities on the basis of their housing needs. The amendments tabled by the Liberal Democrats would either remove the power to make regulations requiring housing capital receipts to be pooled, or limit the pooling rate to 50 per cent. In other words, they are not quite as wrong the Conservatives, but their proposal is still unsatisfactory because it would reduce the amount available for distribution to authorities in need.

We have always taken the view—interestingly, so did the previous Government when the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young) was the relevant Minister—that it is right that a proportion of the proceeds from the sale of council housing through the right to buy should be recycled, so that it can be used in areas of greatest need. That is a fundamental principle of housing capital finance, but the amendments tabled by today's Conservative party would overturn that principle. If the amendments were passed, the very authorities that we want to help would be penalised—those with high housing need, but low capital receipts.

I believe strongly that all authorities should have access to the funding that they need to meet national housing priorities, such as affordable housing and

[Mr. Raynsford]

decent homes, and pooling three quarters of housing receipts is an element in the process by which we can achieve that; removing £600 million from the national mechanism is not.

The hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge claimed that this was a centralising measure, interfering with local authority freedom. On the contrary, it simply applies the same principles that were the fundamental element of the previous Government's policy, but it does so consistently to every authority, rather than allowing a different logic to apply uniquely and paradoxically to debt-free authorities.

The proof of the pudding has to be in the total sums available. I put it to the hon. Gentleman that, far from reducing local authority freedom, the Government are in the business of increasing investment and allowing local authorities to do a great deal more. In 1997–98, we inherited £900 million capital investment in housing; in 2002–03, we are investing £2.5 billion in housing—about two and half times more. That is possible partly because we make proper use of the available receipts, which otherwise would not be applied.

Matthew Green: The Minister will accept that there may be years when the amount that the Government put into housing, or the amount collected back from capital receipts, is not enough to meet all the housing need throughout the country. The Bill is a centralising measure because somebody in the centre, at regional or national level, will decide what the priorities are for giving out what grant there is. I accept that there may be much more money going into housing, but if it does not meet total need, someone will still be making decisions on priorities—and that someone will not be the local council.

Mr. Raynsford: Housing is a national issue, and it is absurd to suggest that it should be left entirely to individual local councils to decide whether there should be policies to meet housing need in their areas. In Committee, I cited an example of the Liberal Democrats making a great fuss about the failure of a Conservative council in Surrey to use its money for housing investment—yet they still attack the Government's proposals to ensure that money is used for housing. I have to say here on the Floor of the House, as I said in Committee, that it is typical of the Liberal Democrats to look both ways. First they say that they want money invested in housing, because housing is a priority, but when the Government do something to achieve that, they complain that we are centralising.

Mr. Edward Davey *rose—*

Mr. Raynsford: On that note, I give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Davey: I am surprised that the Minister has brought that example up again, because we soundly defeated him in argument when he brought it up in Committee. My colleagues in Surrey, who were arguing against the Conservatives running the council, were speaking to the local people, because they wanted them to exercise their democratic choice at the next council elections to get rid of the Conservative administration that was mishandling the resources available to it. That is called local democracy. If the Government are to push a model in which everybody, on every issue throughout the country, should always look towards Westminster and Whitehall for a solution, they are advancing a centralised model that Stalin would have been proud of.

Mr. Raynsford: As usual, the hon. Gentleman does his case no good by overstating it. The Bill is designed to ensure that there is a larger pot of money available to enable local authorities to respond to housing need in their areas. By no stretch of the imagination can it be compared to the behaviour of the former Russian dictator whose death 50 years ago is the cause of a certain amount of newspaper comment at the moment. On reflection, the hon. Gentleman will realise that that is not a very appropriate parallel.

As hon. Members will know, because we made the announcement in Committee, we have put in place generous transitional arrangements to assist debt-free authorities—a move that was largely welcomed in Committee, albeit slightly grudgingly by some Members.

New clause 3 is to some extent unworkable. For example, I assume that the reference to special grant means a special grant under section 88B of the Local Government Finance Act 1988, which, as hon. Members will know, requires an affirmative resolution of the House. If the receipt concerned were received at the end of the financial year, there simply would not be time to go through that procedure to comply with the time scale in the new clause. I therefore hope that new clause 3 will be withdrawn.

Mr. Hammond: It ill behoves the Minister to talk about the time scale at the end of the financial year when he has just abolished local authority social housing grant with zero notice to local authorities. Moreover, if this is all about redistribution, why does the Bill not explicitly ring-fence the receipts in the hands of the Secretary of State so that they have to be redistributed as additional money, and cannot simply be lost in the big pot?

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman will remember that we debated that matter in Committee, and I gave clear assurances that the money would be used for housing. Those assurances are on the record, and I am happy to repeat them today. It is not necessary to make additional amendments to legislation.

New clause 6 is an odd combination of two rather different proposals, as the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton pointed out. First, it seeks to limit what a local authority can do with council tax information concerning empty homes. The second, unrelated provision seeks to ensure that the extra money raised from removing or reducing the discount on long-term empty homes is kept by the billing authority.

I am surprised by the official Opposition's apparent commitment to supporting the freedom of the owner of an empty property to enjoy keeping the property empty. Most people on both sides of the House recognise that there is a problem with empty property, and that we need to take more effective action to bring it into use.

The hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton made several valid points about the work of the Empty Homes Agency, and about action to incentivise the owners of empty properties to bring those properties into use. However, he went on to say that some owners were inexperienced or nervous about letting their properties, and some may be keeping properties empty out of inertia. It is therefore entirely right and proper, as the Select Committee has said, for there to be mechanisms to identify people in that position, to ensure that local authority empty property agencies, where they exist—and many local authorities run empty property units—can advise people about what can be done to bring properties into use, perhaps by putting them in touch with a local housing association that may be able to help with letting.

The provisions in the Bill are simply about using information already held by local authorities to get empty homes back into use. That is a wholly sensible and admirable proposal, which was supported by the Select Committee and has also had support from all parts of the House, so I am surprised that the Conservative party now appears to oppose it.

I agree about the importance of safeguards for council tax information, but that information cannot be used to remove the freedoms of a property owner—to require them to take tenants or to sell to someone who would occupy the property, for example. The hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge mentioned the reference in the communities plan to propose measures to encourage empty properties to be brought into leasing. It says:

> "We plan to do more to make better use of long-term empty properties in high demand areas. We will consult during the Spring on giving local authorities powers to lease long-term empty properties to improve them and bring them back into use".

There will be full opportunity to discuss those provisions, which are not related to the Bill. The Bill is purely about information available to local authorities to enable action to be taken in line with the Select Committee's recommendation to bring the number of empty properties down. I would have thought that everyone would welcome that.

Mr. Hammond: The Minister says that he will consult in the spring about powers for local authorities to lease properties compulsorily, but there is no provision in the Bill to give effect to that. On new clause 10, however, he said that he needed to put the power relating to something that he intended to consult on in the summer into the Bill now, because otherwise there might not be another opportunity to get that power on to the statute book for a couple of years.

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman may not be aware that my noble Friend Lord Rooker, the Minister for Housing and Planning, is preparing a piece of legislation that would provide a good opportunity for such provision. To the best of my knowledge, and I speak with some authority, there is no more local government legislation in the pipeline. As for retaining the extra money from removing or reducing the discount, we had a full debate in Committee on that question when we considered Opposition amendments to clause 75.

3.30 pm

As the Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Mr. Leslie) said at the time, we believe that there should be no financial benefit to a local authority from a decision on whether to charge full council tax on long-term empty homes. The decision should be taken entirely on housing grounds and not because of potential additional financial benefits to the authority, which could provide a perverse incentive. That would be particularly problematic in areas where there may be very low demand and genuine difficulties for people in letting property. In such cases, we believe that an authority should take decisions on the merits of the case without a potential distorting financial incentive.

Mr. Edward Davey: What I do not understand about that argument is that it seems to suggest that local authorities cannot be trusted to work out the housing needs in their area and the best policies to tackle them. Although the Minister talks about freedoms and flexibilities and says that this is a decentralising Bill, he is preventing local authorities from enjoying that revenue when they are taking sensible decisions.

Mr. Raynsford: On the contrary, the policy gives local authorities the freedom to be able to reduce, and even eliminate entirely, the discount on long-term empty homes if they think that that is the right thing to do. We believe that local authorities should base their decision on a proper estimate of the impact of that withdrawal of subsidy and whether it would achieve the desired effect. That gives local authorities the freedom and the choice, and not a perverse incentive. As the hon. Gentleman will recognise, it would require the virtue of the Archangel Gabriel in some cases for local authorities to forgo potential revenue which, if it were available, they might be tempted to use in particular circumstances.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): The Minister's argument would hold some sway were it not totally inconsistent with his policy on abolishing the discount on second homes. What is the difference between the two aspects? The only difference is that abolishing the discount on second homes could raise £60 million, whereas abolishing the discount on empty homes could raise £160 million. Is it the case that the Government simply do not trust local authorities to use that money?

Mr. Raynsford: No, that is not the case. As the hon. Gentleman knows, there is a fundamental difference, because, in areas with substantial numbers of second homes, real concern exists that many local people on modest incomes are priced out of the market. In some tourist areas, such as the west country or the Lake district, where there is a shortage of affordable housing, house prices get pushed up by the presence of many second home owners. That has serious consequences for local people in need.

It is an explicit provision of our arrangement to ensure that local authorities can use the revenue that they get from removing or reducing the discount—we must have the 10 per cent. discount to ensure that those properties can be identified as second homes—to meet

[Mr. Raynsford]

local needs. The Liberal Democrats pressed us to insist that that money should be used for housing, but we said that it is better to give local authorities the freedom to decide what they should use it for. I therefore remind the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton that his is not the only party that supports giving freedom to local authorities and trusts them to take the decision.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Will the Minister at least concede that, if councils abolish some or all the discount on empty homes, they should be reimbursed for the costs of levying that council tax? Otherwise, there will be a perverse incentive not to reduce the discount on empty homes at all.

Mr. Raynsford: No. The position is that a property that is a second home has qualified for the 50 per cent. discount. Under the new arrangement, the authority will be free to decide whether to reduce that discount to anything between 50 per cent. and 10 per cent. It will have discretion as to the level of reduction. Any revenue received from that decision will accrue to that authority and to other precepting authorities when there is a county as well as a district. A fair distribution will therefore exist between different tiers of government. That is a quite separate issue from a purely housing policy-based decision as to whether it is appropriate to give an incentive to someone to bring an empty property back into use by charging the full council tax.

Mr. Edward Davey: Can the Minister confirm that the final decision on this matter will come when we see the regulations? Will he therefore assure the House that he will keep this aspect under review and possibly ensure that regulations will allow some variations, so that we can see whether he is right or we are right?

Mr. Raynsford: I can happily give the hon. Gentleman the assurance that the policy will be kept under review. Obviously, we keep all policies under review. Our firm view, however, is that the right way forward is that which I have set out, and that is the way in which we intend to proceed.

The requirement in new clause 7 for annual reports on the operation of clause 90 and its effects on local authority rents would achieve no substantive benefit but it would impose an unnecessary administrative burden. Housing revenue account subsidy has operated as a redistributive system for more than a decade. Like other things, it dates back to the previous Government, as it was introduced by the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. It therefore seems doubly bizarre that the Conservatives are now changing the position that they adopted when in government. Redistribution has been achieved up to now by offsetting assumed housing revenue account surpluses against rent rebates. That depended, however, on housing benefit being included in the HRA, which was highly controversial and deeply unpopular with many tenants.

In response, we took a decision to remove housing benefit from the housing revenue account, but after rent rebates are removed from the HRA, the old redistribution system will not be possible, so the new, more transparent mechanism in clause 90 is needed. For the vast majority of authorities, the clause will simply replicate the outcome of the current redistribution mechanism. The only authorities whose resources will be affected are the 18 English housing authorities that currently have an assumed HRA surplus greater than their expenditure on rent rebates.

I have mentioned the figure of 18, so I now owe an apology to the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge. He suggested that there were 34 debt-free authorities, but I intervened to suggest that the figure might be 18. I apologise—I was incorrect, because I was thinking of the other group. In fact, the number of debt-free authorities with housing stock is 35. I hope that that puts the record straight.

The authorities that have an assumed HRA surplus greater than their expenditure on rent rebates are currently required to transfer the excess to their general funds, thereby effecting a transfer from council tenants to general council tax payers. In future, subject to transitional arrangements, these amounts will be pooled, thus stopping the current subsidy of council tax by council tenants. That subsidy has caused considerable anger to council tenants.

Assumed HRA surpluses and deficits for the purposes of clause 90 are calculated on the basis of assumptions about an authority's rent levels and expenditure on its stock. Contrary to the views expressed by Conservative Members, there is no link between an assumed HRA surplus and good performance or political make-up. Local authorities that had the good fortune of low investment needs and, therefore, little debt while being able to command high rents have tended to end up in assumed surplus. Likewise, deficits generally occur when investment needs and, therefore, debt levels, are higher than can be funded from reasonable rents however efficient the council is and however well it manages its affairs.

The proportion of authorities rated excellent and good by the Audit Commission under the comprehensive performance assessment is about 50 per cent. for all three main political parties. Similarly, comparable proportions of both deficit and surplus authorities equally achieve good or excellent ratings. I stress that list in case the Opposition parties are tempted to indulge in any mischief making on this point. In addition, there will be no adverse impact on council rent payers. Clause 90 will not make any difference to council rents for any authority, as we have now put in place a national framework for affordable social rents based upon the size, location and condition of properties.

The new clause is not necessary because totals of HRA surpluses collected and HRA subsidy paid to authorities in deficit will be approved by Parliament as part of our request for resources. The figures will also be recorded in the annual accounts of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and be open to scrutiny by both Parliament and the National Audit Office. Additionally, the start of consultation on the annual general determination of HRA subsidy has always been announced in the House and the papers made available. Copies of the final determination of HRA subsidy are also made available to the House. That will continue. There is therefore no need for the further report suggested by the new clause.

Mr. Andrew Turner: The Minister suggested that the provision would have no effect on rent levels. However, will he confirm that the framework that he is proposing involves guidance, will not be mandatory on local authorities and that an authority, such as Sunderland, that has a large HRA surplus could use the surplus to subsidise rents? Or will the framework be more mandatory and will authorities such as Sunderland not be allowed to retain the surplus to subsidise rents?

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman is getting a little confused. The purpose of the rent restructuring framework is to ensure broad consistency across the country that will take account of the size and attraction of particular properties. It will also take account of the local housing market in different areas. The aim is to do that over time, because we cannot make sharp adjustments to issues that impact on the viability of housing organisations and people's budgets. The programme is being phased in over 10 years, and it is designed to ensure that there is a more coherent framework of rents across the country.

New clause 16 relates to the Government's policy of ensuring that all social housing is decent by 2010, and in particular the contribution that the transfer of local authority housing to registered social landlords makes towards that. The policy was set out in the housing statement, "The Way Forward for Housing" published in December 2000 and reaffirmed last month in the plan for building sustainable communities that was announced by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister. The new clause would require the Secretary of State to report to Parliament annually on two matters. The first would be the amount of any payments made, or likely to be made, under clauses 40 and 41. Those payments are in respect of overhanging debt that may arise when an authority transfers its housing to a registered social landlord. The second would be the effect of such payments on the rents of those properties that are being transferred.

Clauses 40 and 41 allow the Secretary of State to assist one or more English local housing authorities to meet debt liabilities through a direct payment either to the public works loans commissioners or to the local authority on the condition that it is transferred to a non-PWLC lender. They confer similar powers on the National Assembly for Wales in relation to the debts of Welsh authorities. The policy driver for clauses 40 and 41 is assisting individual authorities that transfer their housing stock to a registered social landlord and need assistance to meet outstanding housing debt liabilities when the receipt is insufficient to cover them.

The amendments appear to suggest that something is not being disclosed in relation to those payments—or perhaps there is a belief that we are giving favourable treatment to authorities that transfer their housing stock and for which we make an overhanging debt payment. Neither is the case. All authorities are treated on a fair basis. It is for a local authority to choose whether it wishes to retain or transfer its stock based on a rigorous option appraisal involving tenants and other stakeholders.

If an authority or its tenants choose to retain their stock, the Government, through the housing revenue account subsidy, continue to ensure that a local authority can meet the cost of servicing its housing attributable debt. In other words, HRA subsidy continues. However, when a local authority transfers all its housing stock, it is inappropriate and, frankly, stupid for it to remain in receipt of ongoing housing revenue account subsidy. That is nonsensical. In such cases, we make an overhanging debt payment. Different authorities are not treated differently. Those that keep their stock continue to get subsidy; those that have no stock no longer get subsidy and the overhanging debt is written off. We do not select the authorities; that is the result of local choice that is possible because the Government have made a commitment to make housing transfer and a decent home available to all tenants.

When the payment is made, it is common practice for the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister to include reference to both the payment and its amount in the press notice accompanying the housing transfer. Once a transfer takes place, details of it, including the number of dwellings, the sale price, private finance and overhanging debt payment, are also included on the website and are freely available from the ODPM. Overhanging debt payments were originally recorded in the Treasury's annual accounts, but from 2002–03 they will be recorded in the annual accounts of the ODPM and reported to Parliament through that route. So payments are open to the scrutiny of Parliament and the National Audit Office.

New clause 16 would also require that the effect of an overhanging debt payment on the rents of the transferred stock should be reported. That again misses the point of the Government's rent restructuring policy, which was introduced after much consultation, and the justifications for it have been set out many times. In consenting to all housing transfers, it is a condition that the new landlord will have determined rents in line with rent restructuring policy and methodology and will meet the 2012 target. How that is delivered will have been part of the development of the transfer proposal on which tenants will have voted. Whether or not there is to be an overhanging debt payment will not have an impact on that process.

Whether the transfer is of all, or only part, of an authority's housing stock, the delivery of restructured rents by 2012 across all social housing remains the priority. So where there is a partial transfer with overhanging debt, it is our intention that there should be no impact from the transfer on the rents of those tenants who remain with the authority. Therefore, a report to Parliament on the impact of the overhanging debt payments on rents would be nugatory because in all cases there would be nothing to report. I hope that the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge will not press the new clause to a Division.

3.45 pm

Amendments Nos. 4, 35 and 36 relate to the Government's policy of encouraging authorities to restructure rents, as I have set out. The Government inherited a social rents policy that was a total shambles. In some areas, rents charged by neighbouring councils for similar properties varied by huge amounts and housing associations often charged more than half as much again for similar properties in the same area. In time, our rent restructuring policy will produce a coherent pattern of rents for social housing across England. By contrast, the Opposition's policy would make the situation even more chaotic.

[Mr. Raynsford]

If social rents were allowed to approach market levels, some housing providers in areas of low demand would be unable to operate, while in areas of high demand such as London, those on modest incomes would be priced out of the market altogether. Amendments Nos. 4, 35, and 36 would delete clause 92, which seeks to remove an obstacle to the policy of rent reform. The amendments would undermine that rent reform and restructuring policy and are therefore undesirable.

The hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge asked whether a local authority could look at the relationship between public and private rents in its area. The relevant legislation does not explicitly refer to an authority having regard only to its own area, so local authorities can look at a much wider area. However, we believe that that is undesirable because it inhibits the scope of rent restructuring policy, which is why we are introducing change. As for the position in Wales, he rightly identified the fact that we wish to give the National Assembly for Wales scope to reach a decision on its own merits within the Principality.

The hon. Gentleman also raised the issue of nomination rights. I apologise for the fact that he has not received a letter. I tried to ensure that all the commitments were followed up, so I shall certainly pursue that. However, I took up the issue because there was a potential anomaly and conflict with existing policy, as nomination rights are not taken into account when calculating the level of receipt. My noble Friend Lord Rooker has since agreed that, when an authority's contribution to pooling is calculated, any consideration or reduction of the receipt in respect of nomination rights will be excluded. However, I shall write to the hon. Gentleman and put that on the record.

Mr. Hammond: Will the Minister answer my question about a possible clawback for English Partnerships and the way in which that relates to clause 11?

Mr. Raynsford: I will write to the hon. Gentleman on that issue. I urge him and the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton not to press their amendments to a vote.

Mr. Hammond: As usual, I greatly enjoyed the Minister's reply to the points that he thought that I was going to make. In many cases, however, he did not address the points that I did make. The key provision in this group of amendments is new clause 3, which deals with issues raised by clause 11. Clause 11 is a centralising measure—it gives the lie to the Government's claim that the Bill delivers freedom and flexibilities to local authorities and it is the antithesis of good accountable local government. New clause 3 is a sensible compromise and has the support of both Conservative and Liberal Democrat Members. The Government have rejected it because they are bent on the redistribution of assets of prudent, debt-free local authorities. I urge my hon. Friends to support new clause 3.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 183, Noes 312.

Division No. 101] **[3:48 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Beith, rh A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James *(Beverley)*
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr. Liam
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hogg, rh Douglas
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howard, rh Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Mackay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Moore, Michael
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, rh Michael
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Randall, John
Redwood, rh John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew

Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Wilshire and
Mr. Mark Francois

NOES

Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, John
Beard, Nigel
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, rh Paul
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burnham, Andy
Byers, rh Stephen
Caborn, rh Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Farrelly, Paul
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, rh Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hoon, rh Geoffrey
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, rh Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, rh Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, rh Peter
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, rh Michael
Merron, Gillian
Milburn, rh Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, rh John
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*

Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Rooney, Terry
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh John
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Charlotte Atkins and
Mr. Nick Ainger

Question accordingly negatived.

New Clause 8

COUNCIL TAX AND REGIONAL BODIES

'.—Nothing in Part 6 of this Act (sections 74-86) may be used in conjunction with the use of council tax to raise tax for any regional body.'.—*[Mr. Clifton-Brown.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

4 pm

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): With this it will be convenient to discuss amendment No. 3, in page 71, line 11 [Clause 120], after 'authority (', insert 'but not'.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: The purpose of the new clause is to probe the Government's intention for funding the various regional bodies that they are introducing. The Under-Secretary has already funded the shadow regional assemblies—the so-called regional chambers—out of central Government funds. If he can tell me that no provision in part 6 seeks to fund any regional bodies, I shall withdraw the new clause now. Unless he can give me that assurance, I shall continue to press the matter. Will the Under-Secretary give way?

Mr. Leslie: I shall intervene. Part 6 has no tax-raising mechanisms save for revenues from forgone discounts or changes to valuation bands at some point in the future. There are no direct mechanisms whereby regional bodies could gain. However, part 6 affects revenue and such mechanisms cannot therefore be ruled out for the future.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: "Such mechanisms cannot be ruled out for the future." We must therefore assume that the Government have a gleam in their eye and council tax will be used in future as a mechanism for funding various regional bodies. We already know from the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill that eight shadow assemblies or chambers will be set up by the late spring. All eight regions will have those so-called indirectly elected bodies. They are likely to constitute the regional planning body, which will have substantial powers to draw up regional spatial strategy. It presumably needs substantial funding to operate them. We will have regionalisation to that extent, whether we like it or not.

We know from the Deputy Prime Minister's community statement that a regional housing body will be established to draw up a regional housing strategy. Another stratum of regional bodies will therefore require funding. Furthermore, the Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Bill, which is in another place, will provide for the possibility not only, God forbid, of regional referendums, but of directly elected regional assemblies, if people vote for them. Those regional bodies will require considerable funds, and that is what the new clause probes. It would be interesting if the Minister could indicate the sums that the Government are already providing to fund these shadow regional assemblies, chambers—call them what you will—in the north-east, for example, where the concept is most advanced.

Amendment No. 3 would reverse the thrust of clause 120 so that, although the Secretary of State will be able to provide powers to designate different local authorities for different purposes, he will not be able to do it purely on a regional basis. It seems grossly unfair that a whole class of local authority should be singled out on a regional basis for different treatment in relation to council tax.

Will the Minister clarify the stage that funding for the regional bodies has reached, the size of the budget that is set aside for the next year or two, and whether it is intended that there should be a regional council tax or any separate precept to pay for them?

Matthew Green: We support the new clause, although for an entirely different reason—namely, that council tax should be scrapped. It is a completely inappropriate means of raising revenue for councils or for regional bodies. When the regional bodies finally emerge from the weak state that the Government propose into the fully-fledged system of regional government that we hope for, they will need tax-varying powers. Scotland has the ability to raise extra tax or, indeed, to lower it; Wales does not, but should have. One of the oddities involved is that it may turn out that all the English regions, Scotland and London have the power to raise money in one way or another—although the London system is inappropriate—while Wales is left as the only part of the country that cannot. The Government may find themselves in difficulties with their Welsh MPs in that regard.

Overall, council tax is an iniquitous, inappropriate and non-progressive form of taxation that should be abolished and replaced with levels of local income tax. I am sure that that system will increasingly develop in the future.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I seek clarification of the Liberal Democrats' policy. Are they saying that they would have a local income tax to raise money for local authorities as well as a regional income tax to raise money for the regions? Have they undertaken any proper costings as to how much those two taxes would put on the average taxpayer's bill?

Matthew Green: The money would only replace money that is currently raised by council tax, so overall it would not add any extra burden of taxation. Such a tax would be based on ability to pay rather than on a fixed asset. Council tax is a particular burden on pensioners, for example, who are on fixed low incomes but have to pay more each year. Council tax has no buoyancy. It has to be raised every year, unlike income tax; with the latter, if the economy goes up there is a general shift up in revenues. Council tax is completely non-progressive. We have proposed that in the forthcoming Budget the Chancellor could introduce a 50p band for income tax across the country and use that to knock £100 off every council tax bill.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will continue his remarks in relation to the amendment.

Matthew Green: Thank you for bringing me back on course, Madam Deputy Speaker. I was getting rather too enthused about our alternative Budget. However, the reality is that the money that would be raised through a local income tax, or through a regional form of income tax, would merely replace money that is currently raised through council tax.

I should point out to the Conservatives that such a system works in America, where several different tiers of income tax are raised at state, county and national levels. Indeed, such a system is also used in parts of Europe. This is not rocket science, and my understanding is—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is about to draw his comments back to the new clause.

Matthew Green: I thank you for your guidance, Madam Deputy Speaker, but in a way they are directly related. In supporting the Conservatives, we are seeking to ensure that the council tax is not the mechanism used to fund regional bodies. I am explaining what should be used instead, so I hoped that, on that ground, it was in order to go down that route for a while.

Our support for the Conservatives' new clause is based on an entirely different reason from theirs; it is clear that they would not want to establish the ability to raise, or to vary, taxation at a regional level. In our view, the council tax definitely should not be used as the vehicle to raise such funding; in fact, it should be scrapped at a local level as well.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: The hon. Gentleman is being very generous in giving way. Does he not accept that there will be an increase in the overall burden of taxation? His party strongly supports regional bodies, but we say that they are an unnecessary tier of bureaucracy. In any event, they are expensive and will have to be paid for. Does he accept that there will be an increase in the burden of taxation to pay for them?

Matthew Green: Regional bodies exist, and they are currently paid for out of central Government funds through the passing down of national taxation. We want such decisions to be taken at a regional level by democratically elected regional assemblies. The hon. Gentleman assumes that if a new tax exists, it has to be higher; however, it can be simply a replacement for another form of taxation, and that is what we want to see.

In conclusion, we will support the Conservatives' new clause, and on amendment No. 3, we are in broad sympathy with their reasons for probing the Government. We are happy for central Government to make regulations applying to individual councils in order to vary matters, but we do not want them to take blanket decisions that apply to entire regions. For that reason, we are happy to support the Conservatives' amendment. Overall, and perhaps for entirely different reasons—particularly in respect of new clause 8—we lend them our support.

Mr. Syms: I rise to support new clause 8. My hon. Friend the Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) has been clever in tabling it to tease out the Government's position; indeed, the Minister's intervention was very interesting in that regard. In talking about regional government and its architecture, the Government, whenever they propose such a case, have always said that it should involve moving powers downward from central Government, rather than upwards from local government. If there is a case for financing regional government, I doubt whether the council tax should be used. I hope that the Minister will be a little more explicit on that issue in winding up the debate.

The Government have been honest in the sense that, before we get to regional referendums, there will be a boundary review to examine the structure of local government, so that people know what form of local government they will have. Before we have such referendums, it would be equally fair of the Government to set out in explicit terms how the funding of these regional bodies will be covered. Regardless of the different opinions that exist on both sides of the House, once such bodies come into existence, there will come a point when they will need some form of independent finance. However, the Government have not said a lot about that. In setting up another tier of Government, costs are inevitable, even if one is trying to get rid of the

[Mr. Syms]

county councils, as is the Government's will. We therefore need a little more clarity about what the Government hope to do in this regard.

Council tax is appropriate for local government, although I will not stray into that argument, Madam Deputy Speaker. As the hon. Member for Ludlow (Matthew Green) has said, a number of models exist in other parts of the world such as the United States and Germany. Those models may be more appropriate for this kind of funding.

4.15 pm

This shortened debate is important. The Minister will understand that, on this side of the House, we are not great enthusiasts for regional government. We are concerned that the Government have a stealth policy towards local government: they keep pushing powers to the regions and employing more people there, but without there being any great demand for that, from my constituents anyway. The Government ought to be more explicit about the sort of deal that people will get. Financing will be critical in whether or not people will support regional bodies.

Mr. Leslie: I am glad that the hon. Member for Poole (Mr. Syms) found my earlier intervention interesting. Let me elaborate on it, because I am concerned about new clause 8 and amendment No. 3. Let us be clear about what the new clause will do. It would make it impossible for anything in part 6 of the Bill to allow the raising of revenue for any regional body. However, part 6 does not contain foundation revenue-generating instruments; it simply contains a number of measures that amend existing council tax provisions. The effects of new clause 8 would not be straightforward. For example, the new clause would mean that any revenues that were generated or changed because of alterations to the revaluation cycle would not be able to go towards regional bodies. However, other parts of council tax revenue would be able to go towards regional bodies, which is rather curious. Highlighting technical flaws in a new clause is sometimes a Minister's last refuge but there are more substantive issues that I would like to raise.

Matthew Green: I am sure that the Minister is just about to raise those substantive issues, but this may be a good time for him to let us know what the Government's thinking is on the possible future need to raise money regionally. Without making any commitments, can he tell us what the likely mechanism will be, so that people can have some preparation time?

Mr. Leslie: The hon. Gentleman will recall from his late-night reading of the White Paper, "Your Region, Your Choice: Revitalising the English Regions", that funding and decision-making powers will not be taken away from local government but from Whitehall. I commend the White Paper to all hon. Members; it will make that point clear, even to the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown). Funding and decision-making powers will be devolved to elected regional assemblies, should they be set up. Funding for programme expenditure would come from revenues that had already been determined and decided by central Government, rather than being raised wholly from local council tax payers. In that respect, hon. Members on the Conservative Benches have set a hare running in the wrong direction. I hope that what I have said usefully corrects their view.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: My hon. Friend the Member for Poole (Mr. Syms) raised an important point. If the Government are setting up a mechanism to discover whether people want referendums on elected regional assemblies—with all that that would involve in sorting out the different tiers of local government—people are entitled to know what those regional assemblies are likely to cost, and whether council tax, or something else, is to be the mechanism for that. I hope that the Minister will be able to answer those points in the best possible spirit.

Mr. Leslie: We have not yet passed legislation to create regional assemblies. A Bill is going through the House that will enable referendums to be held on the establishment of elected regional assemblies. However, legislation on how those assemblies would operate and the programmes that they would undertake has yet to come.

The White Paper suggests that a precept on council tax could be levied for the administrative running costs of elected regional assemblies, but not for the programmed expenditure. We anticipate that about 5p a week would be the typical levy on a band D council tax payer. That small amount would go towards the administrative running costs of an elected regional assembly. However, we should not rule out other possible precepting capabilities for a regional assembly. If local people choose in a referendum to have a regional assembly, and if they wish to see revenue generated for regional expenditure, who are we to stop them?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: The Minister has just said something very significant. On top of the new council tax band D bills of more than £1,000 that will be imposed, he has just said that he expects a regional council tax precept to be around 5p a week. Is he saying that £25 a year will be added to those huge increases—*[Interruption.]* If my maths is right, 5p a week is £25 a year—

Mr. Syms: It is £2.50.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I got the decimal point in the wrong place. Even so, the principle would be established that a precept could be put on the council tax to pay for the running costs of regional bodies. Could the Minister confirm that?

Mr. Leslie: Of course I can confirm that. It is in the White Paper and has therefore been in the public domain for some time. If the Conservative party has only just noticed that, I congratulate it. It would be only £2.50 a year, and I cannot see that as too onerous. We should also remember that there are already many precepting authorities for the council tax, many of which are regional bodies. That brings me to the point that the new clause could stop longstanding regional bodies operating. For example, regional flood defence committees levy a precept on local councils. Under the new clause, they would be bereft of funding, because they would no longer be able to precept local authorities to raise revenue. Other regional environmental, planning, arts and tourism bodies would be affected, even those on which Conservatives serve. I challenge the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) to confirm that he intends that the new clause should deprive regional flood defence committees and coastal defence committees of the revenue that they need to stave off potential natural disasters that could affect many people. That expenditure is extremely important and those constituents who have been afflicted by floods and disasters would be most surprised at the import of the new clause.

In any case, regional chambers already exist, many of them with Conservative members. For example, 41 Conservatives sit in regional chambers in the south-east and 30 in the south-west. Those chambers derive some of their revenue from local authorities, but the new clause would prevent that. It would mean that it was Conservative policy to put an end to those voluntary regional chambers, and would be a significant constraint on the freedom of local government to contribute to them.

Mr. Clifton-Brown *indicated assent.*

Mr. Leslie: The hon. Gentleman is nodding and it seems to be his deliberate intention to restrict the ability of local authorities to contribute to voluntary regional chambers, even though they perform useful functions. We also hope that they will embark on the scrutiny process for regional development agencies, before elected regional assemblies are set up. That will be important work.

Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire): The Minister is being disingenuous if he thinks that just because Conservatives serve on regional bodies, we think that they are the most appropriate way to serve our constituents. Conservative representatives will serve on whatever bodies currently exist, but that is not to say that we think that they are the most appropriate.

Mr. Leslie: That may well be the case. Conservative members do serve in regional chambers, but I was seeking to establish whether that was official Conservative party policy. We know that the Conservatives are opposed to elected regional assemblies and that they would not give people the choice in a referendum to establish them. However, are Conservatives opposed even to the establishment by local authorities of voluntary regional chambers? The hon. Member for Cotswold was nodding about something before. Will he confirm that the Conservatives oppose regional chambers?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I shall deal with that later.

Mr. Leslie: I look forward to that.

I believe that new clause 8 would place a significant constraint on local government, but it is not untypical of the general policies pursued by the Conservative party when in government. In any case, part 6 of the Bill contains no specific provisions relating to precepting, apart from discounts on council tax banding. It is clear that the new clause would have a detrimental effect.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: The Minister challenges me to say whether the Opposition are in favour of funding the voluntary regional chambers, but it would be helpful if he estimated the costs being incurred by those bodies—in the north-east, for example—and said where the funding comes from. Is any council tax precept being levied to fund those bodies at present?

Mr. Leslie: There is no precept as such, but local authorities are free to contribute whatever they like towards regional chambers. New clause 8 would prevent, constrain, inhibit and stop authorities from being able to contribute freely to the perfectly reasonable activities of regional chambers. Local authorities would not be able to use council tax to raise resources for regional bodies. I challenged the hon. Member for Cotswold to say whether or not Opposition policy is to scrap regional chambers, but his refusal to answer speaks for itself.

Mr. Andrew Turner: Will the Minister explain what he understands is meant by the word "tax" in new clause 8?

Mr. Leslie: New clause 8 has a number of drafting deficiencies. It is not for me to point them all out. The word "tax" could well mean precept, but it could also mean revenue for those regional bodies. If the hon. Gentleman has a different opinion, perhaps the new clause should have been drafted more precisely. However, the vagaries of the new clause are precisely what caused me to try to gauge from the hon. Member for Cotswold's remarks whether the Opposition were opposed to regional chambers. Again, answer came there none.

The hon. Member for Ludlow (Matthew Green) supported new clause 8 for entirely different reasons. I hope that the clarifications that I have given will cause him to reconsider.

Matthew Green: They will not.

Mr. Leslie: That is very alarming. If the Liberal Democrats are also saying that council tax revenues should not be used to support regional bodies, they may find themselves in the same pickle as the hon. Member for Cotswold, who said that he would not allow council tax revenues to be used for regional bodies such as flood defence committees. I know that the hon. Member for Ludlow does not like the concept of council tax, but we have no alternative to it at present. The new clause would have a very significant effect, and I urge the hon. Gentleman to reconsider his position.

Matthew Green: We shall not change our minds on this matter because we believe that council tax should not be used to raise revenue for any bodies, even local councils. Instead, there should be a local income tax.

Mr. Leslie: Presumably, therefore, the extension of that rather dubious logic is that the hon. Gentleman will oppose any changes to council tax because he disagrees with the tax in principle.

Matthew Green *indicated assent.*

Mr. Leslie: Will he also refuse to countenance the use of council tax in any local government revenue plans in

[Mr. Leslie]

the future? Will he shun that appalling mechanism for raising revenue? I do not think that that is the position of the Liberal Democrat party. Surely there must be some strand of pragmatism among its members? The party will need it if, God forbid, there is ever a Liberal Democrat Government, at some indeterminate point in the future, who want to change the system. The hon. Gentleman must work in the system as it exists at present.

I am most concerned about the love and enthusiasm for local income tax exhibited by the hon. Member for Ludlow. I would not want to pre-empt the Government's funding review because we accept that there are significant issues around how local government should raise revenue and around making sure that it is tied to local accountability and principles. While not ruling out options which that review might examine, I caution against the hon. Gentleman's enthusiasm for local income tax. There may be a lot of income in Kingston and Surbiton that could be taxed, but there is less in other Liberal Democrat authorities such as Liverpool—which may find raising revenue through a local income tax extremely difficult. I only speculate because it would not be right to address that particular issue, which is for debate another day.

Council tax does relate to wealth, albeit capital wealth, and, as many hon. Members will remember, it is more progressive than the poll tax. There are certainly ways in which it could be improved. The Bill makes provision for banding and revaluation, which we believe are the mechanisms that should be used to make sure that council tax is more relevant and up to date—and that it relates more to ability to pay. New clause 8 is wrong in its conception, design and drafting and would have a significantly detrimental effect on some regional bodies—some of which do extremely important work. We need to know whether the movers of the new clause propose to scrap regional chambers and to stop funding regional and coastal flood defence from council tax.

4.30 pm

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Occasionally when one moves a probing amendment or new clause, one strikes gold. On this occasion, it is clear that we have exposed a huge new revenue-raising power for emerging regional bodies. The part of the Bill to which the new clauses apply is anyway far-reaching. It provides for a mandatory revaluation cycle, and gives the power to change the number of council tax valuation bands and introduce transitional arrangements. There was a lengthy debate in Committee about how to enforce the payment of council tax by some of the poorest people in this country by distress of their assets. Where their assets are insufficient to cover the costs of that distress, the outstanding debt can be the subject of an attachment to earnings order.

We have suddenly discovered that all the new powers in the Bill can be used to raise money for emerging regional bodies.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): Shocking.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. That purpose is not in itself shocking but it is not transparent. I pressed the Minister several times to state the costs being incurred by the transitional regional bodies but he did not give me one example. I pressed him in respect of the north-east but still he did not give me one example. I have given examples of regional planning and housing bodies—all of which will have staff, expensive buildings and a budget. How will they be funded?

Mr. Leslie: I suspect that the hon. Member for New Forest, West was describing the hon. Gentleman's contribution. The hon. Gentleman is well aware of the millions of pounds raised from council tax precepts towards perfectly reasonable expenditure on regional flood and coastal defence committees, which the new clause would prevent. Does the hon. Gentleman really intend that those regional bodies should be bereft of that funding? Does he say that existing regional chambers should also be wound up and be bereft of funding?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: With great respect to the Minister, who is a pretty straightforward man, he is equivocating. He will still not give us a clear answer as to how much money is likely to be raised through those mechanisms, and for what regional bodies. He has now introduced to the argument the fact that we might have regional arts bodies, regional tourism bodies or regional flooding bodies. How many more regional bodies are we to have? That council tax could be used as a mechanism to fund all those regional bodies in performing functions that are currently paid for from general taxation. We can thus conclude only that there will be an additional tax-raising power for all the functions that those regional bodies will have and which do not currently exist. The Minister has still told us nothing about that.

We have still not had straightforwardness as to how much of that regional council tax will fund the elected regional assemblies to be set up under the Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Bill that is currently in another place. It is all very well for the Government to say that the Bill does not give the detail for each region; I realise that that information will be separate from the Bill. Nevertheless, the Bill is the paving measure that will give rise to those elected regional assemblies, if we ever get as far as a referendum and a positive vote in favour of them.

Mr. Leslie: I repeat that we envisage that elected regional assemblies might levy a precept of about 5p a week from a band D taxpayer. To aid the hon. Gentleman, that amounts to £2.50 a year, not £25. However, before we even get to elected regional assemblies there are existing regional bodies that receive revenue from precepts. Is the hon. Gentleman saying that the new clause will stop that, or not? I have asked him about four times and I should appreciate an answer.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: When will the Government be straightforward about their proposals? They are making the decisions; the job of the Opposition is merely to probe them as to their intentions, not to state our policy. We want to know something about the costs of those regional bodies and how they will be funded. Will they be funded from council tax?

I shall give the Minister some figures so that we can see whether we are in the same ballpark. We already know about the costs for the new Parliament building in

Edinburgh and the Assembly building in Wales, and that when public sector buildings are needed for the new regional bodies, significant costs will be involved. The abolition of Humberside alone cost £80 million. Extrapolate from that the cost of abolishing all county councils and the sum would run into billions.

As we advance towards elected regional assemblies, we are entitled to know what sort of sums the Government have in mind and how those bodies are to be funded. Will they be funded in full by the regional council tax or will there be other tax-raising powers?

We could continue to press the Government and embarrass them further. Suffice it to say that very large sums are involved and it is not clear that the functions taken over by those regional bodies will cease to be undertaken by somebody else—for example, the Minister's Department. Would the departmental budget then be reduced? It would have been useful had the Minister told us about that. Perhaps he will intervene again. If he plans to raise all that money for regional bodies through the regional council tax, will his departmental budget be reduced in lieu? As taxpayers, we are entitled to answers. The Minister shakes his head, but we, as taxpayers in general, are entitled to answers to those questions.

How many more regional bodies will be set up? The Minister has already referred to regional arts boards, regional tourism boards and regional flooding boards. How many more? Regional planning bodies and regional housing bodies do not yet exist. How much will they cost? How many buildings will be needed to house all those functions? We have not heard a single word from the Minister about the costs of those regional bodies. Council tax payers throughout the land who are likely to have to fund the cost of those bodies are entitled to some answers.

There has been a singular paucity, indeed a complete lack, of answers from the Government. Taxpayers can only conclude the worst. We may have been told that the amount will be only 25p a week in the first instance, but, by golly, in a year or two that amount will escalate many, many times.

The Minister laughs, but council taxpayers up and down the land will not laugh when they begin to get increased council tax bills of well over £1,000 for a band D house this year. They will not be laughing; they will be pointing an accusing finger at the Government because those increases are very significant.

We have heard no answers from the Government this afternoon. I respect the Minister, but it is fairly typical of the Government that they have failed to give us any answers. The only mechanism that we can use to protest vigorously is to press this matter to a vote, and I ask the House to accept new clause 8.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 178, Noes 298.

Division No. 102] **[4.40 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Beith, rh A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James *(Beverley)*
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr. Liam
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hogg, rh Douglas
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howard, rh Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Mackay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
Malins, Humfrey
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Moore, Michael
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Portillo, rh Michael
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Randall, John
Redwood, rh John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew

Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Wilshire and
Mr. Mark Francois

NOES

Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, John
Beard, Nigel
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Burnham, Andy
Byers, rh Stephen
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, hon. Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Farrelly, Paul
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hoon, rh Geoffrey
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, rh Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, rh Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Meacher, rh Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim

Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh John
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Charlotte Atkins and Mr. Ivor Caplin

Question accordingly negatived.

New Clause 13

EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS OF LOCAL AUTHORITY EMPLOYEES

'.—(1) No employee whose employer is a local authority or local authority company shall be required to work at any time on both a Saturday and a Sunday in the same week if that person has the care and control of a schoolage child.

(2) Any adult with whom a schoolage child customarily lives as part of his or her family has the care and control of that schoolage child and where more than one adult qualifies under this test each of them has the care and control.

(3) In this section:

"employee" and "employer"—

(a) in relation to England and Wales, and Scotland, have the same meaning as in the Employment Rights Act 1996, and

(b) in relation to Northern Ireland have the same meaning as in the Employment Rights (Northern Ireland) Order 1996;

"local authority" means a local authority in any part of the United Kingdom, including the Common Council of the City of London but excluding a parish or community council.

"local authority company" means a company through which is exercised a power conferred under section 95.

"week" means a period of seven consecutive days ending on a Sunday.

"schoolage child" means a person who has attained the age of five but has not attained the age of eighteen.'.—*[Andrew Selous.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Andrew Selous: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

It is a great pleasure to move this new clause, which has support in all parts of the House. It is a modest but necessary measure as far as local authority employees are concerned. As I said, there is something in this clause that all Members should feel able to support.

The new clause will ensure that the children of local authority employees do not have parentless weekends. The new clause would mean that local authorities would not be able to force their employees with school-age children to work on both a Saturday and a Sunday. Our constituents would be amazed to learn that legislation is not already in place to prevent that from happening.

The evidence showing the need to do something about the problem comes from many sources, not least from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation/National Centre for Social Research report that was published in December 2002 entitled "Happy Families? Atypical Work and Its Influence on Family Life". Among other things, it showed that 20 per cent. of working parents with dependent children work on both Saturday and Sunday and that three quarters of them wish that they did not have to work at weekends.

I am, of course, aware that local authorities have to provide many vital services seven days a week. Local authority care homes immediately spring to mind, and tidy tips, some libraries and leisure centres seek to open seven days a week. There is nothing whatever in the new clause that would prevent local authorities from running services seven days a week. It would not put a barrier in the way of a local authority asking any of its staff to work on either a Saturday or a Sunday. However, it is entirely reasonable not to allow local authorities to force their employees with children at school to work on both Saturday and Sunday. If authorities were allowed to do that, the children would not see their parents at the weekend.

I have spoken to local authorities in my area and to the East of England Local Government Conference. They have told me that they do not believe that the new clause would create a serious problem for the running of authorities and that it would have only a minimal impact. However, it is necessary, given that 3 million parents work on both Saturday and Sunday. We know from recent events in Stoke-on-Trent, where plans to provide refuse services on Saturday and Sunday were withdrawn by the council, and in Richmond, which recently ran into difficulties with the provision of library services because of the way in which it imposed on its staff, that we need to address the issue.

Alistair Burt (North-East Bedfordshire): I have listened to my hon. Friend's argument with interest. Does he not agree that it is a curious feature of modern life that, whereas the many enjoy much more choice, they occasionally do so at the expense of the few? Does he share my hope that, if this modest measure were adopted, private enterprise might see the lesson and introduce, of its own volition, similar provisions to ensure that people in the private sector who work on Saturday and Sunday and whose children endure parentless weekends might enjoy a freedom similar to the one that he is suggesting?

Andrew Selous: This new clause relates to local authorities, but I am sympathetic to the general point that my hon. Friend makes. He made the valid point that we need to be aware of the costs imposed on the employees who provide the services that we expect from local authorities on Saturday and Sunday. I am fully conscious of the fact that many local authority services have to be provided seven days a week, but this modest

[Andrew Selous]

but necessary measure would provide some protection to local authority employees and prevent them from being pressed to work on both Saturday and Sunday.

Mr. Paul Goodman (Wycombe): Has my hon. Friend received support from Labour Members for his proposal given that trade unions must be extremely concerned about the problems that he so eloquently describes?

5 pm

Andrew Selous: As I said, the new clause is supported by all parties and hon. Members on both sides of the House. I should have thought that a Labour Government would want to be associated with it. Indeed, there is an onus on anyone who opposes it to justify why local authority employees with children, whom they would not otherwise see, should be forced to work on both Saturday and Sunday. I hope that the Minister will address that. Although it is up to me to make the argument for the new clause, it is up to the Government to justify the forced working of parents of school-age children on Saturdays and Sundays.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): Would it not be strange for the House, which voted for family-friendly hours and mid-term breaks to allow us to be with our children, to vote against the proposal? It is not even limited to the nuclear family, but covers the broader spectrum of family life in which children need adults and adults need children.

Andrew Selous: The hon. Gentleman makes a valid point and is right. People outside this place look at the conditions that we grant ourselves. Those who work for local authorities are entitled to request and require us to extend the same protections and principles to them in their important work.

David Cairns (Greenock and Inverclyde): As a non-parent, I have some sympathy with the new clause, although I suspect that more formal consultation will be needed before the Government accept it. However, I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say. I am genuinely curious to know why the hon. Gentleman has limited the new clause to children of school age. In developmental psychological terms, surely the forming of the bond between parent and child is most important in the years up to the age of seven.

Andrew Selous: I understand that point. It is not that I think that the time that parents and young children spend together is unimportant, but those children who attend primary and secondary schools have fixed hours when they have to be in school. Their only opportunity to see their parents is on a Saturday or Sunday. If the House and the Government intend to deny those children and parents the time to be together as a family on one day a week, that is a sorry state of affairs. I look to the Minister to give us some comfort on that.

Matthew Green: We support the new clause. It will be interesting to hear the reasons against it. Frankly, we have a 24/7 society and, unfortunately, some people have to work at weekends so that the rest of us can enjoy the ability to make choices on Saturday and Sunday. The House would never consider sitting through the weekend. We can all choose what we want to do. No doubt many of us hold our surgeries and carry out constituency work, but we can choose whether to see our children. I am delighted to be the father of a six-week-old child, although I unfortunately missed the chance to serve on the Committee because I wanted to spend time with my child immediately after the birth.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Paternity leave.

Matthew Green: Indeed.

It is important for the development of children that their parents should have the right to spend—awful word—quality time with them during the week, not just a snatched half hour in the evening when children are tired and their parents probably are too. The new clause is worthy of support. As the hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) made clear, Members who oppose it will have to come up with interesting reasons for doing so, as most of us would struggle to argue with its worthwhile aims.

David Cairns: Briefly, I have a great deal of sympathy with the underlying aim of the new clause, and I look forward to the Minister's response. Although the hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) has researched the matter through contact with his own local authority, other local authorities may not have its flexibility, and their safety critical provisions could be affected by the new clause. That is only a surmise, but perhaps the Minister will tell us whether the Government have undertaken a survey.

At the risk of straying from the narrow confines of the new clause, I should point out that I am currently trying to steer a private Member's Bill through the House that would stop Sunday working being obligatory for shop workers in Scotland, a legal protection enjoyed by constituents of hon. Members who represent English and Welsh constituencies. When legal protection on Sunday working was given to shop workers in England and Wales, Labour's home affairs spokesperson—now the Prime Minister—said freedom to shop on Sunday must go hand in hand with the right not to have to work on Sunday. Shop workers should not suffer so that others can enjoy those freedoms. Surely, then, our freedom to enjoy non-essential council services must go hand in hand with the rights of those who are working to provide those services.

Most council services, including the more flexible ones, are not provided on Sundays. Those that are provided tend to be essential. When I was a councillor in London, councils adopted more flexible working practices in, for example, the delivery of meals on wheels. People did not have to go out on Sunday, as clients were provided with microwave ovens, steamers and so on. Under the current regulations, it is possible for councils to order their working week so that people are not required to work on Sunday. People staffing certain council facilities may be required to work at times when they would otherwise not have to work if the local authority had a more enlightened attitude as an employer. In the absence of such an attitude, legislation may be necessary, so the hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire could well be on to something in his new clause.

I am looking forward to the response to a wide-ranging consultation that the Secretary of State for Scotland is undertaking with businesses throughout Scotland, which will affect my Bill in Committee. A consultation of local authorities to assess the impact of weekend working may not have been conducted. If so, I may not be able to support the hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire if he pushes his new clause to a vote, but I am strongly sympathetic to his aims.

Mr. Gary Streeter (South-West Devon): I, too, shall make a short contribution. Someone famously said that you could not buck the market. It is also true that you cannot buck nature. No one can sustain a working pattern of seven hours a day, seven days a week. Families cannot survive unless there is an opportunity outside work for parents and children to spend quality or quantity time together and learn from another. I strongly support the modest measure proposed by my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous), as it sends an important signal.

We enact laws in this place not just for the benefit that the law will bring, but also for the signal that it sends to the wider community. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt) that although the new clause is a modest measure limited to local government and local government companies by the nature of the Bill, it sends a signal to the wider community. I hope that it sets an example to many private sector companies that want to be good employers and want to learn best practice. It might encourage them to put parents of school-age children at the centre of their thinking when they plan their rotas. For large companies and large organisations such as local councils, that might be a little inconvenient, but they could cope with it. The benefits would be immense.

We must recognise that family life is under pressure. We all sit in our surgeries and listen to case after case linked to the Child Support Agency, welfare benefits and so on. We think about the children involved in some of those cases, who are denied time with their parents or are subject to some other pressure. For people like me, who had the advantage of growing up in a secure family setting, spending time with parents and learning right from wrong, even if we did not always agree—we all have our moments—it is horrifying to think that so many children today are denied the consistency of parental input. The new clause is an important attempt to put that right.

We heard, I think, that 20 per cent. of parents work on both Saturdays and Sundays. Will my hon. Friend confirm that that was the statistic that he gave?

Andrew Selous: My hon. Friend is right. According to the Joseph Rowntree study, 20 per cent. of parents of school-age children work on both Saturdays and Sundays, and three quarters of them wish they did not have to do so.

Mr. Streeter: I find that a terrifying figure. If it is right, when do those school-age children spend time with their parents? We know that children watch a lot of television—I do not criticise that—listen to a lot of music, and spend time with their peer groups. They are getting their values and standards from somewhere, and surely that should be primarily from their parents.

On quality time as opposed to quantity of time, I am fortunate that both of my children are adults and therefore off our hands.

Mr. Syms: My hon. Friend does not look old enough.

Mr. Streeter: I know; say it again. I remember a classic example of when my son was a teenager of 15 or 16 and going through some of the things that teenagers go through.

Mr. Leslie: Bored with his father.

Mr. Streeter: I hope those comments are being picked up by *Hansard.* They do not always reflect well on those who make them.

My son was working on his computer in our front room. I was lying on the floor reading something or other, and for several hours there was little interaction between us, but after a while, because we were in the same room together, he suddenly piped up and wanted to discuss something that had been troubling him. That would not have happened if we had not spent time together in the same room, even though we were not interacting. Time together is important for parents and children. It is not a touchy-feely thing; it matters.

The measure proposed by my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Bedfordshire is an important improvement to the current law, and I hope the Government will respond positively to it.

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): Most of that which needs to be said has been said, so I shall be brief. I welcome the new clause and commend the hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) on moving a modest, limited clause that could do some families some good. So often, because we cannot do everything that we would want to do, many of us fail to do anything. I hope it will not be patronising to say that although the hon. Gentleman has been in the House for a relatively short period, he is putting to shame some of us who could have done the same thing, and I commend him for his initiative in doing so and for his well researched argument in support of his case.

The hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (David Cairns), who has his own private Member's Bill dealing with weekend working, observed that many council services are not provided on a Sunday, but there may well be pressure for that. The hon. Gentleman cited examples of councils that were looking to expand weekend services. We need to put the safeguards in place now, not when the expansion has already taken place and we cannot get the genie back in the bottle.

I also commend the fact that the hon. Gentleman is concerned about all sorts of families. Essentially, the new clause deals with the welfare of children. Whether children and parents are in lone-parent families, two-parent families or families of any shape or size, it is in their interests to spend time together. This modest new clause would help to achieve that.

5.15 pm

A question was properly raised about children of pre-school age and their need to spend time with parents. I am aware from experience in my area that bodies such as Ofsted report that children starting at primary school show all the hallmarks of not spending time with parents. The hon. Gentleman is right that those are important and formative years. In a world in which children are increasingly starved of parental attention, often because both parents are working simply to meet the cost of their mortgage, the sort of protections that he is trying to introduce are entirely appropriate. If anything, they are more needed today than ever before.

I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman tabled the new clause. Should there be an opportunity now or in future to support it in a Division, I shall be very pleased to do so.

Mr. Goodman: I should also like to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) on tabling the new clause. I know from serving with him on the Select Committee on Work and Pensions that he takes a serious and informed interest in issues of social exclusion.

I want briefly to make a suggestion to the Minister that he may find helpful. I suspect that he is about to tell us that, as matters stand, he cannot accept the new clause. I suspect that one of the reasons that he will give is that the Government cannot single out local authority workers as the new clause suggests. My first suggestion is that he should take up the idea of the hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (David Cairns) and try to see how local authorities would respond to the measure on a wider basis than that which my hon. Friend has so far had a chance to investigate.

Secondly, if the Minister is going to argue that the Government are unwilling to single out local authority workers, it would be helpful to give some hint of whether they are considering more widely the problem about which my hon. Friend so eloquently spoke with regard to parents and children. Since the Labour party tends to regard the vulnerable and those on low wages as its special property—I profoundly believe that that is an error on its part—he may want to spell out a little more fully how he might give workers generally the protection that my hon. Friend is seeking for local authority workers. I am sure that my hon. Friend would also want the measure to be more widely extended.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I think that my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) has done his constituents who are local authority employees a great service today. Indeed, he has done all our constituents who are such employees a service. I suspect that this will be one of those landmark occasions in the House when the Minister may not accept a proposal—in this case, the new clause—but the idea that it contains will be like a seed, as it will germinate and put down roots and everyone will suddenly become convinced of its merits.

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): In anticipation of the Minister's possible response, does my hon. Friend agree that it may be necessary to give thought to circumstances in which there might be an override? For example, a particular emergency might require the services of people with family responsibilities. One looks to the Minister not merely to respond that difficulties in respect of one emergency invalidate the important principle that is being floated and established today, and welcomed from the Opposition Front Bench.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: My hon. Friend, who has great experience in these matters, makes a prescient point, as he alludes to a part of my speech to which I was about to come.

My hon. Friends the Members for South-West Devon (Mr. Streeter) and for North-East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt) and others sitting behind me, including my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr. Goodman), have spoken very eloquently about the need for a more family friendly atmosphere. My children are now in their later teens, but when they were at a more formative age, time spent with them at the weekend, especially over Sunday lunch, was extremely valuable. Even as a Member of Parliament, one was able to make time to spend with one's family. Nowadays, too many children grow up without spending enough time with their parents. They do not have that prime time in which to interact and learn from their parents.

Mr. Swayne: Does my hon. Friend agree that time at the weekend is even more important for children who have divorced parents?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: My hon. Friend makes an important point. Perhaps if they spend more time with their parents, they will be able to form better relationships. The Minister should take that into account.

Why is it necessary for local authority employees to work on Saturdays and Sundays? Of course, some emergencies, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) alluded, such as flooding, require local authority employees to work. That also applies to some enforcement functions, such as trading standards, some public information services and some payment collection services, such as council tax collection. However, local authorities should generally be able to organise their functions so that employees are not "required." That is a key word in the new clause.

It is different if employees volunteer to work at the weekend. When they volunteer, and even when they are required, they generally get time off in lieu. However, such time off is not especially satisfactory for people who are required to work, because it is likely to be given during the week when children of school age are at school.

What research has been conducted on the matter? How many local authority employees work on a Saturday and Sunday? I doubt whether comprehensive research has been conducted, but it would be interesting to know whether, as a result of the new clause that my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Bedfordshire tabled, it could be undertaken to ascertain the answer to important questions. How many local authority employees who work on Saturdays or Sundays have children of a school age? What would alternative arrangements cost each local authority?

I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Bedfordshire will cause the Government to consider the matter seriously. Perhaps local authorities can set a trend that other employers will follow.

Mr. Raynsford: Our debate has been useful and I understand the entirely proper concern, not only of the hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous), but of all other hon. Members who spoke, about ensuring family-friendly employment policies. However, I cannot accept the new clause.

The hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire called for more protection for workers against being required to work on Sundays so that families can have one shared day a week when they do together what they please. I assume that the new clause intends to further the campaign, but I am unclear about the reasons for singling out the local government sector for special treatment.

There is no special local government case for such a provision. Existing employment law fully protects local authority workers. Local authorities are generally ahead of the game in promoting flexible working. The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions conducted research and produced a report, "Work-Life Balance—A Survey of Local Authorities" in 2001. It found that 94 per cent. of authorities operate job sharing, 95 per cent. operate flexitime and 64 per cent. provide more maternity pay than the law requires. I could cite many other examples.

In local government, circumstances will always arise in which people need to work at weekends. That would regularly apply to, for example, residential care homes, where care needs to be provided 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Similarly, local authority leisure facilities such as swimming pools, sports centres and parks need to be open at weekends if they are to provide for the leisure needs of local residents, including families who will want to be able to go out to a park or to go swimming together. It would be perverse to deny people that option given that we are trying to encourage family-friendly policies. In less regular circumstances, similar considerations apply to, for example, emergency services, which the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) mentioned. To take a recently topical issue, road gritting in adverse weather conditions or other environmental and security emergencies require staff to be able to work at weekends, often at short notice.

Alistair Burt: The Minister's argument is taking a curious turn. Neither my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) nor any other hon. Member suggests that services should be denied. We suggest that it should be possible to change rosters or other arrangements so that, where two parents are involved in working, their children should not be prevented from seeing them. No one is suggesting that any service should be denied, so that is not a good reason to reject the new clause.

Mr. Raynsford: If that argument is valid—I can see some force behind it—any provision would have to apply to the whole work force and there would be no particular case for singling out local authorities. That is not within my remit; it would be a matter to press with my colleagues in the Department of Trade and Industry. It is important to recognise that some local authority services require substantial attendance because weekends are the times when they are busiest—I particularly singled out leisure-time activities. It might be difficult in some cases to operate a roster that guaranteed such provision.

Mr. Streeter: The new clause relates to local government and local government companies because we are discussing a local government Bill. As many hon. Members have said, it is to be hoped that it could be the forerunner to a wider application of the law that would in due course protect employees in every sector.

Mr. Raynsford: I fully understand why the new clause has been framed in such a way as to apply only to local government: it would otherwise be out of order. That does not in any way change the logic that there is no case for singling out local government for differential treatment, especially given that the available evidence suggests that, on the whole, local authorities are ahead of the game in adopting family-friendly policies.

Mr. Goodman: The Minister is following the line of argument that I anticipated. Can he therefore give any assurance that the Government are investigating generally the problem that the new clause seeks to address?

Mr. Raynsford: I intend to come on to some of the measures that the Government are taking to promote family-friendly policies.

Matthew Green: The Minister's argument is a little perverse. He argues that the measure is unnecessary because local authorities are good employers anyway, but then says that it would put a burden on them. It must be one or the other—it cannot be both.

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman is getting excited about his observation, but I am afraid that, in the usual way of the Liberal Democrats, it is wrong. The case for imposing special obligations uniquely on local authorities, rather than on any other employers, would possibly be justified if they were not operating good policies. However, given the evidence that they are probably ahead of the game, it is extremely odd—although Liberal Democrat Members perhaps do not recognise that—to single them out to impose more onerous obligations on them than on other employers.

Rev. Martin Smyth: The Minister will remember that, when we dealt with Sunday trading, provision was made on a specific issue, although it has not always been kept to. Does not the same argument apply now: we are dealing with local government, so we want to secure protection for local government workers? We should also bear in mind the perverse attitude of some employers, who may say to people who work in shops, or in local government if we go down that road, "We can't employ you if you aren't prepared to work every Sunday."

Mr. Raynsford: I want to avoid widening the debate too far, because we shall be out of order. This is

[Mr. Raynsford]

specifically about local government. I reiterate that I know of no evidence to suggest that local authorities are unusually unsympathetic to the aspirations of employees who have family responsibilities that would justify the implementation of a special measure in the Bill that did not apply more generally.

5.30 pm

Mr. Calum MacDonald (Western Isles): We are all sympathetic to the aims of this new clause, but regardless of our views on its merits, should not such provisions be left to local government, rather than being imposed by central Government? For example, my local authority does not open any leisure facilities on Sundays; it takes a policy decision not to do so, and other local authorities are undoubtedly equally free to take such a decision. Is it not curious that the Liberal Democrats and the Tories, who advocate local decision making, want to be centralist in this particular respect?

Mr. Raynsford: My hon. Friend makes an extremely good point, which I was about to come to. Throughout consideration of this Bill, we have heard repeated complaints from the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats about the Government imposing unreasonable, centralising obligations on local government. Here we have a classic illustration of their being wholly inconsistent, and yet they look pained when such inconsistency is pointed out to them. When it suits them, they say, "Liberalise, and give more freedom to local government", but when the latest issue reaches their ears, they say, "No—we must legislate to impose an obligation." Then they look outraged when they are reminded that they are being inconsistent. That is absolutely typical of the Liberal Democrats, who never know which way they are pointing, unless they get an indication as to which way electors are likely to vote. Then, they say what they think will please electors.

The Government are keen to promote family-friendly policies, and we have a commitment to helping to support working parents. On 6 April 2003, a series of new rights specifically for parents will be introduced. They include a new right for parents with children under six, or for parents with disabled children under 18, to ask their employers for flexible working arrangements. The law will place a duty on employers to consider such requests seriously, and the Employment Act 2002 specifies only eight business grounds on which such requests can be refused. So there are measures—along with others that are the responsibility of my colleagues in other Departments—to help promote family-friendly policies. That is the right way forward, rather than trying to single out local government for special treatment. I therefore urge the hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire to withdraw the new clause.

Andrew Selous: I am extremely grateful to those hon. Members who have made contributions on this new clause. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Ludlow (Matthew Green) for his support, and I noted with interest the suggestion of my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) that we could usefully have emergency override provisions where a local authority had a specific need to bring them into effect. I am also grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) for his response. He, like other Members, called for a period of consultation on the full effects of the provision; indeed, the hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (David Cairns) said that his private Member's Bill made a similar undertaking. I would be sympathetic to having such consultation before we make further progress.

I have to say that I was extremely disappointed with the Minister's reply. He pointed out that local authorities operate seven-days-a-week services, but so did I when I moved the new clause. There is nothing in it that would prevent local authorities from providing such services. All that this modest measure would do is to prevent local authority employees from having to work on a Saturday and a Sunday. For the Minister to say that playgrounds and leisure services would be denied to the broad mass of the population within a local authority area—

Mr. Raynsford *indicated dissent.*

Andrew Selous: The Minister was getting quite close to doing so.

Mr. Raynsford: I hope that the hon. Gentleman recognises that I did not say that, and that he accepts that that is a misrepresentation of the position that I adopted.

Andrew Selous: I apologise if I misrepresented the Minister—I was trying to listen carefully to his argument. Of course, all of us in this House want leisure services to be open seven days a week, and I very much include myself in that. I am simply asking the House to agree that we should extend the same right to local authority employees themselves, who would perhaps like to go to a local park or to a playground with their children on a Saturday or Sunday and spend time with them. Some of them cannot for want of a clause such as new clause 13. I do not think that that is overstating the case.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: If the Minister had said that local authorities should voluntarily adopt working rosters so that people with children of school age would not be required to work on a Saturday or Sunday unless it was absolutely necessary, it would at least have been a start. Does my hon. Friend think that we could have expected that from the Minister?

Andrew Selous: Of course, I would have welcomed encouraging remarks from the Minister.

I want to take up the point raised by the hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. MacDonald). He asked why we could not leave these matters to local authority discretion. He comes from a part of the country with a long cultural tradition under which such matters are taken very seriously. I quite understand the decision of his local authority; I respect and applaud it. However, he will acknowledge that many of us come from parts of the country without such traditions. This Parliament must deal with matters on a national basis.

Mr. Edward Davey: I endorse what the hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire has said. Employment law is national and has never, under any party, been decentralised to local authorities. The Liberal Democrats would never wish to decentralise employment law to local authorities. There have to be minimum standards and the hon. Gentleman's proposals are along those lines.

Andrew Selous: The hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) has summed up the situation fairly and accurately.

Mr. MacDonald: This is not an employment Bill but a local government Bill. We are changing local government law. My point is still valid. If my local authority wanted to carry on doing what it does and close leisure facilities on a Sunday, and this House passed a law that said, "No—you have to open leisure facilities on a Sunday, for the benefit of the rest of the public," the hon. Gentleman would be the first to object. The issue is between centralising principles and local democracy.

Andrew Selous: I will come on to the point about local authorities, but the example that the hon. Gentleman raises is not one that would come under the new clause. The new clause is not about forcing local authorities to open particular services; it is merely about giving some protection to local authority employees so that they too can enjoy those services.

The Minister asked, "Why local authorities?" and then answered the question himself: this is a local authority Bill. I see absolutely no reason why local authorities could not lead the way in this area, setting an example to other employers.

I understand that my noble Friends in the other place, with support from other noble Lords of all parties, will seek to reintroduce a similar amendment.

Mr. Streeter: Does my hon. Friend agree that it was not only the words of the Minister's reply that were disappointing but their tone? It seems that he has misunderstood the spirit of this debate. Here we are, trying to do our best for parents, children and families—the very people the Government say that they want to support—but the Minister has not taken up that spirit. Does my hon. Friend share my hope that the Minister, who is a reasonable man, will reflect on this debate and perhaps encourage his noble Friends in the other place to be more gracious in their response to this proposal?

Andrew Selous: My hon. Friend has made a fair point and has just reminded me that the new family-friendly measures to which the Minister referred do not, as far as I am aware, address the specific points that would have been remedied by the new clause. Those points are significant and the Minister did not address them.

I will seek leave to withdraw the new clause, but I serve notice to the Minister that this will not be the last time that the Government hear about this matter. My noble Friends, with support from noble Lords of all parties, will seek to revisit this matter in the other place. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New Clause 18

COUNCIL TAX ON RESIDENTIAL CARE ACCOMMODATION

'. Care and nursing homes registered with the National Care Standards Commission shall be counted as one unit for council tax purposes.'.—*[Mr. Heathcoat-Amory.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

The new clause would remedy an injustice in the law by relieving small units in residential and nursing homes from being separately assessed for council tax. At present, accommodation units that have the rudiments of self-catering facilities are in danger of incurring full council tax, even though the occupants are residents of a home and dependent on the care of that home.

The issue was brought to my attention by the residents of the Kathleen Chambers home in my constituency. It is a home run by the Royal National Institute of the Blind to a very high standard. In October 2001, 19 residents of the home wrote to me about their imminent assessment for full council tax. I raised the matter in the House on 20 November 2001, and the then Minister, the hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Dr. Whitehead), invited me to write to him and undertook to look into the matter. I then engaged in lengthy correspondence with the Department and I was assured that

> "we are aware of the problem you highlight and are presently reviewing the regulations to see if they can be updated to reflect new forms of residential care."

The RNIB also supplied a large amount of background information to the Department.

The problem has arisen only because of the high standards in that home and others. I know that the Kathleen Chambers home is not the only one affected. My hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) has also raised the matter in the House, and I know that other hon. Members have similar problems in their constituencies. The Kathleen Chambers home was rebuilt in 1996—I had the honour of reopening it—and the RNIB followed Government guidelines and used the social services inspectorate to set the standards. Those guidelines include the provision of facilities for people to prepare snacks and drinks for themselves. They state that the units should include

> "small kitchen facilities, near or in their own accommodation."

It was precisely because the home did that that the residents were separately assessed for council tax. The problem will increase. As more homes are updated and meet the higher standards in the regulations, more will be in danger of having separate assessments made.

I eventually received an assurance that the matter was being looked at and that legal changes were being considered. On 26 March 2002, I received a letter from the Minister thanking me for some information that I had provided and saying:

> "This will be helpful to my officials who are currently reviewing the issue to see whether any changes in legislation need to be made".

I would have thought that the Bill would be an obvious vehicle for any changes that needed to be made to remedy the problem.

[Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory]

Meanwhile, the RNIB appealed against the assessment. On 18 February this year, it appeared to win the case, having appealed against the verdict of the valuation tribunal and won. However, their celebrations were premature, because the Inland Revenue intends to appeal the decision. The whole matter is therefore back in the melting pot. A great deal of money has been spent on it—charitable funds that would have been spent much better on caring for the blind.

The people in the Kathleen Chambers home have considerable spirit. I visit the home at election time, and the people there are well versed in current affairs. They know exactly what is going on but are bemused and baffled as to why the matter has been allowed to drift on for more than 18 months, despite reassurances from the Department.

The people in the home clearly depend on the home—they would not be there otherwise. They have enough problems in life: they are blind, and many are of very slender means. They cannot understand why the Government look on while these unjust assessments are made. They seemed to secure a win in court, but that decision is now subject to another appeal.

Great anxiety has been caused in the Kathleen Chambers home, and the problem needs to be resolved. I look to the Government to do that by accepting the new clause. There are safeguards in it, because only care homes registered under the care homes regulations would qualify. The matter is therefore policed automatically. If a care home ceases to be so registered, separate assessments could be made for each small unit, as appropriate. There is therefore no possibility of leakage into other dwellings.

I hope that the Government will bring the matter to a conclusion. It is very regrettable that the Bill as drafted does not do that, despite the written assurances that I received. It is about time something was done, and I await the Minister's response with great interest.

Mr. Edward Davey: I rise to support new clause 18. The right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) got to the Table Office with the new clause just before I got there with my own proposal. I am glad it happened that way, as the House has been well instructed by the right hon. Gentleman.

Constituents have not raised the matter with me, but the RNIB and voluntary organisations representing disabled people in general have. However, there may be wider implications for all elderly people, given that standards of care in homes are rising, as a direct result of Government policy. The Government should consider the new clause, because the council tax legislation is ambiguous.

5.45 pm

The ambiguity arises from the way in which care homes and domestic and sheltered accommodation are defined. It appears that the people who assess whether a home fits into the care home category or the domestic and sheltered accommodation category think that the addition of some small extra facilities—such as cooking facilities—to a room will have a specific effect. They deem that those facilities can change what was always intended to be a simple room in a care home, where a person may enjoy the care provided by staff, into a place where the resident can be independent, and therefore liable to council tax.

We could be at the beginning of an issue that will grow and grow. As care standards improve and facilities are enhanced, what in the past was deemed unnecessary will become more common. Disabled people and residents of RNIB homes may be more affected than others, as they may be more able to make drinks and food for themselves, even though they still need extra care. By contrast, frail, elderly people may not have a need for such facilities. That might be a narrow point but there is the potential for growth. The Minister has been lobbied and received letters on the issue, so he is aware that there are many ways around it. I am informed that he could utilise town and country planning use class orders—such as the C2 order that currently applies to care homes—and tie council tax tests to part of the planning system or to the Care Standards Act 2000, as new clause 18 seeks to do.

This is not a party political issue but is about making sure that the tax system is updated to reflect the way that care homes are developing and standards are changing. If the Minister cannot accept the new clause, I hope that he will have his solution presented in this House or another place.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his presentation of new clause 18. If Parliament is to serve any purpose, his arguments will succeed. The new clause deals with a small anomaly that has cost some charities a great deal of money trying to resolve—and it could be sorted out quickly and precisely if new clause 18 were adopted. The vast majority of registered care homes are not affected by the anomaly but are regarded as one rating unit. Only a tiny number of care homes are affected. One of them is Dolphin Court in my constituency—which I invite the Minister to visit, to see for himself the facilities it provides to people who are desperately disabled.

I spend a lot of time visiting residential homes. Some of them can be acutely depressing; a group of elderly people are to be seen sitting in a circle looking at each other. Others—such as those run by the Abbeyfield Society and John Grooms—go out of their way to provide disabled people with independence and dignity. Not to regard Dolphin Court as a single unit is ridiculous. The individuals who reside there are not independent although they have separate accommodation, together with enablers and facilitators who actively encourage and motivate residents to be less dependent. Guidance is given to each residence on acquiring the skills needed to achieve personal goals. Group meals and activities supplement the individual's living programme. Communal meals are provided, but such care homes try to provide the kind of independent accommodation that encourages disabled people to be more independent.

The tribunal that considered Dolphin Court stated that while the residents were not able to live independently, their individual flats constituted separate living accommodation and should be assessed accordingly. Uncertainty has existed since 1993. In case after case, evaluation tribunals have decided not to proceed, while others—as in the case of Dophin Court—have proceeded. Charities have spent a great deal of money on professional advice. I have pursued the issue with various Ministers—including the delightful lady who was Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, from whom I received a letter on 19 January 2002, in which she stated that there would be no overall change in rates payable by classifying the property as separate dwellings. She said, "Don't worry. There'll be no financial impact."

I then took the matter up with the Minister of State, Department of Health, the right hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton), in a question on 13 November and he said that he would look into it. However, I would like to tell the Government what it means for John Grooms, Dolphin Court, Southend-on-Sea. The council tax payable rose from £700 a year to £4,000, which is a substantial increase and a large amount of money.

Of course, individuals can apply for rebates. There are 20 residents and the majority receive rebates, but is it really fair that a residential home providing limited basic accommodation is regarded as a single unit while worthwhile organisations or charities such as John Grooms, which try to help people to become more independent, to have more dignity and to widen their contribution to society, are hammered? We are telling those homes to pay £4,000 instead of £700.

Only a limited number of homes are affected. They are the ones that go out of their way to provide better facilities for people. I am sure that that is the last thing that the Government would want to stop. The Minister should consider the matter seriously, and not just blether, as he sometimes does in these debates. Is he saying that if a home provides people only with meals and the opportunity to look at each other the Government will give them a benefit, but that if a home tries to provide separate accommodation and opportunities that give people more facilities for an independent and dignified lifestyle, they will hammer it? That is what the measure will do. If a home goes out of its way to improve things for its residents, it will be hammered; if it does nothing, it will be okay.

It is simply a question of logic. The independent valuation tribunal's report on Dolphin Court stated that the residents were unable to live independently, but that it had to regard the accommodation as separate units. I am sure that the Minister will accept that the measure is unfair and unreasonable, and discriminates against people who are trying to provide better facilities, so I hope that he will accept the excellent new clause proposed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells. The vast majority of homes are okay; we are simply trying to ensure that all registered homes are treated in the same way.

As the Minister knows, my right hon. Friend and I, and other MPs, have been troubling him with this issue for quite a while. We have said that something is wrong, and that the situation is unfair and should be put right. Charities have spent a great deal of money to try to resolve the problems. They feel strongly that they are being hammered for going the extra mile for disabled people who require assistance. I hope that the Government will put things right; that is only fair and reasonable.

If the Minister has any doubts, I hope that he will visit Dolphin Court to see for himself. When people with great disabilities are not merely being looked after but helped to improve their opportunities and to do better in society, that deserves encouragement. However, instead of getting that encouragement, the charities are being hammered. I hope that the Government will do something about it.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: The Opposition strongly support the new clause proposed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory). I congratulate him on pursuing the case on behalf of his constituents at Kathleen Chambers House so diligently over such a long period. I echo the words of my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir Teddy Taylor).

Since my right hon. Friend drew the matter to my attention, I have been contacted by the Royal National Institute of the Blind, which produced a brief for this debate for Members of Parliament.

We seem to be moving into the more enlightened regime envisaged by the Care Standards Act 2000 whereby people who are blind or physically disabled can lead as near a normal life as possible. As other hon. Members have said, guidance was issued under the 2000 Act so that facilities would be upgraded to allow residents to live as independent a life as possible.

6 pm

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells said, the accommodation needs to be brought up to modern standards. Those people need a sink, a cooker and other kitchen facilities to live a more independent life, but that does not mean that individual residents could live a completely independent life if it were not for the general, overarching care provided by the home. The problem is that the individual units become subject to council tax when those minimum care standards are achieved.

The RNIB makes the point that there is a high degree of regulation and inspection of care homes, so the valuation tribunal has less grounds for concern about illicit operation in care homes than in the housing stock at large. One of the grounds that the Minister might use in rejecting the new clause is that there would be council tax leakage. However, the RNIB also makes the point that, if the premises ceased to be used as a care home, the registration would automatically cease, which would effectively reinstate the exemption from residential care accommodation that used to exist under community charge regulations.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells has said, it seems totally wrong that the law should be unclear. As my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend, East, said, cases have gone to valuation tribunals way back as far as 1993. The Minister now has an opportunity to clarify the law. Even if he does not accept new clause 18, I hope that he will accept the principle that my right hon. Friend has established and say that the detailed drafting required to amend the law on council tax regulations will be prepared so that an amendment can be introduced in another place.

The Opposition support my right hon. Friend's new clause, and I hope that he will press it to a vote and encourage the Government to introduce regulations in another place.

Mr. Leslie: May I first put on record my appreciation of the fact that the right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) has raised this issue today? We have had a useful debate and a number of important issues have been raised. I hope that the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) will at least give me the opportunity to say my piece and then reflect on what I have to say before drawing his conclusion about whether to press the motion to a vote.

I have to admit that this is clearly an issue, and the right hon. Gentleman has clearly come up with a possible solution in new clause 18—a proposal that would ensure that care and nursing homes registered with the National Care Standards Commission were counted as one unit for council tax purposes. The RNIB has also deduced that that option is a possible solution, and that issue has been raised in correspondence with my Department. Again, I should like to put on record my appreciation of the work done by the RNIB—not just its work on this issue but the wider beneficial work that it does for people with visual impairment.

Residential homes have traditionally been interpreted in council tax regulations as essentially a series of bedrooms with communal facilities, but, as the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) said, such accommodation is becoming increasingly self-contained—units have their own kitchens and bathrooms, for example—precisely to facilitate more independent living, and many hon. Members support that as standards are raised. However, that type of accommodation traditionally falls under the definition of separate chargeable dwelling. That is why such accommodation has been billed separately in certain circumstances.

I was very interested to hear what the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir Teddy Taylor) said about Dolphin Court and what the right hon. Member for Wells said about Kathleen Chambers House—the home in his constituency. Indeed, I have no reason to challenge what they have said about the circumstances that they have reported to the House. The chargeable dwelling can either be a complete dwelling—for example, a house—or part of a building with self-contained units such as flats. The definition tends to focus on whether there are kitchen and bathroom facilities either in or outwith the unit. The specific test is whether the units have been adapted for use as separate living accommodation; that is the definition in the regulations.

However, as care homes establish more self-contained units, that can result in residents in the more modern units receiving separate council tax bills for the first time. Obviously, that can be surprising and unwelcome for those residents, and also awkward for the local authorities that have to administer the billing process.

I want to put on the record the fact that I am very sympathetic indeed to the rationale behind the arguments of the right hon. Member for Wells and the others who tabled the new clause. I hear the suggestions by the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton about other mechanisms, such as planning classification, that might be used.

The hon. Member for Cotswold says that the Government should not be thinking about the loss of council tax revenue, but that is not the reason why I shall, I am afraid, have to ask the right hon. Gentleman to withdraw the new clause. There are drafting issues that mean that the new clause would not fit into the Bill as it was intended to. Moreover, it is not needed, as the changes to the regulations defining a chargeable dwelling can be made by secondary legislation under section 3(5)(b) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992. There are also other issues affecting application to the National Assembly for Wales, which mean that new clause 18 is technically deficient.

The Government may well decide to exercise our powers to change the regulations and treat all registered care homes as single dwellings. We are considering that in great detail now; the valuation of care homes is being carefully examined and evidence is being collected to see how widespread the problem is. If need be, we will use our legislative powers to remedy the problem.

The right hon. Member for Wells specifically mentioned that he had written to previous Ministers on the subject and that the attention given to the issue had not been as swift as he would have liked. I have raised the matter with my officials, and I intend to ensure that we can resolve the problem satisfactorily over the coming months. After the useful debate that we have had, which has put everything on the record, I shall go back and redouble our efforts to ensure that we can resolve the problem. In the light of that commitment, I hope that hon. Members will accept that the time has come to withdraw the new clause.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I am grateful to the Minister for his recognition of the problem, and to my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir Teddy Taylor) for his powerful support, based on another real case. I am also grateful to the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey), the Liberal Democrat spokesman, who is clearly concerned about the problem too.

The Minister said that he was "very sympathetic" to our case. I think that in parliamentary parlance, that means that he will definitely act. He also said that there were avenues for remedying the defect through secondary legislation. He recognised that his Department had been somewhat dilatory in grasping the issue, which has been around for at least 18 months—if not a great deal longer, according to my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend, East.

A great deal of expense has been incurred. In the case that I have described it was incurred by the RNIB—a body which I much value, and which I am sure would rather have spent the money on front-line care. As I said at the outset, the problem has also caused much anxiety among vulnerable people for whom life has already created a good many difficulties.

In the light of the Minister's remarks, however—I take his assurance at face value that he will find a remedy, and that his Department will grasp the issue with the urgency that it deserves—I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New Clause 19

ABOLITION OF CAPPING POWERS

'.— Section 30 and Schedule 1 of the Local Government Act 1999 (c. 27) are repealed.'.—*[Mr. Edward Davey.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Davey: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With this it will be convenient to discuss amendment No. 49, in page 112, line 7 [Schedule 7], leave out 'and 31' and insert

', 30 and 31 and Schedule 1'.

Mr. Davey: It is not often that one gets the chance to react with a legislative proposal so soon after a Minister has made a particular threat. At the weekend, the Deputy Prime Minister, in answer to various journalists' questions, said that the Government were considering capping certain local authorities that were increasing their council tax by large amounts. I was particularly concerned to hear that, as it went against much of what Labour said in opposition and in government with respect to capping powers. I therefore felt that it was appropriate, as we had the chance to do so today, to probe this issue to see whether we could help the Labour Government put on the statute books the policy to which they subscribed in opposition: rightly, Labour in opposition was against capping powers. When the Conservatives were in power, the Liberal Democrats, with the Labour party, used to criticise the way the Conservative Government, time after time, used capping powers to stop local authorities reacting to the wishes of their electorate to invest in services, whether services in our schools, services for elderly people, services for vulnerable children or services more widely in the communities that councillors were elected to represent.

It is therefore disappointing that, when this Government came to power, they slightly changed their policy. They kept some reserve capping powers, and, to use the Deputy Prime Minister's words, they got rid of "crude" capping and somehow introduced "sophisticated" capping in the Local Government Act 1999. Some of us feel that that type of capping is still not right. The reason for that is simple: these issues should be decided by the electorate in the areas of the councils concerned.

We have some concerns, of course, that councils may be using opportunities to rack up the council tax. When I raised the issue at questions earlier today, the Minister—I think that he had Wandsworth borough council in mind—responded that some councils had cut the council tax before the election and were now raising it significantly. He has a problem with that case, as he well knows, because while I would not wish to support Wandsworth's methods—the way in which it cut the tax before the election and has now put it up is outrageous—the people who should judge that are the electors of Wandsworth.

The Minister has another problem: the comprehensive performance assessment of various councils has for some reason rated Wandsworth an excellent council. The Government, under their policy of freedoms and flexibilities, have said that they would not apply capping to those sorts of councils, so they have a real problem with the way in which they approach the matter. It would be simplest to get rid of capping powers altogether, which is the effect of new clause 19. I hope that we will have some support from Conservative Members on that.

Matthew Green: Has not the new formula in fact created a situation in which some councils, in order to move up to what the Government suggest they ought to be spending at formula spending share, would have to introduce large council tax rises? Bridgnorth district council, for example, set a band D rate of around £65 last year, although the assumed national council tax level is £185. The figure is used in the calculation of how much Government grant the authority receives. However, if the authority were to spend at the formula spending share—the level that the Government suggest might be appropriate—it would have to put in a 200 per cent. council tax rise. It has not done that; it has put in a 13 per cent. rise. However, this case illustrates the problem that the Government have created.

6.15 pm

Mr. Davey: My hon. Friend is exactly right, in the sense that the grant changes this year have been part of the problem. Therefore, it is not right for the Government to blame individual councils. The Government's policy of reforming the grant distribution formula has led in some cases to the large council tax increases. Ministers will say that they have protected local councils by the introduction of floors. However, we all know that those floors were not high enough for many local authorities. Those authorities faced significantly increased costs, such as the national insurance increase, above-inflation salary increases for many local authority employees and increases in insurance costs that were way above inflation. We therefore know that the floors were not sufficient.

When we take into account the effects of ring-fencing and passporting, particularly in respect of education—which is often a large part of the budgets of unitary authorities and county councils—we understand how local authorities have arrived at this position. Not only have they received insufficient grant and faced large cost increases, but they have been given no room to manoeuvre because much of the grant that they receive has been predetermined by central Government diktat. It is the fact that there is no wriggle room or ability to move the budgets round to meet communities' needs that has created the problem.

Mr. Andrew Turner: I have much sympathy for the hon. Gentleman's views, not least because my authority—as he knows, it is led by the Liberal Democrats, even though they are somewhat ashamed to admit it—increased the council tax by a small amount before the most recent local elections and subsequently increased it by massive amounts in the following two years. There is a good case for removing the power of council tax capping, but it is difficult for local authorities

[Mr. Andrew Turner]

to set a rate that is decided locally when they are subject to national pay bargaining and do not have discretion over whether they implement that.

Mr. Davey: The hon. Gentleman repeats a point that I was making. Local authorities face such problems even when they are given, as the Government keep saying, grant settlements that are above inflation.

The Minister must recognise that, because of what is known as the gearing effect whereby authorities raise only a small proportion of their total revenue locally, a 1 per cent. cut in the grant sometimes translates into a 5 per cent. increase in the council tax so as to replace lost revenue. That is one reason for the large increases in council tax. When the gearing effect is added to cost pressures and ring-fencing, that means that the council tax has to rise by a large amount for an authority to meet the demands on it. That is one reason why we oppose the council tax and want it abolished. The other reason is that it is such an unfair tax.

The Government should not use capping powers even though the council tax is such an unfair tax. They should introduce a policy that would cut the council tax by £100 per council tax payer and use central Government money to fund that. If capping powers were used, there would be arbitrary cuts in services such as education and social services. We do not want that. By providing money from the Treasury—our alternative Budget showed that the Government could do that in the forthcoming Budget—we could ensure that councils were able to deliver cuts in council tax and maintain services. That is surely a much better approach than going ahead with capping.

Mr. Turner: I am intrigued that the hon. Gentleman believes that the introduction of a local income tax would remove the gearing effect. Surely a local income tax would have to be supported by Government grant in some authorities to a lesser extent than in others. How would that remove the gearing effect?

Mr. Davey: The hon. Gentleman is right to pick me up on that. A local income tax gives us the potential to get rid of the gearing effect. Income tax is fairer than council tax. A local income tax would allow us to cut national income tax and increase local income tax penny for penny, so reducing the grant and the gearing effect. It is a mechanism by which we could reduce the gearing effect, although obviously not immediately. Council tax does not provide us with that potential. That is the problem. In the balance of funding review, the Government are trying to discover whether they can put more demands on the council tax, but because the tax is so unfair, it cannot bear that weight. So the gearing effect will never be abolished or even reduced while we have such an unfair tax. By replacing it with a fair tax, we have the chance radically to reform local government finance.

In most other western democracies, local government finance is not the bugbear that it is in Britain. The prime reason for that is that many of them have a fair local income tax. Their local authorities are able to raise more of their revenue locally and are accountable to the local electorate. We should follow that model. People have been debating it for many years and it is about time our Government faced up to it.

Mr. Turner: I have listened with care to the hon. Gentleman's explanation, but surely a 1p reduction in income tax would reduce the money that the Government receive and they would then reduce the local government grant. A 1p increase in income tax imposed by the hon. Gentleman's local authority would generate far more money than a 1p increase in income tax imposed by my local authority, because people in his area have much higher incomes. How would that reduce the gearing effect?

Mr. Davey: The hon. Gentleman is right to make that point. We want to increase the revenue that is raised locally from 25 per cent. to 70 or 75 per cent. That would reduce the gearing effect hugely, but we would always need an equalisation grant—a redistribution grant—for the reasons that he outlines. We would not want poor authorities not to have resources because they have a lower income tax base. Similar aspects of the grant system have existed before. However, by having a fair tax, such as a local income tax instead of council tax, we would enable that shift to be achieved over time—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have been generous enough in allowing the debate to be shaped this way. I remind the House that we are discussing a new clause on capping powers.

Mr. Davey: You are right, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Only time will tell whether the Government will use capping powers this year. I hope that Ministers will tell us that they have decided not to use them. I also hope that the Minister will go further and tell us that, with cross-party support, capping will end altogether. We should take one step towards reviving local democracy and improving local accountability. Let us build on that in the next stage by reforming the local government finance system entirely.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: The debate has been interesting and I listened with care. I fully accept that Conservative Governments in the 1980s used capping powers against some of the most profligate authorities—mostly Labour controlled—that were wasting taxpayers' money outrageously. There was, and is, another problem—in some authorities, the majority of council tax payers do not pay the full amount of council tax, so they have an interest in their council providing ever more subsidised services. One could argue that those who pay the council tax in full need the protection of capping. On the other hand, the Conservatives strongly support the principle of devolving as much power as possible to the lowest possible local level. Provided that the ratio of the highest to the lowest band of 3:1 is maintained so that council tax cannot be unfairly skewed to the top band or two, the Government have plenty of powers to force poorly performing authorities to restore their services to a reasonable and cost-effective level. Many more powers, for example, have been given to the Secretary of State in the Bill.

We have complained about the Bill's centralising tendency, but one consequence is that the Secretary of State has many more powers to deal with councils that overstep the mark, waste money and provide poor services to local people. The Government have powers, including one involving the Audit Commission, over the comprehensive performance assessment and star rating that have been introduced, and ultimately they can send in officials to run council functions or, indeed, the council in cases of grossly incompetent management. Such powers have been exercised over Walsall council. On the other hand, it will be interesting to see what the Government will do about one of the top-performing councils—Wandsworth. It would be nonsense if a top-rated council in the Government's new comprehensive performance assessment and star rating were capped because it tried to maintain local services.

While we fully support the Liberals' aspiration and aim of getting rid of capping, it is difficult to see how they can do so under the Government's unfair and skewed mechanism for funding local authorities. We are keeping an open mind, and I must tell the Liberal Democrat spokesman that although I have considerable sympathy with his new clause, regrettably I cannot support it tonight as we need to consider the matter in greater detail. With those few remarks, I wait with interest to hear what the Minister has to say.

Mr. Luff: I have considerable sympathy with much of what the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) said when he moved the new clause. Local government functions are effectively controlled from Whitehall and three-quarters funded by it. To meet the targets effectively imposed on it by the Government, my county council is obliged to increase council tax by 14 per cent. or so just to stand still. West Mercia constabulary, one of the precepting authorities, gave a demonstration to hon. Members from Worcestershire, Shropshire and Herefordshire of the impact of the Government's grant, which the hon. Member for Ludlow (Matthew Green) attended. He and I heard a convincing reasons why a 12.9 per cent. increase in the precept was necessary just to stand still.

I am therefore worried about the capping powers available to the Government. Worcestershire county council could be in an invidious position if the Government used those powers, and might have to cut services, including social services inspection and teachers in schools. Yet it has to impose a monstrously high council tax increase because of the Government's treatment. Quite outrageously, it is between a rock and a hard place.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: My hon. Friend is making an important case. His police authority is in exactly the same position as mine in Gloucestershire. It has had to impose a double-digit precept for the past three years because of the funding that it has received from the Government. Had it not done so, the only alternative was to cut the number of police officers in Gloucestershire.

Mr. Luff: I entirely share my hon. Friend's concern, and am glad that he made that point. Last year, West Mercia constabulary increased its precept by 33 per cent. to enable it to have a useful increase in the number of police officers on the streets and in the villages of my constituency, but I imagine the Government were tempted to use their capping powers. Large increases are being forced on local authorities, police authorities, county councils and district councils by the Government's funding arrangements, which have skewed money away from "leafy" shires to northern Labour strongholds. No wonder we see that council tax increases are typically highest in a line south of the Severn and lower north of the Severn. If the Government used their capping powers on authorities such as Worcestershire county council, it would be an outrage.

Although I have sympathy with the comments of the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton, I recognise that there is a need for the Government to have reserve powers to use against outrageously profligate authorities, but not authorities like Worcestershire, which is put in an invidious position by the Government's own policies. If the Minister can reassure us about the use of capping powers this year at least, that would provide some comfort while more careful, calm consideration is given to the long-term future of the powers.

6.30 pm

Mr. Raynsford: We have had an interesting debate. I can say that as there have now been three speakers. The hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) described it as an interesting debate after we had heard just one speaker. That raises the interesting intellectual question of whether a debate can take the form of a monologue.

The fact that the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton introduced the new clause today strikes me as bizarre. It is surely a strange sense of timing to choose to make the case for the abolition of capping powers on the day when the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy has published provisional figures suggesting that council tax demands from local authorities will be up by some 12.9 per cent. next year.

At a time when many people all over the country are naturally worried about the prospect of large council tax bills landing on their doormat, it shows an extraordinary degree of insensitivity on the part of the Liberal Democrats to suggest the abolition of capping. That sends a message that anything goes, and indicates that their priority is not the poor council tax payer, but the local authority—the producer interest, rather than the public. That, I am afraid, is all too often characteristic of the Liberal Democrats.

Mr. Edward Davey: Can the Minister tell us how he intends to use the powers this year? Which councils will he cap?

Mr. Raynsford: If the hon. Gentleman is patient, I will take him through the policy and its implications. We made our position on council tax capping clear in our 2001 local government White Paper. That built on the Local Government Act 1999, which abolished the crude and universal capping provisions introduced by the Conservatives when they were in government, about which they now clearly feel a little guilty. The hon. Member for Cotswold could not quite bring himself to admit the errors of the Thatcher period, but he clearly indicated a shift in the Conservatives' position.

We have done away with those provisions and accepted that it was wrong to have those blanket powers, which were used in an insensitive and

[Mr. Raynsford]

inappropriate way. However, we retained more selective reserve powers that can be used, if necessary, in cases where local authorities impose an unreasonably high council tax demand. We can cap a budget increase in-year; we can pre-set a maximum budget which an authority can set in subsequent years; or we can set a notional budget requirement against which future years' capping decisions can be taken.

The hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton suggested that the Government were being inconsistent in our approach. We are not. We do not wish to use capping powers, but we believe, as any responsible Government should, that it is right to have reserve powers against circumstances where a local authority has behaved in a dubious way and imposed an excessive council tax increase for no good reason. That is the right policy stance to protect the interests of the public.

As regards this year, we are still waiting for all the information on council tax rises. The CIPFA figures to which I referred are based on approximately two thirds of local authorities. It will be a while yet before we have received all the data for all local authorities. It would be wrong to make any decision on the use of the powers just yet. We do not rule out their use, but we have no current plans to apply the capping powers. We do not wish to use the powers, but we recognise that in certain circumstances that may be necessary. The retention of the powers is important to send a message that local authorities should always act responsibly and should have proper regard for their council tax payers—for ordinary people who have to pay the cost and who would see a bill increasing by rather large amounts, as some, I am afraid, will do this year, as a very serious imposition and a cause of deep concern.

Looking at the figures for the current year, it is clear that there are some very wide variations in the council tax demanded in different areas. For example, the west midlands has a number of metropolitan authorities that are of roughly similar size and are getting roughly similar levels of Government grant. However, their council tax demands range from 4.4 per cent. in Coventry and Birmingham and 5.8 per cent. in Sandwell and Dudley to 14.4 per cent. in Conservative Solihull. I do not know why Solihull finds it impossible to budget for a modest council tax increase just as Birmingham and Coventry do, given that its grant increase was in line with those received by other west midlands authorities.

The Tory party has tried to pretend that the Government grant is responsible for council tax increases this year. That is an outrageous suggestion, because this is the first year ever when every local authority in the country has received an above-inflation grant increase. That has never happened before. During the years when the Tory party was in government, councils more often than not saw a reduction in their grants in real terms and sometimes in actual terms. This year, every council in the country has had an increase. The overall increase has averaged 5.9 per cent. in general grant. When special and specific grants are added, the average is 8 per cent. That is a good settlement that is substantially ahead of inflation.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I have heard the Minister repeat that assertion several times on the radio, but it is simply not true. Out of the average increase of 5.9 per cent., at least 3 per cent. has been taken up by Government-imposed taxes—increased pension contributions in respect of advance corporation tax changes, increased national insurance and non-funded increases for public sector employees. Those increases take up 3 per cent. of the 5.9 per cent. average. In addition, many councils have received an increase of only 3.5 per cent. under this Government's settlement. How are they supposed to maintain services with such a grant increase and such increased costs?

Mr. Raynsford: I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman can bring himself to say that with a straight face. When his Government were in power, councils got cuts in the grant. They saw reductions and cuts, but while this Government have in been in power local authorities have seen year-on-year grant increases. This year, they are getting an increase averaging 5.9 per cent. in general grant and 8 per cent. when specific grants are taken into account—a total of £3.8 billion. Let me deal with one or two of the points that he raised about that. Does he know how much is taken up by national insurance?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Roughly, out of the 3 per cent. cost increase that I have just mentioned, 1 per cent. relates to the issue of ACT and pension contributions, 1 per cent. to underfunded public sector pay increases and 1 per cent. to national insurance changes. Those costs mean that 3 per cent. of the Government's so-called 5.9 per cent. average increase is immediately taken up. Furthermore, they do not fund the amounts passported through education. How are local authorities supposed to maintain services without increasing council tax?

Mr. Raynsford: In an earlier debate, the hon. Gentleman gave us an interesting insight into his mathematical skills by suggesting that an increase of 5p a week was equivalent to an increase of £25 a year, rather than £2.50 a year. *[Laughter.]* That is true; it is an indication of just how out of touch the Opposition are. He is out of touch once again in respect of the figures that he has just given to the House. The total increase attributable to national insurance increases is £230 million, which compares with £3.8 billion of additional grant. That is the reality. That is what the Tory party is trying to hide, as it is Tory authorities that are increasing council tax unreasonably this year. When the full analysis is carried out, he will have to explain why Tory councils are making the largest council tax increases by far this year. It is not because of the grant. As I have pointed out, many Tory councils have received a very similar grant to that received by Labour councils, and they include Solihull, which, although its grant is similar to that of Labour Birmingham or Coventry, has introduced a council tax increase of four or five times the size. Why is that? Why is Tory Wandsworth, which reduced its council tax by 25 per cent. last year— an election year—imposing a 55 per cent. increase this year? Tory authorities are taking such cynical action because they are trying to blame the Government for their decisions.

Andrew Bennett (Denton and Reddish): What would be the implication for local councils of the 20 per cent. cut in public expenditure that Conservative Members are considering?

Mr. Raynsford: My hon. Friend, who chairs the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning and Local Government Committee, knows only too well that if the Conservative party ever came back to power, we would return to the days of cutting Government grant year after year. A Conservative Government would do that even more savagely if they fulfilled their leader's pledge and made a 20 per cent. reduction in overall public expenditure. A 20 per cent. reduction in council grant would lead to huge increases in council tax.

Mr. Luff: Indeed, it would. However, there is no such plan and I wish that the Government would stop talking such nonsense.

Will the Minister do Worcestershire county council the kindness of accepting a delegation from the relevant portfolio holder and the director of finance and reassure them that spending will be not be capped? Receiving such a delegation would enable him to understand why the council is obliged to increase its council tax by so much simply to deliver standstill services.

Mr. Raynsford: It is slightly odd that the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) takes that view. Worcestershire county council has received a 6 per cent. grant increase from the Government. That is more than twice the level of inflation. There is no basis on which a council that receives that amount of grant can justifiably claim that it has no option but to impose an unreasonably large council tax increase.

If one considers the council tax that different local authorities set this year, one realises that it is possible for prudent and sensible authorities to budget in a way that does not impose unreasonable demands on their council tax payers. Let me tell the hon. Gentleman, who is so keen to support the county councils, a few home truths. Two years ago, in an election year, the average increase in county councils' council tax was 6 per cent. Last year, when no elections took place, it increased to 9 per cent. This year, the provisional figures suggest that increases will be 13 per cent. That is far greater than the increases of most other authorities.

Why does that happen? County councils have the same social services and educational responsibilities as other authorities—I referred to some in the west midlands—which have set substantially lower council tax increases. There is no good reason for unacceptable council tax increases.

Earlier, I referred to Wandsworth, but let me give one more example to kill for ever the myth that Government grant is somehow responsible for council tax rises in a year when all councils have had an increase in grant that is above inflation. The district council of Weymouth and Portland in the south-west threatens to impose a council tax increase of more 50 per cent. Yet Government grant to that authority has increased by 12.5 per cent. What does it need to avoid imposing an unreasonable increase on its council tax payers? It raises serious questions if 12.5 per cent. is not a sufficient increase on which to budget prudently.

All the evidence suggests that authorities can budget prudently. This year, authorities that are getting good Government increases should be able to impose a council tax demand that is not unreasonable.

Against that background, it is clearly inappropriate to accept the amendment this year. As I have already made clear, we do not wish to use capping powers. We want local authorities to budget but we expect them to act prudently. We cannot turn a blind eye to authorities that not only impose unreasonable tax increases on their residents, but act in a way that appears to be motivated by electoral considerations or profligacy. Every hon. Member should condemn that.

The hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton must surely have learned a lesson from the fate of Richmond upon Thames council, which last year had an unenviable reputation for imposing the highest council tax of any authority in the country. Not surprisingly, the Liberal Democrats no longer control Richmond upon Thames council. I therefore put it to him, in the nicest possible way, that it might be in the interests of his party if he were to take a more prudent and rigorous attitude towards those members of his party who do not believe that they have a responsibility to moderate their council tax demands. If we do not send out from this House the message that we expect local authorities to act prudently, the public will take a very dim view of our responsibilities—our serious responsibilities—towards the ordinary people who ultimately have to pick up the tab.

We cannot accept the new clause. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will withdraw it and send out a message that authorities should act prudently and responsibly.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Ministers will not blind council tax payers with science. Even "The World at One" today ran an item on whether the Government were skewing the local government finance distribution system through resource equalisation, taking money away from prudent and well-run southern councils to give it to their friends in the north. People are tumbling to that, and they will certainly tumble to it when council tax bills fall through their letterboxes.

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman seems to believe that the louder he shouts, the better his chance of persuading people. I have to tell him that usually the opposite is true—if one has a sound and strong case, one needs only to put it across in a sensible and modest voice. In a year when every local authority in the country has had an above-inflation grant increase, there is no justification for some of the profligate council tax demands that are coming through, particularly from Conservative authorities. I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman—who, in his opening remarks, referred to the Government of the party of which he is a member taking action in the 1980s against councils that, in his view, were acting unreasonably—cannot bring himself to condemn those Tory authorities that are imposing wholly unreasonable council tax increases on their residents.

We cannot accept the new clause. I hope that the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton will withdraw it, but, if not, that the House will reject it.

Mr. Edward Davey: I am afraid that the Government's argument will not wash with the electorate. They know that the blame for many of the high council tax rises lies with this Government. It is not good enough for the Minister simply to say that every council has had an above-inflation increase. He should look at analyses that show the effects of ring-fencing, or of the passporting requirement that his colleague, the Minister for School Standards, imposed in respect of the education grant on the ability of councils to manage their budgets. The right hon. Gentleman knows, because he will have heard many local authority councillors and council officers make this argument, that although they may have had an increase, their ability to manoeuvre in using that money has been sorely limited. Therefore, in areas where they have not had sufficient grant, where there are huge demands and huge cost pressures, they are having to make good the lack of grant through council tax increases. The Minister knows that, owing to the effects of gearing, a small shortfall in grant revenue means that council tax has to increase significantly to make amends. His argument does not wash under analysis and it will not wash with the electorate.

Andrew Bennett: To make it clear, it is Liberal policy, then, to make sure that some of the extra money that was to go to education does not go to education. Can the hon. Gentleman tell us which schools will face the cuts that will result from that policy?

Mr. Davey: The hon. Gentleman makes a typical centralist argument. As the normally very good Chairman of a Select Committee, he should be ashamed of doing so. His Committee is supposed to stand up for local government, and the whole point about local government is that local democracy should determine such issues, not Ministers in Whitehall. He should be aware that there was a huge row in Whitehall when the Minister for School Standards sent a letter to every head teacher in the country telling them exactly how much money they should expect from their local education authority, because that was not the message that was coming from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. When Ministers are quizzed about that, they are very embarrassed by what their colleagues in the Department for Education and Skills said. The hon. Gentleman's Committee made that very point, so he ought to know that. He should also know that this problem will not go away until the Government refund the local government finance system more effectively.

The Government will have to come clean in the next few weeks. When they have the full figures, rather than the two thirds that the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy reported on today, they will have to decide whether they are going to use the capping powers. The Minister gave us no real answer, but what he did say is that they do not really want to. If they do not want to, they should accept new clause 19. They should return to what they said in opposition—that capping powers are undemocratic and unfair, and that the judgment on how a council is performing in managing its budget should be made by the electorate, not in Whitehall.

We will not withdraw the new clause. We will push it to a vote, and I hope that hon. Members on both sides of the House will consider whether they believe local democracy to be important. If they do, I hope that they will vote to get rid of these centralised capping powers, which have been on the statute book for far too long—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I think that the hon. Gentleman has made his point clearly.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 46, Noes 290.

Division No. 103] **[6:50 pm**

AYES

Allan, Richard
Baker, Norman
Barrett, John
Beith, rh A. J.
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Burnett, John
Burnside, David
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Carmichael, Alistair
Chidgey, David
Cotter, Brian
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Doughty, Sue
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gidley, Sandra
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Hancock, Mike
Heath, David
Hermon, Lady
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Lamb, Norman
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Moore, Michael
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Rendel, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Stunell, Andrew
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Willis, Phil

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Alan Reid and
Mrs. Annette L. Brooke

NOES

Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, John
Beard, Nigel
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burnham, Andy
Byers, rh Stephen
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*

Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, hon. Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Dodds, Nigel
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hoon, rh Geoffrey
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Liddell, rh Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, rh Peter
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, rh Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, rh John
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh John
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Straw, rh Jack
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Betty *(Conwy)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Fraser Kemp and Joan Ryan

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Government have timetabled this afternoon's proceedings in such a way that we have discussed only six out of the 13 groups. We have had no opportunity for the Minister to put on record what Government amendment No. 24 is all about, and therefore I request on behalf of the Opposition a separate vote on it, so that we may have an opportunity in future to discuss that matter.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am prepared to concede a vote on that matter. It will follow immediately.

Clause 77

STATUTORY REVALUATION CYCLE

Amendment proposed: No. 24, in page 40, line 10, leave out 'each House of Parliament' and insert 'the House of Commons'.—*[Mr. Raynsford.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 269, Noes 176.

Division No. 104] **[7:5 pm**

AYES

Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, John
Beard, Nigel
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burnham, Andy
Byers, rh Stephen
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, hon. Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hoon, rh Geoffrey
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jowell, rh Tessa
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, rh Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, rh Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, rh John
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh John
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Williams, Betty *(Conwy)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Fraser Kemp and Joan Ryan

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Barrett, John
Beith, rh A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James *(Beverley)*
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Dorrell, rh Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flook, Adrian
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr. Liam
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hogg, rh Douglas
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howard, rh Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
Mackay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Moore, Michael
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Pickles, Eric
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Randall, John
Redwood, rh John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Desmond Swayne and
Mr. Mark Francois

Question accordingly agreed to.

Clause 32

ANCILLARY POWERS

Amendment made: No. 33, in page 15, line 4, leave out subsection (2).—*[Mr. Raynsford.]*

Bill, as amended in the Standing Committee, to be further considered tomorrow.

7.19 pm

Mr. Philip Hammond (Runnymede and Weybridge): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. During the Committee stage, the Government tabled what is now clause 118, which will be considered by the House on Monday. At that time, the Minister for Local Government and the Regions was unable to provide the Committee with draft guidance and indicated that he hoped to be able to do so by the Report stage. The Opposition have tabled an amendment that would remove clause 118, but we did so only for the purpose of creating an opportunity for a discussion of the draft guidance on the Floor of the House. Have you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, received any indication that such draft guidance will be available before Monday's debate?

The Minister for Local Government and the Regions (Mr. Nick Raynsford): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it may help the House if I indicate to you, as I have done privately to the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond), that I have written to him and the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey), sending them the guidance, and I intend to make it more widely available by placing copies in the Library and by giving a copy to any hon. Member who would like to see one before next week's debates on the Local Government Bill.

Mr. Anthony Steen (Totnes) *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. I am obliged to both the hon. Gentleman and the right hon. Gentleman. No further ruling from me is required.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. During Monday's

[Mr. David Heath]

sitting, when we were discussing the prevention and suppression of terrorism, the Home Secretary said:

> "I do not believe that there is a problem with people approaching their general practitioner for the smallpox vaccination."—[*Official Report*, 3 March 2003; Vol. 400, c. 596.]

The Select Committee on Science and Technology has just heard evidence from, among others, the British Medical Association and the Royal College of General Practitioners, which said that that is not the case, cannot be the case, and should not be the case, and suggested that the reference by the Home Secretary should be retracted. Has the Home Secretary indicated to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, whether he intends to come to the House to make such a retraction, because it is very important that clear advice be given on those important counter-terrorism matters?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The short answer is that no such approach has been made, but the issue that the hon. Gentleman raises, however serious, is a matter for debate, and I am sure that it can be pursued in other ways now that he has put it on the record.

Mr. Steen: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Forgive me for interrupting while you were on your feet; I thought that you were about to sit down any second. Please forgive me for any discourtesy.

I want to raise with you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the question of the ministerial door that leads from the Star Chamber Court up the back entrance to the Table Office. As a matter of course, that door is always open during Divisions. It was not open this evening. I am afraid that, with this modern technology, a lot of the plastic cards do not work effectively. I came a long way for that Division—from Norman Shaw North—but I had to miss the vote because the door was locked. I wonder whether you could ensure that that door is left open in future, as it has been in the past.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am sure that we are all very pleased to see the hon. Gentleman now. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I will ensure that the matter is investigated by the Serjeant at Arms, so that Members are not obstructed in future.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE BILL (PROGRAMME) (NO. 3)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Orders [28 June 2001 and 29 October 2002],

That, in accordance with the Resolution of the Standing Committee of 4th March 2003, the programme order of 4th December 2002 in relation to the Criminal Justice Bill shall be further varied as follows—

Consideration and Third Reading

(1) Paragraphs (4), (5) and (6) of the Order (Consideration and Third Reading) shall be omitted.

(2) Proceedings on consideration and Third Reading shall be concluded in three days and shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the moment of interruption on the last of those days.—*[Derek Twigg.]*

Question agreed to.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

SEA FISHERIES (RESTRICTIONS ON DAYS AT SEA)

Ordered,

That the Sea Fisheries (Restrictions on Days at Sea) Order 2003 (S.I., 2003, No. 299), be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.—*[Derek Twigg.]*

Coal Industry Social Welfare Organisation

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Derek Twigg.]*

7.23 pm

Mr. Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West and Penistone): I am pleased to have been successful in obtaining this Adjournment debate, and I am glad that my hon. Friend the Minister for Energy and Construction will reply, because he is sympathetic to mining communities and he has been very helpful in obtaining the current aid package for the mining industry.

This debate is about the Coal Industry Social Welfare Organisation and its funding. CISWO, as I shall refer to it, came into being after 1 January 1947, when the industry was nationalised. Although a mosaic of welfare and social provision had existed previously, CISWO brought it together and was able to roll out the provision right across the United Kingdom coalfields.

CISWO has a national framework, with a regionally devolved structure, fitting the organisation into different coalfield cultures in a way that allows it to engage with the community. It offers advice and help to those who organise the welfare facilities and ensures that management skills are on hand to assist local initiatives. In addition, CISWO organises local initiatives and helps to organise sports and brass band concerts, as well as providing bursaries for the sons and daughters of miners and former miners who go on to further or higher education.

Perhaps the most important services provided by CISWO are those for the disabled and frail in the mining communities. It administers the miners' paraplegic centres and provides assistance and counselling for their families. The organisation's social workers assist ageing and disabled miners and their widows; 19 social workers work for it within the UK coalfields, and CISWO social workers now carry out about 10,000 visits a year, in response to a range of issues such as poverty, ill health, bereavement, social exclusion and income maximisation. Those services are invaluable to mining communities.

I remind the House that the coalfield communities stretch from Scotland through the north-east, the Midlands, south Wales and Kent, and that the population of those mining communities is about 5 million—roughly equal to the population of Scotland.

Much has been done to regenerate and renew former coalmining communities, but there is still a long way to go. Many of the men who were made redundant after the economic dislocation caused by the colliery closures in the 1980s and 1990s have never found employment. Indeed, a report published some time ago by the Coalfield Communities Campaign suggested that 44 per cent. of miners made redundant at that time had not found alternative employment. That creates social problems of its own, which are peculiar to mining communities, and CISWO helps them deal with some of those.

The deep coalmining industry has left mining communities with a legacy of disability. I know that the Minister has been extremely helpful in ensuring that the COPD—chronic obstructive pulmonary disease—scheme has made money available. Although when the scheme was first initiated and the lawyers devised the handling agreement it was extremely problematic, my hon. Friend has worked hard to ensure that the scheme has been made practicable, and money is now coming through to the mining communities.

Nevertheless, the high level of disability imposes a burden on local authority social services, which find it difficult to provide, often to remote communities, the kind of specialist help that former miners and their families require. I should point out that the coalmining industry is not an urban industry but a rural one. Many of the small communities dotted around the towns require the special help that CISWO provides.

David Hamilton (Midlothian): Does my hon. Friend agree that now that there is not one deep mine left in Scotland, CISWO's role is more important than ever? When the pits were still running, we had trade unions and miners clubs that could organise in local communities, but these days CISWO's role is unique. It fills the gap, and delivers the information that it is so important to let people know.

Mr. Clapham: That is a relevant point. When collieries close, the service provided by CISWO becomes more important.

Let me give the Minister an example from my community that highlights the degree of disability. The local economy in Barnsley was dependent on coal mining, and little diversification took place through the 1980s. Of course, when economic dislocation occurred as a result of colliery closures, enormous job losses followed. It had always been known that there was a high degree of disability in the Barnsley community. In 1997, the local authority carried out a survey in the town that showed that nearly a third of households in the borough had a disabled person: generally, a father or a grandfather crippled with a respiratory disease as a result of working for years underground. CISWO provides special services for those families. Many of the former miners and their families live in mining villages that are dotted around outside the town. They often require the specialist assistance that, I feel, only CISWO workers can provide.

As the Minister will be aware, following a successful campaign in 1993–94 at the time of coal industry privatisation—a campaign that was actively supported by many Labour MPs—CISWO was preserved. The then Conservative Government provided, through British Coal structures, a £10 million endowment fund, and a £2 million special expendable fund was also made available. The mining companies that had bought the British Coal mines augmented that: they were contractually obliged to provide £1 million per annum of revenue income for a maximum of five years.

As my hon. Friend the Minister is aware, for the last three years CISWO has been in discussion with the Department of Trade and Industry, which is responsible for British Coal, about the need for it to revisit the initial funding package. In the autumn of 2002, the Department announced that it was prepared to make £200,000 per annum available for three years, in recognition of some of the historical liabilities that

[Mr. Clapham]

CISWO would inherit from British Coal, particularly those concerning the appointment of local trustees of mining charities. It is clear from what I have said that the Department's offer to CISWO is inadequate to enable it to maintain the services that the UK's mining beneficiaries desperately require. Using figures from both mineworkers' pension schemes, there will be about 300,000 beneficiaries in that area. CISWO services are therefore badly needed by that group.

CISWO has engaged with many Government initiatives such as the one on lifelong learning. It has been working in mining communities to tackle social exclusion and social enterprise, as well as helping with capacity building. That is in addition to the work carried out by social workers to which I have referred. The organisation's operational staff also work closely with the trustees of local mining charities, of which there are more than 350. Recently, many of those have launched initiatives of the type needed in mining communities, some of which involve miners' institutes providing IT classes. Some of those IT classes are being attended by three generations of former mining families. In addition, other educational opportunities, luncheon clubs, crèches and after-school clubs are provided, all of which are special services required in communities that are adjusting to renewal.

The coalfield taskforce report, as my hon. Friend the Minister will be aware, set out 80-odd recommendations for regeneration and renewal of mining communities. Besides setting up the Coalfields Regeneration Trust, the report set CISWO the challenge of developing mining charities as one-stop shops. There has been a magnificent response to that challenge, and in the last five years CISWO has accessed more than £37.5 million from external funders for community development projects. CISWO has done more than any other single organisation to help to redress the problems facing coalmining communities by dealing with their needs and through local capacity building and developing social enterprise. Funding CISWO provides value for money. The figures that I have mentioned show that it is levering more into mining communities.

CISWO has enormous social and economic value to mining communities. Over the years, it has become indispensable in addressing the needs of former miners and their families and in assisting the rebuilding of mining communities. It is difficult to understand therefore—perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister will refer to this—why the Government are not supporting the organisation.

I have referred to the contractual commitment of the mining companies to CISWO when the industry was privatised. The cessation of that commitment has resulted in CISWO losing half its annual income. The reserves that it had built up have been used, particularly in the period of the long discussions with the Department of Trade and Industry about funding. So desperate has the situation become that the trustees met last Friday and decided that, given the lack of funding, they had no alternative but to consider a plan for reducing service provision to beneficiaries and mining communities to less than half its current level. This is extremely disappointing and will impact detrimentally on mining communities at a time when the demand for service provision is increasing.

Mining communities are aware that the package put in place by the Conservative Government at the time the industry was privatised was worth £17 million. Since then, CISWO has been offered just £600,000 over three years. That is despite the enormous amount of money that it has levered into mining communities to support community projects.

I know that my hon. Friend is sympathetic to mining communities, but the situation is gravely disappointing and the consequences of the DTI not properly funding CISWO will be paid for by mining communities and by the sick, the disabled, and the disadvantaged in those communities. CISWO provides an invaluable service to the mining communities and former mining communities of the UK, and I urge my hon. Friend to reconsider the Department's stance on this issue and to make the necessary funding available for CISWO to maintain its previous level of service provision.

7.38 pm

The Minister for Energy and Construction (Mr. Brian Wilson): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham) on securing this debate. I welcome it. As is often the case with Adjournment debates, it provides an extremely useful vehicle for focusing on an issue of real concern.

The issue is familiar to me, as it will be to all the Labour Members present. For the sake of the mining communities who will study the debate, may I point out that only Labour Members are present? That is as one would expect. I fully understand the interest in CISWO's future, so I am pleased to have the opportunity to explain the current position to the House. I shall obviously take account of my hon. Friend's eloquent remarks.

I certainly appreciate and recognise the important work that CISWO has done over a long period. We are not discussing the desirable ends for mining communities, as we all agree about the desirability of regeneration and the valuable activities that CISWO has carried out. Instead, we are talking about the mechanisms of delivery, and I shall detail later that, since 1997, the Government have put in huge sums of money under different headings to these communities. We are dealing with the narrow question of CISWO's role in delivering that and the nature of the services that it provides. I could not help noticing that, almost without exception, the activities listed by my hon. Friend share the characteristic that they are not the responsibility of the Department of Trade and Industry.

CISWO is a product of nationalisation. It was established as a limited company under the Miners' Welfare Act 1952. The funding and functions of earlier organisations, which had a less comprehensive network, were transferred to the umbrella of CISWO. Besides providing direct services to miners in their communities, it presided over the network of more than 400 miners' welfare schemes, including miners' institutes and recreation and social centres. It was also involved with welfare committees, trusts, funds and convalescent homes.

The funding for CISWO's activities was allowed under section 13 of the 1952 Act. The National Coal Board, and latterly the British Coal Corporation, made payments to CISWO which allowed it to meet the costs of carrying out its activities. Up until 1987, British Coal's annual contribution to CISWO was in the region of £2 million per annum. In 1987, an agreed scheme provided that its funding would take the form of a levy on British Coal's production at 2p per tonne of total output of saleable coal. British Coal, CISWO and the mining unions were party to that scheme, which continued up to the privatisation of the coal industry in 1994. CISWO also derived other income, mainly from grant aid from outside bodies, interest receivable and recovery of social work costs.

My hon. Friend accurately portrayed CISWO's history. At the time of privatisation, CISWO became a charitable trust and consideration was given to how it might continue post-privatisation. A financial package was put together that allowed CISWO to continue with its activities in the mining communities. That was in two parts: British Coal, not the Government, provided a cash endowment totalling £12 million, and a covenant arrangement was put in place whereby the successor companies would provide CISWO with funding of £1 million a year up to and including 1999. That made a total of £17 million, which is not an insubstantial sum in a period of transition. The package up to 1999 was designed to give CISWO the time, resources and manoeuvrability in which to build up its grant and fundraising capabilities in the charitable sector—something that it had been unable to do as a company.

Over the years, CISWO's main activities have changed and evolved. They now include assisting coalfield communities to access other funding streams, such as the regeneration programmes, while continuing to support miners' welfare organisations and undertaking social work-type activities in coalfield areas. Its role is inevitably a response to the way in which the mining industry has changed and contracted. It is true that, over the past two years, CISWO has approached the DTI for new funding of £1 million a year to replace what was previously provided by the post-privatisation employers. I have met Vernon Jones from CISWO, as has my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister. I am aware that the organisation is having difficulty in generating funding to cover its costs, including its support for regeneration-related activities. Perhaps I should clarify that CISWO intends to protect, and is able to protect, its core social work functions.

The issue is not new. All Governments have limited budgets. On that basis, we are unable to continue to provide the £1 million a year that CISWO wants. However, I am able to provide support for CISWO's activities that relate specifically to those unique responsibilities that it performs in relation to the management of miners' welfare trusts which might otherwise fall to the residual British Coal contribution.

David Hamilton: The Minister spoke earlier about the miners' convalescent homes, which are a big asset to CISWO. Numerous people in Midlothian and throughout Scotland use those homes. If CISWO is forced into a position where it has to look at its own resources and sell off assets to try to keep its service going, those homes could be a casualty. Will the Minister assure us that that will not be allowed to happen?

Mr. Wilson: I certainly do not want CISWO to be forced to sell convalescent homes. My information is that CISWO can protect its core functions and social provisions under the proposed financial arrangements. If that is not the case and if I am told authoritatively that it is going to be forced to sell convalescent homes, I shall certainly look at that, but I obviously need hard information rather than a hypothesis. We have offered £200,000 per annum for three years, which would enable the organisation to develop and put in place a long-term strategy to deal with the issues and responsibilities that I have described.

My hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone rightly spoke about CISWO's role in regeneration activities, for which huge amounts of money are available. The Coalfields Regeneration Trust has approved grants of over £40 million to more than 500 projects to support coalfield communities. The national coalfields programme has a budget of over £390 million, which is currently creating 3,680 jobs. The sixth round of the single regeneration budget awarded over £180 million to 16 schemes in coalfield areas. We have allocated an extra £28 million over three years to local authorities to tackle housing problems in coalfield areas.

That is an area where there is no disagreement. My hon. Friends who are here tonight have been extremely active in making representations on behalf of the coalfield communities. In response, the Government have introduced all those programmes that are of benefit to coalfield and former coalfield communties. I therefore emphasise that it is not about money. If we are going to start talking about all the money that has gone to coalfield communities, I would point out that coalfield health schemes are enormous and unprecedented. We are talking about a narrow subject—CISWO's role in the midst of that activity.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): If it is not about money, what is it about? We are talking about a third of the Lord Chancellor's furnishings. Every morning, you used to pay a sum of money into CISWO, but that has all gone now, except for about 7,000 or 8,000 people. It is not only the contribution from the old Coal Board, it is the miners' money as well. We even have a post office in a miners' welfare office in my constituency—it came up with an offer when the post office closed. It also looks after paraplegics. We are not talking about a great sum of money. Will my hon. Friend remind the Chancellor of the Exchequer of the millions of pounds that go to the Treasury as a result of the 50 per cent. clawback from the miners' pension fund? We are asking for a tiny bit. Yes, the Government have ploughed money in, but I urge them not to spoil the ship for a ha'p'orth of tar. Let us get that little bit of money that we need for CISWO.

Mr. Wilson: I was relieved to hear my hon. Friend suggest that we approach the Chancellor of the Exchequer and not the Lord Chancellor. I am alert to the point that he made—a lot is going in, but some things are more difficult to do and justify than others. It is not as if we are turning our back on CISWO—we

[Mr. Wilson]

are offering £200,000 a year. It is not as if the functions that have been described will not be funded in other ways, including the substantial provision from the Government that we all agree is justified.

I do not regard the purpose of our debate as putting the lid on this. I am listening to the arguments.

Mr. Skinner: The Minister is not putting the lid on, and the ink is not dry.

Mr. Wilson: I never put the lid on things; the lid is never on till the fat lady sings.

There is a real debate to be had. I responded to the point about convalescent homes, for example. If I thought for a moment that such work was in danger, I would be every bit as concerned as everyone else. To some extent, CISWO must look to itself. It is not as though the present situation has crept up on it. There was never any understanding, as far as I am aware, that the 1994 settlement was a guarantee of £1 million a year continuing. With that sort of notice, CISWO has had the opportunity to transform itself, as other organisations have done, into a body that accesses money on its own behalf, as well as accessing money for mining communities.

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): My hon. Friend says that he would re-examine issues such as convalescent homes if they ever came under pressure. We all appreciate that. CISWO runs many organisations. In my constituency, in the village where I live, there is the Maltby widows' club. Those are all miners' widows. CISWO runs an administrative service for such clubs. There is every likelihood that that club would fold if it did not get that service, which CISWO has been providing for decades in coal communities, although probably no one knows about it. I hope that my hon. Friend will keep his eyes open to all the activities that may come under pressure as a result of the reduction in funding.

Mr. Wilson: I hear what my hon. Friend says. I am sure that my hon. Friends would agree that it is a bit odd that all those activities, which are not specifically mining-related or DTI-related activities, are funded by a grant from the Department of Trade and Industry. We have said that we will continue to provide money for those functions that are specifically related to the responsibilities of the DTI. Perhaps we should all work on other potential sources of funding. Ultimately, nobody is interested in where the money comes from, as long as it is available to sustain activities that I recognise are necessary in mining communities.

At a time when so much has properly gone into mining communities, as the nation repays its debt to mining communities, I do not want the positive outcomes and impressions to be negated, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) suggested, because of a grievance. We all know that there are small historical issues that continue to niggle away. We have tried to deal with them one by one, in a way that is fair and which addresses past problems and past history in the industry. Our position is that £200,000—*[Interruption.]*

Perhaps I should move on. I recognise that a number of organisations, including—

The motion having been made after Seven o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at seven minutes to Eight o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 6 March 2003

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

The Secretary of State was asked—

Drax Power Station

1. **Mr. Eric Illsley** (Barnsley, Central): What proposals she has received regarding the changes in emission limits at Drax power station. [101110]

The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Michael Meacher): AES Drax Power Ltd. has applied to the Environment Agency for a variation to its existing integrated pollution control authorisation for its power station at Selby. Drax has applied to increase its SO_2 emission limit from 47,000 tonnes to 60,000 tonnes per annum.

Mr. Illsley: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that response. He knows that the AES Drax power station in Yorkshire is one of the most efficient in western Europe, mainly because it is fitted with flue gas desulphurisation equipment. As a consequence, the cost to the power station is £30 million per annum greater than it would have been had that kit not been fitted. Given the lower level of electricity prices, Drax is bidding in its electricity at a price that it needs to maintain its company, but that means that power stations that do not have FGD fitted can come above it in the merit order. In other words, we are producing electricity from our dirty power stations, not the clean ones, because of the situation at Drax. Will my right hon. Friend investigate that to see whether he can alleviate the problem?

Mr. Meacher: I am aware of that problem. It is perverse that there has been an increase in coal burn at installations without flue gas desulphurisation and a decrease at installations with it. That is certainly the case with Drax. The Environment Agency decided to revise its IPC authorisation so that power station operators have to present BATNEEC—best available technique not entailing excessive cost—justification for not using FGD. If BATNEEC cannot be demonstrated, they will be authorised to operate at a load factor not exceeding 40 per cent. That change of policy by the Environment Agency should assist stations such as Drax.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that, close to Drax, also in the constituency of Selby, an experimental project was undertaken to create biofuels? That would not have breached any emission limits, but, regrettably, it closed. The project took willows from farms, including many in the Vale of York. Will he revisit that idea and perhaps consider Government support for such projects to enable that crop to be continued, bearing it in mind that it is a more environmentally friendly way of producing fuels?

Mr. Meacher: I am glad to tell the hon. Lady that I did revisit the project. I went to Willowby—I mean Wetherby; the confusion in my mind is that I went there to look at willows. On a farm near Wetherby, I saw short-rotation coppice and miscanthus. I am concerned about what happened with the—ARBRE—arable biomass renewable energy—project. The management decided not to continue it, but at least 40 farmers had, in good faith, sown biomass crops for use at the power station. We are extremely anxious to find an alternative buyer. That has not happened, but there are real prospects. I have discussed at length ways to keep the project going with the two largest farmers, one of whom struck me as extremely innovative and determined.

Mr. John Grogan (Selby): Does my right hon. Friend see an advantage in the Environment Agency developing an overall policy for emissions for all coal-fired power stations, including Drax, which is clearly the cleanest, rather than just assessing individual applications to increase sulphur dioxide emissions, as at Drax, or to burn pet coke, before it decides how to apply the large combustion plant directive and the national air quality strategy to such stations?

Mr. Meacher: My hon. Friend is right. The Department has a strategy under the second sulphur protocol to reduce sulphur dioxide emissions by 80 per cent. by 2010 compared with a 1980 baseline. We are on track to do that and achieved a 76 per cent. reduction by 2000. However, under the national emission ceiling directive, which is related to the large combustion plant directive, we have agreed to lower the SO_2 ceiling further to 585,000 tonnes, and we intend to adhere to that. So it is a combination of an overall policy of environmentally sensitive reductions in those emissions with a case-by-case analysis. That is the right policy.

Illegal Food Imports

2. **Sandra Gidley** (Romsey): If she will make a statement on control of illegal food imports. [101111]

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Margaret Beckett): Significant progress has been made against the Government's action plan, published in March 2002. We have increased the level of inspections and seizures, provided better powers for enforcement officers, increased public awareness and taken decisions about future responsibilities for

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detection and deterrence. However, we are not complacent and we recognise that there is still more to do, so we are preparing a revised and updated action plan for 2003–04. We are also working to finalise the arrangements for Customs and Excise to take overall responsibility for anti-smuggling measures.

Sandra Gidley: Does the Secretary of State agree that little attention has been paid to the vast majority of seaports and airports, with attention concentrated on the main two? What additional resources will be available to local authorities that have seaports and airports to assist them in detecting illegal meat imports? When will she publish the risk assessment prepared by the Veterinary Laboratories Agency?

Margaret Beckett: The hon. Lady is not quite correct. There has been a larger increase in staff at the major airports, as is to be expected, since that is where the major amount of trade is, but there has also been an increase in staff at major seaports, for example. Local authorities already have duties and it is up to them to carry them out. With regard to the risk assessment, I cannot add to what we said on a previous occasion. As she knows, that is out for peer review. We hope to publish it in the not-too-distant future, and I am sure that the House will find it fascinating reading.

Mr. Barry Gardiner (Brent, North): My right hon. Friend will know that I chair the bush meat campaign, which is arranging trials of X-ray equipment for her Department to show how it can be used to detect meat in passenger luggage. While we await the results of the Veterinary Laboratories Agency analysis of the potential disease risks to animals from illegal meat imports, will she ask the Food Standards Agency to explain why it has failed to conduct an analysis of the disease risk to human health from the illegal trade in bush meat and other illegal meat imports into the UK? It seems strange to the public that something that is considered a risk to animals is not deemed to be a threat to humans that warrants investigation.

Margaret Beckett: My hon. Friend asks two questions. As he knows, although it is important that we deal with the issue of illegal imports in general, including illegal imports of bush meat, only about 2.5 per cent. of reported seizures of products of animal origin are of bush meat. It can be a serious problem, particularly if it comes from endangered species, which is not always the case. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for the work that he and others are undertaking and look forward to receiving the results of that work. There is not much more that I can add. I shall draw his remarks to the attention of the FSA, but as he knows, it is an independent agency with its own responsibilities. In so far as it reports to Government, it reports to the Department of Health.

Mr. Bill Wiggin (Leominster): Is the Secretary of State aware of the 17 farms in Holland where there has been an outbreak of avian influenza? That is a notifiable disease for which there is no vaccine, and it is between 85 and 100 per cent. fatal. What steps is she taking to prevent the disease coming to Britain? It started in Italy and moved through Germany to Holland. Will she stop imports now? Will she be proactive to prevent another outbreak similar to foot and mouth? Will she ensure that there is proper compensation if her efforts to stop the disease fail?

Margaret Beckett: That was about six questions. Yes, I am aware of the outbreak and we take it very seriously. The chief veterinary officer reported to me only yesterday that we are monitoring what is happening, issuing the relevant warnings and so on. The hon. Gentleman knows that we cannot simply close our borders under single market rules, but we are monitoring the situation carefully.

Mr. Russell Brown (Dumfries): My right hon. Friend will be aware that many believe that the action taken in other countries is far stricter than our system, but many people forget the amount of smuggling that takes place in those countries. Does she agree that the best way forward would be a single enforcement agency, so that everyone would know who was tackling the problem?

Margaret Beckett: As I hope my hon. Friend will be aware, we do not by any means rule that out in the slightly longer term. He is right that there is sometimes an illusion about how much more is done in other countries, especially with regard to the amount of trade and traffic. We have substantially increased activity in this country. For example, in January, at Gatwick alone, almost 3,000 people arriving from outside the European Union were either questioned about or searched for illegal food products. As he knows, it takes time to set up separate agencies, agree remits and so on. It was agreed that, because of the urgent need to take more action, it was better to identify which single agency should have overall responsibility at present. That is why Customs and Excise will take responsibility from April, but we shall continue to monitor the situation and, if it seems better to set up a separate new agency later, we shall certainly give the matter careful consideration.

Andrew George (St. Ives): Does the Secretary of State understand that farmers are being asked to make Herculean efforts to ensure the biosecurity of their own holdings but very few have confidence in the biosecurity of this country? How confident is she in the effectiveness of her Government's policies, especially in respect of illegal meat exports from countries that are known to be the primary source of the problem, and in intelligence about the market for illegal meat in this country, which should surely provide the benchmark against which she and her Department can measure the success of her policies?

Margaret Beckett: In particular, I accept the hon. Gentleman's last point about the markets in this country and how one should identify and track them down. I assure him that when we had our first stakeholders' discussion on this matter, a very considerable effort was made to encourage those who might have knowledge and awareness of where the demand is coming from and how such meat is marketed to come forward. I fear that that was done without very much result, so if any

Member of the House has any contacts that might help to add to the intelligence, which is, frankly, pretty lacking at present, that would be very beneficial.

Of course, I do not think that anyone would ever pretend, no matter what we do, that we can be 100 per cent. confident of keeping out all illegal imports. That is impossible. All I would say to the hon. Gentleman's farming constituents is that I accept, of course, that there are onerous responsibilities on them, as there are on the Government, and we are doing our utmost to discharge our responsibilities, but such matters can never all be the responsibility of the farmer without the Government needing to do anything. The Government need to do what they can to tackle the problem of illegal importation, but equally, it cannot be solely their responsibility. The issue is a very important link in the chain. It is one thing when a disease source comes into the country, but quite another when it spreads, particularly as it did in the last outbreak.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): My right hon. Friend will be aware that the issue of food imports is not distinct from that of the animal by-products order, which takes effect on 1 May this year and relates in particular to the composting of animal materials. She is aware that there is something of an impasse between the Government and farmers organisations, renderers and others in the food chain. Is that impasse likely to be broken before 1 May, otherwise, there could be some difficulties about what happens to such products?

Margaret Beckett: I accept that discussions are continuing, but I have just quickly cross-checked with my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment, and I do not think that any of us is under the impression that we have reached an impasse and that there is no way forward. There are difficulties and concerns, as is frequently the case, but we are certainly continuing with those talks and we hope that they will be successfully resolved.

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): May I press the right hon. Lady further on the Veterinary Laboratories Agency's risk assessment? That key part of the Government's strategy has now been delayed for many months beyond its expected publication date. Indeed, in a report dated November last year, the Department's own website shows that the report was expected to be completed by the end of 2002. Can she explain the reasons for that prolonged and repeated delay in completing this essential report? Does not all this bear out the comment of the president of the Royal Society that the one thing lacking from the Government's action plan was any action?

Margaret Beckett: No, it does not, but I accept that there is some justice in the hon. Gentleman's remarks about our having had to wait an unduly long time for the risk assessment to be made available and published. What hon. Members should take on board—they will do so when the assessment is published—is that, as people will see, the assessment is an enormously complex task and a ground-breaking piece of work. It is not something that people have tried to do before. There are two reasons why the assessment has not yet been published: quality assurance and peer review. As I said, it is a first to try to do this. When we publish it in full, everybody will be able to see the process, methods, data and results, and will probably have a good idea of why it took so long.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I need the co-operation of the House. We are still on Question 2 and we are 20 minutes into Question Time. We need brief questions and briefer answers.

Waste Incineration

3. **Bob Russell** (Colchester): If she will make it her policy to prevent local authorities from transferring waste for incineration to other local authority areas that have waste plans opposed to incineration. [101112]

The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Michael Meacher): To be brief, no. I should add that decisions on the transfer of waste and its incineration are for local authorities to take within the framework provided by national policy as set out in "Waste Strategy 2000" and the guidance on municipal waste management strategies.

Bob Russell: Presumably, the Government feel that incineration is a safe method of getting rid of waste. Does the Minister agree that local councils that wish to have their waste incinerated should have incinerators in their own backyard, not carry the waste 40, 50 or 60 miles to local authorities with proper recycling facilities and collections? Colchester is a visionary council that is threatened with two incinerators. Surely the best way to ensure that no councils incinerate is to say that a council that wishes to do so must have the incinerator locally, not carry the waste 40, 50 or 60 miles.

Mr. Meacher: I know that the hon. Gentleman has been involved in the issue locally and has taken his concerns a considerable way, including to court. The original draft of the Essex waste plan included proposals for incinerators around the county, but after extensive public protests, consultants were appointed to carry out a public consultation, which is being assessed. The whole place of incineration within the plan is now being reconsidered, and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will be pleased about that. I entirely support the proximity principle to which he referred, but ultimately it is a matter for local authorities to decide.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): Will my right hon. Friend be even firmer than he has been today in standing up to the Liberal Democrats, Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth, who take a remarkably negative approach towards incineration? As he will know, I am a long-term campaigner for good environmental solutions for waste, and the fact is that incineration does play a part, especially in relation to energy from waste solutions, in tackling the waste in our towns and cities.

Mr. Meacher: The Government strongly support a waste management hierarchy whereby the prime goal is to reduce the generation of waste in the first place. Then, where waste is generated, to recycle, re-use, recover or compost it and then—and only if none of those options is possible—to consider incineration and, conceivably, landfill. We have to meet very tough landfill directive targets by 2016.

Our goal is the maximisation of recycling. Whether all the waste generated can be recycled is a moot point, but incineration will be chosen only where it is the best practicable environmental option—by that, I mean where it provides most benefits or least damage to the environment at acceptable cost, both in the long term and the short term, and that, very importantly, it will be considered only where it can be demonstrated that it will not crowd out future recycling options.

Mr. Charles Hendry (Wealden): The Minister will know of Wealden district council's success in reducing the need for incineration through its outstanding recycling programme. It is one of the most successful in the country and recycles almost half the household waste that it collects. Does he realise that the animal waste by-products order, to which the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) referred, has put the scheme in jeopardy because it would prevent the inclusion of any meat products in the waste for recycling? That is clearly an unrealistic target. What steps can the Minister take to ensure that that unrealistic policy will not undermine the scheme and mean that we have to go further down the incineration route?

Mr. Meacher: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has already answered that question. I am aware that the animal waste by-products order, as it was originally drafted, could be construed as a constraint on composting. It originated in the Government's determination to block all channels that might conceivably resuscitate foot and mouth disease. However, the original drafting went further than intended and could constrain recycling. We therefore hope to table an amendment, which will ensure that there is no chance of causing another outbreak of foot and mouth and protect the genuine and desirable objective of maximising recycling.

Norman Baker (Lewes): On the proximity principle, does the Minister accept that transporting waste long distances for incineration means that those who generate it have less incentive to minimise it? Perhaps he knows that Brighton and Hove council is adamant both that it will not have an incinerator in its backyard and that my constituency will deal with its waste. Is not that another reason to discourage incineration? Is not it time for an incineration tax to support robustly the waste management hierarchy that the Minister proposes? The money raised could be used for doorstep recycling for every house in the country.

Mr. Meacher: I have already said that the Government do not support any significant expansion of incineration. However, we do not rule out the possibility that it may be necessary in some cases. That cannot be refuted. Only 14 municipal solid waste incinerators exist in this country, and we incinerate 8 per cent. of our waste. Let us consider the green countries, if I may use that description. Denmark incinerates 50 per cent., the Netherlands 41 per cent., and Sweden 35 per cent. We intend to maintain our low level.

I strongly support the proximity principle, and the criteria for gathering waste to feed an incinerator would be considered in any application. The proximity principle is a key point in that.

Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): The Minister has broad support for his emphasis on recycling. However, does he accept that well-designed, carefully monitored incineration plants that provide heat from waste have a place in our waste disposal strategy? Will he advocate that strongly against vested interests?

Mr. Meacher: The Government have already made it clear that there are two criteria for applications for an incinerator. First, its size must be appropriate: it should be smaller rather than larger. Secondly, it should provide combined heat and power facilities when appropriate. The criteria for judging applications already take account of my hon. Friend's point.

Warm Front

4. **Dr. Vincent Cable** (Twickenham): If she will make a statement on the funding of the Warm Front programme. [101113]

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Margaret Beckett): Final decisions on allocations for Warm Front in 2003–04 are now being considered. Resources are tight and we will face difficult decisions. However, we are on track to meet our public service agreement target of assisting 600,000 households between 2001 and 2004, and we remain committed to achieving our other targets for eradicating fuel poverty.

Dr. Cable: Two weeks after the Prime Minister put fuel poverty at the centre of energy strategy and the independent Fuel Poverty Advisory Group said that a 50 per cent. increase in the budget was needed to achieve the Government's target, why are contractors being told that they can expect budget cuts in the next financial year? Is not the Department making a fool of the Prime Minister?

Margaret Beckett: No. There is some confusion in the reaction to the report, which covers the longer-term prospects. The Government have set ambitious targets as we approach, for example, 2010 and 2015. We remain committed to trying to achieve them. However, in a sense, we are ahead of our current targets. As I said, our PSA target is 600,000 households by 2004, and more than 500,000 households have already been assisted through Warm Front. When one takes into account all Government action rather than one specific scheme, an increase will take place this year.

We would like to do more; we wanted to put even more resources into the scheme. We shall probably not be in a position to do that, but I repeat that decisions have not yet been made.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): If Warm Front requires more funding, should it not first put its own house in order? I am spending masses of time going round in circles with Warm Front, Lionheart, East Coast Gas, Dearle Henderson, Ideal Boilers and

DEFRA, trying to get a boiler in the home of an 83-year-old woman constituent working. A previous boiler worked but the new boiler does not. There are indications that the boilers from Ideal are known to be defective when they are installed. The whole thing needs sorting.

Margaret Beckett: I am sorry to hear of the problem that my hon. Friend identified. If he finds that raising the matter in the House does not result in speedy activity, I urge him to raise the matter with me again and we will see if there is something that we can do to assist. In the longer term, we are reassessing the impact of the pilots to make sure that the money being made available is used as effectively as possible.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Mid-Bedfordshire): The Government are required by law to implement a strategy that will lead to the end of fuel poverty for the vulnerable by 2010. The energy White Paper states:

> "energy efficiency is likely to be the cheapest, cleanest and safest way of addressing the four objectives"

of the Government's energy policy. One of those objectives is

> "ensuring that every home is adequately and affordably heated".

Why is it that the White Paper fails to set targets for improving energy efficiency and to allocate any new resources for achieving fuel poverty targets? Is not the consequence that 3 million people will continue to be condemned to live in homes that are not, in the Government's own words, "adequately and affordably" heated?

Margaret Beckett: I know that memories are sometimes short in the House but when the hon. Gentleman's party was in Government, it presided over a tripling of fuel poverty involving 4 million people. He said that the Government "are required by law", as though it were a burden imposed by somebody else. It was actually this Government who placed that provision on the statute book. We are not only implementing it but ahead of the present target. However, I do not dissent from his observation that the White Paper identifies the enormous contribution that energy efficiency can make, not only to resolving fuel poverty but to the effective running of the economy and the prosperity and competitiveness of the business sector. Energy efficiency is extremely important and the Government remain committed to pursuing it with as much force as we can. Other agencies, energy companies and local authorities are involved in dealing with that issue as well as the Government directly.

Non-food Crops

5. **Mr. David Heath** (Somerton and Frome): What measures she is taking to encourage sustainable markets for non-food crops. [101114]

The Minister for Rural Affairs and Urban Quality of Life (Alun Michael): We have provided £70 million to develop markets for biomass and a further £29 million to support the planting of energy crops. To encourage the market for transport biofuels, the Chancellor introduced a cut in the duty rate for biodiesel last July.

Mr. Heath: Given that the Curry report in January 2002 stated that

> "England needs a long-term strategy for creating and exploiting opportunities in non-food crops"

and that the area

> "should be a high-priority research and technology transfer effort"

have not the Government's activities been extremely disappointing? What happened to the non-food crops centre and the stimulus for not just the planting of non-food crops but plans for utilising them? Does the Minister really believe that the fiscal incentives so far for biofuel have been successful?

Alun Michael: I indicated the financial incentives that have been made available. We are establishing a new centre of excellence to bring together industry, academia and Government to create the conditions for successful technology generation and transfer with the aim of creating a market, to which the sustainable farming and food strategy clearly makes reference.

Brian White (Milton Keynes, North-East): Is my right hon. Friend aware that companies such as BP have said that they could use biofuels in their existing refineries but are experiencing problems in dealing with agencies such as Customs and Excise? In developing the new strategy, will my right hon. Friend ensure that relevant agencies are taken on board?

Alun Michael: I was not aware of that, but I shall be happy to look into it. It has been suggested that the use of biomass is one of the main contributors to the renewables generation mix, the aim being to meet the target of 20 per cent. of electricity production through renewables by 2020. It is important for that reason.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard (South-West Norfolk): The current round of World Trade Organisation negotiations will mean a collapse in the price of beet sugar produced in this country. What plans have the Government for the development of alternative uses for sugar beet, which will effectively become a non-food crop? Have they a co-ordinated approach to such plans, and if so which Department and which Minister are in charge?

Alun Michael: Some work has been done by the Central Science Laboratory, and, as I have said, an announcement has been made of the intention to cut the duty rate for bio-ethanol. Both those measures will, I think, be helpful.

Dr. Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test): Is my right hon. Friend aware that biofuels can be added immediately to either petrol or diesel, causing a reduction of some 65 per cent. in carbon dioxide emissions? Does he accept that the development of a biofuel non-food crop market could have an immediate impact on climate change, and will he discuss with his colleagues in the Treasury, the Department of Trade and Industry and the Department for Transport how that market might best be introduced?

Alun Michael: I think my hon. Friend's essential point is that we are talking about the creation of a market. It is difficult for the creation of a market to be instant, but I assure my hon. Friend that my colleagues in the DTI and the Treasury share our wish for it to take place.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Will the Minister now answer the question asked by my right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard)?

Alun Michael: The question asked by the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) clearly involves different responsibilities. The Chancellor has responsibilities for duty, and my colleagues in the Department for Transport and the DTI have their own responsibilities. We at DEFRA are positively promoting the development of the market, which is why scientific and other research is being carried out. I would expect the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir Patrick Cormack) to be more interested in those facts than in an over-simplistic question about who is in charge.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): Given European Union enlargement and the changes we need to make in the common agricultural policy, is it not crucial to make biofuels successful? Is it not vital for us to have more discussions with the National Farmers Union and others to ensure that the changes succeed and the agriculture industry can survive?

Alun Michael: Indeed. The work being done is supported by organisations such as the NFU, and the EU biofuels directive is expected to set indicative targets that will help the development of the market to which a number of Members have referred.

EU Water Framework Directive

6. **Mr. David Amess** (Southend, West): What assessment she has made of the potential impact of the European water framework directive on UK industry. [101115]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): The Government published an assessment in 2001, and we plan to publish an updated version later this year.

Mr. Amess: Does the Minister accept that the cost of implementation is expected to be known by 2015? What impact does he expect the directive to have on water pricing? Finally, can he clear up the mystery of why the directive makes no mention of the Water Bill with which the other place is currently dealing?

Mr. Morley: I can certainly deal with the last point. The Water Bill is not designed to implement the framework directive; it has implications for such things as abstraction management and water transfer, which will have a bearing on the framework.

I do not think there will be a big impact on consumer prices in the medium term. As the hon. Gentleman said, we expect the directive to be implemented in 2015 and some of the price implications to be known in about 2012. We are currently conducting a price review. There will clearly be price implications—I would not want to pretend otherwise—but a range of measures are being implemented in relation to water quality, ecological quality, pollution control and the nitrate directive, which will help us reach our target and will reduce the overall cost.

Dr. Stephen Ladyman (South Thanet): My hon. Friend will know that houses in many villages in Thanet and Dover are not yet connected to mains sewerage. Is there anything in the water framework directive or in the Water Bill that is being introduced along the Corridor to make it easier for water companies to put rural villages on to mains sewerage?

Mr. Morley: WS Atkins is conducting a survey on private sewerage, although I realise that that is not a complete link to my hon. Friend's question. The issue is a serious one in his constituency, and he has raised it assiduously on behalf of his constituents on several occasions. The situation in respect of costs and responsibility is complex and that is one of our considerations as part of the overall policy on water provision.

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): Can the Minister confirm that the water framework directive requires that there be zero emissions of such substances as mercury, which is emitted into the earth's atmosphere by volcanoes, and of polyaromatic hydrocarbons, which emit from every combustion process known to man? Will the Minister indicate how on earth British industry is supposed to meet that impossible requirement?

Mr. Morley: With respect, the hon. Gentleman takes far too literal a view of the directive, although, as he rightly says, there will be trace elements of such chemicals. However, chemicals such as mercury are serious pollutants and we need to take action to try to minimise them. The water framework directive indicates the most appropriate and proportionate way of dealing with such issues and there is provision for reasonable derogations in its application. I do not think that the approach is as fundamental and unreasonable as was suggested.

Mr. Lidington: I am afraid that I hold to the old-fashioned view that one requires a literal reading of legislation that imposes penalties on either individuals or industries.

May I take the Minister back to the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess) on the possible costs to consumers? Does the Minister share the view held by a number of water companies that the costs of the directive to the water industry alone could be in the region of £4 billion to £4.5 billion and that it could lead to an increase in individual water bills of up to 10 per cent? That is the view of the water industry. Does the Minister disagree with that assessment and, if not, how does he propose to alleviate the additional stealth tax that it would impose on households?

Mr. Morley: I do not accept those figures, which I think the hon. Gentleman bases on Water UK projections. They include a range of costs resulting from directives that are currently going through, and will thus be an accumulating factor in meeting the water framework directive. At this stage, an accurate projection of costs is premature. Of course, we need some idea about them; that is why we produced impact assessments. There will also be further refinement of the figures in a report later this year.

Fishing Industry

7. **Mr. Mark Simmonds** (Boston and Skegness): If she will make a statement on her policy on fishermen from EU accession countries fishing in UK waters under flags of convenience. [101116]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): Only vessels licensed by their respective member state and third-country vessels licensed by the European Commission may fish in European and UK waters.

Mr. Simmonds: I thank the Minister for that answer. As he will be aware, fishermen in Boston are gravely concerned both about other EU vessels fishing in the Wash and about the current closure of the mussel beds. Will the Minister today assure my constituents that he will resolve the contradictory policies of English Nature and the Eastern sea fisheries joint committee and reopen the mussel beds to allow the fishermen from Boston to go back to work?

Mr. Morley: The hon. Gentleman's latter point was a very good way of working into his question a local issue, which is, I know, of concern both to him as the MP and also to his local fishermen. I have raised the issue of the mussel beds with English Nature and I want any action to be based on proper scientific evidence and to be proportional in its impact on the industry.

On the access of Spain and Portugal, and of other countries in future under the accession agreements, the principle of relative stability was agreed and included in the reformed common fisheries policy at the December Fisheries Council. That will protect the UK quota share of quota species and will not allow access to other member states.

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): Given that the common fisheries policy is essentially a political policy, rather than a conservation policy—it is concerned with doling out catches to nations—will my hon. Friend make strenuous efforts to try to ensure that there is more effective monitoring of other European nations' catches and by-catches, particularly in the North sea but in British waters generally, because we have a problem, first, as Spain is now able to fish there and it will be anxious to build up a track record and, secondly, with Danish industrial fishing catching large by-catches of immature white fish?

Mr. Morley: My hon. Friend raises a very serious point. On the need for uniform enforcement across the European Union, which was agreed at the December Council, we are, for example, extending satellite monitoring across the EU to another range of vessel sizes. On the by-catch strategy, which was also agreed in December, we are looking at the by-catch in the industrial fleet sector and, indeed, at the impact that the by-catch right across the fishing fleet has on stocks, as well as at how the various fishing methods contribute to that. I take my hon. Friend's point that the CFP has been far too much of a political tool in the past, and we must concentrate much more on the conservation priorities of fisheries management.

David Burnside (South Antrim): The Minister must realise that running a fishing vessel is like running a small business—it has revenue and it has costs. If he goes to see his opposite number in the Irish Republic, for example, he will find that other EU member states give massive capital grants for replacing, refurbishing and modernising vessels, which produces unfair competition against the fishing vessels that come out of Ardglass, Portavogie and Kilkeel, as well as fishing vessels and fishing businesses in England, Scotland and Wales. Will he look at the example from the Irish Republic and try to give our fishing industry the same sort of Government support?

Mr. Morley: I have to be honest with the hon. Gentleman: I genuinely believe that public subsidies that increase fishing capacity and effort are entirely unsustainable; they go against the principles of sustainability. I appreciate that some member states are really rather addicted to those subsidies, but I am glad to say that those subsidies will end in 2004 and will not be available in any member state. As for our own fishing fleets and those of Northern Ireland, we have funds available through FIFG—the financial instrument for fisheries guidance—which is designed to be used much more sustainably, not least in helping fishermen to add value to their catches. That is a much better way to use such funds.

Foot and Mouth Disease

8. **Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield): What steps she is taking to minimise the possibility of reinfection of the national herd with foot and mouth disease; and if she will make a statement. [101119]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): We have taken a large number of measures, including improving the detection of illegal meat imports, banning swill feeding, subjecting animal movements to licensing and a standstill period and strengthening the contingency plans for dealing with an outbreak. Details are set out in the Government's response to the FMD inquiries published last November.

Michael Fabricant: The Minister mentions the illegal importation of meat, and he will know that the British Veterinary Association believes that that is one of the prime causes of the outbreak of foot and mouth disease. Does he agree with the Governments of the United States, Australia and New Zealand who believe that one of the best ways to detect illegal meat imports is to use specialised sniffer dogs? How many sniffer dogs do we have at British seaports and airports?

Mr. Morley: We currently have two, which is two more than the previous Conservative Government used at ports. Of course putting in place border control measures is very important, but the hon. Gentleman should also be aware that, although the virus may well have come into the country through some form of illegal meat import, it spread because of the failure to observe rules on the use of pigswill and in processing and to report the fact that animals had the disease. That resulted in the disease becoming widespread in this country, with catastrophic results. So we need a range of measures, not just one, if we are to tackle the control of the disease.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): Does my hon. Friend know the names of the dogs? *[Interruption]*. I have not finished yet. If we cannot stop illegal drugs and illegal immigrants coming into this country, we will never stop all illegal imports of meat. The reality is that we can safeguard against a further outbreak of foot and mouth disease only by routinely vaccinating all the animals that are susceptible. What efforts are going into developing that vaccine?

Mr. Morley: We have access to a range of vaccines, but complex issues are associated with how they are applied. As my hon. Friend will know, in response to independent inquiries, we are moving vaccine use up as part of our response strategy. As I said, if we are to have an effective strategy to combat disease, we must apply a range of measures. I confess that although I take a close interest in the work of the dogs, I am not aware of their names.

Mr. Boris Johnson (Henley): Given that under the terms of the European Union animal by-products regulation vans carrying carcases will be moving from farm to farm, which will significantly increase the risk of infection and reinfection, will the Minister explain why he agreed to that regulation? It will do away with the practice of disposing of fallen stock on farms, which has been going on for thousands of years. Who will pay for it? Will it be the local taxpayer, the national taxpayer or the farmer?

Mr. Morley: The collection of fallen stock from farms is nothing new. Vehicles go on to farms. People who go through the process understand the biosecurity issue well. Given the risks of disease, which we have just discussed, and the public health and environmental issues, the basis for the European directive is logical. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is spending about £30 million a year on the collection of fallen stock for a variety of reasons—the over-30-months scheme, and transmissible spongiform encephalopathy monitoring. We have told farming organisations that we are prepared to use that money as the basis for a national collection and to provide funding for organising start-up, but it is not unreasonable that the livestock sector should contribute to what is a problem in that sector. We are trying to approach the matter in partnership and to deal with the issues in a practical sense.

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon): The Minister will know that foot and mouth disease is at its most stubborn in the sheep flock, where it is hardest to detect. The Government have relaxed the 20-day rule to six days, but the hon. Gentleman will be aware that there is serious concern about two further elements: the European proposal for double tagging of sheep and the severe restrictions on sheep movements, which will make undertaking normal business difficult for farmers. Will he ensure that the regulations are always set at the minimum level necessary to achieve security and that they will be designed to be relaxed as soon as possible so that trade can take place and farmers may have at least some hope that their already poor incomes will recover?

Mr. Morley: I accept the right hon. Gentleman's point. The fact that we have changed the 20-day rule to a six-day standstill is a reflection of trying to balance the best veterinary and scientific advice that we can get on risk reduction, the practical problems and the effect that the standstill had on the livestock sector. The six-day standstill is a fair compromise and I am confident that the vast majority of the sector will support it and ensure that it works. On double tagging, there is a serious problem with traceability in the sheep sector as the right hon. Gentleman will be aware. I accept that the EU may not have given adequate thought to some practical issues. We will certainly put forward the practical arguments that we hear from the industry about the difficulties of applying the scheme.

Common Agricultural Policy

9. **Sir Teddy Taylor** (Rochford and Southend, East): What estimate she has made of changes to the cost of the common agricultural policy resulting from the proposed extension of the EU. [101120]

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Margaret Beckett): Enlargement to a European Union of 25 is forecast by the Commission to cost €6.3 billion in common agricultural policy direct payments and market support in 2013. This is consistent with the ceilings on agricultural expenditure agreed at the European Council in October 2002.

Sir Teddy Taylor: The common agricultural policy has cost European central funds more than £100,000 million over the past five years, apart from the massive sums spent by member states and the extra costs borne by the consumer. Does not the Secretary of State accept that we will face a nightmare of spending with the extension of the CAP, bearing in mind the enormous potential for extension in countries such as Poland and Romania? Will she say whether there is any real possibility of a fundamental review of the CAP, which we were promised would come before the extension of Europe?

Margaret Beckett: The hon. Gentleman will know that a huge amount of discussion is now under way about reform of the CAP. I accept two of the points that he has made: first, it has long been a very expensive policy for taxpayers and consumers; secondly, it is important that we make sure that we can curtail that expenditure, not least because of enlargement. I assure the hon. Gentleman that the Government continue to work with all the vigour at our command to ensure as much reform as we can conceivably achieve.

Lawrie Quinn (Scarborough and Whitby): Has my right hon. Friend had an opportunity to make an assessment of the impact of these changes on upland areas such as the North York moors and on less favoured areas where producers are struggling quite a lot now, where the impact could be even worse in terms of a sustainable agricultural system?

Margaret Beckett: I entirely accept my hon. Friend's concern and I know that he speaks for his constituents in such areas in expressing that anxiety. I assure him that a great deal of work is going on all the time to assess the shifting proposals that are being made, as they are developed and expanded, to assess their impact on all areas. In general terms, we believe that the proposals would be beneficial to the farming community, including less favoured areas, as a result of the combined impact of the different measures. I assure my hon. Friend that we keep that under close review.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): The Secretary of State will be aware that the structure of British farming is that we have larger farms than those on the continent. We therefore stand to lose most from a reform of the CAP. Does she agree that it would be intolerable for British farmers to lose out but for the British taxpayer to continue to pay into the CAP only to subsidise continental farmers who would compete with British farmers in the single market?

Margaret Beckett: First, I entirely accept that the impact of CAP reform, as with the impact of the existing CAP, is different in different member states. The hon. Gentleman is entirely right that we have many larger farms. He will have noticed that, already, the Commission's initial suggestion of a ceiling on payments is no longer in the proposals. I assure him that it is no part of this Government's negotiating objectives to see British farmers suffer at the expense of others.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): The expression "no part of this Government's objectives" will be taken as a slightly disappointing reaction by the National Farmers Union and farmers. Does the Secretary of State not accept that 75 per cent. of continental farms receive less than €5,000 a year, but 43 per cent. of British farms are of a size whose subsidy will be heavily slashed under current proposals? Will she not toughen up her stance on this matter? Will she not fight for British farmers who have already been devastated, and many of whom are suicidal?

Margaret Beckett: Mindful of your injunction to give short answers, Mr. Speaker, I answered the point raised by the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown), which was about the larger farms. I entirely accept the point that the present structure of the proposals, with a franchise that excludes smaller farms, has a differential impact in different member states. We shall continue to fight for a scheme that is fair, both to British farmers and to others, not least because we are the only member state with real experience of a scheme of modulation, and it is only because it is seen to be fair to all that it is accepted at all.

10. **Mr. Desmond Swayne** (New Forest, West): What assessment she has made of the impact that the proposed reforms to the common agricultural policy will have upon farmers in the United Kingdom. [101121]

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Margaret Beckett): We have undertaken various economic and impact assessments of the Commission's reform proposals. They conclude that, overall, the reforms would have a positive effect on farmers and on farm incomes in the UK.

Mr. Swayne: I find that hard to believe. The July 2002 proposals—the Government's regulatory impact assessment—did not deal with the sheep, beef and pig sectors. Will the report that is now due, consequent on the consultation period that has just ended, put that right?

Margaret Beckett: First, I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman finds the assessments hard to believe, but I assure him that they are available on the Department's website, a great many assessments are being undertaken, and it is not only the Government who believe that such a package of reform could be beneficial to UK farmers. With regard to issues of regulation, we continue to keep under review all of the regulatory approach that we adopt, in an effort, for example, through a whole-farm approach, to reduce and to simplify the regulations that farming faces.

Mr. Wayne David (Caerphilly): Has there been any assessment of the likely impact of the mid-term review of the CAP on food prices in the United Kingdom?

Margaret Beckett: Well, there will be a varying impact. We do not expect a particularly dramatic impact in the short term, but I assure my hon. Friend that the impact on consumers, taxpayers and farmers is very much part of the assessment that we are making.

Business of the House

12.30 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Will the Leader of the House please give us the business for next week?

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): It will be a pleasure.

MONDAY 10 MARCH—Conclusion of remaining stages of the Local Government Bill.

TUESDAY 11 MARCH—Estimates [2nd Allotted Day]. There will be a debate on the second report from the Foreign Affairs Committee on the foreign policy aspects of the war against terrorism.

At 7 pm the House will be asked to agree all outstanding estimates.

WEDNESDAY 12 MARCH—Proceedings on the Consolidated Fund (No. 2) Bill, followed by debate on Welsh Affairs on a motion for the Adjournment of the House. *[Interruption.]* I am glad that the hon. Member for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin) finds satisfaction with the business.

THURSDAY 13 MARCH—Motion to approve a money resolution on the Fireworks Bill, followed by motions to approve money and ways and means resolutions on the Marine Safety Bill, followed by debate on flood and coastal defence policy on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

FRIDAY 14 MARCH—Private Members' Bills.

The provisional business for the following week will include:

MONDAY 17 MARCH—Consideration of an allocation of time motion, followed by all stages of the Northern Ireland Assembly Elections Bill 2003.

TUESDAY 18 MARCH—Remaining stages of the Extradition Bill.

WEDNESDAY 19 MARCH—Consideration of Lords Amendments to the Community Care (Delayed Discharges etc) Bill.

The House may also be asked to consider any Lords messages that may be received.

THURSDAY 20 MARCH—Second Reading of the Waste and Emissions Trading Bill [*Lords*].

The House will also be asked to consider any Lords messages that may be received.

FRIDAY 21 MARCH—Private Members' Bills.

The House will not adjourn until Royal Assent has been received to any Act.

The House may wish to be reminded that the Budget statement will be made on Wednesday 9 April. The House will now sit on Friday 11 April and will, subject to the progress of business, rise for the Easter recess on Monday 14 April and return on Monday 28 April.

Mr. Forth: I am grateful to the Leader for that information. Will he now do us the courtesy of telling us just why the Budget date has been so delayed? Why was the Budget date announced so late, and why was it sneaked out rather surreptitiously yesterday in a written ministerial statement? What is going wrong? Is the Chancellor ashamed of his Budget? Is he trying to avoid us in some way? Will the Leader come straight about this? Surely we and the country deserve an explanation rather than a series of late, sneaky and shamefaced announcements.

I should like to return to the dodgy dossier. I think that we need either a statement or a debate on its status and its provenance. I say that because on 10 February the Prime Minister, no less, said in a written answer:

> "It is a Government document".—[*Official Report*, 10 February 2003; Vol. 399, c. 583W.]

On 24 February, the Prime Minister said in reply to my hon. Friend the Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin):

> "This was a Government document cleared in the normal way."—[*Official Report*, 24 February 2003; Vol. 400, c. 254W.]

On 27 February, my right hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell (Mr. Mackay) asked about the dodgy dossier. The Leader of the House said:

> "I understand that the paper was not issued as a Command Paper and, therefore, the process of ministerial accountability for White Papers would not necessarily apply."—[*Official Report*, 27 February 2003; Vol. 400, c. 412.]

Surely if the dossier is a Government document, as the Prime Minister has said, with all the weight and significance that that implies, especially on a subject as important as Iraq, we must now know—I ask the Leader of the House to tell us now or to allow a debate on it—who saw the document, who authorised it, whether it was done at official level or whether a Minister is responsible for it, its contents and what it says. In the name of open government, please tell us who.

Mr. Cook: Over the past 50 years, there have been 22 Budgets in April. There is no particular delay in having another Budget in April; indeed, this Budget will be earlier than last year's Budget.

I assure the right hon. Gentleman that there was no delay in the announcement. The Budget date was announced as soon as it was agreed. As Opposition Members appear concerned that there was delay in the announcement, I would have thought that they would welcome the fact that there was no attempt at concealment.

The right hon. Gentleman asks about the Chancellor's written ministerial statement. The normal practice has been to announce the Budget date in response to a planted question. As he knows, written ministerial statements are more transparent, more obvious and more clear. They replace the written parliamentary question. There is nothing different in the way in which this Budget has been announced from any preceding Budget.

I have nothing to add to what has already been said on the dossier. It was cleared in the normal way.

Mr. Forth: By whom?

Mr. Cook: I do not know, nor would I expect to know, who saw the document in advance—nor do I think that it is an important matter in relation to the debate on the severe and grave matters that concern us in international affairs. It would do Opposition Members more credit if they focused on the central grave questions that we face in international affairs, rather than picking at the edges in a desperate attempt to distance themselves from a policy that we are told they fully agree with.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): May I express my sincere sympathy to the Leader of the House, who has lost out again in his long-standing battle with the Chancellor? After the announcement, for the first time, of a long-term parliamentary plan to enable hon. Members to plan their work in their constituencies, and after the efforts, with the support of the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons, to have a proper diary for the business of the House, I hope that the Leader will agree that it is disappointing that the Chancellor seems to be responsible for planning the business of the House—or is it President Bush or Saddam Hussein? What will be the future of the programme that the Leader has announced? After all, many of the matters that he has announced today are not all that urgent. Are we to wait on the Chancellor's whim before we know what the business of the House will be? Is it not time to have some mechanism that will allow the House to take back control over its own business? I understand that the Scottish Parliament, which the Leader visited recently, has such a mechanism.

In discussions that I hope that the Leader will hold with Opposition parties—in which I hope he will allow Back Benchers to influence the business of the House—will he consider in particular the mental health Bill, which was referred to during last week's business questions? There should be consultation on that Bill—not only on its scope, but on its pre-legislative scrutiny and timetable. In that regard, will he look in particular at early-day motion 263, on the victims of schizophrenia?

[That this House welcomes the National Institute for Clinical Excellence's Technology Appraisal Guidance No. 43 on the use of newer, atypical antipsychotic drugs for the treatment of schizophrenia, issued in June 2002; believes that the guidance is a real step forward in delivering better care for those with schizophrenia; recognises the importance of ensuring that patients have an informed choice about their treatment options; recalls the NHS' statutory obligation to ensure that all NICE recommendations are implemented within three months of issue; notes the concerns raised at the Rethink severe mental illness conference, Only the Best in December 2002, over the slowness of implementation; and urges NHS trusts, health authorities and primary care trusts to ensure that sufficient funding is made available to implement the NICE guidance quickly and effectively to improve the lives of those with schizophrenia.]

Mr. Cook: I found value in my visit to the Scottish Parliament. I believe that there are things that the oldest of Parliaments can learn from the newest of Parliaments. I look forward with confidence, in the light of the success of the Scottish Parliament, to the re-election of the governing coalition. I imagine that the hon. Gentleman would attach himself to that wish for the coalition.

I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his sympathy, but, among the many things for which I may take responsibility, I have never pretended that I can set the date of the Budget.

Mr. Forth: Ah!

Mr. Cook: I do not think that I have made an especially contentious statement.

My responsibility is to ensure that the House can fully scrutinise the Government and fully debate the business that the Government put before it, That is why it is important that the House should have a full four days for debate after Budget day, as would normally be the case. I would not have thought that Opposition Members would begrudge one day of the recess to allow the opportunity for full scrutiny of what will be an excellent Budget. *[Interruption.]* I suggest that hon. Members should not tempt me too far; otherwise, I may suggest that, because of the Government's excellent record in soundly managing the economy, a fifth or sixth day of scrutiny may be well worth while.

I note what the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) says about the mental health Bill. In fairness, I think that we have consulted more often than any previous Administration on arrangements for the introduction of Bills. I shall certainly bear in mind what he said about a Bill that has attracted deep and considerable interest not just in the House but among the public outside.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Will my right hon. Friend assure us that there will be a debate in the House before Britain casts its vote at the United Nations for or against a war with Iraq? I have heard reports that arrangements are being made for the House to be recalled on Saturday 15 March, two days after hostilities will have begun in Iraq. The House will then be asked to approve what has already taken place. Can he set my mind at rest and assure me that the House will be able to vote on the propriety of a war with Iraq before British troops are committed to it?

Mr. Cook: I shall attempt to put my hon. Friend's mind at rest, but I anticipate that that is a serious undertaking that I have not previously managed to achieve.

I repeat from the Dispatch Box what has been said repeatedly by my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary: it is both our wish and our intention that there should be a vote in the House of Commons on the commitment of any British troops and that we want—the Foreign Secretary carefully explained why this is in the interest of the Government as well as that of the House—that debate and vote to take place before troops are put into action. Plainly, we have got always to reserve as our primary consideration the safety and security of our troops. However, subject to that necessary reservation—with which, I think, all Members would agree—we want that debate and vote to take place before there is any military action.

I am aware that a story about a Saturday debate is currently running in the press, and I have received questions about it. However, I do not recognise the suggestion. I am puzzled about why it would be necessary to have a recall on a Saturday given that the weekend to which my hon. Friend refers is preceded and followed by a sitting week of the House of Commons. I hope that we will be able to debate the matter in good time and at a time that will not inconvenience Members.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that many members of the

[Sir Patrick Cormack]

staff, who serve us so well, are obliged to take their holidays during parliamentary recesses? Is he aware that I have been approached, as a member of the Commission, by a number of staff who wonder why the Budget cannot be announced on the Tuesday or, indeed, the Monday of the week beginning 7 April? We could still sit on the Friday and have our four days of Budget debate. The staff, who serve us so well, would not have to cancel—sometimes at great expense—holidays that they have made in accordance with the conditions of service that we impose on them.

Mr. Cook: I am well aware that the Commission is examining the position of those members of staff who may be in the position to which the hon. Gentleman refers. However, I draw the House's attention to the fact that we have not yet passed any motion on the Easter recess. Indeed, the timetable that I produced last October—I was cautious when I announced it to the House—says that "all dates are provisional". There is a value in having provisional dates, but it is important to bear in mind the fact that they are provisional.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): I might as well tear up the dodgy diary.

Mr. Cook: I am not sure what point the hon. Gentleman seeks to make. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I cannot see any reason for hon. Members to shout at the Leader of the House. *[Laughter.]*

Mr. Cook: I am not sure that you, Mr. Speaker, carried the House with you in that customary consensual intervention.

I put it to Conservative Members that it is perfectly plain that we need to make sure that the Budget is adequately scrutinised. I really would not have thought that they would object to spending one day of their recess considering the Budget debate. [HON. MEMBERS: "Staff."] Nor, indeed, do I believe that the staff who serve this place well would wish to see consideration of the Budget skimped so that it is not properly considered. *[Interruption.]* If hon. Members let me continue, I will remind the House that, when we announced the parliamentary timetable, I made it plain that the first week of the recess would be a constituency week. I would not expect the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) to complain at having to be dragged from his constituency to spend a day in this place debating Government business.

Ms Meg Munn (Sheffield, Heeley): Now that the Fire Brigades Union seems to be accepting the idea of modernisation, is it not time for hon. Members to begin to adapt themselves to the modernisation of this place rather than seeking continually to overturn the will of the House in respect of our new hours?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend draws attention to the fact that we are making progress on our discussions with the FBU about modernisation and the pay package. I hope that they are concluded successfully. She is correct to point out that we cannot lecture the rest of Britain on the importance of modernising and changing working practices if we are not willing to do so in a way that makes us more relevant to the world outside and more in touch with the lifestyles that our constituents lead.

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): Is the Leader of the House aware that yesterday the Deputy Prime Minister used a written ministerial statement to withdraw completely the local authority social housing grant? May we have an urgent proper statement or debate on that? Local authorities in constituencies such as mine have done everything that they were meant to do—pay down their debt and transfer houses to housing associations—to provide low-cost accommodation for local people, but that is now impossible because of the Government's gerrymandering. They are taking money away from local authorities in the south and giving it to their own badly run authorities elsewhere.

Mr. Cook: I shall consider the specific point that the hon. Gentleman raises, but let us not lose sight of the fact that the Government are spending three times more on social housing than the Conservative Government whom he supported. Within recent memory, we have had a statement on the future of housing, in which my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister announced a further £5 billion for social housing. Let there be no doubt about the Government's commitment to social housing. We are providing much larger sums than the Conservatives provided in the past or could ever provide in the future if they persist in their commitment to cut public spending by 20 per cent.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On the question of business, I regularly ask the staff what is on the agenda for next week. Usually, people in the post office and on the door know in advance what is likely to happen. My right hon. Friend said, although not in totality, that the House will not meet on a Saturday, yet when I came in this morning and asked, "Anything on the agenda?", the staff said, "Yes. There's a distinct possibility that we'll be having a vote about Iraq on a Saturday, so you'd better clear your desk." Is my right hon. Friend ruling that out completely, because, if so, it will be the first time that the staff have been wrong?

Mr. Cook: Plainly, I must spend more time in the Members' Post Office. Perhaps we can have next week's business statement there or in the Members' Lobby. I can only repeat that at present we have no plans to meet on a Saturday—*[Interruption.]* I am not seeking to provide the footnotes to the wriggle room; I genuinely have no plans at present to recall the House on a Saturday. Should such an eventuality arise, I anticipate that my hon. Friend would much rather that we were recalled and debated the matter than we did not debate it at all. At the moment, however, I do not anticipate that necessity.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): The right hon. Gentleman will know that informal consideration was given to holding the Report stage of the Police (Northern Ireland) Bill the week after next, but that idea appears to have been dropped. Can he assure the House that, when he announces its Report stage, the

Government will not use it to introduce anything that they may have agreed in this week's talks? Any further changes to the policing of Northern Ireland deserve to be in a Bill of their own and given proper consideration in both Houses rather than being sneaked into the Report stage of a Bill that has already been considered fully in another place.

Mr. Cook: As I understand the timetable for discussions in Northern Ireland, the parties to the agreement have gone away to consult their Members and their contacts. They will probably return in April, which is some way in the future. I am not aware of whether that will produce a requirement for fresh legislation or fresh legislative requirements. Should it do so, I anticipate that the House would want to ensure that any step necessary to consolidate an agreement is carried through expeditiously. I cannot anticipate at the moment whether there would be a specific vehicle for that or whether it would affect the Bill. However, as the hon. Gentleman knows, we attach high importance to the Bill. It is part of our agreements with Northern Ireland and we would wish to make reasonable progress on it.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): Given the awesome American weaponry lined up surrounding Iraq and the terrifying effects that the strategy—"shock and awe"—will have on the civilian population, it is essential that we have a debate before a week on Saturday, because everybody knows that the countdown to war has begun. We need that debate on a substantive motion so that hon. Members can express their view on whether or not we go to war.

Mr. Cook: I do not think that there is any difference between my hon. Friend and I on that point. Indeed, the Government—I, the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary—have repeatedly said from the Dispatch Box that we would wish to bring before the House a substantive motion in the light of any Security Council resolution that may be agreed, and that we would want that to happen, if it was at all possible, in advance of any military conflict. That position stands. I assure my hon. Friend that the Government regard it as important not only to the House, but to themselves and to British troops, that they should have that decision by the House of Commons in the event of any conflict taking place.

Pete Wishart (North Tayside): Which of the political parties in Scotland does the Leader of the House believe will benefit most from the Budget statement being made in the middle of the Scottish election campaign?

Mr. Cook: I am confident that the Labour party will benefit most from the Scottish campaign in any event. I am slightly puzzled by the anxiety of the Scottish National party about the timing of the Budget statement. That anxiety makes sense only if the SNP assumes that a display of the sound economy of Britain, the strength of the economy under the Chancellor of the Exchequer and a positive Budget that is popular and well received in Britain and particularly in Scotland will jeopardise whatever small chances it has of taking control in Scotland. I welcome the hon. Gentleman's confidence in my right hon. Friend the Chancellor and his confidence that it will be a positive Budget and a popular one in Scotland.

Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the number of UN personnel administering the oil-for-food programme in the north of Iraq has been reduced from 500 to 200, and that UK-based NGOs such as Christian Aid and Save the Children were advised last week by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to withdraw their personnel not only from Iraq but from Israel and Palestine? Will he urgently communicate this question to his right hon. Friends and discuss with them the potential humanitarian consequences for the 60 per cent. of people in Iraq who are dependent on that aid?

Mr. Cook: I am not aware of the figures that my hon. Friend quotes, but I will pass on her concern to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development. I assure my hon. Friend that the Government attach high importance to the oil-for-food programme in northern Iraq, and I am confident that it would be able to continue even with a reduction in staff, provided that the resources continue to get through. It is striking that, under the UN's direct administration of the oil-for-food programme in northern Iraq, child mortality has gone down, the health of the population has improved and education levels have improved, in stark contrast to the way in which all those measures have gone in the opposite direction in the rest of Iraq, where it is Saddam, not the UN, who administers the programme.

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire): Reverting to the wholly unsatisfactory arrangements for the Budget, does the Leader of the House recall saying on 29 October:

> "I have been in the House for almost 30 years without ever being able to plan from one recess to the next when I can count on being away from Westminster. The motion will enable Members to make sensible arrangements more than two months ahead."—[*Official Report*, 29 October 2002; Vol. 391, c. 697.]

What does he now say to Members and Members' staff who took his advice and made sensible arrangements?

Mr. Cook: If the right hon. Gentleman is suggesting that we should not have that fourth day of debate on the Budget, I will be only too happy to consider it. I suspect that some of my hon. Friends will welcome that proposal. However, I think it is important that the House should fully scrutinise the Budget, and the job of scrutiny by hon. Members must take priority over the travel arrangements that we or our staff may have made. When I announced that diary in October, I made it plain that we were combining the constituency week with the Easter recess. For an important piece of Government business such as the Budget, it is not unreasonable that hon. Members should be in the House rather than in their constituency for only one day of that week. Even without that day, the Easter recess will be longer than most Easter recesses of the past four decades.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): May we have an early statement from Health Ministers on the funding of long-term care for the elderly? My right hon. Friend will be aware that the health service ombudsman recently completed an investigation and found that in four cases—probably out of hundreds, and perhaps thousands—very elderly people had to pay for their own

[Mr. Gordon Prentice]

long-term care, when the NHS should properly have paid. The matter concerns all Members. Many of their constituents are affected, and the Secretary of State for Health ought to be able to assure the House that health authorities and trusts are not misinterpreting the guidance sent out by the Department of Health.

Mr. Cook: It would indeed be a serious matter if local authorities were not properly applying the Department of Health's guidance. I can assure my hon. Friend that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health would be happy to pursue the matter if my hon. Friend has specific cases in mind and can provide us with that data. On the broad issue, I assure him that the Government have increased the funding for social services throughout England and Wales by 6 per cent. per annum, compared with a serious restriction on the funds for those local authorities under the previous Government. The increase has enabled local authorities throughout England to carry through an increase in the fees that they pay for long-term residential care, in many cases up to 10 per cent. I regret that in some cases that has left nursing homes charging above the local authority contribution, but we are increasing the funds, the local authority is increasing the fees, and between us we will do all we can to meet the problem.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): I can well appreciate that the Chancellor may have wanted to delay the date of the Budget until the end of the tax year to see just how bad the tax revenue situation is, but, given that he will have drawn those conclusions by 5 April, can the Leader of the House explain why we cannot have the Budget on the Monday of the week in question, so that instead of devoting just four days to scrutinising the Chancellor's bad stewardship of the economy we could devote five?

Mr. Cook: It is worth recalling, and I am sure the Chancellor will recall it when we meet on 9 April, that Britain has one of the lowest unemployment rates of any country in Europe, and the lowest that we have had for a generation; it has one of the lowest inflation rates anywhere in the industrialised world; and it has the fastest growth rate of any of the G7 countries. That is a splendid record, which was praised by the International Monetary Fund report earlier this week as an enviable record, and it is envied by the other industrialised nations. I am sure that when he speaks to the Budget, the Chancellor of the Exchequer will make sure that the House and the rest of the country fully understand the strength of the British economy as a result of his sound management.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): Is it not odd that whereas the large majority of our constituents will simply have Good Friday and Easter Monday off, there are complaints when we are to have a recess of two weeks, as my right hon. Friend mentioned? Why do Tory MPs complain time and again that the recess is too long—too short. *[Laughter.]* Many of us take the view that it would do no harm if the Easter recess were just one week.

Mr. Cook: I would not wish to put that last proposition to a vote. My hon. Friend raises a serious issue. Before we rise for the Easter recess, there will be a debate on the Easter Adjournment, to which my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office will reply, and there will follow three or four hours during which hon. Members will argue that we should not rise for the recess because there is an important and pressing issue to debate. When that event comes round this year, I expect that my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office will remind them that they have consistently and repeatedly objected to coming back for only one day to debate the Budget.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): You will notice, Mr. Speaker, that the House will be able to don the shamrock on 17 March. Will the Leader of the House make sure that a Foreign Office Minister replies to the debate on terrorism on Tuesday and tells us what steps have been taken to deal with the international weaponry that has been stored in the Republic of Ireland and used in terrorism, and the more recent developments that have told us throughout Ireland that there are international terrorist cells in various parts?

Mr. Cook: Of course, international terrorism will be considered in the debate on the report by the Foreign Affairs Committee. To the extent that the situation in Northern Ireland is relevant, it obviously can be considered both in the debate and in the response to it but, as I am sure the hon. Gentleman will be the first to agree, internal terrorism in Northern Ireland is not an international matter but is firmly one for the United Kingdom Government to pursue as a domestic issue. Plainly, there are international links, of which the hon. Gentleman is well aware, and I would be surprised if a Unionist Member did not contribute to the debate to highlight them.

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): Regardless of arrangements that may have been made for a debate on possible military action in Iraq, does my right hon. Friend agree that tomorrow's reports by Dr. Blix to the Security Council will be of crucial significance in determining people's attitudes to military action? In the light of that, is he of the clear opinion that next Wednesday it is more important to debate Welsh affairs than Dr. Blix's report?

Mr. Cook: The debate on Wales has already been deferred precisely so that we could debate Iraq—it was a casualty of our debate on Iraq the other week. It is important that my Welsh colleagues and Members who represent our voters in Wales should have an opportunity to explore Welsh issues.

I entirely concur with my hon. Friend about the importance of Hans Blix's report tomorrow. It is important that the world should hear from him at first hand what progress, or lack of it, he is making on the mandate that he was given by the Security Council. One of the reasons why we in Britain should take particular interest in what he says is that Britain, more than any other nation, was successful in taking the Iraq crisis on to the UN track, from which we secured the return of the weapons inspectors to Iraq. We shall therefore play close attention to what Hans Blix says tomorrow.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): Can we have an early statement from the Foreign

Secretary on whether the language of Security Council resolution 1441 and the draft resolution that was recently tabled in fact provide proper authority for war? In that context, the Leader of the House will have seen the letter today in *The Times* from Professor Black, a distinguished jurist, saying that the language of 1441 does not provide a proper warrant for war and, furthermore, that the draft resolution, which we put before the Security Council, does not do so either. Surely we must probe that so that there is no misunderstanding about the legal basis for what the Government have in mind.

Mr. Cook: It is of course the right and duty of the House to probe the Government, and I do not doubt that in future debates on Iraq the right hon. and learned Gentleman may wish to make those points. However, I repeat to the House what has been said on a number of occasions, including most recently by the Prime Minister yesterday—there is no question of the Government taking any action that they believe to be contrary to international law. Should they take any action, they would only do so in the conviction that it is consistent with international law.

Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): Could we have a debate next week on the report by the Office of Fair Trading about the pharmacy market that was published on 17 January? Is my right hon. Friend aware of the widespread concern in my constituency and elsewhere about the effects of that report? It is competition gone mad, and will mean the closure of many high street pharmacies and the domination of that market by Tesco and Asda. Could we have an urgent debate before the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, who is sitting on the Front Bench, has to make a decision?

Mr. Cook: I am happy to tell to my hon. Friend that I am well aware of the House's deep concern about that matter, which has been raised in three successive sets of business questions—a useful barometer of opinion and concern in the House. After last week's exchanges, when it was raised by no fewer than four Members, we communicated to the Department for Trade and Industry the House's interest in the matter.

My hon. Friend will be aware that we are half way through the 90-day period for a Government response. The Government are consulting appropriate representative bodies on their response, and will consult again on any draft proposals that we make in response to the OFT report. I assure my hon. Friend that we are fully aware of the concern that the matter is causing in Members' constituencies, and want to take action consistent with our NHS plan to make sure that there is a successful and diverse range of pharmacies in every community in Britain.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Can the Leader of the House find time for the House as a whole to discuss the European Convention and its emerging proposals before they are cast in Giscardian tablets of stone and foisted on us as a putative constitution? Can the Government take into account the alarming divergent diplomatic postures of leading EU members, namely France and Germany, on the Iraqi crisis, and does that not call into question the principles of ever closer union, as enunciated in the Maastricht treaty, on which the Convention is based?

Mr. Cook: Of course we are well aware of the considerable interest in the House on the development of the Convention on the Future of Europe. After all, as a House, we are unusual in having two representatives who serve on the Convention independent of our Government representatives. We therefore set up a unique Committee for Back Benchers to which those House representatives can report and where debates can be held. That Committee has met at least twice, and a further debate is coming up in Westminster Hall. However, the issue is important, and cannot be debated too often. I shall certainly bear in mind when it may be appropriate for the House to consider it.

In the meantime, the nature of such bodies and international negotiations means that proposals change as they proceed, so one should not necessarily take what is on the table now as what will be there at the end of the day.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): Is the Leader of the House aware that in response to a question by my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Lynne Jones), on the Government's attempts to obtain a second UN resolution authorising war against Iraq even before the weapons inspectors had completed their second report, the Prime Minister said that

> "in relation to the resolution, we are confident of securing the votes for that resolution and we will carry on working to that end."—[*Official Report*, 5 March 2003; Vol. 400, c. 817.]

Today, however, we read in the newspapers that the Government's confidence is remarkably misplaced and they are attempting to cobble together a compromise resolution. That is the third time this week that the Government's action or policy on Iraq has been reported first in the press—B-52 bombers are to be allowed to use our islands as a terrestrial aircraft carrier, and there is the particular incident to which I have previously referred. Can we have a debate, if not on Iraq itself, then on the Government's failure to inform the House of such changes before they inform the press? The issue is of overwhelming national concern, and the House has consistently been kept in the dark.

Mr. Cook: I cannot think of a single issue in the past three months on which we have had more statements in the House than Iraq. I am confident that there will be future occasions when Ministers will report to Parliament, and Parliament will be able to debate the matter.

The Government have a clear commitment to seek a Security Council resolution. We are in the lead in trying to secure such a resolution, and shall continue to work for it. When we secure such a resolution, we shall bring it to the House for a debate and approval on a substantive motion. That remains our strategy, and we are committed to it.

Mr. Nigel Dodds (Belfast, North): With reference to the legislation that the Government intend to introduce Monday week on elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly, can the Leader of the House give a

[Mr. Nigel Dodds]

commitment that there will be no further interference with the democratic process and the right of electors in Northern Ireland other than that which has already been announced, postponing elections from 1 May to 29 May? Furthermore, can he ask his colleagues to come to the House and give details of the paper, so far denied to representatives of the people of Northern Ireland who were not invited to the talks, on the deal that is currently under consideration, which consists of 29 pages and five annexes? Surely, the people of Northern Ireland have a right to know what has been discussed regarding the future of the Province. Can the Leader of the House give an assurance that he will publish that document and that it will be placed in the Library of the House so that the people of Northern Ireland can judge the merits or otherwise of the Government proposals?

Mr. Cook: I can certainly assure the House that when negotiations are concluded one way or another the Government will wish to make sure that the House is fully informed. I anticipate that at that moment there will probably be a statement to the House. At present, negotiations are proceeding among, as the hon. Gentleman knows full well, those who are party to the agreement. It is hardly surprising that those parties that have chosen not to be party to the agreement have been excluded from those talks and the documents, which are necessarily work in progress. When that work is concluded, the hon. Gentleman and all Members of the House will share in the results.

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the debate on the reform of the House of Lords has moved from unthinking muddle to profound confusion? Will he undertake to draft a motion, which the House might consider in an Adjournment debate, that would give us a chance to reflect thoughtfully on what has happened so far, and to see whether we can find a way forward that fulfils our commitment to democratise the second Chamber?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend has an unerring capacity to find the helpful question. May I remind hon. Members that this matter was put to the House last month, and in that debate I sought to give the House an opportunity to find a consensual way forward? I fear that we failed on that occasion to find any clear, commanding, compelling agreement on a particular form of reform.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): It is all the Prime Minister's fault.

Mr. Cook: No, it was the fault of every hon. Member who took part in the debate, in which we failed to find a majority for any single way forward on reform. As I have said since then, there will be no reform of the second Chamber until there is a majority in this Chamber for a particular way of reform. We shall certainly continue to look for that, but until we see the makings of such a majority, I think that it would be premature to bring the matter back to the House.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): The Leader of the House will remember saying to me last week that the Prime Minister—unlike his predecessors—had better things to do than to spend time sitting in important House of Commons debates. That statement was followed 24 hours later by the biggest parliamentary rebellion since the 1800s. Does the Leader of the House think that there is a connection between those two events? Will he tell us whether the Prime Minister will join us in the House for the conclusion of the Budget debate in the first week of the recess?

Mr. Cook: I have not previously been charged with being personally responsible for the biggest rebellion in the past 100 years of parliamentary history, and I will reflect gravely on the charge that the hon. Gentleman makes. I would remind hon. Members that the Prime Minister has not only come to the House to make a full statement and to answer questions on Iraq, and dealt with the matter repeatedly in the course of Prime Minister's questions, but has taken a very close personal interest in how the House debates it. For that reason, he uniquely spent two hours in front of the Liaison Committee answering questions from senior Members of the House. That is something that no previous Prime Minister, whether Labour or Conservative, has ever done. I can tell the hon. Gentleman that the Prime Minister will of course continue to take a very close interest in the Budget and in the debate that follows it.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): What impact is the rebellion of 122 MPs over the Iraq issue having on the business of the House? Is the Leader of the House aware that, for many of those MPs, it was the first time that they had voted against the Whips? He must know that, once someone loses their political virginity, it is much easier for political promiscuity to take over. If whipping arrangements in the House were to collapse, what would happen to life as we know it?

Mr. Cook: I would be well advised to avoid any discussion about promiscuity and whipping. Of course I fully understand the strength of feeling in the House and in the country, and the vote last week revealed the very deep concern and worry in the country about the present situation in relation to Iraq. For me, that is why it is so important that we should stick with our strategy of making sure that this crisis is resolved through the United Nations, and that we secure that second resolution within the United Nations.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): May I ask the Leader of the House for an urgent debate on an important matter which affects the health of all our constituents in the face of a possible terrorist threat? Last Monday, in a debate in the House in which I also took part as shadow Minister for national security, the Home Secretary said in an unguarded moment to my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin):

> "I do not believe that there is a problem with people approaching their general practitioner for the smallpox vaccination."—[*Official Report*, 3 March 2003; Vol. 400, c. 596.]

My right hon. Friend pointed out to the Home Secretary that that was factually inaccurate. We understand that there was then consternation approaching panic in the Department of Health and, as a result, the following morning the Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community Safety, the right hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham), considerably watered down what the Home Secretary had said, when he replied to my hon. Friend the Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice) in a debate in Westminster Hall. The Minister said that

"people should go to general practitioners if they want advice".—[*Official Report, Westminster Hall*, 4 March 2003; Vol. 400, c. 204WH.]

It was clear by then that people could not approach their GPs for the vaccine. We believe that vaccines should be available now for any of our citizens who wish to be vaccinated. Will the Leader of the House urgently talk to the Home Office and the Department of Health, and can we have a debate on this crucial matter?

Mr. Cook: I am very happy to ensure that both those Departments receive the comments that the hon. Gentleman has made. In the meantime, so that the public outside can, to some extent, have their concerns allayed, I am happy to repeat what we have often sought to make clear, which is that we are not aware of any specific threat of the use of smallpox in the case of Britain.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff, West): Can we have a statement from the Secretary of State for Defence on preparations to avoid friendly fire—and, indeed, civilian casualties—in any joint military operations with US forces in Iraq? Is the Leader of the House aware that, in an answer to my named day written question for 10 February which was finally answered on 5 March, in which I had asked the Secretary of State for Defence about any representations that he had made on the use of amphetamines by US air force pilots, the Secretary of State said that that was a matter for the US authorities? Should not the British Government be making representations to the US authorities about the issue of amphetamines to US air force pilots, not least because they were cited in the case of the friendly-fire deaths of four Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan last year, and because they are banned in our own armed forces for precisely the reason that we should be making representations to the US?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend tempts me into an area that is very much within the province of my right hon. and hon. colleagues in the Ministry of Defence. I shall certainly draw his remarks to their attention, and they can consider what appropriate representations might be necessary. Of course, every possible effort is made to ensure that the armed forces of the United States and the United Kingdom can operate in a way in which any risk of casualties from friendly fire is diminished as far as is humanly possible.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): Has the Leader of the House had the opportunity to read the excellent Bill introduced by my noble Friend Lord Goodhart, which is due to be given a Second Reading tomorrow, entitled the Ministerial and other Salaries (Amendment) Bill, and which seeks to reduce the salary of the Lord Chancellor to that of a common-or-garden Cabinet Minister? When that Bill is passed in the other House, as I expect it to be, probably by acclamation, will the right hon. Gentleman provide an early opportunity for this House to debate it? If not, can we at least have a debate on the role of the Lord Chancellor and the conduct of his Department?

Mr. Cook: I am delighted to say that one of the initiatives that we have taken is to create a Select Committee on the Lord Chancellor's Department. This is the first time in the history of the House of Commons that there has been such a Select Committee, and we therefore now have a new vehicle to ensure adequate debate on and scrutiny of the actions and responsibilities of the Lord Chancellor. On the question of his salary, it is important that we should pay adequate attention to equity and equality, and I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's concern that there should be equality within the Cabinet. Of course, it is also an important principle of new Labour that merit should be adequately rewarded.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): Given that the credibility of Government spokesmen is of paramount importance in international affairs, will the Leader of the House explain why those spokesmen denied the existence of a document which recorded that Mr. Kamal Hussein had stated that the Iraqi Government had not, in fact, acted as he had earlier described in relation to the creation of weapons of mass destruction? Why was the existence of that document denied by Government spokesmen, and how did it subsequently come into the possession of *Newsweek*?

Mr. Cook: As I understand it, the document to which the hon. Gentleman refers is a statement by Rolf Ekeus, the former weapons inspector in Iraq, who gave his verdict on interviews with Kamal Hussein. I personally am not familiar with the idea of any Government spokesman having denied the existence of that document, nor would it be within our power to confirm or deny what is in the United Nations weapons inspectors' records. If the hon. Gentleman would like to clarify precisely to what he is referring, I shall certainly make the necessary inquiries.

Bob Spink (Castle Point): Further to the question raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins), the Government gave advice to the public on Monday that they should go to their family doctor to ask for a smallpox vaccination if they wanted one. Is the Leader of the House aware that the British Medical Association and the GPs giving evidence yesterday to the Science and Technology Committee said that they had not been consulted in any way on this matter, that the advice was downright dangerous, that the GPs would not be able to respond to it and that the Government should withdraw it immediately? Will he ensure that the Home Secretary comes to the House, clarifies the matter to the public and apologises?

Mr. Cook: I can certainly confirm that the Department of Health has repeatedly provided advice on that matter. Of course, the hon. Gentleman makes a very fair point in saying that the smallpox vaccination carries a risk of side effects, so it is important that it be used only in circumstances in which the risk of infection is greater than that of side effects. That is why the plans of the Department of Health and the Government for

[Mr. Cook]

dealing with any smallpox outbreak involve vaccination of those who would be most at risk, rather than general vaccination. It is very important that we keep the matter in proportion and do not unnecessarily alarm our constituents, so I repeat that we are not aware at present of any specific threat of a smallpox attack on Britain.

Mr. Bercow: Can we have an early debate on the Floor of the House on the iniquitous impact of the Government's so-called fairer charging policy for the receipt of home care services? Does the right hon. Gentleman recognise that such a debate would enable us to show how the Chancellor of the Exchequer has broken a seven and a half year old pledge to end the means test for our elderly people, how the policy reflects the appalling financial mistreatment of the shire counties, and how the cumulative impact of those errors of judgment and that malice on the part of the Government will cause some of my constituents to pay 200, 300 and 400 per cent. more than they currently do for services on which they critically depend?

Mr. Cook: It has of course been a longstanding practice of many local authorities to provide some form of charging for home care services, and it is often means tested. One of the great dilemmas for a Government—the hon. Gentleman will have to wrestle with it in any unlikely future event of his finding himself on the Treasury Bench—is to what extent we try to achieve harmony in the practice of local authorities. There has been some resentment throughout the country about the extent to which there has been wide variation. The Government's current proposal is intended to achieve a degree of common standards and a common approach among local authorities. While some might lose out—I hear what he says about his constituency—there will be other cases in which residents and constituents will benefit from the scheme and in which the application of a fair and consistent national minimum standard will benefit those most in need of care.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): May we have a debate in due course on the compulsory funding of the BBC as a public service broadcaster, given that such a debate would enable us to explore the mentality of the official BBC spokesman? That spokesman said that the BBC's new series on Cambridge spies was

> "the first time that they can be seen to be heroic because it's post-Cold War"

and made this statement:

> "In 'Cambridge Spies', we see and understand why it was that these young men were so implacably opposed to fascism and how communism was the only legitimate response".

What possible relationship can there be between the concept of compulsory levies, public service broadcasting and such an utter perversion of liberal values and the historical record?

Mr. Cook: One of the commendable ingenuities of the hon. Gentleman is that he always manages to find a way of making his point without my having to arrange a debate. He has just done so again. I fully concur with him in the sentiment behind his point—there is nothing heroic in being a traitor. I think that the whole House would agree.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): In reply to questions asked by my right hon. Friend the shadow Leader of the House, the right hon. Gentleman said that the dodgy dossier did not matter. I can tell him a reason why it does matter. Hundreds of aircrew and ground crew personnel are being deployed from RAF Marham in west Norfolk to the Gulf. Surely they need to trust the Government and believe them when they are making their case for the war. Will he now answer my right hon. Friend's question?

Mr. Cook: I would be very surprised if a single airman or serviceman who is preparing for what may be military conflict in the Gulf is currently sitting over his cocoa debating which Minister cleared the Government dossier. If the hon. Gentleman would like to find me a single person who has written to him expressing concern about that point, I would be interested to hear about it. Of course, what servicemen want to know is where the Opposition stand on the major question as to whether military conflict would be correct.

ROYAL ASSENT

Mr. Speaker: I have to notify the House, in accordance with the Royal Assent Act 1967, that Her Majesty has signified her Royal Assent to the following Acts and Measures:

Income Tax (Earnings and Pensions) Act 2003
London Development Agency Act 2003
Synodical Government (Amendment) Measure 2003
Church of England (Pensions) Measure 2003

Point of Order

1.25 pm

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I seek your guidance and assistance concerning the performance of the Home Office. I have with me three files, on two of which a response has been outstanding from the Home Office since 5 November last year. More importantly, I wrote on 21 January 2002 to the Home Office on behalf of a constituent who was concerned about the time that it was taking her to obtain her British passport. I received an acknowledgement card some three days later. I have since written three further letters, on 7 May and 3 September last year and 17 January this year, and I still have not received a substantive answer from the Home Office, which means that I do not know the present status of the case. More importantly, my constituent expects to be able to travel and does not have her British passport.

How can hon. Members in this place fulfil their duties to their constituents if a Department is taking so long to reply to correspondence? I appeal to you in desperation, Mr. Speaker: what can a Member in this place do, and how can we stop people's lives being disrupted by the lack of performance of Home Office Ministers?

Mr. Speaker: Ministers should answer hon. Members timeously.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): But they do not.

Mr. Speaker: Order. If the hon. Lady sends the details of the cases to me, I shall investigate the matter. I also point out that there is a Select Committee on Public Administration and that she should also take her complaint there.

International Women's Day

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Sutcliffe.]*

1.27 pm

The Minister for Women (Ms Patricia Hewitt): I am delighted that international women's day has been selected as the topic for today's debate.

It is 100 years since Emmeline Pankhurst formed the Women's Social and Political Union. Earlier today, I launched the Royal Mint's new 50 pence coin commemorating that anniversary. Emmeline once said:

> "We are here not because we are law breakers, we are here in our efforts to become law makers."

Since women won the vote, only 252 women law makers have been elected to this House and only 18 women have served in Cabinet in all those years. I am proud to be one of those women and grateful for this opportunity to pay tribute to Emmeline Pankhurst and all her fellow suffragettes who fought outside this House for political, economic and social justice. I am glad that the whole House will join me in honouring her achievements.

This Saturday, millions of people around the world will take part in events to mark international women's day. I have no doubt that many of them will again take the opportunity to express their deep concerns about the possibility of war in Iraq. All of us hate the idea of war. As we know from every test of public opinion, women are even more likely when faced with the horrors that war inevitably brings to prefer a peaceful route, but I have no doubt that it is only the threat of war that has persuaded Saddam Hussein after 12 years of defying the United Nations to allow the inspectors back in and offer a few inadequate gestures of co-operation. Even now, Saddam can put a stop to the possibility of war by co-operating fully with resolution 1441, which was passed unanimously by the Security Council.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): In endorsing what the right hon. Lady says, may I remind her that there is also a long and very honourable tradition of women playing heroic parts in the wars that have had to be fought throughout the 20th century in order to preserve the freedoms that they were fighting to win when they fought for the vote?

Ms Hewitt: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. Many of us have female, as well as male relatives who played their part in both world wars in particular.

We know, from every test of public opinion, that women are even more likely to prefer that peaceful route. Even now, Saddam can put a stop to the possibility of war. Of course conciliation would be better than war, but let us not confuse conciliation with appeasement, or muddle our rational fear of war with irrational trust in Saddam after all that 12 years' bitter experience has taught. That experience has been bitter indeed for millions of Iraqi women who have watched their children die in poverty. Their sons and husbands have been tortured and executed. Women themselves have been brutalised by professional rapists. In last week's debate in this House, my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) gave her own moving account of the sufferings of the families whom she met on her recent visit to northern Iraq.

[Ms Hewitt]

Our armed forces fought in Kosovo to end the horror of ethnic cleansing and a conflict in which rape was deployed as a deliberate weapon of war. Millions of women and men are now rebuilding their lives and their country. We fought in Afghanistan against al-Qaeda and international terrorism, and, with the removal of the Taliban that followed, girls are now back in school for the first time in more than a decade. I recently had the privilege of meeting Habiba Sorabi, the Minister for Women in the new Afghan Administration, who, with her colleagues, is helping to rebuild that country. If we do fight in Iraq, it will be to uphold international law and to get rid of weapons of mass destruction, but the defeat of Saddam will also be the liberation of the women of Iraq.

Just as we work internationally against genocide, terrorism and weapons of mass destruction, so we work internationally to combat poverty and disease. Today, at a time of immense political uncertainty and of economic slowdown, it is doubly important that we renew our efforts for trade and development. If we are to build a lasting international coalition for disarmament and security, we must build an equally powerful international economic coalition, because we will never deal with terrorism and other threats to world peace if we do not also deal with the hunger, misery and frustration across the developing world and in refugee camps. More than 1 billion men, women and children in our world are without adequate food, water, sanitation, health care or education; 70 per cent. of them are women. Forty-two million people in the world have HIV/AIDS, 60 per cent. of whom are women, and women are the fastest growing group of sufferers. More than 0.5 million women die in pregnancy and childbirth every year, half of them in sub-Saharan Africa. No wonder Kofi Annan said

> "Poverty has a woman's face".

I have no doubt at all that if we can create a system of world trade that is fair as well as free, we will empower some of the poorest women in the poorest countries of the world. That is the experience of women in Bangladeshi villages who are supported by the Brahmin bank and by their Government in creating new enterprises. That is the experience of the women whom I met earlier this year in Nong Ta Kai village in north-east Thailand. Years ago, they worked in rice fields, their only hope of escape from poverty to flee to the city, where they were vulnerable to exploitation and to prostitution. Now, they have come together, like so many other women in Thailand, to create their own silk-weaving co-operative. They used to live in old wooden shacks—I saw some that were still there. Today, they are used for storage, because next to them are the modern two-storey houses that those women have paid for with the earnings from their own work and from their ownership of that co-operative.

So the opportunity is there—above all, because in November 2001 we launched the Doha development round. We—the 142 countries in the World Trade Organisation—launched it because we know that if we could just halve protectionism around the world against agricultural and industrial goods and services, we would boost developing country incomes by about $150 billion a year: three times the value of all the aid budgets put together. Substantial trade liberalisation could reduce the number of people living in poverty by more than 300 million by 2015—a big contribution to reaching the millennium development goals. But progress on the Doha negotiations is far too slow. That is why I appeal again to President Bush and the American Administration to join with the developing countries and the European Union in the compromise agreement on access to medicines that we came so close to finalising just before Christmas. And it is why I yesterday met my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and for International Development to ensure that we redouble our efforts to secure reform of the common agricultural policy, to open our markets and to end the agricultural subsidies that lock poor world farmers into poverty, and thus to move forward on the WTO negotiations.

We will continue to work internationally on human rights and women's empowerment. My officials are currently attending the 47th session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women. I am delighted, too, that the Government are supporting UNIFEM, the United Nations Development Fund for Women, an organisation dedicated to strengthening women's economic security and political participation, and that that organisation, with our financial support, will now be launched in London.

We know that the struggle of women in the developing world is on a wholly different scale from the challenges that we face in our own country. We have come a very long way in the past century, but there is still a long way to go before we can say that we live in a truly just and equal society. When the first international women's day was held in 1911, women in Britain were fewer than three in 10 of the work force; today, we are nearly half. However, only one in four managers is a woman, only one in 10 directors is a woman and there is only one woman chief executive in the FTSE 100. In 1911, the pay gap between British men and women was around 55 per cent.; today it is 19 per cent., but that is still 19 per cent. higher than it should be. In 1911, Oxford and Cambridge would not even grant degrees to women; today, women are more than half our full-time undergraduates. However, 50,000 women with science, engineering and technology degrees—women whose skills are urgently needed in our economy, particularly in manufacturing industry—are not in employment at all.

We know what the problems are and we know what needs to be done. We know, for instance, that we need to make it far easier for women and for men to balance work and family life. Look at the changes that have taken place. Families have been transformed. In place of the family based on the male breadwinner and the woman at home that so many of us grew up with, there are many more two-job families and many more lone parents. The workplace is changing, as well—it is no longer based on nine-to-five, five days a week. New consumer demands and growing competitive pressures require ever more organisations to be far more flexible in how they employ their people.

The best employers know that working time reform is not a burden forced on them by Government, but an opportunity to be far more successful. Last week, I presented the awards for the *Sunday Times*-DTI 100 best companies to work for, including Microsoft, Honda UK, Asda, Tesco, the Scotch whisky company Glenmorangie, Kimberly-Clark, Richer Sounds and many others. Those are companies that consistently outperform the FTSE index and have found that the more choice they give their people about working hours, the more satisfied are their staff and the less problem they have with recruitment and retention, so they are all the more productive, profitable and successful.

Not only women but men want that choice in their working hours. According to a recent survey by the Equal Opportunities Commission, men are responsible for one in three child-care hours. The younger generation of fathers wants the chance to spend more time with the children. Younger fathers want to be more active in their children's lives than perhaps their fathers were in theirs. Given the opportunity, half of all men would work flexitime. The demand and the challenge therefore exist. However, if we left such changes to voluntary action and the pace of cultural change, unsupported by Government, the process would take too long. Parents cannot afford to wait.

In April we will introduce a new package of support—the largest ever—for parents. It includes not only the new child tax credit but rights for people in employment. They are: providing better maternity pay up to £100 a week; increasing the amount of maternity leave that a new mother can take up to a year; giving fathers the right for the first time to two weeks' paid paternity leave, which will benefit more than a third of a million fathers every year; giving adoptive parents, who have been left out in the past, equivalent rights, and granting all parents who work and have a child under six, or a child with disabilities under 18, the right to negotiate flexible working arrangements with their employers.

The new package of rights was agreed with the TUC, the Confederation of British Industry and many small businesses. We have great confidence that it will work. With the help of trade unions, business organisations and women and family groups throughout the country, we can ensure that every parent knows about the support that is available. We do not provide it out of sentimentality or because we are trying to tell parents how to do their job. We know that parents need and deserve far greater support from Government in balancing the two great responsibilities of earning a living and bringing up children.

Of course, there is far more to do to ensure that women can play their full role in the economy. Earlier, I referred to women in science, and I am especially grateful to Baroness Greenfield for her excellent review of women's participation in science, engineering and technology. I am delighted by our success in recruiting women and men, but especially women, to the science and engineering ambassadors programme. It will put more people into schools to inspire girls and young women to follow a scientific and engineering path. As we celebrate the anniversary this year of the discovery of DNA, the Rosalind Franklin award honours the achievements of a woman whose contribution to cracking the DNA code has been overlooked too often.

We need to do more to improve opportunities for women not only at the bottom but at the top of business. The report by Derek Higgs that I published recently shows that more than half of all directors of listed companies are appointed through personal contacts and friendships. That old boys' network is not an adequate way in which to ensure the highest standards of corporate governance and the best available talent. Derek Higgs suggested several methods of making the process more meritocratic through an open, fair and rigorous appointments procedure. I am delighted that Laura Tyson is considering the way in which we can progress on that. I look forward to receiving her recommendations.

In our global economy, the war for talent is real. Our businesses, public services and our country will not succeed unless we use all the talent of all our people—women as well as men from every part and community of our country.

We need to do far more to ensure that women play a full part in public life. We have changed the law to make it much easier for women to stand for election. I look forward to hearing from the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) about the way in which she will overcome the problem of male resistance in the Conservative party. I do not say that in a partisan spirit because, as many of my hon. Friends know, we have been through the same battles in the Labour party.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): The right hon. Lady's challenge is fair and I have no doubt that my hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) will respond to it with characteristic vigour and precision. However, the evidence that I have adduced from the Equal Opportunities Commission shows that the phenomenon of prejudice against selecting female candidates is principally a matter not of male opposition but of older people. There is an age factor and older people, both men and women, are prejudiced whether they know it or not. We must all counter that.

Ms Hewitt: The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point, and I believe that he regrets his party's difficulty in recruiting younger members. However, we all face such challenges; we have set ourselves a challenge in government of recruiting 50 per cent. women for all public appointments by 2005.

Ms Dari Taylor (Stockton, South): I listened to my right hon. Friend's response to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) with interest. However, there are also structural problems of image, tradition and belief. It is not simply a problem of age or gender. Many young women simply do not believe that any of us take them seriously and they are therefore not prepared to take us seriously.

Ms Hewitt: I agree with my hon. Friend. There is a serious problem of political disengagement and a sense that party politics and parliamentary democracy do not speak for most people. That is precisely why I am so passionately committed to ensuring that we have more women, more younger Members and more Members from our black and Asian British communities. We need to ensure that Parliament looks like our country and can therefore speak for our country.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): It is simply not enough for Parliament to look like this country; we must also listen to the country. Yesterday provided a marked example of not only Parliament's but the Government's failure to listen. A mass lobby of

[Glenda Jackson]

school children who deeply opposed war against Iraq took place. They were remarkably well informed and they did not simply treat the event as a day off school. They made a clear political comment. Until we begin to take such matters seriously, it does not matter how much we look like the country. If we do not listen to it, we take no step forward.

Ms Hewitt: My hon. Friend is right that we must listen. We must engage in all seriousness, as we have done in the House, with people who are passionately committed to peace. We need to argue our case, as I did earlier this afternoon. I welcome the fact that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has done so much to make the case in person, on television, through meeting young people at No. 10 and so on. He has done that precisely in order to listen, engage with the argument and lead.

Mr. Bercow: The right hon. Lady's passion is visibly overflowing. We hear her mellifluous tones and the content of her speech with interest and respect—but I am desperate that she should move on to the subject of child care. What assessment has she made of the effect of the rigidities of the planning process and the nature of the Ofsted inspection regime on the availability of high-quality and affordable child care?

Ms Hewitt: We have made real improvements over the past five years but not enough. When I met women members of regional development agency boards yesterday, planning was specifically raised. My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister is already taking steps to reform and speed up the planning regime. As to Ofsted, in my own discussions with child care providers and in the review published recently by my noble Friend Lady Ashton, setting quality standards was not found to be a particular barrier to the development of child care services. There are undoubtedly other barriers. I welcome that direct provision and child care tax credit have begun to make a real difference but I am the first to say that a good deal more needs to be done.

Miss Julie Kirkbride (Bromsgrove): Only this week I learnt that a child care club in my constituency, which has been running for 16 years and has experienced staff, is in severe difficulties because of the requirement that staff who have been doing the job a long time must pass an examination. Such individuals do not want to sit an exam, when they probably know better than most of us in the Chamber how to look after small children. Will the right hon. Lady use her good offices to address that issue?

Ms Hewitt: I shall be happy to look at that point. There is a balance to be struck between offering existing child care workers good opportunities to improve and formalise their skills—and in doing so, providing them with further opportunities to progress in employment—and using common sense to make sure that we do not undermine the excellent work already being done. If the hon. Lady will write to me with the details of the play group concerned, I shall be happy to consider them.

When I met women RDA board members yesterday, I was struck by the fact that almost all of them would never have thought of putting themselves forward simply from reading a press advertisement. One after another said that she had applied because somebody had specifically asked her to do so. Over the past year, my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche) and I have led a programme of visits and meetings around the country, bringing together thousands of women who might be tempted to enter public life. After hearing from women who had made that step, almost all the others said that they would put their names forward. An inspiring black woman speaker at one of the seminars said that her motto was "Lift as you rise". For those of us who have been honoured by election to this House, that is a good motto to remember as we encourage other women to step into public life.

A little more support from the media than is sometimes the case would be welcome. In the 1970s, when I was working on a campaign for a sex discrimination Bill, the BBC and ITN would not employ women newscasters on the ground that women's voices were too high and nobody could possibly take news bulletins seriously if they were read by women. That was changed but even today, as a recent survey showed, there is only one woman newscaster for every three men—so there is still more to be done.

Rob Marris (Wolverhampton, South-West): My right hon. Friend has been speaking about women in public life but perhaps she will outline the Government's proposals to tackle the fundamental scourge of domestic violence, which by its nature is usually hidden behind closed doors—and tends to repeat from generation unto generation, particularly among boys who grow up in that unacceptable environment.

Ms Hewitt: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that issue. I welcome the fact that my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green is working closely with other colleagues in the Government—including my right hon. Friend the Solicitor-General—to ensure that far more is done to end the scourge of domestic violence. As my hon. Friend says, that crime mainly takes place in private but leads to the death of one woman every three days. That is the scale of the problem faced in Britain. By getting the police and prosecution services working more closely and effectively together, supporting a help line and investing in refuges, we are doing a great deal to help women and their children to escape abuse.

We have come a long way since the Women's Social and Political Union was formed but as Emmeline Pankhurst said, "deeds not words" count. Our deeds include the minimum wage, which has helped 1 million or so women on low pay; new rights for mothers and fathers; children's tax credit; and the national child care strategy. But as all right hon. and hon. Members readily recognise, there is a great deal more to do. All of us, whatever our differences over the means that should be employed, share the same vision and a commitment to making Britain and the world a better, safer and fairer place for us all.

1.57 pm

Mrs. Theresa May (Maidenhead): I apologise to the House for the absence of my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman), the shadow Minister for Women, who is on a fact-finding mission in Sudan, Kenya and Malawi. Her absence gives me the opportunity to participate in this valuable debate and I look forward to contributions on many issues concerning the position and role of women in the world today.

What is international women's day and what should it represent—an opportunity to celebrate all that is good and unique about the female sex and its achievements or a chance to highlight the inequalities that hamper women around the world? Superficially, nearly 100 years after the establishment of international women's day, many of the movement's original aims have been achieved, including the vote; equal education; equal pay and conditions—at any rate, in the eyes of the law; and acceptance that a woman is an independent soul who does not have to be the shackled property of her family or husband. Such advances should not be forgotten or belittled.

In far too many parts of the world, those rights are still denied to women. International women's day still has an important campaigning role, but if it is to remain relevant in a new century with new challenges, perhaps a less narrowly focused raison d'etre is required. Women today think more about the security of their streets; the quality of education; the robustness of their pension; the effectiveness of medical care; and local transport. Such issues are uppermost in the minds of women and cannot be confronted or resolved by statistical targets and equality legislation alone.

The Minister set great store by the changes that the Government have introduced, but the approach is all too often based on targets and regulation. My hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) was right to raise the issue of child care. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Miss Kirkbride) pointed out, the Government's regulatory approach often reduces rather than encourages opportunities for child care provision. Some 59 per cent. of women do not feel that there is adequate child care provision in England. Improving access to child care would help many women to return to work much more quickly, and fewer might be passed over for senior posts that should have been theirs by right.

What is needed is a coherent strategy to make it easier for women to obtain employment, to secure good, affordable child care, and to resume work if they have chosen to take time off to look after children. That would enable women's participation at higher levels of society to continue rather than stagnating, as it sadly shows every sign of doing. Before 1997, just over 25 per cent. of self-employed workers were women—an 88 per cent. increase since 1981—but the rate of increase has now slowed to a crawl. Between 1991 and 1995 the proportion of public appointments held by women rose from 23 per cent. to 30 per cent., but it has not risen since. During the years of the Conservative Government the pay gap narrowed to 20 per cent.—the best result among the major European economies—but over the last five years it has narrowed by only a further 2 per cent.

The Minister made a number of references to the role of women in the House of Commons. I agree that we need more diversity in the House, and that we all have a role in encouraging women—and indeed others—to come here. As the Minister said, women in particular often seek encouragement to stand for Parliament, and to adopt other senior roles, rather than assuming—as do all too many young men—that such roles are theirs by right.

The Government say that they want to improve women's status. The cause of women, however, is helped not by targets and rhetoric but by a stable economy, growing employment, business deregulation and the availability of choice and quality in our public services. One does not need to be a rocket scientist, even a female one, to work that out.

The things I have mentioned sound basic and they are basic, but let us not forget the difference that such basic things can mean. When 70 per cent. of those in the world who live on less than $1 a day are women, and when as many as one in 13 die in childbirth in some countries, what count are what we consider to be basic rights.

The Minister mentioned Afghanistan. We all know of the appalling treatment of women under the Taliban, and of the improvements now being made. It is crucial that the Government can send the girls to school, equalise access to health care and encourage female participation in the political process, but we know that beyond Kabul the burqa must still be worn, and that education and health care are still strictly limited. These are not western cultures and we must be wary of applying western attitudes, but international women's day and the many agencies that support it can make a difference. What is needed as much as a legislative shift is a cultural, or perhaps more accurately an emotional, shift in attitudes. That is needed from women as well as men, by which I mean that we must encourage women to believe in their own equality. Only such a shift in attitudes can ensure lasting and widespread change.

Ms Dari Taylor: The hon. Lady speaks with passion about attitude change, and I think that what has been said so far is absolutely right. The current view in the criminal justice system is that street crime is the most grievous crime that it must handle. There are 160,000 street crimes a year, but there are 290,000 crimes of domestic violence a year. We must tell those in the criminal justice system that they are wrong. It is high time there were more women, or at least more balanced people, acknowledging that problematic attitudes often arise within the system that constantly churns out such decisions.

Mrs. May: I agree that attitudes within a system often produce barriers preventing the progress that we want to make. Domestic violence is an important issue, and if the hon. Lady will bear with me I will deal with it specifically later.

Education is the key to the necessary change in attitudes. It teaches women about good health care, which in turn reduces the rate of infant mortality. Literate mothers are 50 per cent. more likely to immunise their children, and the risk of premature child death is reduced by 8 per cent. for each year that a mother has spent in primary school. Britain is

[Mrs. May]

committed to the United Nations millennium goal of equal access to education for the sexes by 2005, but we are a long way short of that. In early April the Global Campaign for Education's week of action will highlight the problem, and try to energise Governments into making fresh efforts to reach that important target.

It is not just at primary level, however, that education can make a difference. Training and education at all levels can transform the futures of women in developing countries. The Minister gave a number of examples of the way in which working with women could improve their conditions and employability in various countries. Last year I visited a charity called Feed the Children, based in my constituency, which has had a significant success with its micro-finance strategy, teaching women's groups and helping them to found small businesses and reinvest the profits in the community. It gives small loans to the co-operatives, enabling them to expand their businesses. The loans are repaid at very low interest rates, and an extra amount is put into a savings account to which access is allowed at the end of the loan period. If a loan has been repaid, the group can apply for a larger loan, and the virtuous cycle continues.

That model has been running for more than 10 years, and operates on three continents. The key to its success lies in the training given to women to enable them to succeed. Rather than giving them money and expecting them to go away and make it work, Feed the Children offers support at every step along the road, training, teaching and encouraging. It believes in the women. As a result, repayment rates are outstanding. For example, in Sierra Leone, where Feed the Children has worked with a fishing business, the rate stands at 98 per cent. after three loan cycles. That is a country that was believed to be beyond such assistance. It is women who make the system work, because they understand the importance of reinvesting the savings in their children and the community.

The model has worked from Uganda to Guatemala, and has transcended cultural and economic differences of every hue. I am sad to report, however, that attempts to encourage a similar scheme in Afghanistan have come to nothing, because the eyes of the world no longer look on that country. The promises of aid given so fulsomely by world Governments have not yet borne fruit. We must not let the opportunity given to us by the bold action of the coalition against terror slip away in bureaucratic wrangling. We have a responsibility to the women of Afghanistan not to let that happen. The nations that promised aid should deliver it quickly, or a final chance to rescue Afghanistan will have been lost. Charities such as Feed the Children show that with the right training and with adequate, well-targeted funds, women can lead the way in rebuilding shattered communities and societies.

It is through education that the barriers to female inequality can be challenged throughout the world. The lack of education to prevent the spread of sexual disease, for example, is possibly the most pressing problem in sub-Saharan Africa—the Minister mentioned this—where teenage girls are five times more likely than boys to be infected. Last year 1.3 million women died of HIV/AIDS, and some older women are looking after as many as 40 orphaned grandchildren. Education is also vital to the prevention of violence against women—not just abroad, as I shall explain shortly. Genital mutilation, human trafficking and prostitution are just some of the horrors facing girls and women in developing countries. They cannot be dealt with only through aid, although aid is needed; they cannot be dealt with by legislation, although legislation can help. It is through a programme of education—education of both sexes—that women's freedom will be attained.

For too long we have concentrated on pure statistics as a barometer of progress, perhaps at the expense of the wider role that women fulfil as workers, carers, mothers and volunteers. Is that incredible diversity to be denigrated because it does not improve official statistics on equality? Might that narrow focus be preventing us from tackling more important issues, such as the crisis in pension provision or the shocking statistics on domestic violence, to which the hon. Members for Stockton, South (Ms Taylor) and for Wolverhampton, South-West (Rob Marris) referred? One in four women suffers from domestic violence. On average, a woman suffers 35 attacks before she goes to the police; 50,000 women and children seek sanctuary from domestic abuse every week. Most worrying of all, two women and two children die every week at the hands of a partner or former partner.

We welcome the forthcoming Green Paper on domestic violence and look forward to working constructively with the Government on the issue. However, although we welcome legislation, it must be recognised that domestic violence will be truly defeated only when attitudes are changed. Sadly, 20 per cent. of young men, and even 10 per cent. of young women, still think that abuse or violence against a partner is acceptable. The campaign to end drink driving shows that legislation alone does not produce results. Only when a younger generation of drivers came through, who believed that drink driving was unacceptable, did the problem begin to be rolled back.

Indeed, the drink driving campaign inspired my party's domestic violence posters last Christmas, which were supported by the Police Federation and Women's Aid and endorsed by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. We wholeheartedly welcomed the recent BBC "Hitting Home" project, which really brought home to people the nature of the problem of domestic violence and its prevalence, sadly, for all too many women. Many women in this country live in dangerous and vulnerable situations and we must help them.

It is also true that what might be described as the "machinery of government"—the system—is still not always as responsive as it should be to the needs of women. The benefits system remains too complicated; women are often unsure about what they are entitled to and for what they can claim. Pensions, too, are complicated and make no allowance for the many women who are carers. Women live longer than men; the majority of pensioners are female, yet too many women do not have enough on which to live comfortably.

The efforts of the past 100 years to improve female equality have achieved notable success—indeed, I should not be standing here if they had not. To continue our progress, however, we need to find a new language and a new mindset or understanding of what constitutes "equality" in the 21st century. We need a modernisation of our intellectual response to old arguments about equality and progress.

I pose this question for everybody. Let us say that we all woke up tomorrow and found that women had equal representation in all walks of life and that all pay differentials had genuinely disappeared: would that remove the need for an international women's day? I suggest that it would not.

Equality under the law, equality in business and politics, and equality of opportunity are all important and vital; but it is in equality of the mind that the changes really matter. We need equalities of attitude and the acceptance that everyone's choice is equal and that statistics alone do not produce an equal society. That is the challenge facing the future of international women's day; it is a challenge that faces us all.

2.13 pm

Valerie Davey (Bristol, West): I welcome this debate and the opening contribution to it by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Women. On this day and in this year, I want to pay tribute to the courage, professionalism and sheer hard work of women Members of Parliament in Tanzania, whom I had the privilege of meeting last month. In particular, I thank the hon. Member for Muleba, North, Ruth Msafiri, who took me to her constituency and showed me the work that she had been doing. Last week, even *The Guardian* referred to me as a hard-working constituency MP, so that must be right. I would have agreed until I experienced the work of the honourable Ruthie, as she is known in her constituency, and realised that I actually have time to sleep. I cannot believe that the honourable Ruthie can get through as much as she does and find enough time to sleep.

Since 1999, the British Council in east and central Africa has run a programme to support and encourage women in politics. I pay tribute to the council for its incredibly good work in increasing the number of women in effective leadership. The project, which is entitled "Just Big Cars and Leaky Roofs?", involves a work-shadowing exchange in which 14 women from seven east and central African countries and 14 women from throughout the United Kingdom took part. The aim is to ensure that more women are involved in politics, and that they begin to appreciate the nature of the role of a Member of Parliament and how they can encourage more women to enter politics in order to improve the lifestyle of women in those countries.

The programme's title arose from research in east and central Africa which concluded that most electors thought of their MPs only in terms of big cars and that MPs visiting their constituencies felt that the only demand made of them was to improve leaky roofs. The title thus encapsulates the results of the British Council survey.

It was a salutary experience for me to sit in the Gallery of the Parliament in Dodoma. Looking down, I was enthralled to see a wonderful red semicircle. People addressed the Speaker, who sat high above them—even higher than you, Madam Deputy Speaker—well above contradiction. Three clerks sat below the Speaker. The mace may not have been as lavish as ours, but it was carried in with as much dignity. I was delighted to find that there was no second Chamber. Of the 282 Members of Parliament, 61—or 21 per cent.—are women. However, unlike our system, only 12 of those women Members, including the honourable Ruthie, are elected. The others hold special seats and two are presidential appointees. The British Council is anxious, as I am, that more women should be elected, but before we criticise that system we should understand the situation in which it developed.

The Tanzanian Government are committed to getting more women into Parliament and, because they realise that there is hostility to women who put themselves forward, they have ensured that there are appointed places for women. Those women are now looking for elected seats so that they will be fully accountable, as they see it, to their electorates.

The work undertaken by those women is impressive. Although I was not able to follow in Swahili the debates and question time that I was privileged to watch, their body language—their great dignity and confidence—was evident. A woman Minister answered questions and a woman deputy Minister and other women contributed to the debate.

An all-party women's group invited me to a question and answer session. They wanted to know how we planned to meet the 30 per cent. Beijing target for women on elected bodies, especially Parliament, by 2005. They know how they will do so. They will have as many elected women as possible, topped up with appointed Members, so that at the 2005 election they will have reached the 30 per cent. target.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): Is that Labour party policy?

Valerie Davey: It is an increasingly interesting prospect. I could give the all-party group no clear answer on how we would reach 30 per cent. I explained the Labour party's approach, which is that there will be all-women shortlists as seats become available. They were impressed, but the question came back: "Will that get you to 30 per cent?"

Ms Dari Taylor: No.

Valerie Davey: I had to admit that it probably would not do so.

Those appointed women are doing some remarkable things. We have already talked about HIV/AIDS, and one of them chairs a huge committee on the subject that is in touch with our all-party group on AIDS and has other international links. Another Tanzanian woman MP was in the UK last week, taking part in the Red Crescent and Red Cross meeting at the Queen Elizabeth II conference centre. These women are impressive and their work is distinguished. They have no offices and the Assembly is bereft of equipment, although the British Council has provided a suite of computers and the training to go with it, and is servicing those women—giving them the confidence and support to continue in a very professional manner.

That was just the beginning; I then made the five-hour drive back to Dar es Salaam, and I had to take two flights and a Land-Rover trip to get to Muleba, North—and a boat trip to get to some of the 19 islands in Lake

[Valerie Davey]

Victoria that the honourable Ruthie represents. Meeting the community groups was absolutely fascinating. When the honourable Ruthie turns up, people suddenly emerge from everywhere; they want to know about the next stage of the project that they are undertaking. Local community groups, often with strong women leaders, come forward and tell her, "We have done this. Here is part of the primary school. Here is a whole load of rocks—it is the beginning of our dispensary. What is going to happen next?" All the community leaders, including schoolteachers, come forward to present their reports. They read them out very respectfully, and ceremoniously put them into envelopes and hand them over. All the people and the crowds are very respectful—I have not seen a political meeting like it. Even in the evening in the pitch dark, 600 or 700 people gradually came round to listen respectfully.

The most moving thing was the pile of stones for the dispensary, and the leader of community coming forward to say, "A boy died in this village yesterday, but we decided that we should not postpone this meeting with our MP coming and our distinguished white visitor because our community has never had such a visit from a white visitor, and it is some time since the honourable Ruthie came. We decided that this would be a blessing, a turning point, and we look forward with you to establishing this dispensary." We left after a long meeting with music, dance and festivity and visited the home of the boy who had died. That was one of the most moving parts of an incredible visit.

We packed into three or four days more constituency work than many Members would get through in a month or even three months. People came to listen and to share, and they were not always given the answer that Members might expect to be given. We went to a road and were told, "Yes, thank you very much. We bought the materials, but they have all been stolen." Whereupon, with complete calm and dignity, the honourable Ruthie faced a crowd of 200 to 300 people and said, "Then you will not get another Tanzanian shilling until those people have been brought to court and the materials are returned." I wonder how many of us, on the spur of the moment and given such a difficult situation, would have had the courage to stand up in front of all those older people and, with complete aplomb, give that verdict—but she did.

One of the issues that arose from the British Council's survey was that women Members of Parliament are recognised in east and central Africa as no more or less efficient than men, but they are less likely to be corrupt and are more concerned for their local communities. Again, I pay tribute to the British Council for all the work that it is doing.

Hon. Members will realise that I could go on speaking for the rest of the debate, but I hesitate to do so because I know how many more want to contribute. Let me just say that I recognised something from that hands-on experience that I would never have found out without going on that return visit: Ruth Msafiri had been sitting in the Gallery last year.

We talk about the need for infrastructure, and of course those people need roads. Just as my right hon. Friend the Minister for Women said earlier, those women's groups need markets for their craftwork and ways to get their work to them, but what I found to be essential to civil society—perhaps we do not highlight it as much—is training for magistrates. Yes, they will get the police officer to arrest the people who stole the materials, but they have not got enough magistrates to sit in local communities.

There are not enough people to teach book-keeping. In fact, some of the projects go wrong because of lack of basic book-keeping skills. Hon. Members may find this hard to believe, but librarians are also needed. I went to a small teacher-training college that runs two-year courses entirely to underpin the millennium project of providing universal primary school education in Tanzania. Those at the college have not got computers. I was not expecting that; I was hoping that I might make the link between Africa and computers.

What did I find? I was told, "We had a brilliant librarian. He was wonderful, but he died in 1977, and we haven't had another one since." I went into the library. The reading room was empty and the books on the shelves were not classified. The only people who take out books are the lecturers. Having looked along the shelves, I would not want many of the books to be taken out because they date back to the 1970s. A librarian is what that college actually needs. A VSO librarian, as opposed to a teacher or a lecturer, would send that college forward by leaps and bounds.

Legislation is being introduced thick and fast in the Tanzanian Parliament, but it needs people to draft it—I do not know whether we have any to spare. I returned determined that Bristol, West would make its contribution. I am sure that the education department at Bristol university will be able to offer some help. I do not believe that the people of Tanzania will spurn Bristol university; it will be only too welcome.

I shall also ensure that the women of the Bristol Labour party and any others willing to join us will set up, with the help of the honourable Ruthie, a credit union for the women in their many different local groups, just as the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) has suggested. The honourable Ruthie is determined to set up an umbrella group—we will help her to do so—so that women's groups are empowered through their community. I am sure that those links will be maintained with my right honourable friend, Ruth Msafiri.

I want to end with a word to another Tanzanian woman, whom I met for the first time earlier. Her name is Elly Macha. She is now Dr. Elly Macha; she has just received a PhD at Leeds university. What is unique? Well, at the age of three, disease made her blind and her immediate family rejected her. She has come through a Lutheran school in Tanzania, and now through Leeds university. It is so appropriate that she heard my right hon. Friend the Minister for Women open this debate, as her thesis was on gender, disability and access to education in Tanzania.

2.27 pm

Sandra Gidley (Romsey): I, too, welcome the fact that the Government have devoted parliamentary time to this subject, and I associate myself with the remarks about Emmeline Pankhurst. The moot point is whether she would have been a Conservative today and joined the modern Conservative party, but perhaps I shall leave that for the summing up. We should use today's debate to discuss the range of subjects that are important to women.

The Minister for Women will forgive me if I say again that the regular 10- minute Question Time on women's issues offers too narrow a focus. I am sure that the right hon. Lady would agree that women's lives are about much more than public life, the pay gap, domestic violence and child care, important as those subjects are. Although I intend to start by talking about those subjects, I shall move on to the international picture because it is only right and proper that most of the debate should be about that.

Without further ado, I shall begin by examining the role of the Minister for Women. Sadly, it is a part-time role. I hope to make the case today that it should be full-time, and we need only to look at the record to see that that is necessary. Let us consider women in public life. I am sure that the Minister for Women is as disappointed as the rest of us that, sadly, the number of women in public life has increased by only 2 per cent. since 1997.

Some 1,328 women attended the seminars aimed at getting more women into public life—quite a lot—and I had hoped that that might have some impact by now, but I had not realised that January 2003 figures were based on the situation in March 2002, so the seminars have not had time to have an effect.

That prompts a number of questions. First, in this technological age I am not sure why it should take 10 months to compile a report. Secondly, it would be interesting if the Minister informed the House about any follow-up. Of those who attended the courses, 91 per cent. claimed that they would be more likely to apply for a public post. That would be brilliant if it were followed through. The Minister said that women need to be encouraged to do specific things. Since the seminars, has there been any follow-up with the women who attended to ensure that they are still keen and to direct them to bodies in which they could usefully have an input?

I have noticed that women do not want to be part of an organisation just for the sake of it—for a title and a CV. They want to feel that they are making a real input. Sometimes, they need a little persuading that their contribution is worthwhile.

The Minister for Social Exclusion and Deputy Minister for Women (Mrs. Barbara Roche): I am following the hon. Lady's argument closely, in particular her words about positive action. What is the Liberal Democrat party's policy on positive action in its selection of women candidates?

Sandra Gidley: I knew that that question would come up, although I did not think that the Minister would ask it. My party debated the issue two years ago at conference, when it decided—conference decided, which is unusual in political parties these days, but our conference makes decisions that the party follows through—that it was important not to go down the route of positive discrimination. I disagreed and argued the opposite at the time. It would be foolish if I did not admit that. However, we decided to invest a lot of time in supporting, encouraging and mentoring women. That is a long-term strategy. I do not think that it will deliver many more women Liberal Democrat Members of Parliament at the next election, as I have said on record, but the rewards will be reaped in the election after that. I will not go into detail about the strategy, but many women are being encouraged and will be poised to get those target seats in that subsequent election. As we are gaining all the time, I am sure that the hon. Lady will agree that we will perhaps get more women MPs in that way.

I have put my efforts behind that strategy. Unless we are seen to follow it wholeheartedly, we will not know whether it works. However, there is another issue. Unfortunately, we find that we are trying to train women to perform like men, which is the wrong way to go about it. As one Labour Member said—I cannot remember which one—when we ask people to picture an MP, the image they perceive is male, middle-aged and middle-class. We have to break that mould. I welcome the Labour party's efforts in that regard, but they have not been enough to change hearts and minds. It is not that people are innately prejudiced, but they have to get over that hurdle. We need to make people more aware that more than one type of person can become a Member of Parliament.

On the report "Public Bodies 2002", in a recent parliamentary answer the Minister for Women stated

> "We are determined to deliver on our aim that women should hold 45–50 per cent. of public appointments . . . by the end of 2005".—[*Official Report*, 31 October 2002; Vol. 391, c. 946W.]

In a more recent answer, she said that she had no effective control over the matter and stated categorically that the responsibility for making those appointments lay with individual Ministers supported by their Departments, and that each Department set its own targets. Perhaps that explains the complete inconsistency between Departments and why some have targets that are less than aspirational.

The Department for International Development target for 2004 was

> "to ensure that the percentage of appointments held by women currently 23.8% does not fall below 23% in subsequent years".

I think that the Minister will agree that that is a little disappointing, but it is even worse when one realises that in 2000 it had placed 27 per cent. of women in public appointments. Clearly, the Department is happy to go backwards.

On current trends only two Departments, the Scotland Office and the Cabinet Office, should reach the target of 50 per cent. of public appointments being women in time for a general election in 2005. Fewer women are now serving on a number of bodies than was the case in 2001. I could list them, but I will not.

Will the Minister look into that matter and encourage ministerial colleagues to set targets that are realistic but that have some element of ambition, and to have some sort of plan as to how they will achieve their goal, rather than merely laudable ambition? On the subject of ministerial colleagues, I must mention mainstreaming. There is little evidence that it is happening in any shape or form, which suggests that a radical overhaul of the women and equality unit is needed.

In the past year, I have asked a number of questions of Government Departments on the implementation of the Government's "better practice" agenda to mainstream

[Sandra Gidley]

gender equality throughout Departments. I hate using such terms—they are such a management-speak mouthful—but they are what we are lumbered with. Simply put, the responses highlight incompetence and shortcomings in a significant number of Departments, ranging from total failure to embrace gender mainstreaming to inadequate acceptance of its importance.

I asked each Department four questions, which were designed to test whether gender equality was being mainstreamed throughout government. I asked what new data series, broken down by gender, race, disability and age, had been commissioned by each Department since August 1997. I asked Departments to list the women's organisations that had been consulted over proposed legislation in various years and whether the responses had been published. I also asked if Departments had established a baseline for policy appraisal against which to measure progress on equal treatment and what progress had been achieved. Finally, I asked them to list the subject of each gender impact assessment drawn up since June 1997, indicating in each case whether the outcome had been put out to consultation or published.

I was surprised and disappointed by the results. Nine out of 15 Departments had failed to implement a gender-aware policy agenda to date. The Ministry of Defence, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Scotland Office and the Northern Ireland Office had neglected to conduct any gender impact assessments. The Wales Office and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport had not seen the need to conduct any analyses of gender mainstreaming. Five Departments would not answer one or more of the questions. A number of them had not defined any baselines for policy appraisal so far.

The Minister will be pleased to hear that it is not all doom and gloom. The Department for Education and Skills and the Department of Trade and Industry are the top-ranking Departments in demonstrating concrete evidence of mainstreaming equality. If gender awareness is not seen as a significant priority by the women and equality unit, it is difficult to imagine who will take up the initiative. Despite vast increases in resource allocation, the unit is clearly not doing its job properly and has let fall by the wayside the very object of its existence.

Finally, on the Minister's specific area of responsibility, more than two weeks ago I tabled a parliamentary question asking what percentage of her time was devoted to her role as Minister for Women. Unfortunately, to date I have not received an answer. It would be useful and nice to receive one today, but I hope that she realises that I asked the question out of frustration rather than pure mischief.

Earlier, I mentioned the large number of female Members of Parliament elected at the 1997 election. Yes, they were Labour MPs and some of them have come in for some flak, much of which is undeserved. I am convinced that having a large body of women in this place has resulted in many of the Government's policies being more women friendly and taking into account aspects of family life that were not previously so much to the fore. For example, I am convinced that the paper on domestic violence that is due to be published soon—it is the first paper on the subject to be published in the history of Parliament—would not have been produced had there not been so many women MPs willing and able to do their bit. I want a full-time Minister for Women to do more of that sort of thing and to ensure that other Departments come up with more policies that take the lives of women into account.

I place on record my congratulations to the Home Secretary. Last summer, I was invited to visit Cambodia to look into the problem of sex tourism, which involves many under-age girls. I was really shocked and horrified by what I saw. It was bad enough seeing young girls in brothel areas, but the extent of the problem was really brought home to me when I visited a shelter that tried to rehabilitate girls who had been rescued from brothels. One of those girls was eight years old, which is shocking by anybody's standards. At that stage, I decided that I would like to do something about it.

I mention the problem because, at the moment, people on the sex offenders register can travel abroad for less than eight days without registering with anybody. Police forces in those foreign countries are therefore completely unaware of the presence of such people. To me, that seemed completely wrong. I was pleasantly surprised by the Home Secretary's response: he said that he had been unaware of the problem, but that such people should not be allowed to go abroad at all. The statement published yesterday showed that he has taken the matter very seriously, and I want to put my thanks for that on the record.

It struck me when I was in Cambodia that the problems of women in other parts of the world are on a completely different scale to those that we perceive as problems in this country. Among the examples quoted by the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) were micro-finance initiatives. I visited a World Vision initiative, and the people running it were clear that they much preferred giving money to women because women saw the necessity of re-investing in families. One particular woman to whom I talked wanted to buy a motorbike and a plank of wood, so that she could take chickens to market. That might not sound much, but it would make a big difference to her particular community. I welcome all those initiatives, and we should launch more of them.

I am a little disappointed, although I understand the need for it, that there is a move towards money being given to Governments on the basis of good governance. If that money is given to non-governmental organisations, however, it is often spent on the heart of the problem; if it is given to Governments, they may divert it for other purposes. Again, so many things are taken for granted in the UK. Among the other truly horrific things that I saw were families foraging for food on a rubbish dump. We understand that we should not eat food covered with flies, but such a basic understanding is lost on generations of children who do not have education or role models. Another project is designed to educate those children. Such initiatives are small but very worthy, and I hope that we will support them.

I was going to talk about public health but I have digressed on Cambodia. In a similar way to the Tanzania story, when one sees such things one is very affected by them. Although MPs sometimes come in for criticism for visiting countries abroad, it is sometimes one of the best things that we can do to realise what a long way we have come, how lucky we are, and what we need to do to improve things in other countries, too.

I want to finish by talking about the important role that women play in post-conflict reconstruction in war-torn countries, and about war generally. The impact of war on women, and women's role in peacekeeping, are subjects that, sadly, have fairly recently come to notice on the international agenda, having traditionally been a non-subject. In October 2000, the UN Security Council passed resolution 1325 on women, peace and security. It underlines the vital role of women in conflict solution, and mandated a review of both the impact of conflict on women and their role in peace building. The resolution emphasises the importance of taking a gender perspective throughout, especially because of the adverse impact of conflict on women and girls.

The UN Secretary-General noted in his report on women, peace and security:

> "Women and children are disproportionately targeted in contemporary armed conflicts and constitute the majority of all victims."

He noted that they

> "also constitute the majority of the world's refugees and internally displaced persons."

On a global scale, the figures are huge, as women and children constitute some 80 per cent. of the world's estimated 34 million refugees and other displaced persons. Although generalisations should be made only tentatively, it is widely documented that women's experiences of conflict are striking similar around the world, despite the huge differences in cultures and the character of conflicts. Women are more vulnerable, less mobile and the first to feel the effects.

One of the most unpleasant aspects of that is sexual violence. Reports from armed conflicts around the globe document how soldiers and paramilitaries terrorise women with rape, sexual and other physical violence and harassment. Combatants and sympathisers have used rape as a weapon of war, pulling communities apart and forcing women and girls to flee their homes.

I want to digress slightly and pay tribute to the V-day campaign, which has done much to highlight this and many other aspects of violence against women. Anyone who has ever heard a performance of "My vagina was my village" cannot fail to have been forced to recognise the brutality of war and its effect on women. It is a worldwide problem, which has affected women from different areas such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone, Rwanda, Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina—the list goes on. Women in those countries have reported mutilation and all sorts of other horrors. In many cases, perpetrators first raped, and then killed their victims. In other cases, those who survive suffer psychological trauma, permanent physical injury, and frequently are left with a long- term health reminder in the form of a sexually transmitted disease such as HIV/AIDS.

Until recently, however, many viewed violence against women as an inevitable, if regrettable, consequence of war. That attitude effectively guaranteed immunity for perpetrators and silenced women who suffered gruesome sexual and physical abuses. Indeed, it surprised me to learn that the recognition of rape as a war crime resulted from the war in Bosnia and was not officially internationally recognised until as recently as 1998. Since 1998, some success has been achieved, with a number of trials that have convicted certain individuals of rape, used as an instrument of genocide.

It is also pertinent to examine the post-conflict situations that face many women. Sadly, the end of war rarely signals the end of violations against women. In the post-conflict period, many women confront discrimination in reconstruction programmes. They also experience sexual and domestic violence in refugee camps, and violence when they attempt to return to their homes. It has recently been documented that, one year after the Taliban's fall, women and girls in Afghanistan still face severe restrictions and violations of their human rights. In many areas, Taliban officials have been replaced by warlords, police officers and local officials with similarly oppressive attitudes toward women. The Taliban's collapse at the end of 2001 gave hope that Afghan Women and girls would soon enjoy greater rights and freedoms. Indeed, in November 2001, US Secretary of State Colin Powell stated:

> "The recovery of Afghanistan must entail a restoration of the rights of Afghan women . . . The rights of women in Afghanistan will not be negotiable".

A year later, however, many in Afghanistan, particularly outside Kabul, believe life has not dramatically improved. I quote one woman from the Herat province:

> "The leadership here is very bad for us. It is not much different than under the Taliban."

Women of all ethnicities in Afghanistan are still being restricted in their participation in public life. They continue to face serious threats to their physical safety, denying them the opportunity to exercise basic human rights and to participate fully and effectively in rebuilding their country. I quote from a recent Human Rights Watch report:

> "Women and girls enjoy little freedom of movement in . . . Herat . . . They may not walk or ride in a car alone with a man who is not a close relative, even a taxi driver. A police task force now patrols Herat city, arresting men and women who are seen together and suspected of being unrelated or unmarried. Men are taken to jail; women and girls are taken to a hospital to undergo forced medical examinations to determine whether they have recently had sexual intercourse."

According to the same report:

> "In Kabul, a reconfigured Vice and Virtue Squad (renamed 'Islamic Teaching') is now operating."

One of the problems is that, sometimes, things are done in the name of religion that are not necessarily in line with religious edicts.

The report continues:

> "A team of some ninety women under the Ministry of Religious Affairs harasses women in Kabul's streets for 'un-islamic' behaviour, such as wearing makeup, and, in some instances, follows them home to castigate their parents or spouses."

I find it bizarre that in a country that needs to rebuild its infrastructure people worry about whether women wear make-up or not. The report also says:

> "There have been reports of Schools for girls being attacked with rockets or set on fire in at least five provinces."

These examples of violent, oppressive and restrictive behaviour severely undermine the most fundamental rights of women and girls in many areas of Agfhanistan.

[Sandra Gidley]

Women's participation in the reconstruction of their country is severely constrained, leaving little hope for their broader political participation in the future. The humanitarian aid and development programmes depend on women to determine what aid is needed and ensure that the aid reaches women and children and is not diverted. If women are involved in administering programmes, aid will reach the people for whom it is intended.

As of December 2002, the US and coalition military forces in Afghanistan are continuing to pursue a strategy of entrusting general security and policing to local forces. We need to have some input into that if we are to improve things. The international community has still to offer adequate resources to expand peacekeeping or even to provide decent police training throughout the country, even though most Afghans and diplomatic officials admit that those steps are a necessary precursor to reconstruction efforts. The recent decision by the British and US Governments to deploy additional troops outside Kabul to work on security and disarmament issues is welcome, but much more needs to be done to ensure that the stranglehold on power enjoyed by the warlords who rule most parts of Afghanistan is weakened.

In Iraq, the Gulf war a decade ago resulted in the destruction of a large number of public facilities such as electricity generation stations and water purification plant and sewage treatment works. The damage has led to a rapid decrease in the health of the nation. That has affected women particularly because they are the main domestic workers and they are responsible for collecting water. In a water shortage, their workload doubles and if they collect poor water, the incidence of diseases such as typhoid fever increases. That has a severe effect on life in the country.

In 10 years, child mortality in Iraq has gone from one of the lowest in the world to the highest. The rate for under-fives is now two and a half times what it was in 1989. Maternal mortality has doubled because women are not receiving obstetric care for complications during pregnancy and childbirth.

I have cited Iraq and Afghanistan as examples of the impact that conflict has on women. I do not know what situation we will find ourselves in in the next few weeks, but I urge the Minister to do all that she can to ensure that women in post-conflict situations are empowered because they provide a vital linchpin in the rehabilitation of a war-torn country.

2.53 pm

Mr. Ben Chapman (Wirral, South): I am delighted to take part in the debate today in celebration of international women's day, the central theme of which, as has been admirably demonstrated, is achieving equal rights. Extending equality, tackling barriers to participation and allowing everyone to play their full part in the social and economic life of the nation have to be the central tenets of the Government's vision of a truly inclusive society in this country and in others. Naturally, I commend the Government on their efforts in that direction and welcome the forthcoming gender equality action plan and disability bill, which will be aimed at fashioning just such an inclusive society based on respect and opportunity for all.

In striving to achieve equality between the sexes, it is important that we should remember those members of society for whom legislation does not adequately cater. I welcome the Government's promised legislation on the rights of transsexuals. I commend all that has been said before, but perhaps particularly the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, West (Valerie Davey) about women in Tanzania. I worked there myself for four years, and I recognise the accuracy of all that she has said. So I think I can say, if I remember it rightly, "Asante sana ndugu", for raising that subject so tellingly.

I also endorse what has been said about domestic violence and the importance of addressing it. It was effectively addressed a couple of weeks ago in my constituency by a federation of women's organisations which held a conference on the subject in Heswall halls. The conference also dealt with what should be done about it, and an action plan is being proceeded with.

The first person who raised with me the problems of transsexuals is now a woman, so I am taking the opportunity of raising the issue in a debate on women, although, with the necessary changes, my comments also apply to the plight of transsexuals who are now men. The problems are different, but there is much read-across. The rights of transsexuals lag far behind those of any other minority group in this country. The Sex Discrimination Act 1975 secured the legal basis of equality for women, but while similar rights for transsexuals were secured just four years ago there are still crucial gaps. It is sufficiently frustrating that three decades after achieving de jure equality, women do not enjoy in all aspects de facto equality. I sincerely hope that that precedent is not followed in the case of transsexuals. I hope that we can save our successors from having to debate these issues in a similar vein in 30 years.

Most of us are comfortable with our gender. It is not something that we think about on a daily or hourly basis, but a small minority in our society experience unending anxiety and prejudice as a result of their gender identity. Legal ambiguity and the inability to alter official documents can have a pervasive effect on the lives of transsexuals and restrain their freedom in the absence of any legal protection of their privacy. For example, a birth certificate is required when one obtains a driving licence, a passport, insurance or even a bus pass. I understand that full disclosure of one's history is also integral to the process of finding employment. Transsexuals are at present even prevented from maintaining their discretion and dignity in death, as death certificates use official gender records. In addition to such personal difficulties, transsexuals cannot marry, which brings with it the concomitant denial of rights to a partner's pension and property. I am open to correction, but I do not think transsexuals can foster or adopt. They can even have their parenthood of a child denied.

If a transsexual commits a criminal offence, the legal ambiguities surrounding them can result in their being sent to prison according to their official, rather than their assumed, identity and gender. Medication can be stopped during such incarceration, with potentially devastating physical and psychological side effects. It is perhaps, sadly, for this reason that transsexuals are one of the most law-abiding groups in society.

Sue Doughty (Guildford): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that transsexuals are often discouraged from seeking basic rights such as benefits or from dealing with officialdom in any way because the people with whom they have to deal often have a dreadful habit of starting with "he" then changing to "she", perhaps giggling on the telephone and saying, "I don't know what to do now." The huge humiliation that people have to endure who have gone through such emotional pain to get to where they are now means that they often give up rather than obtain the rights to which they are entitled.

Mr. Chapman: I agree entirely. Not only legislative change but societal change is needed to address the rights of transsexuals. We need to define those rights and to define how transsexuals' privacy can be protected so that they can participate and contribute to society in a normal way. I hope that that will be achieved in the forthcoming Bill from the Lord Chancellor's Department, which I hope will be introduced quickly.

To illustrate the plight of transsexuals, I want to discuss the plight of a brave constituent of mine, Miss Janie Kirkby—who not only gave her consent to being mentioned in this debate but actively encouraged it. She regards my outlining of her plight as a way of helping other transsexuals of both sexes.

Miss Kirkby was born a man and has been uncomfortable with her gender identity for most of her life. Having made the transition and become a woman, she has found that the discrimination that she suffers substantially inhibits a normal existence. She has been unable to find gainful employment and has had to fight for her benefits—an issue that the hon. Member for Romsey (Sandra Gidley) raised. Being loth to subject herself to further prejudice, she has not been able to secure a passport or even a bus pass. Had she pressed the point on the bus pass, she would have found that, at least in Merseyside, we have equalised the age for bus pass issue. At 60, she could have got a bus pass, but she does not wish to go through the indignity of all that is necessary to secure it.

She has had experience of employment in cleaning and nursing and has repeatedly applied for jobs in both those areas. She has been rejected from approximately 300 posts in two years for various given reasons—often as spurious as, for example, "The people here wouldn't like you." What has happened cannot be attributed solely to malfeasance of the part of the employers. In nursing, it is legally necessary to be either a man or a woman. As a transsexual, Miss Kirkby's acquired gender is not legally recognised. She is therefore wholly unable, legally, to be employed in that area. For other positions, there is no legal basis to prevent her employment, but she is still consistently rejected. In frustration, she has pursued employment tribunals. However, it is always difficult to prove the specific reason for which one failed to get a job. Needless to say, it is not made explicit.

Miss Kirkby is a classic example of someone who has not passively accepted her fate. She got on her bike and went searching endlessly for work. However, she has consistently been rejected because of her gender identity. As she rightly says:

> "If I wasn't a transsexual, I would be employed now."

That is true.

Now of pensionable age, rightly, as a woman, she still experiences many daily problems. She had to fight for a pension, although, thanks to the change in the rules, she received one at age 60. However, that sort of hardship is typical of the experience of the majority of transsexuals in this country. I urge the Government to fast-track legislation on this issue. I welcome proposals that would make possible marriage for transsexuals and formal recognition of their acquired gender—including the issuing of papers that are indistinguishable from birth certificates and that mention only the present gender. I would welcome any statement on the progress of such legislation. Legal precedent has been set in the cases of I *v.* UK, Goodwin *v.* UK and Bellinger *v.* Bellinger. I urge the Government to act in accordance with those rulings in codifying transsexuals' rights and in recognising acquired gender roles as legally valid.

To feel that one has been born in the wrong gender is difficult for me to comprehend but it must be disturbing in the extreme. I cannot imagine the kind of emotional turmoil that would be necessary to persuade someone that they had been born in the wrong body and that they must change their sex. The liberation and joy of achieving one's right gender must be great—but perhaps not as great as the trauma that one will have suffered in the past and, to some extent for some people, will continue to suffer in future.

It behoves all of us to reduce the burden on transsexuals. As I said earlier, this issue must be addressed not only in legislation but in perceptions. Societal attitudes must change. When walking down the street can be dangerous and humiliating, it is not surprising that transsexuals become dysphoric and despondent. Transgender behaviour is a normal variation of the human condition and should be seen as such. It is not a disorder. A civilised society has a fundamental responsibility to adapt to the needs of all its members. Let us hope that the needs of transsexuals can be fully met, and soon.

3.5 pm

Miss Julie Kirkbride (Bromsgrove): I begin by congratulating the hon. Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Chapman) on his explanation of the problems faced by transsexuals. I had not intended to discuss that matter today, as there are a number of other issues that I wish to raise.

As a Conservative MP, I ought to tackle one issue face on—my party's lamentable performance in attracting more Conservative female MPs to these Benches. I would dearly like to see that change. My hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) has many engagements and duties, and sadly she is not here to listen to what I have to say. She had to leave a few moments ago but I am sure that she will read the *Official Report* and so be fully aware of my views. As party chairman, she will be interested in these matters. I congratulate her on being the first lady in the Conservative party to reach the position of party chairman. That is an achievement. It is sad that the Secretary of State is not here to hear me say that it was a shame that, in listing the achievements of women in politics, she failed to mention that we have had a lady Prime Minister—the Conservative Margaret Thatcher. That proves that there is not really a glass ceiling in politics if one is good enough.

[Miss Julie Kirkbride]

Nevertheless, my party's performance in attracting more women is not good enough. I suspect that I may not be among the majority on the Conservative Benches in saying this, but although my party has made some progress in attracting female candidates to seats that we hope to win from the Government at the next election, that progress has not been enough and I hope that we will embrace measures that the Government have put in place to require the selection of female candidates. I say that not because, as MP for Bromsgrove, I am here to represent women. That is not so. I am a woman but, as well as in women's issues, I am interested in men's issues and issues regarding elderly people, disabled people and people from ethnic minorities. Of course, we all are. I am also interested in people who did not vote for me; it is my constitutional duty to represent my constituents.

We are all aware that, as times change, Parliament must reflect the general public. If we look at these Benches, we should see the same eclectic group of people as we might see in work places, the pub, or while walking down the street. The public have to believe that we can understand their problems, having had some experience of them. They should not feel that we all come from one group in society and therefore ignore other groups. I hope that my party will make progress on this issue. I thought that some hon. Members might challenge me on this, so I wanted to make my position clear on the record and in front of my Whips.

I pay tribute to the British Council. I was interested in what the hon. Member for Bristol, West (Valerie Davey) had to say. I had the honour and pleasure of having a young MP from Kenya shadow me here in the House of Commons. Sadly, I have not yet been able to go to Kenya, although I would dearly love to do so and share some of the profound experiences that the hon. Member for Bristol, West has had in Tanzania and Malawi. That may be possible in future.

It was a pleasure to welcome Cecily Mbarire to the House of Commons, where she shared her experiences with me. Her experiences are particularly relevant to the debate, because Kenya is about to hold a constitutional conference in March. I hope that it will profoundly change the role of women in that country. I very much hope that the Minister for Social Exclusion and Deputy Minister for Women will pass on to the Foreign Office a message about the need to support changes that will bolster the position of women in Kenya.

Cecily was a complete delight and a tremendous advocate for her sex and her country. I hope that she does as well in Kenyan politics as her undoubted talents deserve. She has been formidable in representing the interests of women in Kenya. She had been a Member of Parliament for only a matter of months when she visited me a few weeks ago. She was the President's nominee for one of the few positions that he is allowed to fill in the Kenyan Parliament. She is determined that she will be elected in her own right as time progresses, and she hopes that the conference will lead to several changes being made to the constitution.

The first change that Cecily hopes will be made is to provide for a gradual progression to bolster the number of female Members of Parliament in Kenya. She takes a sensible approach that is modelled on the systems that are already in place in other African countries. A position in Parliament for a female MP is ring-fenced, in that certain seats must go to women. In a sense, they are appointed. After five years, the women are no longer allowed to stand for those seats but must stand for a fully elected post against whatever competition—it is usually a man—they might face. That is a good way of encouraging a natural process of increasing the representation of women. It gives them the chance to show that they add value and are linked to their constituents. Perhaps they work harder, and the evidence suggests that they are less corrupt than some of their male colleagues. Guaranteeing women a place in Parliament and then making them fight for it on an equal basis is an exciting and progressive approach. It is important that the Kenyan constitution be amended to allow this gradual process of change to the make-up of the Parliament to take place.

The next issue that Cecily would like addressed is domestic violence. We have heard much about the problems of domestic violence in the United Kingdom, where the figures are truly shocking. I do not know the figures for Kenya, but I fear that they are much worse. Cecily told me that a male Member of the Kenyan Parliament said in that Chamber that it was a man's right to chastise his wife in the same way as it was his right to chastise his child. Because women have the vote in Kenya, this shocking statement was related to the MP's constituents. Such were the efforts of Cecily and her female counterparts that I am delighted to say that he was not re-elected at the subsequent election. It is nice to see that, on occasions, people are suitably punished for their totally unacceptable views. Domestic violence is an enormously important issue to the women of Kenya. Their rights do not begin to match the rights of women in this country. I hope that the Minister will encourage the Foreign Office to press for the inclusion of that important issue in the forthcoming constitutional conference.

As the hon. Member for Romsey (Sandra Gidley) pointed out, we have come so far in this country that we can lose sight of the unfortunate position of women in other countries. It is truly shocking to realise that women in Kenya do not have property rights. They do not inherit the joint wealth of husband and wife when the husband dies. They are entitled to the kitchen implements—the pots, pans and spoons—but the rest does not go to them or to their daughters. It goes to their sons. Unless their sons are prepared to look after them, they face destitution in old age.

I hope that the Kenyan constitution will be rewritten to recognise the existence of female property rights. Cecily believes that that might create a sticking point, but it is important that women should be able to have a stake in society. As we have heard in other contributions, women are often much better at using property to bolster the family income. They invest it so as to secure a proper livelihood for the family. I very much wish Cecily, her colleagues and the male colleagues who agree with them about future progress well in the future negotiations. The conference will take place quite soon and, if I get the chance to meet her and her constituents, I hope that I will be able to join in the celebrations to mark the success of her agenda.

Cecily also raised with me the issue of female genital mutilation. We have all heard about that, but she described what it really entails as we were driving to Bromsgrove. Although the practice is outlawed in Kenya, it is not outlawed across Africa. Sadly, it still continues. I should remind the House what the practice involves. Sometimes it involves force but, for cultural reasons, many pre-pubescent girls of nine or 10 are resigned to their fate. Although it is difficult to imagine, a razor is used to cut away the female sexual organs without the use of anaesthetic. There is a profound impact in terms of pain—some girls bleed to death in the process because their wounds do not heal—and other health issues ensue. For example, women who have had such wounds inflicted on them suffer sheer agony in childbirth. It is a horrible process.

I know that progress has been made, but having more women represented in the Parliaments of sub-Saharan Africa is important in beginning to change attitudes. As my hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead pointed out, it does not matter if we change the law if we do not also change attitudes. For example, Cecily told me of a young lady who had run away from home because she feared what would happen to her. Cecily's mother harboured her, but the young lady had to return to her village when she became pregnant. She had her baby but, after that, she was frogmarched out of the village and circumcised.

Ms Oona King (Bethnal Green and Bow): Tortured.

Miss Kirkbride: "Tortured" is the right word. The young lady was tortured because such practices are considered appropriate in that society and village. I asked Cecily why mothers could allow that to happen to their children and she said, "Because that's what happened to them and that's what they expect to happen." Hence the culture does not change. It is important that women's rights be represented in Parliaments in Kenya and in the other countries in Africa where such practices occur.

Mr. Key: I salute my hon. Friend for her courage in raising that issue. Is she aware that although female genital mutilation is illegal in this country, it is happening to hundreds of children from ethnic minority groups because it is not illegal for their parents to take them abroad to a country where it is legal, have the beastly process carried out and then bring them back to this country? Does she agree that it would be a travesty if any hon. Member were to oppose the private Member's Bill on Friday 21 March, promoted by the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd), which would make it illegal for anyone who does that to escape prosecution?

Miss Kirkbride: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for drawing that to my attention. I am shocked that that could occur without the full body of the law being applied. I would welcome any measure to prevent that from happening to children who expect the British law to protect them. However, I should like that protection to be extended across Africa to other children who will be mutilated in that way and whose life chances will be diminished as a result.

3.20 pm

Mrs. Ann Cryer (Keighley): I praise the Government, with all my heart, for their determined efforts to tackle domestic violence against women. Much has been said about that, but it is worth repeating because the subject is so important.

Just after the election of the Labour Government, the Home Office published a document, which I think was a White Paper, called "Living Without Fear—an integrated approach to tackling violence against women". It impressed me and showed the direction that the Government intended to take to address the problem of domestic violence. That work is carried out by various Departments: the Home Office, the Foreign Office, the Lord Chancellor's Department and the Solicitor-General's office.

The Lord Chancellor's Department is organising a series of conferences on domestic violence in the Asian community, not because that community experiences more domestic violence than others, but because it is a taboo subject that is not to be talked about in the community.

During the half-term break, I went to the second meeting in Brentford. The first had taken place in Bolton. I spent most of the day there listening to submissions by specialist groups and women. I was impressed by the serious way in which the subject is being addressed. Keighley domestic violence service in my constituency has a specific section to deal with violence against Asian women. The women who help those people are fluent in the various Asian languages and bring them to me for help, which I willingly give. The Brentford meeting coincided with the BBC's excellent "Hitting Home" campaign, which took place over one or two weeks.

At the conference, I met an old acquaintance from Southall Black Sisters who raised one or two difficulties with me. I talked to her about being a member of the Council of Europe, a little-known body—in fact, the best kept secret in Europe. It has 44 member countries and is the parent body of the European convention on human rights. I am a member of its equal opportunities committee and last summer I was asked to produce a report on honour killings in Europe. It was a stressful occupation. However, the report is ready and I shall probably present it next month.

I told the member of Southall Black Sisters about my work on honour killings and she said that people had forgotten about Zoora Shah, but I had not forgotten about her. She came from Bradford and I have an account of her trial and the terrible time that she had. It is written by Southall Black Sisters and begins:

> "On 30th April 1998, Zoora Shah lost her appeal to overturn her conviction for the murder and attempted murder of Mohammed Azam on the grounds of diminished responsibility."

As is the case with many women in the Bradford district, including Keighley, Zoora had been brought to the area as a wife. She already had two daughters when she arrived and subsequently had a son. Shortly after arriving in Bradford, her husband left her without money or any form of support. She was homeless and a man called Mohammed Azam offered her a home, but he expected certain favours in return. He also introduced some of his friends to Zoora and she was expected to have sex with them, too. She had three

[Mrs. Ann Cryer]

children and it would have been difficult for her to leave because she would have had nowhere to live and no funds. The support from the local Asian community was thin on the ground to say the least.

Eventually, Mohammed Azam started to show an interest in her two daughters who were about 14 and 15. Zoora decided that there was no other remedy but to obtain poison and feed it to him. Over a few days, she poisoned him to death. I would not for one minute suggest that she did the right thing, but she was under a great deal of strain. When she snapped, she did the only thing that she thought she could do to control that man and to stop him doing to her daughters what he had already done to her. In the summary of her case, the organisation, Southall Black Sisters, says:

> "The Courts have been rather more willing to accept cultural and religious factors used by Asian men to excuse the killings of wives and daughters, on the basis that 'their' wives/daughter's behaviour transgresses cultural norms".

Although I do not want to draw comparisons, I want to mention a second case, and I hope that hon. Members reach their own conclusions. A young Bradford woman, Tasleem Saddique, was murdered on 15 June 1995 by a young man called Shabir Hussain. Shabir was the husband of Tasleem's sister. In common with many women in Bradford, Tasleem had been taken to Pakistan when she was 16 for the purpose of marriage. She had a problem—I should say, her family had a problem; I do not think she was terribly worried about bringing the man in—her family had a problem in getting entry for the young man whom she had married in Pakistan. I am not quite sure what happened at that time, as Tasleem cannot tell her own story. On her return to the United Kingdom, she was unable to get entry for her husband, and she sought refuge in one of the Asian women's refuges in Bradford.

As I say, I do not know the story behind that. Because of the primary purpose rule, Tasleem was unable to bring her husband in. I am not knocking the primary purpose rule; I am merely relating what happened. Four years on, when she was about 20, she took up with another Asian man in Bradford. Her sister and her family opposed the relationship and felt that she was bringing shame on the family. One morning her brother-in-law—her sister's husband—Shabir Hussain took a car out. As Tasleem was standing at a bus stop waiting for a bus, he knocked her down with the car, and drove forward and reversed over her several times till she was dead.

Shabir Hussain was charged with murder. The case was protracted, but eventually the charge was replaced by a charge of manslaughter. I do not know the case, but I suggest that he could well have used the defence that the balance of his mind was upset due to the fact that the honour of the family had been undermined by the behaviour of Tasleem. He therefore thought that he was doing the right thing by killing her to preserve the honour of the family.

Shabir Hussain was sentenced to three years' imprisonment, but served only 18 months. Zoora Shah is still in prison. I shall not try to draw comparisons, but I hope that I am right in saying that were those two cases to come to court now, perhaps different conclusions would be reached, because there is a different climate. Cultural practices and differences, including female genital mutilation, cannot be accepted as an excuse for the violation of the human rights of women.

So that it is not thought that I always go on about Asian women and never speak about white women, I shall mention that a couple of weeks ago, at the time of the enthronement of the new Archbishop of Canterbury on 25 February I submitted an early-day motion entitled "Gender Equality in the Church of England". It states that

> "this House recognises and pays tribute to the life and achievements of Monica Furlong, author and journalist, who died on 14th January; celebrates her commitment to gender equality in the Church of England; calls on the Government to amend the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 to remove the exemption of religious bodies from the provision of the Act; and calls on the established church to cease forthwith its present discrimination against women priests and accept the need for women bishops."

Mr. Key: I have only one quarrel with that otherwise excellent early-day motion. I would sign it if it were not for the fact that the Church of England Synod currently has a working party on that very issue. It is the constitutional position that the recommendation should come from the Synod through the Ecclesiastical Committee to the House, which I hope would then approve what the hon. Lady says. I wholly agree with her about the importance of having not only women priests, but women bishops.

Mrs. Cryer: I thank the hon. Gentleman. An early-day motion does no harm in this case; it gives a shove in the right direction.

Glenda Jackson: Does my hon. Friend agree that the hon. Gentleman's intervention constitutes a fairly strong argument for disestablishment?

Mrs. Cryer: If we start talking about that, I shall be on my feet for another hour. There are good arguments for disestablishment. I have been in touch with Monica Furlong and other women who are involved in those arguments in the Church of England. Some of the stories that they tell me compare with stories that I can tell about imams in Bradford, in respect of the treatment of women priests in the Church of England and how they are regarded as substandard. Since I tabled that early-day motion, I have had one or two letters and one or two conversations with hon. Members. One of them—I shall not reveal who it was—said to me, "You know, Ann, a woman can no more be a priest than she can be a father." That is going a bit too far. It bears comparison with the views of imams in Bradford. I am trying to be fair and even-handed in my discussion of religions.

This afternoon, we have discussed this country's position and the likelihood of war with Iraq. I believe that we should not go to war, and that it will not help the women of Iraq one jot if we do so. As has been mentioned, we ought to look at the position of women in Afghanistan. Agencies and groups that have returned from Afghanistan say that sharia law is being reimposed in some parts of Afghanistan. I did not oppose the war in Afghanistan because I felt strongly about the Taliban and women's human rights in the country. There is a lot of unfinished business there which needs to be tidied up before we even think of attacking another country such as Iraq. I am not confident that the women of Iraq would benefit from our intervention. While we are looking at the area, the human rights position of women in Iran is probably far worse than that of women in Iraq. What are we going to do about Iranian women or women in Saudi Arabia, where there are very strange views about women?

Finally, everything that I have said has been pretty miserable, so I shall end on a high note. Government Members ought to celebrate legislative changes made in the past year that will again allow constituency Labour parties, where they so wish, to adopt an all-women shortlist when selecting a parliamentary candidate. I wish Opposition Members well in their determination to follow that example.

3.37 pm

Sue Doughty (Guildford): I, too, congratulate the Government on selecting this important topic for debate.

Progress on dealing with some of the worst injustices to women is still slow, but it is important that at least once a year we have an opportunity for a debate such as this one to take stock not only of what we are doing in this country but of what is happening internationally. We need to reinforce Government intentions and turn them into deeds to secure important improvements. Whatever we say today, our words must be followed with appropriate action.

Last summer, I was a representative of the Select Committee on Environmental Audit at the earth summit in Johannesburg. Having gone there to see what our Government and other Governments were doing to bring about environmental improvements and improved social justice, it was clear that many changes involved social justice for women. It is common sense that women, who make up half the population, should have reproductive health and education rights, and should also participate in the economy and other areas. For the poorest countries, that is the key to economic development, and will bring about change from dire poverty to a much more viable economy.

I was particularly interested to hear some of the arguments in Johannesburg, including an important one about access to clean drinking water. In areas without easy access to water, the people who go and get water are largely women and girls. If girls are fetching water, they are not in school, which is relevant to the argument about universal education. In discussing how we will proceed after the earth summit and the commitment to improve access to drinking water, we must consider how we will liberate women and girls to do things other than just fetching water.

I, too, have been involved in the British Council scheme, and it is worth talking about some of my experiences because the experiences of Tanzania and Kenya are different from each other and also different from those of the country with which I have become involved, which is Eritrea. Eritrea is a desperately poor mountainous country which has only recently gained independence, having been run initially by Italy, then by Britain and more recently by Ethiopia. It has, therefore, been trying to develop its own economy only in the last few years.

There is good news about Eritrea and not-so-good news. I have been over there to help with work on developing political and economic capacity for women. It has a developing Parliament. I cannot match the good news that the hon. Member for Bristol, West (Valerie Davey) was able to give us about Ruthie. My "twin", Tsegereda, has a full-time job, and is a Member of Parliament only one week in four. The Eritrean Parliament is much more like a council, from which its Members can claim allowances, rather than providing full-time jobs to enable them to do the kind of things that we do. It is a challenge for them to learn how to develop their Parliament and their democracy, such as it is.

Eritrea is a one-party state, and there are major issues about human rights there. It now has only one media source—the state media source—as all the others have been shut down, and several journalists have disappeared. It has a problem relating to the lack of elections, and when elections do take place, the current set of MPs will stand as independents to separate them from the one party, which will, in fact, be backing them. There is no true democracy. National service seems to be open-ended, and this affects women greatly. People go into national service and do not come out. They do not get paid, and are effectively used as slave labour to build roads and to carry out various other activities.

One of the unusual things about the Eritrean Parliament is that, although some people say that the importance that the Government accord to equality for women is, perhaps, lip service, it has recognised that women played a strong role in the liberation army and have therefore earned their right to become Members of Parliament. There is a strange situation in that some of the women MPs physically bear the scars of fighting alongside their male partners in the war. Women undertook a strong role in achieving the liberation of Eritrea. The problem now relates to their successors. There are women Ministers who were fighters, but we must now start to think about developing the successor generation of women who will come along and become representatives, whether in their local village council, a regional assembly or the national assembly. Tsegereda, my "partner", attended university and had a job. She is a role model for the kind of people that women should be bringing on as future leaders. It is important that people should see different kinds of women coming forward as leaders.

Interestingly, we commented to the women's assembly that there are fewer women Members of Parliament here than in the imperfect Parliament over there in Eritrea, 22 per cent. of whose Members are women. It also has a quota of 30 per cent., which will increase the total. Getting there has been achieved very differently from here, but it, too, has problems with getting women to come forward. The role played by Ruthie was wonderfully described, with people going to her with their problems and asking for instant decisions. Things are very different in Eritrea, where people are asking themselves what a Member of Parliament does and what power she has. One of the issues that we discussed was how to develop surgeries and to get people to come forward to comment on what the Government are doing. In some villages that is done by using a suggestion box, either because the surgeries are not yet open or because people do not want to come and discuss

[Sue Doughty]

their problems. In those circumstances, they can put a note into the suggestion box—assuming that they can write, of course. So there are a lot of problems there.

I was impressed by the fact that it is recognised that if Eritrea is to build its economy and build on the fact that 45 per cent. of households are run by women because their men are away at war, doing national service or in exile—all factors that exist in a post-conflict situation—it also needs to build women into economic units. If we do not invest in the women, we will have one arm tied behind our backs. Many Eritrean women live in villages and are tied to their homes, where they are bringing up children and seem to cook all day using very primitive stoves. The stoves that they use are health hazards, as children fall over them and burn themselves. Often, they do not have any fuel or have trouble gathering it. The burning of dung is common, but it causes serious respiratory problems. Such work seems an all-day activity.

The women also have no economic independence. If a woman's husband dies, widow inheritance means that another male member of her husband's family can take her as his wife. That leads to problems in terms of the spread of HIV/AIDS, sometimes because the infection caused the husband's death.

There is also very little understanding of nutrition and the need for a balanced diet. There is not only poverty—of course, Eritrea is a very poor country—but lack of knowledge about the fact that feeding a maize porridge to children every day may itself lead to infant mortality.

On the other hand, the assemblies have been building up action plans and considering how they can quickly bring about the intermediate change that is needed to work towards greater change. Some developments have been very exciting. The National Union of Eritrean Women has been working closely with a network of people throughout the country. The trade unions are also very active. I attended a one-day course on which women discussed how they might return to their villages and influence behaviour that can lead to HIV/AIDS.

Eritrea has been a little more fortunate than some countries because it has very strong family structures. Almost everybody is religious; most people are either Muslim, Coptic Christian, Catholic or Protestant. Those structures are in place, but in any post-war situation, people will be on the move. Any development brings about more movement of people. Even the building of essential roads can mean that people have to work away from home on construction projects.

Some of the proposals that are being considered involve very low-technology ideas with which we in the more prosperous economies can help. Eritrea has some electricity, but women who are learning to grow crops so that they have a food source when the men are away can face problems in watering them. People from VSO are helping by providing teaching and a lot of things are happening, but if water is not available, crops do not grow. One solution is the use of solar energy to pump underground water. There is very little infrastructure in some areas, but such solutions are achievable and can help people to make viable arrangements for growing their own food.

There is also some discussion about setting up insurance schemes for animals, as people whose animals are insured might take more interest in their welfare, and other developments are occurring in association with better care of animals. We have also been hearing about credit unions.

On learning to weave, Eritrea has been importing cotton from Ethiopia and India, but if women can learn to weave they can get out of their cottages and start earning as well. People who are teaching women to weave can also talk to them about nutrition. Simple schemes are often very effective. One involves giving donkeys, which can carry enough water for two days. That frees up women to do other things.

One of the most interesting developments could be called an African village Aga saga. The dreadful stoves that the women have to use fill up their rooms with smoke. That is a problem, as they cook all day to prepare bread and the meat that is eaten with it, but they designed a better stove made out of clay. It has a little damper that allows them to burn less fuel, which means that there is less smoke and wood can be used in combination with dung. Such stoves could be sold to women from other villages, who could sell back grain for brewing beer and so on. Such basic trade would be significant. We worry about money, but in some areas of Eritrea, people do not even trade. The women developed that further. They said, "Why are we working on one burner? Why don't we have three, so that we can cook our stew and treat the grain we use for beer as well as bake the bread?". So they ended up with a mini-Aga. They have a model that they take round to other women's houses to show them how they can cook while doing other things, which gets them away from doing nothing but eternal cooking and wood gathering. The British Council is considering tying the latter to a national tree day, because ripping branches off trees does not do them much good. Planting more trees would be a low-cost investment that is very effective in terms of payback.

Another project is based on giving women 25 chickens, which arrive as chicks, so one starts to see chickens running around in the yards outside the houses. That is aimed at developing mixed nutrition, getting protein into people and helping them to bring up their children to do better.

Eritrea is a one-party state and only limited information comes out. Women need to know what is happening in relation to other women. If one of us goes out there, we may be their only source of information about what is happening in other Parliaments. They do not have a lot of written material about that, so the British Council libraries and access to the internet are important ways of providing such information.

The British Council has been strong in teaching English. In Africa, English is often the language of further and higher education. It is not only important in terms of encouraging people to go beyond basic literacy; in a country with nine different languages, it is helpful to have a lingua franca for learning about veterinary skills, horticultural skills and other skills that are needed.

Good work is being done by the aid agencies, but one cannot overestimate the value of the work that is being done by the British Council, with a small level of investment yielding a disproportionate amount of benefit. It is there not just for the bad times and crises—it is there year after year, understanding how people work and, especially through its scheme in Eritrea, facilitating the development of women in terms of their own economy, their own rights and their own justice. I ask the Government to ensure that investment in such schemes continues and is built on, because the development of women that that encourages will lead to improved economies in those countries.

3.52 pm

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): In following the hon. Member for Guildford (Sue Doughty), I should say that I have never visited Eritrea, but in 1985 I was in Ethiopia at the behest of Oxfam. We went as far north as it was possible to go at that time owing to the war between Ethiopia and Eritrea, which was still raging. We visited one of Oxfam's long-term projects, which had to do with the development of corn that could survive drought-hit regions. The Oxfam officials told me that a few weeks earlier they had had a visit from a small group of people from the local Eritrean People's Liberation Front, who had, with great courtesy, albeit at gun point, requested that the Oxfam people lend them their van, which, being sensible people, they did. The van was driven to the centre of the small town, the bank was blown open, the money was extracted, and the van was returned immediately with many thanks from the Eritrean People's Liberation Front.

I found the contribution to the debate by the hon. Member for Guildford, like those of all hon. Members, intensely interesting. Essentially, what has come out of the debate so far is the enormous capacity of women to develop—to expand and to build on, by virtue of their imagination, creativity, intelligence and ability to work hard, the very small amounts of investment that are made in them as individuals or in groups.

I have also been struck by the fact that many speeches depicting the life of women—in Eritrea, in the contribution of the hon. Member for Guildford—perhaps reflect the position in this country 50 years ago. One hon. Member suggested that women should be in charge of disseminating aid, especially food aid, to countries that need it. Fifty years ago in my family, it did not matter how much or how little food was on the table, the men got it first. If there were second helpings, men were asked first whether they wanted them.

A recurring theme of the debate has been that equality of opportunity requires genuine equality of human rights. That programme must be based not only on internationally defined law and justice but the infinitely harder process of transforming hearts and minds. Female genital mutilation has been mentioned, and the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) said that a private Member's Bill on the subject has been introduced, which I am sure all hon. Members will endorse.

However, the most proactive people in insisting on female genital mutilation are women. Their history is that their capacity to function in their societies and cultures depends on their desirability. I do not use that word in a sexual context, given that female genital mutilation removes the possibility of a woman experiencing sexual pleasure. I mean that women's desirability in their society, culture and, often, religious framework, depends on a man's appreciation. That is hard to change. We have failed to change it in our country.

Since my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Mrs. Cryer) became a Member of Parliament, she has, to her great credit, detailed the terrible experiences of women in this country whose antecedents and partners are from another part of the world, where cultural traditions are different. She spoke of the horror of honour killing. In a recent case in this part of the world, a father killed his daughter because he did not approve of the young man whom she was seeing. It also happens in our society, although it may be called something else. Under our legal system, if a woman kills her partner, provocation has to be proven. If the charge is a lesser crime than murder, she has to plead that the balance of her mind was disturbed.

I should like to consider another aspect that most speakers have mentioned: the inevitable link between women and their children. I wish that my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley had given us the name of the hon. Member who argued that women cannot be priests because they cannot be fathers. The obvious rejoinder is that fathers cannot be mothers. Many women in this country have to be mother and father to their children.

I hope that everyone is appalled by acts of violence against children. Such acts are often presented as perpetrated by a stranger who must be a monster, but the greatest damage is visited on children by members of their families. Acts of violence that strangers commit against children almost invariably receive massive coverage. A few months ago, newspapers gave intensive coverage to one such incident when two children were killed. That same week, six other children died but at the hands of their fathers. There was no question of who was guilty or of a trial. Whole families have been eradicated in that way, yet still there is a double standard that has to do with the domestic situation.

Many hon. Members have made telling contributions about domestic violence. I should not want anyone to imagine that I do not appreciate what has been done by the Government and the changes introduced by the police to stop the approach, "This is a domestic and nothing to do with us." I attended the launch, with my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Joan Ruddock), of the Metropolitan police scheme whereby every constable carries a card bearing telephone numbers and addresses that can be used by the young PC encountering domestic violence for the first time in order to obtain assistance.

Ms Oona King: They should make those cards available to MPs too.

Glenda Jackson: Yes. I appreciate the Government's actions and the work of my hon. Friend the Minister for Social Exclusion and Deputy Minister for Women. However, the resources to assist women who find the courage to flee domestic violence and take their children with them are neither adequate nor available in a sufficiently linked-up way. Only this week I have received letters from Women Against Rape—an organisation in my constituency, part of whose funding is being taken away because the Association of London Government grants committee decided that WAP does not warrant its past level of funding, but it does because the violence goes on.

[Glenda Jackson]

There are occasional flurries of newspaper stories and BBC programmes about domestic violence, then the topic slides from public view. There are still huge imbalances in our legal system and every other aspect of our national life that impacts against the equality and protection of women and their children.

Women and their children inevitably suffer the biggest brunt of conflict and post-conflict situations. When my right hon. Friend the Minister for Women paid tribute to the armed forces, the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) intervened to ask whether women had not made their contribution to tackling aggression. Neither my right hon. Friend nor the hon. Gentleman—I am sure that this was an oversight, not a deliberate insult—acknowledged the women who did not serve in the armed forces but who certainly kept this country running during the first and second world wars. In many instances, they paid with their lives. That was the pattern of warfare in the second half of the 20th century, and it is certainly the case now. Modern warfare inevitably means that civilians die in the greatest numbers.

I strongly endorse the remarks made by my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley about women's human rights in Iraq, and I share her opposition to war against Iraq. Death is a form of liberation but I do not acknowledge the concept that war is a form of mass mercy killing in the way that it has been represented—as moral justification for war in Iraq. There is no moral reason for a pre-emptive strike against a nation state that affords no immediate and direct threat to ourselves or our allies.

We have seen the results of modern warfare in that part of the world. I am thinking of the first Gulf war—the Kuwaiti war. The killing was not all immediate. I have seen photographs of real horror: the war also killed, much more slowly, generations that had to be conceived at the end of it. Genetic defects were caused by the use of 21st-century weapons. The extraordinary environmental degradation, and the horrendous cocktail released by the use of those weapons, has marked generations of Iraqi children.

I regret to say that that will happen again. It seems to me almost monstrous that it should still be argued that we are defending the will of, and respect for, the United Nations in our wish to launch a pre-emptive strike against another nation state. The United Nations' reason for being was surely to prevent war. It did not come into being to serve as the world's international army; it came into being to work for, maintain and help to produce peace.

We, as a world and particularly as a country—during what seems to be an almost inevitable countdown to war—are in a situation that I find incomprehensible in many ways. Almost as incomprehensible to me are the arguments that we have been hearing. It is suggested that if we do not go to war, we shall see the destruction of the United Nations. It is said that, just as the League of Nations died because it failed to act against potential dictators, the UN will be sidelined because the present situation will be seen in a similar way.

I have my own theories on what will constitute a genuine sidelining of the UN. It has nothing to do with the League of Nations, and nothing to do with what in many instances seems to be a rewriting of the historical precursors to the second world war. We hear much about Abyssinia, but I think a much closer analogy is that of Guernica. There we saw an open city being blown to smithereens; here we see the possibility of a virtually open country, with little ability to defend itself, being blown to smithereens. If we, as a Parliament, as a nation and, I hope, as a Government, are genuine in acknowledging that women have not always had equal rights and, in many respects, still do not have them—and I believe that we are—we should bear in mind that their human rights are certainly one of the first things that any society will discard when it is under pressure.

In a funny way, we speak as though we had established absolute human rights for women in this country, but we know that we have not. Women's human rights play a much more practical part in other democratic societies, and in some that wish to become democratic. A major movement is taking off in the United States, attempting to overturn a woman's right to choose. It is simply not the case that once we have such rights, they are ours for ever. Here I speak entirely from a gender perspective. There is constant pressure not only for the obtaining of equal and human rights for women, but for the maintaining of those rights once they have been secured.

I was particularly touched by what my right hon. Friend the Minister said about a charismatic black woman who, at a conference, used the words "Lift when you rise". It concerns me very much that young women in this country seem to think that it has all been done, and that nothing will block their advancement, wherever they want that advancement to take them. I must tell those young women that they will have a rude awakening further down the line, because it just ain't so. And we in Parliament delude ourselves if we think that we have got it made here—although I pay tribute to the Government for beginning to prioritise the basic bread-and-butter issues that are so important to women. Almost inevitably, they involve proper, affordable child care, and proper support for women who bear most of the responsibilities at the other end of the age range.

Regional difficulties sometimes work against what the Government want. For example, child care in London is desperately expensive and there are huge variations in its provision. Reference was made to the effects of the planning system on the proper provision of child care. That is certainly true in London. Property prices are astronomical and land is not available, so the physical structural changes that are needed for the provision of child care are extremely difficult to achieve.

Sue Doughty: The hon. Lady referred to the tragedy of women who experience abuse and have to leave home with their children. Does she agree that women who want to leave hostels find it especially difficult to get back into work and to find affordable child care? That does not apply only to parts of the country where there is economic deprivation; women in that situation face economic deprivation no matter where they live. They need as much help as possible to get back into work so that they can look after their families as they want to do.

Glenda Jackson: I wholly agree. Often the problem is exacerbated and such women face additional burdens.

Even if they manage to find work and affordable child care, their children have often been traumatised. They have had not only to leave home but to move to a different school, and have lost touch with friends and relations. Women may clear the initial hurdle by getting away from the immediate danger and then find a job and a decent place to live, but the problems remain. We are sometimes too ready to think that the problems have been solved, but often such women need proper support for much longer from the people who provide those maintaining services—if they exist. In many instances, the services may not be provided or may not be linked as they should be and that can create particular difficulties.

I have always argued that if one has anything worth saying in this place one should be able to say it in 10 minutes. I realise that I have been on my feet for far longer than my self-imposed cut-off point, so I shall draw my remarks to a close.

As I said earlier, women can be enormously capable if they are given even the smallest opportunity to help. We are more than willing to take our proper place in the world, so it would be nice if there was slightly more acknowledgement of what that place is. Sometimes sentimental lip service is paid to women as though they were automatically and naturally members of the most caring professions. Women have enormous talent and ability that could help to improve the world, especially in all those areas that cause us so much disquiet at present. We are immensely capable of doing so.

4.13 pm

Vera Baird (Redcar): International women's day, which we are celebrating, was started in 1908 in the United States by women socialists. Internationalised by 1911, it was undoubtedly born at a time of great social turbulence and change. I am pleased that it took on and maintained a tradition of protest and political activism. As my right hon. Friend the Minister for Women pointed out, part of that contemporary activism was that women all over the globe from all social strata started to campaign for the vote.

On this special day, I, too, pay tribute to Mrs. Pankhurst, but I want to make ample mention of the other wing of the suffrage movement. There were divisions in the English movement as to how the vote should be obtained: between the suffragettes, who proposed militancy, and the constitutionalists who, for many years, pursued lobbying channels and were led for more than 40 years by the lifelong constitutionalist, Millicent Fawcett, to whom I want to pay equal tribute.

I shall return to Mrs. Fawcett later, but I wonder whether we politically active women now sufficiently appreciate the privations that those women underwent to obtain the vote and the right to be candidates, which we readily accept is our right today. Of course we still have to work hard. We still collide against gender brick walls, which have to be breached. None the less, we are reasonably equipped for the job. We have reasonable salaries. We are part of a generally respectable cause, and we are pursuing our aims by nothing more personally demanding than argument and lobbying. Do we sufficiently appreciate the personal privation that early women campaigners underwent to get us here?

The first parliamentary seat that I fought—Redcar is the second—was a little further north than Redcar: it was Berwick-upon-Tweed and that was in 1983. As hon. Members can imagine, I was a very child-like candidate. I lived a few miles from the town of Morpeth, where lay the grave of Emily Wilding Davison, the suffragette who died under the King's horse at the Derby in June 1913. During my first general election campaign, almost 70 years to the day after her death, it was reported that her grave was badly neglected and very broken down.I attribute the success of the women's suffrage campaign to both wings of the suffrage movement and I appreciate that I would not have the right to vote, let alone the right to stand as a candidate, if it were not for such women, so I started to read more about her and the militants.

The militant campaign started in about 1908 in Manchester—I am proud to say that I come from there originally—when Mrs. Pankhurst attended a meeting at the Free Trade hall, addressed by Asquith, and shouted from the back, "Will you give votes to women?" She was arrested, and that was her first period of imprisonment. She seemed to have encouraged that outcome to an extent. The biography of her in which I mostly recently read of that account describes her, after being seized to be removed by a constable, gently spitting into the officer's eye.

Thereafter, for almost every event, demonstration and gesture, as well as for some lawless conduct, the militants were always imprisoned. Some women were frequently and repeatedly imprisoned in extremely harsh conditions. Of course they resisted by going on hunger strike until they almost starved to death, when they were force-fed. Of course force-feeding just stops death by starvation—it does not ensure nourishment—so malnourished women would again go on hunger strike until they started to starve and, again, they would be force-fed.

One can imagine the agonies that such women underwent, and when Mrs. Pankhurst was perceived as almost certain to die if that happened again, the enlightened Government introduced the cat and mouse Act, which allowed women to be released into the community when they got to a very worrying state of ill health, so that they could feed themselves, but, as soon as they were well, they were rearrested and brought back to serve the rest of their sentence. So they went on hunger strike, and they were force-fed and on it went.

Emily Wilding Davison went into custody 12 times for stone throwing, window breaking and setting fire to pillar boxes and, on each occasion, she went on hunger strike and was force-fed—12 times between 1908 and 1913, when she died. I do not think that we take enough cognisance of the extent to which the force-feeding itself was a kind of state torture against those women.

I wish to read a brief paragraph of Emily Wilding Davison's own words, describing the first time that she was force-fed:

> "In the evening the matron, two doctors, and five or six wardresses entered the cell. The doctor said "I am going to feed you by force." The scene, which followed, will haunt me with its horror all my life, and is almost indescribable. While they held me flat, the elder doctor tried all round my mouth with a steel gag to find an opening. On the right side of my mouth two teeth are missing; this gap he found, pushed in the horrid instrument, and prised open my mouth to its widest extent. Then a wardress poured liquid down my throat out of a tin enamelled cup. What it was I cannot say, but there was some medicament, which was foul to the last degree. As I would not swallow the stuff and jerked it out with my tongue, the doctor pinched my nose and somehow gripped my tongue with the gag. The torture was barbaric."

[Vera Baird]

One may appreciate the contribution that repeatedly being put through such torture played in Emily Wilding Davison's decision that, if necessary, her life should be lost for the women's cause.

As is well known, on 4 June she ran out with two Women's Social and Political Union flags in purple, white and green wrapped around her body under a jacket, seized the reins of Anmer, the King's horse, and caused it to stumble. The jockey fell off and the horse kicked her. A small fragment of very grainy Pathe News shows her hat landing on the far side of the course and her lying prone, never to move again of her own volition. She died four days later in Epsom cottage hospital. At the time, her action was seen as an immature and hysterical gesture. It has never been universally approved of. It was a perplexing death. She was not an hysteric and she was not immature. She was 41, religious and a double graduate.

I did not win the 1983 general election campaign in the constituency of Berwick-upon-Tweed and in the days that followed I started to look up more about Emily. In those days, before archive material was as well protected as it is now, I held in my hand the return half of her ticket back from Epsom. Do we really remember such women enough? Emily's grave is still untended and abandoned in the north of England. Three weeks ago, I was asked to give the first Emily Wilding Davison memorial lecture in county hall, Morpeth and a move is being made to fundraise to protect her grave.

We women parliamentarians should take more responsibility for keeping the awareness of such courage alive and passing that word on to the next generation. I will not make any simplistic connections, but it was the next generation of young women who formed the largest group of people who did not vote at the last general election.

I pay tribute to the constitutionalist Mrs. Fawcett, but I also pay tribute to the Fawcett Society, which since her death in 1926 has continued to campaign for women's equality with men. I have expressed concern about the way the criminal justice system treated suffragettes all those years ago. The Fawcett Society has recently become concerned with the way our contemporary criminal justice system deals with women. It has established a year-long commission to look into questions of women and that system and find out whether, and if so how, the system is unfair to women. The commission has a distinguished band of 15 to 16 commissioners, including the experienced criminal High Court judge Mrs. Justice Hallett, Baroness Prashar, First Civil Service Commissioner, and Lord Dholakia, President of the Liberal Democrats and their spokesman on home affairs in the Lords.

I have been privileged to chair that year-long commission. We have only just started and we have come to no conclusions. Why was it even necessary to set up such a commission to look into whether and if so how our criminal justice system is unfair to women? The Fawcett Society has noticed a series of problems in recent years. The problems are not confined to domestic violence, although colleagues here have rightly raised that issue many times today. I shall give three short examples.

A few years ago, the Government intended to abolish the right to elect for trial by jury. That is the right for someone who is on trial for one of a broad range of middle-ranking offences to say, "I want a jury trial. I don't want to be tried by the magistrates court." The notion was to put discretion in the hands of the magistracy and the question was what criteria should be used.

A series of criteria relating to the gravity of the offence were obvious, but others started to be added. However grave or minor the offence, there could be a reason to allow trial by jury if a person were in public life and the conviction was likely to damage their public standing, or if a person had a job, and the conviction, however small, was likely to affect that job. One need only look at those two criteria to appreciate readily that, by all modern definitions, they were indirectly sexually discriminatory: far fewer women, proportionately, are in public life, and far fewer women, proportionately, are in jobs at any one time, as more women are in training, caring for older people and caring for children at any given time. If those criteria were therefore applied to allow the fairer trial of jury trial, because the conviction rate is higher in the magistrates court, it would be done on a sexually discriminatory basis.

For different reasons, that did not happen at all, but in a later legislative mood, in the Criminal Justice and Court Services Bill, a sort of "One strike and you're out," application to probation was proposed. Anyone who was on probation would be warned once, and if they broke their probation order again, they would automatically get three months imprisonment. Proportionately, far more women defendants are put on probation than men. Although men are the bulk of defendants, proportionately more women are seen as offending out of need. Women who shoplift, abuse cheque cards and steal are frequently seen sympathetically by magistrates in particular as not needing punishment but help and support. They are therefore put on probation proportionately far more often than men. For similar offences, men will be fined or will get some other sentence. While men who do not pay their fines would be subject to a whole range of penalties backing that up—perhaps realigning the repayments, a suspended sentence or whatever—women who broke their probation would have an automatic three-month prison sentence. Again, although no one saw it, that policy was, on a closer look, indirectly sexually discriminatory.

In the current Criminal Justice Bill, too, there is a right to elect trial by judge alone. On the face of it, that is an extra right for defendants. Let us consider the position in a rape case in which a female complainant brings to court an allegation that has highly-gendered aspects in relation to the admissibility of previous sexual history and general considerations. The House of Lords has readily accepted in a recent appeal that those are highly-gendered issues, and it is well known that rape complainants are reluctant to come to court and need support anyway. Now, a male defendant facing a rape charge will be able to elect for trial by judge alone: inevitably, by a male judge, as almost 95 per cent. of them are male. Consequently, a female complainant will come to court hoping to have highly-gendered issues heard, and she will have them heard by a man who was, as it were, chosen by the male defendant, and chosen from a body of men who are not known for high levels of gender awareness.

Judges in recent years—not old fuddy-duddy judges, but relatively young and highly intelligent ones—have none the less been guilty of making immensely sexist remarks in rape trials. For instance, in 2000, in the case of A at the Old Bailey, a judge dealing with an issue of previous sexual history remarked that he thought that previous sexual history should be admitted in the particular case, although he could not do it, because if it were not generally admitted, the jury in a rape trial would never know whether the woman was a whore or a nun. The matter went to the Court of Appeal to see if he had been right about not admitting previous sexual history, and the matter did not get any better. The Court of Appeal said that it was a matter of common sense that if a woman had had sex with a man before—this was an issue of previous sexual history with the defendant—it made it far more likely that she would have consented on the occasion in question. Any woman, any judge who had had some gender awareness training, or any woman judge, if there were any, would have told him that it might have made it infinitely less likely that she would have had sex consensually with the same man again. She might have moved on to a different man and have no interest in the accused any more. He might have been too keen on her and she might not have wanted to engage with him again. Any number of things might influence whether a woman who has had sex with a man once consents or does not again, but it is not common sense that the fact that it is the same man points in one direction only—that she is more likely to have consented.

So male defendants will pick their tribunal—one may think against the interests of women complainants—from a bunch of men, the leaders of whom have spoken out in recent times in the manner I have described. Of course, there are two views; judges can be trained in gender awareness, whereas old-fashioned attitudes in juries are perhaps harder to stamp out. But the real problem in all the cases was that no one had seen that there was any problem of gender at all.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson) mentioned provocation. The defence of provocation is currently used mostly in domestic violence murder cases in which men rely on their wives having said that they intend to leave or having confessed to committing adultery. They say, "A red mist descended, I lost my self-control, and I killed her." One has to ask oneself whether—although no doubt consequences follow if one disrupts a marriage in that way—the woman was simply doing what she was entitled to do. One has to ask whether in this day and age it is appropriate to give credit to a man for losing his temper and killing a woman and to reduce his conviction from murder to manslaughter.

More than 100 men a year kill their partners and about 14 women kill theirs. Women who kill their partners almost invariably do so because they have been the victims of domestic violence again and again and, in a situation in which it is about to befall them once more, they retaliate. Sometimes they react too strongly in what is truly self-defence. If it is proportionate, it is a complete defence and the woman is not guilty. If he is coming at her with fists and feet only and she, as is commonly the case, seizes a knife and stabs him to death, that is probably disproportionate. The fact is of course that she would never have reacted like that were it not for the history or the threat, yet disproportionate self-defence produces a conviction for murder, not manslaughter. There is therefore an imbalance in the way in which the law deals with murder, and it needs to be looked at. It is something that the Government have picked up very recently, but the issue is that such imbalances are not being seen.

I have given just samples, but in looking at a range of similar imbalances, the commission appreciated that what we might be spotting were scattered tips of a rather sexist series of criminal justice icebergs that needed a systematic and comprehensive examination to establish how far and how deep such sexism goes.

It is right to say that historically about 95 per cent. of all defendants have been men. Unfortunately, the percentage of women defendants has increased enormously quickly. The number of women in jail has increased by 143 per cent. since 1993, so a lot more women are coming into the system. So it is important to look at the imbalances. It is intended that the results of the commission should be published on international women's day next year. I hope that the Government will consider the recommendations with great care and, if there is a need, provide further tools for mainstreaming. This Government, more than any previous Government, are very apprised of the need to work hard towards gender equality and to understand the issues. However, in some areas, genderism is hard to detect. It can be even harder, once it has been detected, to breach it. We suspect that the male-dominated criminal justice system is one of those areas.

I want to describe some suffragette rough justice from 1910. In those days, the suffragettes had got the Government in such a state that most Members of the Cabinet, when away from home, went in disguise. If they did not go in disguise, wherever they went their cars would be attacked and their tyres slashed. Stones would be thrown. On one occasion, Emily Wilding Davison knew that Lloyd George was going to speak in Aberdeen. She went there and, with a horsewhip, lay in wait in the shadows of Aberdeen station for him to come back from his meeting to catch the train. He arrived in the middle of a group of other men, dressed up as a highland clergyman, wearing a dog-collar, deerstalker and tweed cape. She emerged from her sheltered spot, ran at Lloyd George and horsewhipped him. Of course, she was quickly seized and taken away.

It was not Lloyd George. It was a highland clergyman, wearing his ordinary clothes. More imprisonment, more force-feeding, more hunger strikes—ah well, nothing is straightforward. We must match—although perhaps moderate—Emily Wilding Davison's imagination in the way in which we continue to whip up support for women's issues.

4.36 pm

Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): It is a great pleasure, as it always is, to participate in a debate that is dominated by women. I want to start by congratulating my right hon. Friend the Minister for Women, who is a great role model for us—not just in her role as Minister for Women, to which she has brought a great deal of

[Joan Ruddock]

enthusiasm and energy, but by being the head of a substantial Government Department. As she said, only 18 women have found themselves in that position.

The hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May), who spoke for the Conservatives, is also a role model, for her party, although her role may not be as appreciated as that of the Minister. All the women here today have, undoubtedly, been important in our society by becoming MPs and contributing as they have done.

The international dimension to this debate has been striking and appropriate—it is, after all, international women's day. In the past year, I have spoken on international issues more frequently than on other issues. I will therefore touch on them only briefly today. My right hon. Friend on the Front Bench referred to the Minister in Afghanistan who is responsible for women's affairs, Habiba Sorabi. I too have spent quite some time with Habiba and her colleagues. I was in Kabul but a few months ago. I urge my right hon. Friend that she and her colleagues should fund directly some of the projects that the women's ministry in Afghanistan has identified as essential if there is to be income generation for the women of Afghanistan, and the reconstruction of the country.

I can confirm all that was said by the hon. Member for Romsey (Sandra Gidley) and my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Mrs. Cryer) about continuing injustices and the way in which women are constantly discriminated against and harassed. Outside the capital Kabul, there is no security for women or men, although women are especially affected—Afghan women and the many international aid workers who strive to serve them. In the past year, funds from the international community for the reconstruction of Afghanistan have been equivalent to but two thirds of the funds that this country alone has set aside for the war in Iraq. Much more needs to be done, particularly if we are to use Afghanistan's reconstruction as a model for the post-conflict situation in Iraq. My sympathies and sentiments on Iraq are very much like those of my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson), so I shall say no more about that.

I wish to speak about the wider equality agenda in this country, about the legal structures and about the way in which our laws are supervised by the existing equality commissions. The Government have a long list of achievements in extending equalities. I will not list them all, but they include the equalisation of the age of consent, the setting up of the Disability Rights Commission, the extension of the scope of the Race Relations Act 1976 to introduce a duty on public bodies to promote race equality, the extended protection against discrimination in employment on the ground of sexual orientation, religion, belief and age, on which consultation is currently taking place, the consultation on the future of the statutory equality commissions, and much more.

All these issues significantly affect women. It would be churlish to suggest that we want much more, but this is a case of where more is less. At present, the equality commissions are made up of the Equal Opportunities Commission that deals with women, the Commission for Racial Equality which covers race, and the Disability Rights Commission, which is rather new. In considering how we supervise the new equality provisions that will be introduced for faith and other issues, we should examine the strong case for having a single equality Act rather than building on the diverse provisions that exist today.

The Government have recognised that, in needing to comply with the European Union directive on sexuality, age and religion by 2006, they have to consider whether they should set up three new commissions that would act in parallel with the existing three commissions or whether they should create a new single equality body. The consultation undertaken by my hon. Friend the Minister for Social Exclusion and Deputy Minister for Women has resulted in many contributions, not least those from the Women's National Commission, the Equal Opportunities Commission and other bodies.

My initial position was one of concern at—indeed, probable opposition to—the idea of a single commission. Like many women and the partner organisations of the WNC, I believed that there was a real danger that a single equality body might result in the position of women not being recognised in the way that it is through the EOC. The EOC has done fantastic work over the years but, as my right hon. Friend the Minister for Women pointed out, huge gaps remain despite the fact that we have had equality laws for 30 years. The pay gap itself is testament to the fact that, even with the EOC, we have not been able to achieve all that we might. It is not as though we have got it and can therefore move on. We still have an enormous amount to do.

Women form a majority in this country. Minority groups face specific and different types of discrimination, but women suffer systemic discrimination arising from gendered roles, a gendered labour market and gendered wealth. A different approach is therefore needed to dealing with a majority and such conditions from one dealing with minority discriminations. I have always found it odd that the budget of the CRE is two and a half times that of the EOC.

There is concern that, in a single equality body, women might be marginalised and that there would be a hierarchy of disadvantage, to the detriment of women. That is of particular concern because the EOC recently became reinvigorated and more visible. The consultation undertaken by the WNC, a body charged with bringing women's views to the attention of the Government, has not been concluded, but I know from its discussions with women's groups that there is great concern among women's organisations that a single equality body may not be the way forward. However, the EOC is now on record as supporting a single equality body, and I have to remain open to persuasion; but as I said at the outset, only with a single equality Act can we properly underpin the work of a single equality body.

I know that my hon. Friend the Minister is not persuaded that a single equality Act is necessary, but if there is a logic in bringing together in a single body the existing work of the commissions and adding to it the new discriminations that have to be addressed, there must be a similar logic in bringing together the body of existing law and the new laws that have to be put in place. I stress that I do not argue simply for consolidation, however. At present, equal rights are stronger for some groups than for others. Devolution has created additional anomalies. The Scottish

Parliament and Executive have a power to promote equality. In Wales, as part of the Government of Wales Act 1998, equality is represented as an absolute duty. A single equality body already exists in Northern Ireland. While the Northern Ireland Assembly is suspended, UK Ministers are developing a single equality Bill for Northern Ireland.

Any planned legislation on religion, sexual orientation or age is only linked to employment. The protection against discrimination in goods and services will not be extended to those groups. To do so would require the Government to introduce primary legislation, but the plan is to create the new rights in regulation. That is unsatisfactory, and I urge my hon. Friend and her colleagues to consider what Lord Lester has proposed in the other place. In introducing his Equality Bill last Friday, he set out the consequences of not having primary legislation in the form of a single equality Act. Lord Lester said:

> "Without primary legislation, women will continue to face a heavier burden of proof in discrimination cases outside the employment field; a homosexual or a Muslim denied a service because of sexuality or religion will still be unable to obtain legal redress; and an elderly person, denied essential services by a health authority or local council on the ground of age"—

those people will mostly be women—

> "will be denied legal redress. Except in the field of race relations, there will be no positive duty on public authorities or large employers to make progress towards equality of opportunity."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 28 February 2003; Vol. 645, c. 527.]

I appreciate that my hon. Friend has been considering those matters for much longer than I have, and I am sure that she will get a consensus on developing a single equality body, but I will be surprised if that consensus does not also call for an underpinning of a single equality body with a single equality Act.

The Equal Opportunities Commission issued a press release in which it welcomed various aspects of Lord Lester's Equality Bill, including the fact that it is

> "a single bill bringing together all the equality legislation".

The EOC went on to welcome

> "the introduction of a public sector duty to promote equality; the introduction of protection against discrimination in the provision of goods, facilities and services across all the equality grounds; the establishment of a single equality body; the inclusion of pregnancy as a recognised ground on which discrimination is not permitted"

and

> "the inclusion of a duty to promote good community relations."

I wholeheartedly endorse the view of the EOC. Again, I ask my hon. Friend the Deputy Minister for Women to follow matters in the other place with care. We will need to adopt such a single equality Bill, and it would be appropriate for the Government to introduce it, rather than a private Member.

Between 1997 and 1998 my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Camberwell and Peckham, now the Solicitor-General, and I served in the Government as Ministers for Women. We put in place much of the machinery that has underpinned the equalities work of the Government. I take this opportunity to seek from my hon. Friend the assurance that whatever development there is in terms of a single equality body, the women and equality unit of Government will remain in place. It will undoubtedly need to be further funded in order to cope with an increased work load. I also seek her assurance that the Women's National Commission, which has gained vigour and a louder voice than ever under our Government, and which is so valued by women's organisations in this country, will have a certain future.

One of the proposals that we were unable to get accepted six years ago was the idea that there should be a Select Committee on gender. I hope that Ministers will now accept that a Select Committee on equalities is an idea whose time has come. I hope that Ministers will consider the proposal carefully and in doing so will study the excellent work undertaken by the Scottish Equal Opportunities Committee and the Equality of Opportunity Committee of the Welsh Assembly.

If a single equality body is to be put in place as a means of rightly providing joined-up thinking and operation for equalities right across the agenda, and if that body is to oversee real equality for all groups in this country for the first time, a single equality Act, in which existing legislation is levelled up and equalised and new provisions made, will be essential to future equality, particularly the equality of women in this country.

4.53 pm

Julie Morgan (Cardiff, North): I am pleased to speak in the debate, which has been interesting, enjoyable and stimulating. I am particularly pleased to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Joan Ruddock) and add my support to the views that she expressed about a single equality Act.

The debate is an opportunity to take stock of the present situation in the United Kingdom, in Wales and internationally. I shall start by considering briefly the position in Wales, where we have made much progress. International women's day is a useful opportunity to spell out the good things that have happened. In introducing the debate, my right hon. Friend the Minister for Women said that there had only ever been 18 women Cabinet members in the House. I am pleased to say that we have already had seven women Cabinet members in the Assembly Cabinet in Wales during the four short years of its life. At present, there is a majority of women in the Cabinet in Wales, which is probably unique in the world. Forty-two per cent. of Assembly Members are women. There are 16 Labour women Assembly Members, compared with 12 Labour Assembly men.

It is now common in Wales for women to take the lead on major policy issues, which is a huge change. The Assembly operates family-friendly hours, and I am pleased that here in Westminster we have taken a step forward on such hours—that is a huge improvement.

In Wales, the Assembly operates in an inclusive, consultative way, which is partly due to the country's small size—it is much smaller than England, for example—but also to the Government of Wales Act 1998, which gives it the duty of working closely with the voluntary sector, with which it has a compact and in which many women are involved. Women have been able to prosper in the atmosphere fostered by the Assembly. Nevertheless, there are still problems in Wales, including the pay gap between men and women. The introduction of the minimum wage has increased the wages of thousands of low-paid women in Wales.

[Julie Morgan]

Keir Hardie had three great aims—the introduction of the minimum wage; devolution; and reform of the House of Lords. I am pleased that we have been able to introduce the minimum wage and have got devolution. Unfortunately, we have so far failed on the House of Lords, but I hope that one day we will get a democratic upper House.

The introduction of the minimum wage has had a huge impact on women in Wales and reduced the pay gap there by 3 per cent.—the biggest ever reduction in one year. The Assembly's introduction of learning grants, amounting to up to £1,500 for less well-off students in higher and further education, was important. The availability of such grants for students in further education is significant for women, as many of them take access courses as mature students and need that money to help them manage. I hope that similar grants will be introduced in England, as proposed in a recent White Paper, because it is important that we give financial support to women so that they can have access to education later in life.

Money is now available for students for child-care, separate from a hardship fund, which is a big boost. For older women in Wales, there have been many developments, but I would single out the bus passes that entitle pensioners, disabled people and their carers to free bus travel anywhere in Wales, and across local authority boundaries. The scheme is unique, and many women have told me that there has been a huge improvement in their quality of life because they can now go and see people whom they have not been able to see for years. The scheme is of benefit to both men and women, but it has a tremendous effect on women's lives in Wales because they make up the majority of pensioners.

A mixture of measures from Westminster and the Assembly has resulted in a big improvement in women's lives in Wales. It is important to make a strong statement about that on international women's day, but we must also acknowledge that there is still a long way to go and that poverty is still a serious issue in Wales. My hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford mentioned the Assembly's duty to promote equality, which has been important in mainstreaming gender issues in its work. The Equal Opportunities Commission has done research in Wales demonstrating the significant impact of that duty. I strongly support my hon. Friend's plea for an equality Act and a duty on Westminster to promote equality. I hope that the Minister will give her views on that in her response.

Much progress has been made in acknowledging the seriousness of domestic abuse. I pay tribute to the women Ministers on the ministerial committee promoting that issue, and look forward to the Green Paper to be published in spring. I hope that one result of that consultation will be a proposal for anonymity for the victims of domestic violence—this has already been mentioned in the criminal justice White Paper—because that would represent a big step forward in encouraging women to get to grips with these difficult problems.

I have worked closely with the unions on this issue. I am working with Unison at the moment, and I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to Pat McCarthy, Unison's regional officer in Wales, who has already organised two conferences on domestic violence this year, and who is preparing to respond to the Green Paper when it is published and wants to lobby Ministers and take an active role. It is important that we should involve women from the unions and from the grass roots, as well as the victims of domestic abuse, to try to get their voice into this consultation paper. It is brilliant that we are going to have this Green Paper. It is the first ever of its kind, as was mentioned earlier, and it is also significant that a Labour Government are producing it.

In a Welsh context, I am also pleased to say that Jane Hutt, the Minister with responsibility for social services and health in the Welsh Assembly Government, will today announce the future of the women's safety unit in Cardiff. I chair the Cardiff domestic violence forum, so I have been very involved in setting up the unit. It is a unique project which supports women and children who are victims of domestic abuse. It consists of a small staff group, with people seconded from the police, Women's Aid, the probation service, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children and the Black Association of Women Step Out—BAWSO—and, in a very short time, it has had a significant impact on domestic abuse in Cardiff.

Independent research has shown that, during its time of operation—not much more than a year—the number of women reporting domestic violence has gone up, the number of repeat incidents has gone down, the number of women withdrawing from cases has gone down and the number of reports to social services expressing concern about children has gone up. There is, therefore, objective statistical evidence to show that we can alleviate the situation if we put a bit of investment into a multi-agency project that does not necessarily take women and their families and put them into refuges, but rather works with them so that they can stay in their homes by supporting them, going to court with them, working with the solicitors and the police and working in a tremendously supportive way. That is what has happened in Cardiff and it has made a significant difference.

I refer many women to the women's safety unit. Like many other Members, I have a lot of women coming to my surgeries who are frightened and do not know where to turn. It is a huge step for them to come to an MP's surgery. I often see women—I am sure we all do—who are weeping, who do not know what to do and who are in a desperate situation. Now, in Cardiff, all that I have to do is phone someone at the women's safety unit and tell them that there is a woman in a difficult situation. They will see the woman that day, go to her house, go to the police with her, work with her to contact the housing department, and go to the children's schools. The unit provides a total package of support, and I am so pleased that the future of the project is being confirmed today. Jane Hutt is announcing today that the funding will continue, with a mixture of funding from the Welsh Assembly and the Home Office. Such a project would never have been started without the total commitment of Ministers here to tackle this horrendous issue, which has remained behind closed doors for many years. I want to congratulate everyone involved on the fact that we now have the project up and running so effectively, that it has been evaluated objectively, and that this announcement is being made today. It is great that we can say this today.

I want to turn now to international issues. International women's day is a day on which we celebrate the achievements of women all over the world. The contributions that have been made about women's experiences and what women have seen in other countries have been humbling and have put what we are doing in this country into an international context. Such contributions make us realise not only how fortunate we are in many ways, but how much we have to learn from what women Members have seen in other countries.

It is a great privilege for us that as women parliamentarians, we can make links with women throughout the world. Last year, I visited Iran with a group of women parliamentarians, including the Liberal Democrat spokeswoman. I thought that I would mention the visit as my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Mrs. Cryer) also referred to problems in Iran. Human rights abuses in that country have been well documented. They especially affect women and there is no doubt that they continue. However, I wanted to put it on record that those on the visit were very cheered by the confidence and optimism of the women whom we met in Iran. We felt that they had a great deal of hope for the future. We were very impressed by the fact that 60 per cent. of university students were women and that there had been a huge increase in the number of voluntary bodies, which seemed to be springing up all over the place. Although we must use every opportunity that we can to condemn the human rights abuses that still take place in Iran, it is important that we keep up the dialogue and continue to engage with Iran and particularly with the women politicians whom we met.

Sandra Gidley: As the hon. Lady mentioned, I went to Iran on the same visit. Is she aware that since our visit, the women parliamentarians whom we met have taken a strong public stance against stoning? It is always useful for women parliamentarians to work together.

Julie Morgan: I thank the hon. Lady for that intervention. I noticed that a strong stand was taken very soon after we returned home. I hope that we showed those women our solidarity and our wish to work with them against the human rights abuses that occur in Iran and against stoning in particular.

Several hon. Members have mentioned Iraq and I should like to finish my speech with some brief comments about the situation there. It is very important that we express in this international women's day debate our solidarity with the women of Iraq. We are all aware of our hopes and aspirations as women in this country and we all know that, if there is a war in Iraq, many women and children will be killed and injured and many will be displaced and become refugees, as has been mentioned. Such women will flee to countries such as Iran, which already has the largest number of refugees of any country in the world. Indeed, it already has some 2 million refugees from Afghanistan.

We know that life is grim under sanctions and under Saddam Hussein and we are divided in our views about whether and in what circumstances Iraq should be attacked. It is right to acknowledge those divisions and accept that they exist in the House, but we all have the same end in mind—we all want peace for the people of Iraq and want the women in Iraq to be able to flourish, develop and have all the hopes for the future that we have. I cannot see how the humanitarian consequences of an attack allow it to be justified. I align myself with other hon. Members who have expressed such feelings today about an attack on Iraq.

My right hon. Friend the Minister for Women said that women were consistently more against war than men. All the opinion polls show that that is the case. One recent poll showed that 70 per cent. of women were opposed to the attack on Iraq. I suppose that that is not surprising. All the statistics still show that women are the main carers of children and old people, and the main carers in society. Women bring up children, watch their every step, see all that eagerness for the future and all that hope ahead, and know that bombs from the sky can destroy it all, so I understand completely why so many of them have such strong feelings against war.

Many more women should work as diplomats and in the aid field. Women need to be in positions where they can negotiate and go to the furthest ends for peace. I may be going along with stereotypes, but women tend to work more consensually in terms of looking for solutions and not giving up. They often have the hard grind of bringing up children in a family, having to compromise in all directions, and never being able to do everything that they want to do because they have to look after someone else. That leads to a different attitude and a different way of working.

When we listen to all the people who are talking about war, we do not hear many women's voices raised very loudly. I want to put on the record my solidarity with the women in Iraq and my hope that we can reach a peaceful solution.

5.11 pm

Peter Bottomley (Worthing, West): I think that all hon. Members agree that a peaceful solution would be desirable, but it is a question of how we get there. Allowing the present regime to continue in Iraq is not the right way, and I say in solidarity with the Prime Minister that I look forward to the day when all the refugees from Iraq can return there, including many women.

In El Salvador, I had the experience of meeting groups of women who had come back over the border when the then ruling regime stopped being quite so nasty. Fighting was still going on—indeed, it broke out around us—and it was the women who were carrying on the discussions.

Around the world, the first duty of people in politics is to try to avoid unnecessary war. There are very few examples of wars in which both sides are reasonably democratic. A second duty is to avoid unnecessary high-level persistent civil war. Similarly, there are relatively few examples of really bad high-level civil wars in countries that are reasonably democratic—by that, I mean those with Governments that stay in power with the consent of the people. We must then address other issues that matter, but not quite as much—because the biggest devastation comes from war—such as health, education and prosperity.

It is a matter of record that in the household I share half the MPs are men—namely, me—and the 100 per cent. that got into the Cabinet was not me. I am the founder member of the Denis Thatcher society, which comprises men who are married to women who are more important than we are.

[Peter Bottomley]

Unless we understand the causes of unfairness and have a greater sense of ambition about what we want to achieve, the lives of those for whom we care will not be as good as they should be. It has rightly been said that women bear an over-high proportion of caring responsibilities. They do the working, but they also do the caring—for the young, for the old, for the ill, for the bad and for the sad. Who visits you in prison? Who visits you in hospital? Who cares for you in the hospice? It is a great spread of responsibilities. Anyone who thinks that family policy is about saying that we have got it all right is all wrong. Families are there to be strong when things go wrong, whether by chance or because of people's bad behaviour.

What is to be done? Every week, 2,400 people, mostly young men, commit a serious criminal offence for which they could be sent to jail for six months or more. Most of those offences have victims. One third of our young men have a serious criminal conviction by the age of 30. The figures for women are dramatically lower. I commend the prison statistics on page 15 of CM 5743. It gives figures for the past 100 years.

In 1920, a total of 11,000 people were in jail, of which roughly 9,500 were male and 1,400 were female. In 1940, the figure and proportion were not very different. However, in 1960, the prison population had increased to 27,000, of which roughly 26,000 were male and 900 were female. In 1980, there were more than 40,000 male prisoners in a total prison population of 42,000. There is something deeply wrong in our country when the male-female imbalance in offending is so great. Women should not have to solve that. It is a continuing social disaster and, as with all such disasters, one must look to the people who have the power. They tend to be white, middle-class men in work.

We all know about the National Children's Bureau born-to-fail studies. The problems will not be solved if we ask the victims to solve them or tell the mothers who do most of the caring that it is up to them to make things better. The rest of us must share the responsibility.

Some may laugh at international women's day and others may perceive it as a serious way in which to show international solidarity. However, I believe that one of the day's purposes is to ask men what they are doing to help tackle problems of which women are too often the victims.

Let us consider another example. Five thousand people who were smoking last week will never smoke again: 2,000 have died—not all prematurely—and 3,000 have given up. Tobacconists sell roughly the same amount of cigarettes every week. That means that 5,000 people took up smoking last week. Nearly all are teenagers and a growing proportion is female.

We should not tell young people that they are too young to smoke because we thereby imply that they are doing an adult thing. We should tell 15 or 17-year-olds who smoke, "It's a childish thing to do. Bad luck, you're the one in three who does it. It's a habit that costs £30 a week after tax." It is disastrous that smoking is so class based. It may remain true that the people most likely to smoke are lone mothers on income support. That is the worst group of people to smoke because smoking uses up their resources, and their health and that of their children is worst affected.

My third example is sex. Every week in this country, 6,000 people contribute to a conception that ends in a formal termination. There are 170,000 or more abortions a year in this country. It takes two to tango. Let us allow that part of the figure relates to people who come here from other countries. That means that 3,000 home-grown conceptions end in termination. Six thousand people—not all of them hyperactive teenagers, but people in their 20s, 30s and 40s—engage in sexual activity that ends in their saying, "Cripes! What now?" Why we cannot get our figures down to those of the Dutch is beyond me.

Men and women must be able to say that if we are sufficiently grown up to be closer to someone than simply sharing a toothbrush with them, we should be prepared to ask, "What about conception and fertility choice?" We should stop waffling on about family planning or birth control. After a good party, people are not thinking about planning a family or controlling birth when they get around to having it off. *[Interruption]*. We must be more explicit at all ages. We must get away from the embarrassment that stops people considering such matters. We should let our children and grandchildren learn from our mistakes, so that they do not do as we did but as they can, and have more choice in their lives.

Sandra Gidley: The Health Select Committee is examining teenage pregnancy and sexual health. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that relationship education should start in primary school, to provide a good basis on which to build?

Peter Bottomley: Such education should probably start in the home. The chief rabbi said recently that many people first experience unconditional love given by adults around them too late in life; and that adults need to love young people enough to say "no" at times. I do not say that I have been a particularly good parent. I have spent too much time at weekend family policy conferences, talking about why parents should be at home with their children.

It is clear from surveys in my constituency that young people need care, control, support and love. I may be better at caring, others at controlling. It is a mixture of the two that matters. I refer to social assets and cultural strengthening—the American sociologist the late Robert Merton used the term social capital. Individuals who do not come from extended families need communities that will incorporate the child of a lone caring parent who comes to or moves around this country, just as they would the child from a large family with many cousins who regularly get together. There is a strength in intermediate groups—an expression used by Archbishop William Temple.

I am sorry that I was not present for the start of the debate. I was involved in a good cause elsewhere. It has covered what has been called everything from the womb to the tomb.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): My hon. Friend means, from the womb to the afterlife.

Peter Bottomley: I must be modest in my aspirations.

I do not want to extend my contribution but will comment on the possible merger of equal opportunities bodies. If that must happen, I hope that the result is called something like the "Fairness Commission". Equality comes from fairness and equality. Equality by itself is just a word that does not add up to treating people fairly. When will the colour of a person's skin mean the same as the colour of their eyes or hair—something that is noticed but which says no more about them? When will the stage be reached when being a woman or man—although there may be many overlapping roles and some differences—does not dictate one's role in life, outside some essential differences in caring? When will someone who has physical or mental handicaps find that their abilities matter more than their disabilities? When will the stage be reached when we no longer generalise and say that a man who thinks that he is half-qualified for a job imagines that he is over-qualified, whereas a woman who thinks that she is half-qualified believes that she is disqualified?

Too often we tell people that they must push themselves forward. Men and women do so but in general, the man wins the opportunity, opens the door and goes through while others wonder what is on the other side. We can make progress partly by example, partly by exhortation, partly by experience and partly by education. The progress that we make in this country is nothing compared with the progress needed in places such as Iraq, Zimbabwe and the Great Lakes region. We have achieved much, but there is still so much more to do, to make people's lives better.

5.23 pm

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): I am answering this debate as a representative of the majority population of the world—as I learnt from the excellent Department of Trade and Industry brochure, "Does sex make a difference?", published to mark international women's day. It clearly does. I was interested to discover that there are fewer women than men in the world. For every 100 men, there are 98.6 women.

I may not look like a shadow. I may not even look like a deputy shadow. But I am the deputy shadow Minister for Women. My boss—my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mrs Spelman)—is elsewhere, pursuing her responsibilities in international development.

I was extremely interested by what the Minister for Women said. What struck a particular chord with me was her mention, in the section of her speech on women at war, of the important contribution from Australia, New Zealand, Singapore and the Pacific countries generally during the second world war—indeed, from wherever women were contributing to the war effort, not just in Britain. As an admirer of Australia who has many family members there, I too feel that we should recognise the contribution made by the countries I have mentioned, and, of course, the huge contribution made by those back at home—the women.

I was delighted when the Minister spoke of the millennium goals at Doha. She referred to the importance of access to markets and to medicines, and the need for reform of the common agricultural policy. In fact I found it hard to disagree with much of what she said, which was deeply worrying. She did, however, prompt me to point out that a huge effort is being made to help people who do not work here to understand Parliament, and also to promote understanding of the scientific community. Some of that is due to Government initiatives, but much of it is not. I commend the Royal Society for its pairing scheme. I was lucky enough to be paired with Dr. Lisa McNeill of the Southampton Oceanography centre. I learnt a great deal about the world of science and about Dr. McNeill's specialist subject, marine geology. I hope that she began to understand the political process here.

The hon. Member for Bristol, West (Valerie Davey) pointed out that there was no substitute for Members of Parliament actually going to see how the rest of the world lives. The more we live in an ivory tower here, the more we will deserve to be ignored. We should not blush when we go and see what is happening elsewhere. Indeed, today's debate has been characterised by contributions from those who have travelled, and gained enormous insight and experience as a result.

The hon. Member for Romsey (Sandra Gidley) told us a good deal about her own experience. I know that the Deputy Minister for Women will have a lot to say about that speech, because much of it was directed at her.

The hon. Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Chapman) made a brave speech about transsexuals. He is, of course, entirely right. One of the guiding lights that led to my interest in politics was the importance of treating minorities properly in a democracy. Was it Ben Whitaker, who once represented Hampstead, who founded the Minority Rights Group in the 1960s? I subscribed to it during my years as a teacher, and learnt a huge amount. That undoubtedly coloured my appreciation of the importance of protecting minority rights in a democracy—including the rights of those who wish to hunt foxes.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Miss Kirkbride) made an important speech about the role of women in Parliament, and the difficulty women experience in entering the House, whatever their party. She challenged us to think about how members of all parties, but particularly mine, can encourage more women to go into politics. She touched on positive discrimination. I thought that I was the last person in the world who would allow those words to pass my lips, but I see no alternative to some form of that if the barriers are to be breached. Fortunately, however, that is a problem not for me, but for my hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May). Of course, we must also learn to respect the autonomy of associations.

Ms Dari Taylor: The hon. Gentleman says we must now rely on the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May). I can tell him, as a long-term member of the Boilermakers Union—which sees me, most definitely, as an honorary boilermaker—that I could never have achieved equality or equal treatment without the men in my union. I suggest to the hon. Gentleman that he has a very big role to play.

Mr. Key: My role may be big, but the hon. Lady's charm is deceitful. I suspect that charm as well as ability has got her where she is today.

We learned much from the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Estelle Morris) when she courageously decided that she had had enough. I was

[Mr. Key]

very interested in one of her comments. The House may remember that she called for politics to be conducted differently. She said:

> "I was not prepared to play the game . . . I could have played it like a man to further my career but in the end I said sod it."

We should all remember that in future. The hon. Member for Wallasey (Angela Eagle) also has things to teach us. She said:

> "Women are not stupid and they can see what sort of game politics is and it is not one at the moment that numbers of them identify with."

When Mo Mowlam left the Government and Parliament, she said of the comments that were made about her:

> "Some of it was very cruel . . . There's a boys' club in politics—I think women get a tougher time. But it's not just sexism, it's about power politics, it's about who they want where."

The Fawcett Society, which campaigns for the rights of women, was referred to earlier and has produced a report on women in politics. Its briefing paper concluded:

> "The style is confrontational with an emphasis on scoring points . . . Many women are put off politics altogether by the way they see politicians behave."

No one could take exception to our behaviour this afternoon. The debate has been very constructive and interesting.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove contrasted the problems in this country with those in Kenya and described how women there are treated like cattle and beaten by their husbands. A similar situation existed in this country not so long ago. I am sure that many people know that the origin of the everyday phrase "a rule of thumb" is that a man could not use a stick to beat his wife that was thicker than his thumb. The term is not that old.

The hon. Member for Keighley (Mrs. Cryer) has a deep knowledge of the people whom she represents. When I hear her speak, perhaps on "Today" after some especially appalling tension or incident in her constituency, I often think that she talks a lot of common sense. That is good for politicians. We did not agree on signing up to her early-day motion on gender equality in the Church of England, but I was really making the point that the House should not initiate change in the Church of England. Change must come if the Church wills it—we will not get on to disestablishment for the time being. [HON. MEMBERS: "Go on."] Do not tempt me!

The hon. Member for Guildford (Sue Doughty) spoke of her personal experience in Eritrea. She talked about water, VSO, solar energy and the British Council. I am grateful to her for sharing her experiences.

The hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson) was, as ever, an example to us all. She spoke with no notes and much passion. What a refreshing change that is in this Chamber. We are all guilty of not living up to her standards. She seeks always to change hearts and minds; I wish I could change hers on Iraq.

The hon. and learned Member for Redcar (Vera Baird) spoke with huge authority. We have come to respect what she says. She talked of gender awareness and spoke about Mrs. Fawcett. The hon. Lady is no longer present, but when she reads the report of the debate, she may be interested to learn that my first act as a Minister in the newly created Department of National Heritage in 1992 was to list the Fawcett hall, which is only 10 minutes from this building. That was the first occasion on which the criterion of historical importance was used to list a public building—my little footnote to her history.

Ms Hewitt: Well done.

Mr. Key: The hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Joan Ruddock) spoke with passion about the single equality Act that she envisages. We await the Minister's response to that.

The hon. Member for Cardiff, North (Julie Morgan) spoke about the Welsh experience and I am glad that we had the benefit of her contribution. It is interesting that no Members of Parliament who represent Scottish constituencies are in the Chamber. Scottish women have thus been wholly unrepresented in our debate, which is a great pity. The hon. Lady also talked about experience overseas and the need to understand what makes people tick all over the world.

Many of us have travelled to difficult parts of the world. I have certainly done so. I visited a refugee camp in Mozambique in the pre-Mandela era, and I have also seen repression in Nicaragua. The thing that continues to distress me most about Africa is the situation in Zimbabwe. I last visited Zimbabwe when it was still a prosperous, happy place, and I feel for the women of all races in that sad land.

My hon. Friend the Member for Worthing, West (Peter Bottomley) made a number of important points, but I should like to back up what he said in response to an intervention: sex education starts in the home, but too often—this is a purely personal view—homes fail children when it comes to looking after the sexual maturity of girls in particular. That is why the biggest single health problem in my constituency is chlamydia, which spreads like wildfire and is to do with cl[illegible]ng, spiked drinks and unconscious gang rapes and [illegible]ed for the morning-after pill. It is not fair to blame the child for that; the parents have a lot of responsibility too. We all have a responsibility in setting a good example to our children, and sex education has a role to play from an early age.

I shall move on quickly. Women's day is important and relevant today. That was brought home to me by a member of my staff who has been covering for my secretary, who is on maternity leave. She has been seeking a new job. She told me only yesterday that she had applied for one or two jobs and that she had been contacted by prospective employers and asked whether she is married or single, what is her age, whether she has children and, if so, what are their ages. She said, "I don't suppose a man would be asked those questions, would they?" I pointed out to her that that was against the law, but most women do not seem to know that. I would not want to work for anyone who asked such questions, and we need to send out that message.

There are all sorts of other problems in the wide range of state provision for women and men in this country. There are all sorts of voluntary organisations, but they do not always succeed in getting long-term funding. That was brought home to me only a couple of weeks ago by a letter from the centre manager of the Salisbury district well woman centre. I simply make the point that, for £75,000 a year, it provides a magnificent service and, as the centre puts it,

> "enables and empowers women to help themselves and their families by providing information, support and practical advice."

It says that, in an area such as south Wiltshire, which is very prosperous,

> "it is the wealth and rural composition of Wiltshire that further isolates those socially excluded"—

the position is made worse for those people—

> "through disadvantage and helps keep pockets of rural poverty hidden."

That is just the sort of small hole that can be plugged by such organisations, and I wish it well as we try to find funding.

Of course not all women take a similar point of view. A remarkable national organisation, called Full Time Mothers, which is based in London, has a member in my constituency. Under the title, "Equal not identical", the leader article in its spring newsletter says:

> "You read it here first: men and women are not the same! It seems ridiculous that it should be un-p.c. to say so. FTM has long adopted the role of challenging the 'Emperor's new clothes' mentality of a society that has confused 'equality' with an insistence that men and women should be interchangeable. Whilst the Government tries to organise the tax system so as to 'encourage' mothers to go out to work, it is also attempting to persuade more men into the burgeoning childcare industry which is the inevitable consequence. Fathers are to become the new mothers—and vice versa. Help!"

That point of view needs to be listened to, on behalf of Full Time Mothers.

I wish to touch on a couple of issues that are very important at the moment, the first of which is women in the armed forces. I congratulate all three services on the way in which they have adapted to the 21st century, particularly in the past decade or so. We have seen a truly remarkable improvement in the way in which women have had increasing access to more parts of all three services.

I always took the view that it was important that the decision on whether women should operate in the front line should be a military judgment. It is not only a question of physiological or psychological arguments; it is about the fighting spirit and what happens when one is on the front line and things go wrong. The military are the best people to make that judgment and the Government were right to conclude that it must be a judgment for them. The military concluded that women should not be in the front line for the time being.

Women have an extraordinary record of success in the armed forces. They have a long way to go, but they have made huge progress nevertheless and have my support in continuing with that. It is significant that a large number of women are serving in the forces and have been deployed to the Gulf region. They will find irreplaceable roles there.

We should also remember the families that follow the flag—the people who are left behind at times of great anxiety such as these. Only yesterday, because my constituency is very military, I was talking to the Army Families Federation about the present situation, and the assistance that it can give to forces families. The same is true of the organisation for Navy wives. The Royal Air Force has the Airwaves communication channel, and the Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association also has a lot of work to do. They are all in our minds at the moment. We should never forget that behind a man or a woman in the forces is a spouse or partner on whom they depend. The relationship is completely interdependent.

Will the Minister ensure that her colleagues in the Ministry of Defence in their planning at interdepartmental level for a response to the present humanitarian crisis in Iraq, but more particularly if there is conflict afterwards, take most careful note of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325? That resolution expresses

> "concern that civilians, particularly women and children, account for the vast majority of those adversely affected by armed conflict".

I draw the Minister's attention to paragraphs 4, 5, 11 and 12 of that resolution. Paragraph 4 urges the Secretary-General

> "to seek to expand the role and contribution of women in United Nations field-based operations, and especially among military observers, civilian police, human rights and humanitarian personnel".

Paragraph 5 urges a "gender component", to use the jargon, in peacekeeping operations. Women should be properly considered. Paragraph 11 emphasises the importance of putting

> "an end to impunity and to prosecute those responsible for genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes including those relating to sexual . . . violence against women and girls".

We should ensure that those crimes are excluded from amnesty provisions. Paragraph 12 calls on all parties to armed conflict to include in the design of refugee camps and settlements appropriate care for women.

This has been a remarkable debate. We have heard a wide range of views and we have all made a positive contribution. I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say in reply. There is a continuing need for an international women's day to remind us all of our duty to the other half of the population in a world that is still dominated by men.

5.43 pm

The Minister for Social Exclusion and Deputy Minister for Women (Mrs. Barbara Roche): I greatly appreciated the tone and content of the speech of the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key). He has summed up our debate admirably and I will attempt to follow in his footsteps.

This has been an extremely good debate—a very good day. From the beginning, I was struck by the fact that the debate lived up to its name and was truly international, with speeches from the hon. Member for Guildford (Sue Doughty) about Eritrea and from the hon. Member for Bromsgrove (Miss Kirkbride) about Kenya.

If I had to single out a speech—it is always invidious to do so—that captured the mood of the House and the international flavour of today, it would be the wonderful speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, West (Valerie Davey) about Tanzania. Although I have visited that part of Africa, I have not had the privilege of going to Tanzania. I would certainly like to go there and her speech brought it alive. It was a truly remarkable speech.

[Mrs. Barbara Roche]

Today gives us an opportunity to remember a time when women across the world were still demanding the right to vote and the right to hold public office. In some parts of the world, of course, that fight continues. We have the opportunity today to take stock of where we are, to look forward, and to remember from where the fight came. My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Redcar (Vera Baird) spoke about the contribution of Emily Wilding Davison. While she was speaking, I remembered that when I started to read the history of the period, what shocked me most of all was the cat and mouse Act to which she referred, perhaps one of the most iniquitous pieces of legislation ever passed by this House.

On a slightly happier note—unfortunately, my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Redcar cannot be with us now, for which she apologised in advance, as she had an engagement—we should also remember the special connection between Emily Wilding Davison and this place. On the night of the 1911 census, Emily Wilding Davison, who had come to visit the House during the day, stayed in a broom cupboard attached to the wonderful crypt here. She stayed the whole night—I have looked at that broom cupboard, and it takes some courage to stay in it, even today—so that, the next morning, in the census, she could say that her address was the House of Commons. There is a wonderful plaque commemorating her. I always take visitors to see it, and I urge other hon. Members to do so.

We have come a long way since then, but I recognise that we still have a long way to go. My hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson) put that very well: young women think that it has all been achieved, and it is true that enormous strides have been made, but we must never underestimate the size of the task. Today, most women's work is still underpaid and taken for granted. Women generate more than half of all economic activity in developing countries, but only about a third of their work is currently measured and acknowledged in national accounts.

We also know that there is still a struggle in the UK. Here, women make up nearly half the work force—double the numbers of 25 years ago—and projections still show that, in 10 years' time, there will be 2 million more jobs in the economy, 80 per cent. of which will be filled by women. Of course, the pay gap, although it is much reduced—it was 37 per cent. in 1970—still stands stubbornly at 19 per cent. In every women's debate, when we talk about equal pay and the gender pay gap, we should remember, particularly this year, the enormous contribution of Barbara Castle, who was such an inspirational figure to all of us, and, I would suggest, to women on both sides of the House.

The causes of the pay gap are many: occupational, segregation, the time that women take out to look after children, and even travel patterns. It is not an issue that the Government can tackle alone, and we need to work in partnership with employers, trade unions and other organisations to do it. Last year, we launched the Castle awards to give recognition to employers who are working to address equal pay. We are trying, as a Government, to put our own house in order. We told Departments and agencies to conduct an equal pay audit and prepare action plans to close the gaps. I know that many in the private sector are doing the same. In April, my right hon. Friend the Minister for Women will introduce an equal pay questionnaire to help applicants get the information that they need before they decide whether to take a claim to a tribunal. We are also looking at ourselves as an employer and trying to increase the number of women in the senior civil service. As a result, women now occupy 25 per cent. of the senior posts, compared to 17 per cent. five years ago. We are well on the way to our target of 35 per cent. by 2005. We have also set up schemes in which senior women civil servants mentor more junior women in post. That is important.

The hon. Member for Romsey (Sandra Gidley) mentioned mainstreaming, which is an important issue. For the very first time, we have agreed gender targets as part of the annual public service agreements that Departments reach with the Treasury.

The extremely important issue of child care was also mentioned by the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May). It is right to say that if we want to create equality in the workplace, we must look at some of the barriers that stand in the way of women returning to work. We have a Government strategy to expand child care, especially in the most disadvantaged areas. There is a tremendous disparity in the provision of child care in the prosperous and the most deprived areas. My hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate was right to talk about the expense of child care in London. Our aim is to create places to accommodate 1.6 million children by 2004, and so far more than 1 million children have benefited. Of course, I do not underestimate the size of the task. The hon. Member for Bromsgrove mentioned Ofsted inspections and registration. We will look at inspection arrangements and, where possible, streamline procedures so that we can make them the best that we possibly can.

We also need to make flexible working more possible—as politicians, we are the worst exponents of it. That point was raised by the hon. Member for Worthing, West (Peter Bottomley). We need to think about the balance between our work and our domestic and family life. We are good at preaching about it as politicians, but not so good at doing something about it. We have a terrible culture in this country of presenteeism. People think that we are not doing our job properly if we are not working all the hours of the day and night. In some other European Union countries people think that if their colleagues are at work for all those hours, they must not be very good at their job. But if we are not there with the jacket behind the chair, people think that we are no good. Flexible working is important and therefore we have legislated so that from April this year employers will have to consider seriously requests to work flexibly from employees—fathers as well as mothers—with children under six or disabled children under 18. That is an achievement that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has championed.

So we have to look at the way in which we balance work with our family life. This is not just an agenda for women; it is an agenda for men. Many men in our society want to be active parents and to play a part in their children's lives. It is an agenda that will be increasingly popular.

The importance of women in political life was also raised by the hon. Member for Bromsgrove and my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Mrs. Cryer). We have made progress in the House, but there is still a great deal to do. There are currently 118 women Members of Parliament—a slight drop from 1997, when there were 120. I am pleased that hon. Members today recognise the Government's steps to legislate in this direction. I look forward to seeing what other political parties will do.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Julie Morgan) mentioned the achievements of the National Assembly for Wales. She was right: it is remarkable what has been achieved and it is a tribute to devolution. The emphasis on working hours and family-friendly policies is something that we in this place could try to emulate.

The hon. Member for Romsey mentioned women in public life. We have driven that campaign forward, and we are already seeing the fruits of that. I know of some women who have come forward for public appointment. The hon. Lady asked what follow-up work would be done. Research work is being done by officials in the women and equality unit, and practical work is being done in partnership with the Women's National Commission. I hope that the hon. Lady will applaud that sustained effort.

In today's debate, there has been a great deal of discussion of domestic violence. The issue was raised in speeches and interventions by my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Rob Marris), the hon. Member for Maidenhead, my hon. Friends the Members for Wirral, South (Mr. Chapman), for Stockton, South (Ms Taylor), for Keighley, for Cardiff, North and the hon. Member for Bromsgrove.

Domestic violence is a major blot on our society. The figures are shocking. Each time one looks at them, they are striking. Every three days, a woman is killed as a result of domestic violence. Violence against women accounts for nearly a quarter of all violent crime in this country. If there were statistics showing that men were dying in such numbers, there would be a national outcry and it would be on the front pages. It would not be seen as a men's issue; it would be seen as a national outrage—which is what the present situation is.

Sandra Gidley: It has recently come to my attention that statistics for domestic violence are not collected separately by police forces. Will the hon. Lady do all that she can to ensure that we can have a more accurate picture from police force to police force?

Mrs. Roche: Some thought is being given to that issue. More than we do at present, we have to disaggregate the figures for grievous bodily harm or actual bodily harm, for example.

A great deal of work is being done. I have recently announced help to set up a national refuge helpline, and extra money is going into refuges. We are also getting people to speak out against domestic violence. My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North spoke about the good work that is being done with trade unions. It was important that the Prime Minister launched the initiative on refuges, and that Digby Jones of the CBI and John Monks of the TUC have spoken out on the importance of dealing with domestic violence. We need prominent men to talk about the horror of domestic violence. That has to happen more and more.

I welcome the support that there has been for further proposals that the Government may introduce. My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Redcar spoke about women and the criminal justice system; and the hon. Member for Worthing, West spoke about gender in the criminal justice system. The hon. Lady spoke about rape and we have published a joint report by Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary and the Crown Prosecution Service. There are real concerns about falling conviction rates and high attrition rates.

Excellent points were made about the important and serious issue of female genital mutilation; and my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, South made an important speech about transsexuals.

It is difficult to do justice to all the contributions that have been made this afternoon. This is one of the best debates that we have had on international women's day. I congratulate everybody and look forward to next year's debate, hoping that we have the same incredibly high standard.

It being Six o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Gurkha Regiment

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Ainger.]*

6 pm

Miss Ann Widdecombe (Maidstone and The Weald): First, may I thank Mr. Speaker for selecting this debate for the Adjournment?

I wish to set the context in which I am raising the subject of conditions of service for personnel in the Gurkha Regiment. Mr. Justice Sullivan published a ruling on 21 February in which he addressed many issues, most of which I shall not raise in my speech. However, he said that the Ministry of Defence should review certain aspects of the conditions of service for personnel. In fact, I had applied unsuccessfully for this Adjournment debate for some weeks before Mr. Justice Sullivan's ruling. My concerns do not arise directly from that case or from the recent failed action on behalf of the Gurkhas.

My concerns arise from a conversation that I had not with Gurkhas but with British officers when I visited 36 Engineer Regiment, which is in my constituency and has a substantial Gurkha attachment. I went there on my annual visit after the Remembrance day service to have one of its splendid Gurkha curry lunches. While I was there, I was appalled to be told of some of the conditions that apply to Gurkhas. That determined me to try to raise the issue in the House.

The Minister may be relieved to learn that I do not intend to rehearse yet again the issue of Gurkha pensions. I want to consider two other aspects of their conditions of service. The Gurkhas are much respected, and I know that from my experience of the regiment in Maidstone. I know that there is huge public affection for them. Each time they parade on a ceremonial occasion in Maidstone, they are warmly received. The public would be appalled if they knew about some of the conditions that we inflict on the Gurkhas.

I turn first to the conditions that govern the accompaniment of married Gurkhas by their families. Gurkhas below the rank of colour sergeant—that is, 90 per cent. of them—are not allowed to have their families with them for all but three out of 15 years service. That provision does not go back to the mists of time and it has not accidentally been left there. In July 1997, a review resulted in the introduction of "married accompanied service" for Gurkhas serving in the United Kingdom, which stated that a quarter of married Gurkhas could be accompanied by their wives and families at any given time.

In reality, not even a quarter benefit from that privilege. Colour sergeants and those in the ranks above—I have already said that they account for 10 per cent. of Gurkhas—may have their wives and families with them permanently. Therefore the quarter has to be distributed among them, as well as among the rest. Only 15 per cent. of serving Gurkhas who are not above the rank of colour sergeant have their families with them at any given time. So for 12 years of their service, they are not allowed to have their families with them.

The Minister will doubtless point out that Gurkhas have five months' long leave every three years. If my arithmetic is correct, that means that they get about 20 months' long leave during their period of service. So there is familial separation, enforced by the rules, of more than 10 years. It ill behoves the House to let that continue when MPs have just made such a song and dance about having half-term leave so that they can be with their families; yet we expect people who are serving our country to put up with more than 10 years' separation from their families. Furthermore, that precious five months' long leave is often shortened to two months because of the exigencies of the service. In addition, during those five months when the Gurkhas are in Nepal, they are paid less because they do not get the Gurkha universal addition.

So strictly is that unforgivable rule applied that surplus married accommodation is left empty rather than increasing the number of Gurkhas who might have their wives with them at any given time. Even when Gurkha children are born in this country and are therefore British, their parents cannot apply to stay in the UK after retirement. On proof that the parents are settled in Nepal, one parent can accompany the child to the UK, but only until it is 12, when either both go back or the child is left here alone.

All that is against a background of a proud history of service to Britain on the part of the Gurkhas. There are 26 Victoria Crosses in the Gurkha regiment, 13 of them won by Gurkhas. They have fought in almost every conflict since world war two. They were in the Falklands, Iraq, East Timor and Sierra Leone. At this very moment, as we sit here surveying what is a disgraceful state of affairs, they are in Kuwait, waiting to shed blood in the fight against one of the nastiest tyrants in history. How do we show our gratitude? With a P45 and a one-way ticket to Nepal.

After 15 years of serving this country Gurkhas cannot stay here even if they have British children. But how many Gurkhas are we talking about? Would they flood the immigration system? Would it cause chaos if we let them stay? No. In any given year, between 200 and 250 Gurkhas retire after 15 years' service. They are well trained, well disciplined and dutiful. They are exactly the sort of people we would usually welcome. Some 110,000 asylum seekers came to this country last year. Many of them will be allowed to stay by default because they will not be removed even though their applications are refused. Yet we sternly resist the claims of 200 to 250 people who have rendered sterling service to this country.

If anyone else had been in this country for 15 years, we would grant them naturalisation, but it is rare for a Gurkha to achieve that. So they are sent back to Nepal when most of them are still in their 30s. They have the rest of their adult life before them, but there is not exactly a glut of jobs in undeveloped rural Nepal. Any member of NATO armed forces can lawfully enter the UK upon discharge and can ask to stay here. If a Turkish infantryman can do that, why deny it to the Gurkhas? There is a perception that Gurkha soldiers and pensioners in Nepal are targeted by Maoist terrorists, so some of them will try to return here as asylum seekers. Why do we put them through that when we could simply recognise what they have done for us and grant them leave to stay here on retirement?

The Minister knows that I am not one of those who favours the extravagant language of institutional racism and all the rest of it, and I do not for one moment believe that the intention behind the provisions is racist, but their effect is undeniable: one group are discriminated against and treated in a way that those serving alongside them are not.

If the matter was reviewed as late as 1997, I am baffled as to how we could allow such a state of affairs to continue. I am aware that Mr. Justice Sullivan has asked that the MOD re-examine the rule for married accommodation. What surprises me is that, knowing that these issues were before the courts, the MOD had not prepared a response in case of just such a ruling. When we may shortly see on our screens Gurkhas in action—on behalf of us, not on behalf of themselves—I should like to think that we might then consider whether we should act immediately to solve the problem.

There is one phrase that Gurkhas probably learn fairly early. It is a phrase much used by the British and much used in the Army: "fair play". I am not asking for extra privileges for the Gurkhas. I am not asking for them to have what others in a similar position do not have. I am asking for them to have basic justice—in other words, fair play.

6.11 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) on securing this debate on an important subject. I am, of course, aware of and wholeheartedly endorse the high esteem in which Gurkhas are held on both sides of the House. I am also aware of the concern frequently expressed by the media and general public about their terms and conditions of service.

Interest is particularly high at present because of recent judicial review proceedings in which seven former Gurkha soldiers made a number of very serious allegations in relation to their employment in the Brigade of Gurkhas. Those ranged from complaints about dress codes to demands for improved pay and pensions. There was also a general accusation about a so-called

> "culture of institutional discrimination in the Army in which Gurkhas as a group are systematically given lesser conditions and benefits than other members of the British Army."

In view of the widespread and often inaccurate reporting of the case, I welcome the opportunity to deal with the issues that it raises. Before doing so, I should make it clear that I very much welcome Mr. Justice Sullivan's ruling. I should point out, as he did, that of the 12 original complaints, eight were dropped by the claimants and therefore not pursued in the High Court. All the remaining complaints, which related to Gurkha pay, pension, married accompanied service and education arrangements, were subsequently dismissed. The ruling therefore tends to vindicate our view that, taken as a whole, Gurkha terms and conditions of service are reasonable and fair. I hope it also reassures the House and general public that there is certainly not a culture of institutional discrimination in the Army against Gurkhas, and that any such accusation is wholly without foundation.

Before I explain the thinking behind current Gurkha terms and conditions of service in more detail, perhaps I should take a few moments to explain why successive Governments have taken the view that Gurkhas are different, and why it is necessary for their terms and conditions to reflect that. Gurkhas have volunteered for British military service since 1815. Their numbers grew throughout the 19th century and large numbers fought with distinction, as the right hon. Lady pointed out, in the old Indian army in both world wars. Throughout this period, Gurkhas established a reputation as loyal, formidable soldiers—a reputation that they rightly enjoy to this day.

Many right hon. and hon. Members will be aware that Gurkhas are able to serve in the British Army today only because in 1947, at the time of Indian independence, an agreement was reached with the Governments of India and Nepal to enable four Gurkha regiments to transfer into the British Army. That is known as the tripartite agreement, or TPA. The Brigade of Gurkhas today consists of approximately 3,500 men who serve mainly in the infantry, but also in Gurkha logistics, signals and engineer units, some of which are based in the right hon. Lady's constituency.

One of the original aims of the TPA was to ensure that the Armies of Great Britain and India could recruit and maintain formed Gurkha regiments on an equal basis. It also safeguarded the cultural, religious and national heritage of Gurkha soldiers, in accordance with the wishes of the Nepalese Government. That is because it was important then, as it is now, for Gurkhas not to be seen merely as mercenaries. The TPA linked British Gurkha terms and conditions of service to those of the Indian army, reflecting sensitivities about whether the newly formed Indian army would be able to retain or attract Gurkhas if there was a substantial differential between British Gurkha and Indian army terms and conditions of service. There was also concern about creating a differential in Nepal, where British Gurkha pensioners continued to live alongside fellow citizens who served in the Nepalese and Indian armies.

While I acknowledge that perhaps not all of the principles that underpinned the TPA in 1947 apply today, I must stress that it remains the basic instrument enabling us to recruit Gurkhas. Without it, Nepalese citizens would be classed as aliens for recruiting purposes and would in practice be unable to serve in the British Army. Leaving aside difficulties relating to nationality, if it were not for the TPA, the English language skills of most Gurkha recruits would bar their entry to non-Gurkha units. The Brigade of Gurkhas has a command system that caters for the fact that Nepali is widely spoken and that English is not the first language of its soldiers. It is partly for that reason that Gurkhas serve in formed units.

There are therefore three principles that underpin service in the Brigade of Gurkhas: Gurkhas are recruited in Nepal; they serve in formed Gurkha units; and they are discharged as Nepalese citizens in Nepal. Gurkhas return home with their pension entitlement, which is a vital source of revenue to one of the poorest countries in the world. I have to tell the right hon. Lady that, given the history of the brigade and the unique nature of Gurkha service, it would be irrational if those differences were not taken into account when considering Gurkhas' conditions of employment. Most right hon. and hon. Members are already aware that while Gurkha basic pay continues to be set in accordance with the Indian army pay code, the TPA

[Dr. Lewis Moonie]

allows for a cost of living allowance to be paid for service outside Nepal. For many years, the Ministry of Defence has used that as a tool to enhance remuneration, and since 1997 "Universal Addition" has been paid, broadly aligning Gurkha income to the take-home pay of British personnel.

I shall briefly mention Gurkha pensions, as I received a comprehensive briefing and have enough time to cover the issue. Gurkha pensions, like basic pay, remain linked to the Indian army but have been significantly enhanced. A review in 1981 led to Gurkha pensions being linked to the top band provided for in the Indian army pension regulations. It was also decided that the annual uprating of pensions should be linked to cost of living increases in Nepal, rather than India. An examination of Gurkha pensions in 1999 led to the introduction of welfare-related cash uplifts to take account of Indian Government benefits in kind, such as access to Indian military hospitals, available to Indian army Gurkha pensioners. That increased pension payments for all 26,000 British Gurkha pensioners by at least 100 per cent. Pensions are now set at double the top rate of the Indian army and compare favourably with professional salaries in Nepal. Indeed, our embassy in Kathmandu advises us that a rifleman with 15 years of service now receives a pension higher than the salary of a royal Nepalese army captain.

I should make it clear that we do not link Gurkha pensions to the Indian army solely because of the TPA. There are very good contemporary reasons for maintaining our current policy, not least the fact that we are able to pay immediate pensions to Gurkhas after only 15 years of service. That suits their needs because, unlike the UK, Nepal does not have a sophisticated system of state benefits and support. Gurkha pensions also have to be viewed in the context of Gurkha service in formed units, which have wholly different recruitment and retention patterns from British units. Each year, over 25,000 potential recruits compete for 230 or so places. There is virtually no natural wastage. The result is that 99 per cent. of Gurkhas serve for at least 15 years and are then discharged with an immediate pension. Those arrangements are necessary so that the brigade can maintain its operational edge with a reasonable age and manning balance.

The average length of service for a British soldier, on the other hand, is much lower, and approximately only 8 per cent. of British soldiers serve the full 22 years needed to receive an immediate pension. The armed forces pension scheme is specifically designed so that preserved pensions can be paid to those who have less than 22 years service. If we were to apply those arrangements to Gurkhas, it would result in large numbers of Gurkhas being discharged in Nepal with no financial support until the age of 60. We therefore need separate terms and conditions for them. Most reasonable observers now agree that the arguments for Gurkhas to receive an immediate pension on discharge remain compelling.

Moving away from pay and pension arrangements, it would be right to acknowledge that there is one aspect of Gurkha terms and conditions of service that is very much a cause for concern, and it has been highlighted by the right hon. Lady tonight. I refer to married accompanied service which, in accordance with the TPA, is capped at 25 per cent. of brigade personnel. In practice, this means that family married quarters are provided for all Gurkhas holding the rank of colour sergeant or above. Below that rank, Gurkhas are entitled to only one accompanied tour of around three years. For many years, the MOD has taken the view that it is necessary to abide by this limit in order to stay within the terms of the TPA and ensure that linkages to Nepal are maintained. The importance of these links cannot be overstated, particularly now that the home base of Gurkhas has moved from the far east to the United Kingdom.

Gurkhas are discharged in Nepal because we have a duty to ensure that they return to their home country. We also have an obligation to ensure that they do not feel that they are returning to a foreign country. It is partly for this reason that Gurkhas are entitled to special periods of five months long leave in Nepal every three years, although I take account of the right hon. Lady's assertion that these tours can sometimes be reduced. This is quite unlike any provision available to British personnel.

The brigade also goes to great lengths to ensure that Gurkha personnel are able to observe key Hindu religious festivals and have access to Hindu temples and priests throughout their service. It is provisions such as these that help the brigade to maintain a distinct Nepalese flavour, ethos and identity. At the same time, and in recognition of the problems that Gurkha accompanied service policy can sometimes cause, Gurkha soldiers who are not on accompanied tours are now able to bring their families to visit them in the UK, albeit at their own expense. All Gurkha units now allow for visits of this kind, and surplus family accommodation is made available wherever possible.

In addressing these matters in the context of the recent judicial review, we will have to take account of the views of the Nepalese Government, who will of course be consulted about the outcome. There may also be implications for the garrison estate in Brunei, given that nearly a quarter of the brigade is stationed there. The MOD also has to bear in mind the potential impact that any changes would have on the effectiveness and utility of the brigade. For example, Gurkhas marry at a younger age than British personnel. They also serve in formed units. Any significant change would, therefore, undoubtedly result in Gurkha units requiring more family accommodation.

So, we find ourselves in a difficult situation. Personally, I have a great deal of sympathy with the arguments that the right hon. Lady has put forward. I have tried to stress in my reply to her just how complex the situation is, and that we do not have free and unfettered action available to us because of the terms and conditions of the agreement under which we employ Gurkhas in the British Army. I shall make one or two additional points in which she might be interested. I know that, like many of us, she will be concerned about the situation regarding family accommodation in Maidstone.

Miss Widdecombe: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. I should have said earlier that I was delighted to see my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley) in his place, in his capacity as a member of the Britain-Nepal parliamentary group. Before the Minister reaches his peroration—which I sense is about to happen—I must point out that, so far, he has not addressed the matter that took up about 50 per cent. of my speech, which is the way in which we insist that Gurkhas return to Nepal at the end of their 15 years' service, and whether there is a case for reviewing that.

Dr. Moonie: I thought that I had addressed that issue in some detail, because the thrust of the argument that I thought I was making was that the whole point of maintaining the ethos of Gurkha regiments as Gurkha regiments is to ensure that those who serve are able to return to their own country, as is part of the agreement under which they serve in the British Army in the first place. It is rare for nationals of a country not our own or—as the terms and conditions for enlistment in general would suggest—of the Commonwealth to enlist in our armed forces. It is incumbent on us to be very careful to ensure that the legal niceties are observed. However, I have listened very carefully to what she says about this subject, and I can assure her that I will discuss the matter with my officials and those who represent the Gurkha community to see how much of a problem is caused. Although I do not want to get her spirits up too much—

Miss Widdecombe: Oh!

Dr. Moonie: That is the nature of these things. None the less, I shall see whether any leeway is likely to be available to us. It may often seem that we are rigid—and perhaps even over-rigid—in the criteria that we apply in such cases, but I am generally assured that there are very good reasons for applying them as we do.

Sir John Stanley (Tonbridge and Malling): I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. The key point that my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) was making is that, on the discharge of Gurkhas back in Nepal at the end of their term of service, if they apply subsequently for settlement in the United Kingdom, the Home Office takes absolutely no account whatever in practice either of the value and utility of former British Gurkha soldiers and officers or of their valuable years of service in the British Army when considering those applications.

Dr. Moonie: That is a nice distinction and one that I had not appreciated from what the right hon. Lady said. That is a very different issue and I can assure her that I will take it up with my colleagues, although I again make no promises as to the outcome.

I should like briefly to return to the housing situation, which I know will interest the right hon. Lady. As she knows, although we have made enormous strides over the past few years, much of our service housing remains unsatisfactory. A joint decision has been taken by the Army and the Defence Housing Executive to relocate families and bring to an end a period of uncertainty with regard to 151 1960s houses for other ranks at Maidstone. We are anxious that families currently spread over five locations should be located as close together as possible in the interests of regimental integrity, morale, welfare and operational effectiveness. It is also important that Gurkha families attached to the regiment continue to be able to exercise traditional customs and procedures while maintaining their strong sense of community. The Army is determined that, when the families eventually move from Invicta park, the same level of community support will provided at Chatham.

What can I say in summary? I have listened very carefully to the right hon. Lady's arguments and I have a great deal of sympathy for them. I am constrained by the terms of the agreement under which we engage Gurkhas in the first place, but I will have an honest look at it and see whether any changes are possible. I can assure her of that and I thank her again for raising this matter in the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-eight minutes past Six o'clock.

CORRECTION

Division list No. 99, *Official Report*, Tuesday 4 March 2003, columns 758–61, should read as follows:

The House divided: Ayes 47, Noes 415.

Division No. 99]

AYES

Allan, Richard
Barrett, John
Beith, rh A. J.
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Burnett, John
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Carmichael, Alistair
Chidgey, David
Cotter, Brian
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Doughty, Sue
Ewing, Annabelle
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gidley, Sandra
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harvey, Nick
Heath, David
Holmes, Paul
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Lamb, Norman
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Moore, Michael
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
Öpik, Lembit
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thurso, John
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Weir, Michael
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil

NOES

Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Amess, David
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Arbuthnot, rh James
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bacon, Richard
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Barnes, Harry
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, John
Beard, Nigel

Begg, Miss Anne
Bellingham, Henry
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Byers, rh Stephen
Cairns, David
Cameron, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Cash, William
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chaytor, David
Chope, Christopher
Clapham, Michael
Clappison, James
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Collins, Tim
Colman, Tony
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cousins, Jim
Cran, James *(Beverley)*
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Fox, Dr. Liam
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Francois, Mark
Gardiner, Barry
Garnier, Edward
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Gummer, rh John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hammond, Philip
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Healey, John
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hendry, Charles
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, rh Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hunter, Andrew
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, rh Adam
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, rh Tessa
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kelly, Ruth *(Bolton W)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lammy, David
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leigh, Edward
Leslie, Christopher
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, rh Mrs Helen
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lilley, rh Peter
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Loughton, Tim
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIntosh, Miss Anne
McIsaac, Shona
Mackay, rh Andrew
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNulty, Tony
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Malins, Humfrey
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Maples, John
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
Mercer, Patrick
Michael, rh Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Morgan, Julie
Moss, Malcolm
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Owen, Albert
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Portillo, rh Michael
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Randall, John
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Redwood, rh John
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*

Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rooney, Terry
Rosindell, Andrew
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruffley, David
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sayeed, Jonathan
Sedgemore, Brian
Selous, Andrew
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Shepherd, Richard
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soames, Nicholas
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh John
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stinchcombe, Paul
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Streeter, Gary
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Tredinnick, David
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Walley, Ms Joan
Walter, Robert
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Whittingdale, John
Wicks, Malcolm
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Wilshire, David
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George

Question accordingly negatived.

House of Commons

Friday 7 March 2003

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[SIR ALAN HASELHURST *in the Chair*]

MR. SPEAKER'S ABSENCE

The House being met, and the Speaker having leave of absence pursuant to paragraph (3) of Standing Order No. 3 (Deputy Speaker), SIR ALAN HASELHURST, THE CHAIRMAN OF WAYS AND MEANS, PROCEEDED TO THE TABLE.

9.33 am

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. At business questions yesterday there was some speculation that the House might find it necessary to sit on Saturday 15 March. There is certainly a precedent for that; the House did sit on a Saturday morning with the onset of hostilities at the start of the Falklands war. You will be more aware than most that hon. Members on both sides of the House regard weekends as an opportunity to carry out constituency business and that diaries have to be organised. Nevertheless, there can be nothing more important to Members of the House than the commitment of our troops to war.

It seems likely that by the end of this coming week there may well have been a United Nations resolution, and it is possible that hostilities might have commenced even by Saturday week. Could you please therefore tell the House how much notice the Government are required to give, and how much notice Members might expect, prior to a sitting on Saturday 15 March?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving notice that he would raise this matter. I realise its importance to all hon. Members. Chapter 14 of "Erskine May" is instructive. There are only two ways in which the House can meet on a Saturday. One is if the House itself resolves to do so, which obviously requires a motion to be put before the House at some point. That is plainly a matter for the House and not for the Chair. The other is if the House, having adjourned to the following week, is recalled under Standing Order No. 13 at the instance of the Government and with the agreement of Mr. Speaker. That procedure would only arise in a situation of great urgency, and clearly it would not be possible to give advance notice in the way that the hon. Gentleman is suggesting. I think that that is the best summation of the situation that I can give the hon. Gentleman and the House.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That is very helpful and I am sure that the House is very grateful for that, but could you just remind the House and Members of the timeline, as I think we call it these days, of how these events might unfold? In other words, what is the latest time at which the Government would have to table a motion for the House to consider in order for it to be able to sit on Saturday? I think that it would be very helpful if we had some idea of that—not only we as Members but all officers and staff as well—so that preparations could be properly made. I am sure, following the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale), that this is at the very front of all our minds, and it would be very helpful if we could have some idea of the sort of time sequence that might be envisaged and, to put it bluntly, how late the Government could leave it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: In the alternative scenario of a motion being put before the House, as I understand it that would have to be tabled on the Thursday immediately before the Saturday on which it might be proposed to recall the House.

Mr. Andrew Dismore (Hendon): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I see that there seems to be a significantly large number of Members on the Opposition Benches: far more than one can normally expect to see on a Friday, who one can usually count on one's fingers. I could be flattered and say that they have come for the extra special treat of hearing me speak on a Friday, should I catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I understand from what I heard from a Conservative Member yesterday that the Conservative leadership have put a three-line Whip on today, and I am shocked—

Mr. Richard Bacon (South Norfolk): And outraged.

Mr. Dismore: And outraged to hear that the Conservative party put a Whip on for private Members' business. This is a private Members' day; it is not an occasion for whipped business. Perhaps you could give guidance to those Members who may have come here under the false impression that they were on the Whip to do so, that they are free to leave if they do not wish to hear my speech.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Happily, this is not a matter for the Chair, but it is always a pleasure for the occupant of the Chair to see the House well populated, just as I am sure it is an assurance to the nation as a whole.

Lawrie Quinn (Scarborough and Whitby): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I seek some guidance in terms of the proceedings on which we are about to embark. I went to the Vote Office to seek explanatory notes for today's business and I found that no explanatory notes had been published. I wonder whether you could advise the House as to whether we are in a position to proceed in the absence of those notes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: There is absolutely no requirement for an explanatory memorandum to be provided for a private Member's Bill. There is nothing unusual about the situation with which the House is—*[Interruption.]* Order. There is nothing unusual about the situation with which the House is faced.

Orders of the Day

Retirement Income Reform Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): I have to announce that Mr. Speaker has not selected the amendment in the name of the hon. Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore).

9.39 am

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Although perhaps unusual, a touch of humility and candour from a Member of Parliament would not go amiss at this stage—particularly from this one. I am not sure whether I can feel the heavy hand of history on my shoulder as I move my Bill on Second Reading, but history has a habit of repeating itself. The Bill is not my idea: it is an almost exact replica of the Pension Annuities (Amendment) Bill, introduced by my right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) in 2002, and it is very closely related to the private Member's Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) the year before.

The difference between my hon. Friends and myself is that they—through the application of their powerful intellects, industry, experience and pre-existing knowledge—were able to inform the House in a coherent fashion of what lay behind their Bills and why it was necessary and in the public interest to amend this aspect of pensions law. I will do my best, on this third occasion—perhaps ineptly and, I hope, briefly—to persuade the House that the policy behind the Bill is worthwhile and sensible and that the Bill itself is worthy of support.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): I am very pleased that the promoter of the Bill has said that he wishes to present his ideas as succinctly and briefly as possible. Perhaps the Government have a plan to try to talk out the Bill today, thus preventing the House from reaching a decision on it and, equally importantly, on the Pensions (Winding-Up) Bill, which I hope to introduce a little later. Perhaps the Whips will rejoice that their schemes have met with short-term success, but does the hon. and learned Gentleman agree that those of our constituents for whom the greatest worry, apart from the war, is that their pension promise is being snatched away from them may have very different views about parliamentary procedure and those who are behind it if they attempt to prevent the House reaching decisions on the first, second and third Bills on the Order Paper today?

Mr. Garnier: I am extremely grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his intervention. The one shred of comfort that I will draw from today's proceedings if they are unsuccessful is that I have all-party support for the Bill and particularly the support of the right hon. Gentleman, whose reputation in this field is unsurpassed. I hope that, if not the Financial Secretary, at least the men Friday who sit all around her will pay some attention to what the right hon. Gentleman has said.

Lawrie Quinn (Scarborough and Whitby): I congratulate the hon. and learned Gentleman on his success in the private Members' Bill ballot. Earlier, on a point of order, I sought to find out about the Bill's explanatory notes, and one of the reasons why I wanted to explore that was the status of recent correspondence that I and perhaps the hon. and learned Gentleman have received from the Association of British Insurers with regard to the consumer survey that it has undertaken on such issues. The hon. and learned Gentleman would help me to understand the purpose of the Bill better if he could tell me whether he has received that correspondence and what his reaction to it is in relation to the Bill?

Mr. Garnier: I am always delighted when people take an interest in any legislation. I suspect that if the hon. Gentleman has done his homework, which I am sure he has, and read the Bill and related it to the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988, he will not be in any doubt about the Bill.

Lawrie Quinn *rose—*

Mr. Garnier: I wish to make some progress; I have only been speaking for about two minutes. I know that the hon. Gentleman is keen to get back to Scarborough and I do not want to delay him for any longer than is necessary, so if he will contain himself for a moment—

Lawrie Quinn: Will the hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Garnier: I shall give way in a moment, perhaps, but I want to make some progress so that other hon. Members, such as the hon. Gentleman, who have a lot to say will feel that enough time has been permitted for them to speak.

In moving my Bill on Second Reading, I am immensely encouraged by the support that it has engendered both inside and outside the House of Commons. In saying that, may I remind the House that the Bill introduced by my right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon was given a Second Reading by a large margin and was not defeated in Committee? It simply ran out of parliamentary time. I would be the first to admit that this is not a perfect world and that this is not a perfect Bill, but its imperfections are mine, not those of my right hon. Friend or my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West. Any imperfections can be dealt with in Committee, and I hope that the House will let the Bill get to the next stage.

Like my predecessors, I have benefited from the invaluable help of the retirement income reform campaign and in particular from that of Dr. Oonagh McDonald CBE, a former Labour MP and shadow Treasury Minister in the 1980's, and Mr. Iain Anderson of Cicero Consulting. I have received a large number of letters from my own and other hon. Members' constituents, wishing the Bill success and asking me why it has taken so long to reform this aspect of the law. Our constituents are suffering from the present low annuity rates, and share the concerns of so many of us that the pensions system in this country is now in a state of crisis and that the lofty complacency that this country has shown towards the pensions systems of continental Europe is no longer justified, if it ever was.

Hardly a day goes by without our reading of large public companies—many of them household names and bywords for integrity and financial probity—announcing that their pension funds are in deficit, that they do not have sufficient resources to honour their obligations to their present or future pensioners and that their boards' strategic and day-to-day decisions about the management and direction of the company are now governed as much by the needs of the company's pension fund as by the commercial needs of the company itself.

Clichés about dogs and tails, carts and horses come to mind, but this is the real world of modern industrial and commercial Britain: a sclerosis has beset our economy that is almost exclusively caused by the collapse in the pensions system. Added to the recession in the manufacturing sector and the export of capacity and jobs to Asia and eastern Europe, we now see at every level of the industrial and commercial parts of our economy enterprises that are in reality no more than overdrafts attached to pension deficits.

Young people years away from pensionable age are not investing in their future security through the pensions system, and the state recognises that before very long it will no longer be able to continue to pay tax-based benefits to pensioners at levels which by themselves will provide a living wage to those not at work. The need to deal with that picture is obvious, but the incentives and the vehicles to do so are either absent or have been damaged by the Government.

I do not want today's debate to become a party political point-scoring exercise because that is boring, it produces no new thinking and it is often unedifying, but it cannot go unremarked that the Chancellor's removal of £5 billion a year from the pensions system through his advance corporation tax changes has had a direct and immediate effect on the ability of this country, its citizens and its financial institutions to provide a sustainable and affordable pensions system through individual and corporate schemes.

Mr. Andrew Love (Edmonton): I note that the hon. and learned Gentleman has already become party political in raising the ACT issue, but does he accept that by far the most important reasons for the difficulties in the pension regime are people's increasing longevity, meaning that their annuities have to last longer, and the collapse in the stock market?

Mr. Garnier: I shall not impose an order of precedence on the factors that affect—

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire): Will my hon. and learned Friend give way?

Mr. Garnier: May I just finish the sentence? I shall not impose an order of precedence on the factors that affect the current pensions market, but, clearly, annuity providers will be influenced by the increasing life expectancy of people at the age of 65, 70 or 75. That is not particularly controversial.

Mr. Heald: Does my hon. and learned Friend agree that those who are independent commentators, such as the Association of Chartered Certified Accounts, describe the Chancellor's tax raid as the most significant factor is the current troubles that we are experiencing?

Mr. Garnier: Yes, I am sure that that is entirely right.

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): Will the hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Garnier: No. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will attempt to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker. He is a man of no few words, and I am sure that he will want to give full rein to all his concerns about the pensions system. He tabled, with the hon. Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore), an amendment, which has not been selected, and I have a suspicion that he is itching to tell me all about it, but he can do so in his own time.

There are a number of difficulties facing the pensions system and, added to the matters that I have mentioned, the collapse of final salary and funded workplace schemes has brought to public attention the dangerous state of affairs in the pensions system. The ABI's latest estimate is that the savings gap is £27 billion and the savings ratio is at a 50-year low. The imposition of over-rigid accounting rule FRS 17 has been unhelpful, as has the Financial Services Authority's reluctance to deal with the current rules relating to the solvency requirements for insurance companies that have sold equities in the past 18 months, so impacting on pension portfolio values.

Millions of people are being forced to take out private defined contribution schemes and are thus forced into poorly performing annuities. On top of that, we learn of the Chancellor's decision to tax pensions savings of more than £1.4 million at 60 per cent., which will hit tens of thousands of people retiring on £100,000-plus salaries.

That may not affect many today, but as inflation increases feed into the system, that tax on pensions will hit millions of middle-income earners in 20 years or so.

Lawrie Quinn: Will the hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Garnier: No, I will let the hon. Gentleman make his own speech, as I am very worried about his train to Scarborough.

Set against a context in which public sector employees, including Members of Parliament, are protected from new rules designed to allow pension fund trustees to reduce the retirement benefits of workers who leave company schemes early, we have a recipe for public disenchantment with the governing class and the Government in particular.

Another reason why I do not want the debate to descend into party political point scoring is that the Bill has cross-party support, as we heard a moment ago. That is valuable in itself for a private Member's Bill, but when one considers the names of those who have agreed

[Mr. Garnier]

to sponsor the Bill, the calibre of that cross-party support is made clear. The right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), an expert on welfare reform, whose writings and speeches on pensions and other aspects of the welfare agenda have proved to be insightful and thought-provoking, has put his name to this Bill, and I am most grateful to him. He has his own pensions measure on the Order Paper today, and I hope, as he does, and, I am sure, many hon. Members do, that the Government will permit it to be debated and passed. He rightly wants to help people trapped in distressed pension schemes that could be closed or have their terms altered, by giving them rights to protect their interests against companies that walk away from their pension obligations.

The hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb), an acknowledged expert on welfare and pension policy, has also given my Bill his support. I am grateful to him for telling me that although he cannot be here today, he has asked the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable), an economist of no little repute, who spoke in favour of the last such Bill in January 2002, and in Committee, to speak for the Liberal Democrats. The hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan) has also signed the Bill.

From the official Opposition, I have the support of my right hon. and learned Friend the shadow Chancellor, my hon. Friend the shadow Secretary of State for Work and Pensions and my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Mr. Hendry), who leads on issues relating to young people: the very people who will be most directly affected by the continuing crisis in the pensions industry. To underline the Conservative party's express support for the policy set out in this Bill, I am pleased that the shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury, my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) is here and will endeavour to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker. He is an expert in many areas of financial policy, and has a particular knowledge of the issues behind this Bill. Furthermore, he has knowledge of the concerns of the Christian Brethren, and he will speak about the measures in the Bill that assist them. Importantly, the Bill is signed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon and my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West, its parliamentary parents, and I am grateful to them both.

Formidable supporters, all of them, but I do not underestimate the difficulties that are in front of me. The Financial Secretary, in her short but highly productive life, both in politics and elsewhere, has probably forgotten more about pensions and annuities than I, in half a century, ever knew. She also has the resources of the Treasury and the Government machine at her disposal.

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): Will my hon. and learned Friend give way?

Mr. Garnier: May I just finish off praising the Financial Secretary, as I am rather warming to it.

The Financial Secretary can crush this Bill in a trice by sheer force of numbers with the votes of her loyal and ambitious supporters, although I trust that she would not do so without at least considering the arguments, many of which she may have heard before.

Mr. Waterson: First, may I say how much I support this Bill, not least as co-chairman of the all-party group on ageing and older people? Will my hon. and learned Friend tackle head-on, later in his remarks the only half-decent argument that the Treasury ever put forward on the series of similar measures: the worry that it purports to have about people falling back on the public purse if they are allowed, in effect, to dissipate their pension funds through relaxation of the rules on annuities?

Mr. Garnier: That is dealt with pretty clearly in clause 2 on minimum retirement income, on which I shall touch briefly as we make progress this morning.

My hunch is that the Financial Secretary has much regard for the thrust of this Bill, not least because it is gender-neutral and recognises that the gap in life expectancy at 60, 65 and 70 nowadays is not so much between the sexes but between the different regions of the country. In 1970, a woman of 60 could expect to live six years longer than her male counterpart. By 2000, the gap was down to two years. Male life expectancy for a 60-year-old has been improving by three years every decade, and for a 60-year-old woman by two years. That suggests that before very long the idea of a unisex annuity rate may have little or no impact on either sex: it may also suggest that, with the increase in numbers of women working over that age, work is bad for their health, but I will not pursue that further. Men and women in Manchester have, according to a recent Office for National Statistics survey, the lowest expectation of life, whereas men in north Dorset and women in west Somerset have the longest expectation of life. There must be room for a sophisticated dating agency in the south-west.

The Financial Secretary represents a constituency that is by no means at the top of the income pile, and must realise that a measure such as this will do something, if by no means everything, towards solving the pensions crisis. I accept that the Secretary of State made a statement to the House at the time of the publication of the Green Paper charmingly entitled "Simplicity, security and choice: Working and saving for retirement" on 17 December, and that there are indications that the Government are moving slowly towards some type of annuity reform. But it is far from clear what their real intentions are, how developed their thinking is and when, if at all, we will see a Government Bill to deal with the glaring problems that currently exist and that will only get worse if things are allowed to carry on as at present. The Government have promised reform previously, but nothing has come from that.

Pensions draw-down, to which the Government appear to have attached some importance, is not the only answer, since it is available in real terms only to those with very large pension pots, and in any event pensions advisers and consultants may start to take regional differences into account when recommending either an annuity or draw-down. It might be good advice to offer Mancunians draw-down and those in the south-west annuities: perhaps not my most serious point but an indication of the need for the Government to apply their collective mind to the pensions crisis sooner rather than later.

Let me now turn briefly to the provisions in the Bill. I accept that it is not a candidate for Radio 4's "Book at Bedtime" or even, if I look across at the Financial Secretary, "Listen with Mother", but perhaps that was well before her day. I do not want us to get stuck in a quagmire of interlocking sections and subsections, so I will not attempt to unravel the relationship between this Bill and the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988 more precisely than to say that clause 1 sets out the required amendments to the 1988 Act to end the current system that allows people to choose when to annuitise and what type of annuity can be acquired. It amends the sections of the Act relating to the purchase of annuities from a personal pension fund.

Needless to say, public interest in the part played by annuities in private pension schemes has grown considerably in the last few years because of the declining rates offered by annuity providers, mostly insurance companies, as a consequence of lower long-term interest rates and increased life expectancy. To give just one example provided by the Annuity Bureau, in 1990 a fund of £100,000 would have bought an annuity producing annual income of around £10,000. Now, it would produce only £4,500.

Ms Meg Munn (Sheffield, Heeley): I have been following what the hon. and learned Gentleman has been saying, and, in the absence of explanatory notes, I have relied on information from the House of Commons Library. I am bit confused by what is being said, because the information from the Library states:

> "the Bill as currently drafted would not alter the current arrangements for annuity purchase from defined-contribution occupational pension schemes, including AVC policies."

Given that information, will the hon. and learned Gentleman explain in a bit more detail exactly what the Bill will do in terms of changing the arrangements about annuities?

Mr. Garnier: I have a suspicion, which may be unworthy, that the hon. Lady has read neither the Bill—*[Interruption.]* Yes, I can see that she has a copy of the Bill; nor do I believe that she has read from start to finish the very useful House of Commons Library brief. I suggest that she does so. In any event, if she wants further tuition, now is not the time to receive the kind of detailed information on the Bill that she might like. I will happily see her afterwards if she wants further assistance. Equally, if she volunteers to serve on the Committee, I shall be happy to see her there. I trust that, in due course, she will allow the Bill to proceed to Committee.

Mr. Love *rose—*

Mr. Garnier: Some will say that steady economic indicators mean that falls in annuity rates are not as significant as they might appear to be, but my constituents' pensions are increasing less steeply than their council tax bills and their other day-to-day living costs. Although the immediate future may bring low inflation, they do not feel secure that their pensions will carry them through increased local and Treasury tax demands, evidence of which we see in every Budget statement under this Chancellor, or residential care costs. The pension prospects for a young person now are terrible compared to only a few years ago as a direct result of the fall in the stock exchange indices and rates of return on equities.

It is now compulsory for at least 75 per cent. of a money purchase pension fund to be used to buy an annuity by the age of 75. I and those who agree with me want that rule to go so as to allow pensioners the freedom to choose the method of funding their retirement that best suits their particular circumstances, so long as they maintain a minimum retirement income above the level of income support to prevent them from becoming a burden on the state.

Clause 2 would give the Chancellor the power to set the level of the minimum retirement income annually. It would be secured through an increasing annuity. I accept that further work needs to be done on the sensible level at which to set the MRI each year, especially if the Government's state pension credit, which starts next October, produces a complication. However, as a matter of principle, I am of the opinion that the concept can work to the advantage of both the pensioner and the taxpayer.

Tensions surely exist between family-based and individually based welfare benefits and single pensioner households, and married pensioner households. However, the issues are there to be discussed, and they should be creative, not destructive, tensions. They can be that if imagination and good will on the part of the Government is brought to bear.

Individuals with a pension pot in excess of that needed to meet the MRI would be able to invest their additional savings in a retirement income fund and there would be no restrictions on when and how much income could be withdrawn. The Bill would also require the MRI annuity to be gender neutral and would abolish the provisions relating to income draw-down—the main alternative to annuities at present—as the Bill's arrangements for the MRI and the retirement income fund would give individuals both security for a given level of income and freedom to invest and draw from the remaining fund. The RIF, as defined under Clause 4(7), would allow for withdrawals to be claimed and taxed as income, albeit that the investment growth would be protected from tax as part of an approved pension scheme.

I dare say that the Bill is complicated for some people, but it contains one or two simple themes. It is time to put those themes into practice. I commend the Bill to the House.

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You will be aware that today's Order Paper contains notice of a written ministerial statement to be made by the Chancellor of the Exchequer. That statement has now been made, and it discloses that the Finance Bill will be published on Wednesday 16 April, which will be in the middle of the Easter recess. Can you give the House any guidance as to whether there is a precedent for publishing the Finance Bill during a recess? Is it not absolutely clear that that will be materially inconvenient for Members in

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the scrutiny that they will wish to give to the Bill? Is it not yet further evidence of the complete chaos that currently reigns in Her Majesty's Treasury?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I hope that the right hon. and learned Gentleman will understand that I cannot instantly offer advice on his question about precedent. He has put his remarks on the record, but my first instinct is to suggest that this matter should be pursued through the usual channels.

10.4 am

Mr. Andrew Dismore (Hendon): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. *[Interruption.]* There they go.

I congratulate the hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) on securing such a high slot in the private Members' ballot. I am afraid that I will not be able to support his Bill, and I regret the fact that he did not choose the subject of the third Bill on the Order Paper selected by my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field). That has rather more merit than this Bill.

Lawrie Quinn: May I offer my congratulations to my hon. Friend on the sterling job that he does every Friday? We have just had clear evidence of the effect that he has. Does he agree that when moving the Bill's Second Reading the hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) failed to get to its core? The absence of explanatory notes for such an important and technical measure does neither him nor the debate any credit.

Mr. Dismore: My hon. Friend makes a telling point. The hon. and learned Gentleman did not go through the Bill in any detail.

Mr. Bryant: He does not know what is in it.

Mr. Dismore: I very much agree with my hon. Friend. The only option available to me is to do the job for the hon. and learned Gentleman, and go through the Bill and explain what the problems are. Unfortunately, that might take me a little longer than I like.

My hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Lawrie Quinn) referred to the fact that Conservative Members have deserted their Benches, and that reinforces the point of order that I made. Conservative Members are not here to consider the Bill or to listen to the debate. They have been whipped in as Lobby fodder in an attempt to force the Bill through without their having any idea of what they are voting for.

Ms Munn: My hon. Friend will have heard how my genuine query was dismissed quite rudely by the hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier). I know that my hon. Friend will consider the matter in detail, so will he deal, at a relevant point, with my query in the way that I expected the Bill's promoter to do?

Mr. Dismore: When I come to my comments on tax implications and annuities—I regret to say that that will be much later in my speech—my hon. Friend may hear the answer. If not, I am sure that she will remind me at the appropriate point.

I declare an interest: I have several money purchase policies from my previous life as a lawyer. When we debated a similar Bill last year, I had a couple of Equitable Life policies. I am pleased to say that I have been able to divest myself of them—albeit at great expense—and I am no longer locked into that company. I am surprised that the hon. and learned Gentleman did not declare an interest. I know that he is an eminent Queen's counsel, so he will probably have pension arrangements similar to mine.

Mr. Garnier: I am very happy to sit here for the next five hours listening to the hon. Gentleman explaining the Bill. He is right: I have a number of private pension arrangements. However, I also pay income tax, and I do not declare that during Budget debates.

Mr. Dismore: The Budget is of general application to us all. However, if one has a particular personal interest or personal pension policies—not everyone has them—it is incumbent on him or her to declare an interest, particularly if he or she is introducing a Bill. I am surprised that the hon. and learned Gentleman did not think it appropriate to do that at the start of his remarks. He has now put the record straight, and I am sure people will be grateful for that.

I accept the need for reform of the law on annuities. There is little doubt about that. The Select Committee on Work and Pensions, of which I am a member, has embarked on a wide-ranging review of future pension provision in the United Kingdom. I am absolutely amazed that not a single Conservative member of the Committee has raised the issue of annuities. I have raised the issue, and I hope that when we produce our final report, it will contain a mention of them. That remains to be seen.

Lawrie Quinn: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for not only declaring an interest but reminding the House of his expert work on the Select Committee. Has the Association of British Insurers been along to the Committee and made representations on the issue? Has he had an opportunity to consider the important research that it has conducted on consumer attitudes to the provisions before the House?

Mr. Dismore: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that. He has the briefing document with him and will be able to comment on it at length if he is called to speak, although I will touch on that subject tangentially. The ABI did give evidence to the inquiry, but I do not recall it spending much time on annuities. That may reflect how seriously it takes the problem.

I accept the need for change, but a private Member's Bill is not the right vehicle to introduce such a complex tide of reform. The hon. and learned Gentleman's proposals would have a series of ramifications for the tax system which he was unwilling or, I suspect, unable to explain properly. The changes would affect the pension rights of millions of people, for good or ill, but he skated over them. They would have implications for our benefits system that could cost billions of pounds, but he made no mention of that.

Caroline Flint (Don Valley): My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the complexity of altering pension systems. What we do has an impact not only on pensioners today but on the pensioners and working people of tomorrow. The subject is important and the hon. and learned Gentleman's proposals would create a generational policy change. In those circumstances, it is unwise to nit-pick about aspects of the pension law. Does my hon. Friend agree that we need an holistic approach that can stand the test of time?

Mr. Dismore: I very much agree. The Government have made a detailed series of proposals on the future of pension reform with particular reference to annuities. If there is to be reform, it is appropriate that it should be set out in a Government Bill. I understand, subject to the consultation procedure, that the Government intend to introduce a Bill in the next parliamentary Session—but more of that later.

Mr. Love: Will my hon. Friend deal with the claim that the primary cause of the pension difficulties relates to changes in ACT that were agreed in an earlier Budget? Does he recognise that the official Opposition have not said whether they would reintroduce ACT in its old form?

Mr. Dismore: My hon. Friend makes an important point. The Conservative party jumped up and down about the change to ACT, but failed to say whether it would repeal the provision. My hon. Friend is right to ask whether that is the root cause of what has become known as a pensions crisis.

Mr. Bryant: Is it not also true that additional Government money for the health service serves, in part, to rectify the mortality differences in different parts of the country? That is essential if we are to give old people in parts of the country where people die much younger—my constituents are 10 years younger than the national average when they die—an opportunity to enjoy a retirement of any kind.

Mr. Dismore: My hon. Friend makes his point in his usual erudite way.

It is clear that the hon. and learned Gentleman has cribbed the Bill from last year's legislation. Believe it or not, I kept a copy of last year's Bill and my notes on it. One never knows when such things might come in handy. Indeed, the second Bill that is up for discussion today, if we ever get on to it, is identical to an earlier one, and this Bill is identical to one that reached Report in the last Session. The only difference is its title.

Lawrie Quinn: I served on the Committee that considered the Bill promoted by the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) and must disagree with my hon. Friend. I do not think that the hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) has copied the earlier Bill because, if he had, he would certainly have done something about updating and producing the explanatory notes. He accused me of not doing my homework, but I wonder whether he did his homework or even talked to the industry.

Mr. Dismore: My hon. Friend is right. The absence of explanatory notes is serious. Not only did the hon. and learned Gentleman not deal with the issue of updating the explanatory notes, but it has been almost a year since the previous Bill ran out of time and he has taken no steps to address our criticisms or the lacunae in the provisions. I would take him more seriously if he had considered some of the criticisms that we expressed last year and taken steps to deal with them, but all those criticisms still apply. Since then, I have studied the issues in more detail and now have new criticisms to put to him.

Ms Debra Shipley (Stourbridge): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is interesting that the hon. and learned Gentleman did not respond to my hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Lawrie Quinn)? That was probably because he was talking to two of his colleagues and not listening.

Mr. Dismore: The hon. and learned Gentleman is in the Chamber to defend his Bill, but he does not seem interested in the arguments.

The hon. and learned Gentleman and my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead mentioned the pensions crisis. The Select Committee's inquiry has been considering that and the overwhelming body of evidence leads one to say, "Crisis—what crisis?" The problem is that it is not a crisis in the true meaning of the word. A crisis is an immediate problem that requires action to be taken straight away to put it right, but we have a long-term problem that requires long-term solutions over the next five, 10, 15, 20 or so years. It is nonsense to think that without a knee-jerk reaction to the problem, everyone will end up in the workhouse when they retire.

Mr. Bryant: Surely the real pensions crisis was when the Tories so liberalised the financial services industry that thousands of people were sold pensions that they should never have been sold in the first place.

Mr. Dismore: My hon. Friend makes a telling point, which leads me to the matter of confidence. Although there may not be a pensions crisis per se, I accept the argument put to us by a number of people in the Select Committee hearings that there is a crisis of confidence in the private pensions sector. That is a different issue altogether. The evidence shows overwhelmingly that the fundamentals of pensions in Britain are sound. Compared to Europe and the rest of the western world, we have a well funded pensions industry that is sufficiently robust to cope with most of the trials and tribulations that bash it from time to time. We are in a much stronger position than anywhere else in Europe.

When the hon. and learned Gentleman goes on about the £5 billion pensions tax, he misses the point. My hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant) mentioned mis-selling. That is one of the problems at the

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root of the crisis of confidence. Equitable Life sold pension policies that were attractive at the time. Indeed, I bought its policies—

Mr. Bryant: And me.

Mr. Dismore: I am sure that that company sold policies to other hon. Members as well, but they could not be sustained in the long term. The failure of private sector work-based schemes when companies go bankrupt is another problem that has helped to generate the crisis of confidence in the pensions market. Couple that with the problems on the stock exchange and the falling value of pension company holdings, such as at Standard Life, and people inevitably start to wonder whether it is worth while saving for the long term. That is completely different from saying that there is a crisis in pensions themselves.

There is nothing in the Bill to increase the savings pot for anyone—except women, who will benefit at men's expense, and I shall come to that in a moment—unless the hon. and learned Gentleman's claims of tax neutrality prove not to be correct. The Bill is not a panacea for problems with annuities. Moreover, it would provide very little benefit to the overwhelming majority of pensioners who, if they do buy an annuity, have relatively small funds.

As you mentioned earlier, Mr. Deputy Speaker, my reasoned amendment was not selected, but that does not mean that the arguments behind it are not valid. I turn to those now in explaining why the House should decline to give the Bill a Second Reading. Clause 1(4)(c) provides that section 45 of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 shall not apply to the minimum retirement income annuity, which is one of the hon. and learned Gentleman's inventions in the Bill. I shall deal with that in more detail later.

The purpose of the clause is to remove the defence allowed by that section for sex discrimination in annuity rates. It would prevent annuity providers from setting the annuity rate by reference to the different average longevity of men and women. I suppose that I ought to declare an interest as a man—at least, I was a man the last time that I looked. Perhaps the hon. and learned Gentleman ought to declare the same interest. *[Interruption.]* The hon. and learned Gentleman says that he has no sex at all.

Mr. Garnier: The hon. Gentleman must try not to behave like the Friday afternoon lawyer that he is. I said that I had absolutely no interest in his sex.

Mr. Dismore: Perhaps I ought to remind Conservative Members that there are certain biological differences between the sexes, one of which is that women live longer than men.

Mr. Love: There was some confusion earlier about the current differences in life expectancy. According to a useful House of Commons research paper, even in 2001 the difference in life expectancy between men and women was three years at age 65. Does my hon. Friend accept that that is a major difference, and it must be recognised?

Mr. Dismore: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and I hope later in my contribution to look at those tables in a little more detail and to point out some of the anomalies that the Bill throws up.

When we debated the previous Bill on this subject, my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) eloquently described the effect of that difference on the arithmetic of calculating annuities. I assume that the hon. and learned Member for Harborough failed properly to prepare for his speech, because if he had he would have read those arguments, which are very cogent, in the *Hansard* account of that debate.

I also remind the hon. and learned Gentleman of a point that I made on the Second Reading of the Bill presented by the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry), because I have not yet had an answer to it. I said:

> "What about the sex discrimination legislation and the double exemption? Is it the role of private sector provision to level up between Peter and Pauline . . . or is that the responsibility of the state? There is nothing wrong with the state's involvement in pooling risk between the sexes. I take the point that when each sex reaches the age of 65 the differences between life expectancy are somewhat lower. However, I question whether it is right for the private sector to adopt this position, bearing in mind how annuities are currently calculated for pooling risk."—*[Official Report*, 11 January 2002; Vol. 377, c. 848.]

That is the essence of the argument. The hon. and learned Gentleman is at risk of creating, rather than correcting, inequality between the sexes.

It may seem paradoxical that Labour Members such as myself should advocate a position that on the face of it is contrary to our deeply held belief in equality for everyone. To achieve that, however, we must recognise that people are not equal in certain biological respects, such as ageing, and that can be done within the existing annuities system. I passionately believe in equality, and the state clearly has a role to play in achieving it, but should we regulate private sector rights in this way? At the risk of going down the highways and byways of equal opportunities, I should say that the Bill points up the distinction between the right role of the state in trying to regulate the balance between the sexes, and the wrong role.

If a woman is doing work of equal value to that of a man, she should get the same rate of pay. If a woman buys an annuity, she should have the product of that annuity, and the same is true of a man, but to achieve the same amount as the man, year on year, the woman would have to pay more. The hon. and learned Gentleman is not trying to achieve equality through equal work for equal value or, in this case, equal pension for equal contribution. He is taking money away from the man to meet the aspirations of the woman for her annuity.

Is there not a difference between the pooling of risk between the genders by the state, which carries that process across the whole economy, and the pooling of risk between individuals who happen to be men or women? It is clear that it is part of the state's responsibility to consider the issue, but does not the hon. and learned Gentleman agree that as matters stand we run the risk of robbing Peter to pay Pauline?

Mr. Stephen Pound (Ealing, North): I apologise to my hon. Friend, to the hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) and to the House for my late arrival, which was entirely the fault of the Mayor of London, whose policies are so successful that the streets are now full of cars.

Is there any evidence that people over the age of 75 want to buy annuities? I understand that research by the Association of British Insurers implies that, at most, 5 per cent. want to do so. Are we not in danger of creating a system that will be of interest to the more wealthy members of society, and of doing nothing for the majority of people who have real needs?

Mr. Dismore: My hon. Friend presages my remarks. The Bill is a complex vehicle—the hon. and learned Member for Harborough claims simplicity for it, but it is far from simple—for solving a problem, which, if it exists, applies only to a few wealthy people, like the hon. and learned Gentleman himself perhaps.

The Bill does not recognise the differing life expectancies that insurers take into account in setting annuity rates. It would remove the right of insurers to underwrite personal pension annuities on the basis of sex or to allow sex to be taken into account as a risk factor. Instead, it would force providers to use composite annuity rates averaging male and female factors. Another effect would be that any provider, when setting a composite rate, would face the risk of the male and female take-up not matching the assumed mix, so it might build in a margin that would lower annuity rates in general for both men and women.

The Bill would also introduce inconsistency between different types of pension arrangement. If an annuity was bought to secure benefits from an occupational pension scheme or a retirement annuity contract, the Bill would not prevent the rates from taking account of the annuitant's sex. That is particularly important in view of the alleged flight from defined benefits to defined contributions as a basis for occupational pension schemes. The Bill would, I assume, apply to pension schemes based on defined contributions. We understand from the media that there is a groundswell of movement towards such schemes, but the evidence taken by the Select Committee shows that the movement is not as great as one might believe. The assumption seems to be that no more than a quarter of pension schemes would move in that direction, which would not necessarily be a bad thing—it would depend on the total contributions to the scheme. The Bill introduced by the hon. and learned Member for Harborough would have an unfair effect on an employee on a defined contributions scheme working alongside a colleague on a defined benefits scheme, as it would catch one but not the other.

Mr. Love: Does my hon. Friend accept that a major factor in the shift away from defined benefits to defined contributions pension schemes is the pension holidays instituted under legislation that was introduced by the previous Government?

Mr. Dismore: My hon. Friend makes an important point. I am not entirely sure that the case he sets out is correct, but I can certainly understand why people might think it is. There would be a great injustice in an employer avoiding his responsibilities if, when times were good and the value of investments was rising, he kept the pension fund topped up but, when their value fell, he said that he could not afford to maintain it, perhaps because of the pension holiday—the point made by my hon. Friend. He might then stop maintaining the defined benefits scheme and switch to defined contributions.

As I have said, there is nothing inherently wrong with the defined contributions system. The problem is that employers are using the defined contributions switch as a sneaky way of cutting their wage bill. They often pay only 2 per cent. towards the defined contributions scheme, when they may have been paying 8, 9 or 10 per cent. to the defined benefits scheme. In other words, there is a wages cut behind the scenes, and the Opposition may wish to consider whether they need to talk to their friends in the City about that.

The Library has produced a useful briefing on the issues, including unisex annuities. It says:

> "The Bill required annuities to be provided on a unisex basis, instead of the present rules, under which annuities are calculated separately for men and women. As female life expectancy is longer than men's, the level of income women can expect for a given pension fund is significantly lower. According to the Annuity Bureau, a man aged 65 with a pension fund of £100,000 will be able to get a level annuity of £7,556.40 a year, but a woman would only get £6,948.00. However, as the annuity would on average be paid for longer to the woman, the capitalised value of the annuities is the same."

I am not sure that that is correct, and I shall give a different set of figures later.

Lawrie Quinn: I served on the Committee considering the Bill introduced by the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry), when our hon. Friend the Financial Secretary tabled a relevant amendment. Has my hon. Friend had an opportunity to study the arguments deployed on that occasion? Is it not lamentable that the hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) has failed to deal with the key arguments that the Government made then, and should he not have altered the Bill instead of producing a copycat measure?

Mr. Dismore: My hon. Friend is right, and I have with me copies of *Hansard* recording the Committee stages of the Bill introduced by the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon. The hon. and learned Member for Harborough may care to borrow them. He has obviously not read them, otherwise, as my hon. Friend said, he would have altered his Bill. He simply copied his right hon. Friend's Bill without any consideration of the cogent arguments made by my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary, who I am sure will speak about them later.

Returning to the capitalised value of annuities, as has been said, women receive a lower annual sum because of their longer life expectancy. I have briefly referred to the table on page 13 of the Library briefing, and hon. Members may find it a useful illustration of my argument. It demonstrates clearly how the gap has developed and how long it will take for changes to be made. One hundred years ago, the difference in life

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expectancy for men and women was much smaller. In 1901, there were 10.6 males to 11.6 females at age 65, showing a difference of only 1. If the hon. and learned Member for Harborough had introduced his Bill 100 years ago, he might have had a case for equalisation, but in 2001, there is a different life expectancy beyond 65 for men and women, with 16 males to 19.1 females—the difference has increased to 3.1. In the next 20 years, that figure is predicted to fall by only 0.3, so the hon. and learned Gentleman's reasons for introducing the Bill simply do not stack up. The differences are not predicted to change dramatically in the medium or long term. In the past 100 years, the differences have grown, as the chart in the Library briefing shows.

The key issue is how that translates into pensions. Under the top rates currently available, as shown in the annuity direct rates table for March 2003, a 65-year-old man who purchases an annuity for £100,000 may receive £603 a month. The comparable figure for a female purchaser with £100,000 to invest is £565 a month. For simplicity's sake, I am working with figures for level annuities. To look at the whole range of annuity products would only complicate matters, and would not change my basic argument. Over his expected remaining lifespan of 17 years, the male would receive £123,046, whereas the female over her remaining lifespan of 20 years would receive £135,720 because of the accruing interest on the capital in the investment period. The Library briefing was therefore not quite right. Although the value of annuities is the same for men and women, the net product is better for women even though their annual annuity is slightly lower. Women are quids in at the end of the day.

Mr. Pound: As ever.

Ms Shipley: My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Pound) is living dangerously.

Mr. Dismore: I shall not intrude on the arguments of my hon. Friends. Having declared my interest as a man, I shall, like most men, avoid that dangerous territory.

Martin Linton (Battersea): Does my hon. Friend accept that sometimes men do very well from annuities? My father bought an annuity for £5,000 and, as he approaches his 96th birthday, has received £102,119.

Mr. Dismore: My hon. Friend makes an interesting point, and I ask him to give my heartfelt felicitations to his father when he reaches his 96th birthday. However, he is not typical, as 96 is not the average male life expectancy. Annuities work on the principle of pooled risk across age, gender and a range of other factors. It is swings and roundabouts—if people die younger, the money goes back into the annuity pot for payouts to people who live longer. I believe that that point has been missed.

Before my hon. Friends entered the battle of the sexes, I was saying that women would receive about £12,500 more than men over their lifetime on an initial investment of £100,000. As I said, that is because of the accruing interest on capital during the investment period, which would be longer for women. Interest and inflation rates play a large part in assessing the value of those respective amounts, but the figures demonstrate that the value of a woman's annuity is no less than that of a man. Other aspects being equal, although an annuity payable to a woman may be smaller than that payable to a man, on average it will be paid over a longer period, producing a higher figure. The hon. and learned Gentleman's argument is that women get a raw deal because the annuity rates that they receive are lower than the men's. It is not difficult to see that unisex annuities would generally favour women and disadvantage men. On average, a man will not live as long as a woman, so a man's annuity will be paid for a shorter period than a woman's for the same outlay.

That is simply demonstrated by looking at the reverse side of the coin. If a unisex annuity paid £580 a month for an outlay of £100,000, a man would receive £118,320 over his expected lifespan, whereas a woman would receive £139,200. In round figures, the man would receive £5,000 less and the woman would receive £4,000 more. The difference is probably explained by the exorbitant charges that those who run annuity schemes sometimes levy. However, the net result is that for the same outlay, through the unisex pension, the man is £5,000 worse off and the woman is £4,000 better off. The Bill would prevent a man from entering into a personal pension annuity contract and buying with his own money a pension that reflected his own life expectancy. Unless and until the hon. and learned Gentleman can introduce a Bill to equalise life expectancy, the Bill before us would rob Peter to pay Pauline. In the end, there is no extra money in the pot.

Mr. Garnier: I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman has studied this issue so closely. During the 35 minutes or so in which we have been listening to him, I am sure that we have all been greatly assisted. Is the short point that he is against choice, whereas I am in favour of choice? The Bill does not require people to buy an annuity except for the purpose of a minimum income guarantee. They can do what they like with the remainder of their finances. The hon. Gentleman seems to be suggesting that people should not be allowed to do what they like with their own money. Is that right?

Mr. Dismore: All that I can say is watch this space. I shall certainly be coming to the issue of compulsion. The Bill would create a new raft of compulsion for the vast bulk of people who are in the position that we are discussing, while providing freedom for a tiny proportion of people, including the hon. and learned Gentleman's rich friends. He has a cheek to raise the issue of compulsion.

Mr. Stephen McCabe (Birmingham, Hall Green): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is not really a question of choice? However, there would be choice for the few individuals who would benefit by exercising choice at the expense of the taxpayer. That would be the choice.

Mr. Dismore: As always, my hon. Friend is right.

I would challenge the hon. and learned Gentleman's argument about choice. I suspect—we have had the argument before—that he has not read his Bill. He did not write it, and he has obviously not read it either. Clause 1(4)(c) says:

"after subsection (6) there is inserted—

'(7) Section 45 of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 shall not apply to the annuity provided under subsection (1A).'"

In other words, there is no choice. The provision of the Sex Discrimination Act is removed, so the only choice is to buy one of the hon. and learned Gentleman's unisex policies. He is entirely wrong in that respect, and he has obviously not read his own Bill.

Ms Oona King (Bethnal Green and Bow): Is it not the case that people do have the freedom to put their money where they want, but not if they want my taxes or anyone else's to provide them with a tax benefit in return?

Mr. Dismore: My hon. Friend makes a useful point. I shall be dealing with tax implications later in my remarks. However, the issue goes beyond that. Why should my pension contributions pay for my hon. Friend's pension? That is my big issue in terms of my personal pension. I would be compelled to make those contributions whether I liked it or not. I take objection to that. The hon. and learned Gentleman is entirely wrong when he talks about compulsion. As I have said, his Bill is full of compulsion for the average, ordinary working man and woman, but there is no compulsion for the very few rich people with multi-million pound pension schemes. That is at the nub of the Bill. I shall say a little more about that in a while.

In the end, there is no extra money in the pot. The Bill takes money away from a man to give it to a woman—a woman whom he probably does not know and has never met. Money would be taken from one gender unjustly to enrich the other.

As we know, the Bill has been introduced by an hon. and learned Member.

Mr. Pound: You could have fooled me.

Mr. Dismore: Given the Bill, the hon. and learned Gentleman could have fooled me, too.

I suspect that the hon. and learned Gentleman has not done his legal homework, either. The Bill undoubtedly has a human rights implication. I am sure that the hon. and learned Gentleman has not considered the implications of the Human Rights Act 1998, especially part II of the first protocol, article 1, which deals with the protection of property. The provision is straightforward and it bears reciting to the House. It reads:

"Every natural or legal person is entitled to the peaceful enjoyment of his possessions. No one shall be deprived of his possessions except in the public interest and subject to the conditions provided for by law and by the general principles of international law.

The preceding provisions shall not, however, in any way impair the right of a State to enforce such laws as it deems necessary to control the use of property in accordance with the general interest or to secure the payment of taxes or other contributions or penalties."

The Bill would not achieve the hon. and learned Gentleman's objective through the state mechanisms of taxation, national insurance or the benefits system, which would be permitted by the Human Rights Act; it would effectively deprive men who have made contributions towards their annuity costs of their possessions, namely, their annuity fund. That is because their possessions include their stake in the fund. There is little doubt that the hon. and learned Gentleman is falling foul of human rights legislation.

The hon. and learned Gentleman is no doubt an avid reader of the law reports.

Lawrie Quinn: I apologise for disturbing the flow of my hon. Friend's speech. However, he knows that I am but a simple engineer. From my professional perspective, to ignore central core tenets of a profession by disregarding major legislation and major statutes would have the most serious consequences. If I ignored principles while designing the foundations of a bridge, I would be construed within my profession as being negligent. My hon. Friend is from the legal profession. Would he go so far as to accuse the hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) of being negligent in ignoring the key, central tenets of his own profession by ignoring such an important part of statute law and of the British legal system that involves human rights?

Mr. Dismore: My hon. Friend makes a telling point. I would not accuse the hon. and learned Gentleman of professional negligence in the Chamber. He sits in the Chamber in connection not with his part-time job as a QC in the law courts, but with his other part-time job as a Member of Parliament. However, I would say to the hon. and learned Gentleman that had he advanced his argument before a judge without dealing with all the relevant points under the Human Rights Act and the case to which I shall shortly refer, his clients would at the very least have had something to say about it.

Lawrie Quinn: I shall again use the analogy of designing a structure. Is my hon. Friend saying that the very foundations of the Bill are flawed and that the case is undermined? Is it not deeply regrettable that the hon. and learned Gentleman did not provide explanatory notes, did not do his homework—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have dealt with the question of explanatory notes. The hon. Gentleman has repeated the point more than once, which is unnecessary. We would do better dealing with the substance of the Bill.

Mr. Dismore: In response to my hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough and Whitby—not on the question of explanatory notes, but on his engineering analogy—I would simply say that the hon. and learned Gentleman's structure is built on foundations of sand.

Lawrie Quinn: Technically, that is not a problem.

Mr. Dismore: That shows that my hon. Friend is an engineer and I am a lawyer.

Mr. Bryant: And I am a theologian.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Perhaps we should remember that for the purposes of today's debate, everyone in the House is a parliamentarian.

Mr. Dismore: I am grateful to you for calling us to order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You are right to say that we

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are all parliamentarians. That is the point I was making before the intervention from my hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough and Whitby—if the hon. and learned Member for Harborough had been speaking in his other capacity, his clients might have had something to say about it.

I have dealt with the Human Rights Act implications, but there is another legal aspect that we should consider. I do not know whether the hon. and learned Gentleman reads *The Times*—he probably does. This morning, he may well have read, as I did, yesterday's edition of *The Star Sheffield*, which reports an important case that is not on all fours with his argument for equalisation of the pension rules between the sexes. The newspaper reports the judgment of Mr. Justice Elias on a judicial review application by Barnsley equality campaigner Mr. David Moody, who claimed that recent increases in pension unlawfully discriminated against men, in that women started collecting their retirement pension at 60, whereas men have to wait until they are 65. Mr. Moody and another man, both in their 60s, sought judicial review of the decision of the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions. Mr. Moody argued that the increases were unlawful and that women benefited from them while men of the same age got nothing.

That is the mirror image of the argument in the Bill. *The Times* reported that the High Court judge, Mr. Justice Elias, threw the case out as lacking in merit. I believe that there is an argument for equalisation of state benefits, based on the material to which I referred, but if that does not apply, it surely does not apply with knobs on to private sector pension arrangements, which is what we are discussing today, in the context of the Human Rights Act.

Gender is a recognised factor in the setting of risk premiums by insurance companies in many contexts, not just in relation to annuities. I do not see women queuing up to argue against better car insurance rates, for example, because women as a group are less likely to commit motoring offences. As far as I am aware, the gender differential has not been contested in other areas where women do better than men out of insurance arrangements.

However, gender is but one factor that insurance companies take into account when setting annuity rates and determining risk premiums. When a person requests an annuity, they also consider general health, lifestyle, and whether he or she has a disability. Over the years, there has been much coverage, of people who are at risk of contracting HIV and their relations with the insurance industry, which has often tried to be intrusive in these matters when it comes to setting annuities. Insurance companies may also take into account whether someone is a member of a certain ethnic minority. Indeed, insurance companies have been specially designed and set up to cater for certain ethnic minority groups, as they are able to offer higher rate annuity products to those people, recognising that generally speaking, they have, a shorter life expectancy.

The fact remains that as far as they can, insurance companies set rates on the basis of what they consider to be individual risk premiums. When they cannot set individual risk premiums, they look across broad classes, use proxy and set risk premiums on that basis. Insurance companies' ability to determine risk and to attach it as closely as possible to the individual determines their competitive advantage in an extremely competitive market. That is how insurance companies and the insurance market work.

To wander into such terrain without well-thought-out and coherent proposals would be foolhardy. It would have ramifications and implications right across the insurance industry. The hon. and learned Gentleman has neglected to examine how risk is assessed by insurers. It is important to consider the impact that the imposition of unisex annuity rates would have on individual insurance companies. If insurance companies were forced to offer unisex rates, as the Bill provides, and only unisex rates, they could face an unpalatable choice. For the reasons that I explained earlier, they might have to set cautiously low annuity rates, so everyone would lose out. The reason behind that is that companies could not be sure that take-up of their annuity products between males and females would match the risk that they assumed at the outset. In the end, everybody would lose out—not just men; women would not gain as much as the hon. and learned Gentleman envisages.

Alternatively, insurers could face risks to the solvency of their businesses. With all the problems facing the insurance industry, this is hardly the time to consider any risk or threat to the solvency of any of the life insurers. Everyone would risk losing out. As I mentioned, I lost out dramatically from Equitable Life, and we see from the press that one or two other insurers potentially face the same problems.

Why is it desirable to force insurance companies to discount just one factor, when they can take account of so many other factors? Why should they discount only the gender of the annuitant, yet still be able to take account of whether people smoke, or their occupation. For example, if somebody is a fit SAS man, he may have a long life expectancy, as opposed to a fat, overweight Member of Parliament, who is doing his best to improve his health. My life expectancy may be very much less, and that factor may be taken into account.

Mr. Pound: I apologise for interrupting the grand, glorious stream of my hon. Friend's argument, but I felt summoned to speak on the subject of overweight Members of Parliament and appalling ill-health. Has my hon. Friend studied the December 2002 working paper by the magnificently named Continuous Mortality Investigation Bureau of the Faculty and Institute of Actuaries, which concluded that life expectancy is changing so rapidly that what was once a science is becoming extremely difficult to map? We get into dangerous waters on this subject, because life expectancy is varying so quickly that even the Continuous Mortality Investigation Bureau has had to recast its figures—the last time in 1999, and again as recently as 2002.

Mr. Dismore: My hon. Friend makes a telling point. Should he catch your eye later, Mr. Deputy Speaker, he will no doubt be able to develop his argument at length. There are so many factors in play that it is very difficult for insurers to set annuity rates. To add one more complication would make the job more difficult and potentially threaten their solvency or put even greater pressure on the net annuity product, which in the end is what we should all be concerned about.

Another factor that is taken into account is where people live. The hon. and learned Member for Harborough mentioned that people in Devon live longer than people in Manchester. That might have something to do with the fact that people often retire to the coast. The *Country Life* survey shows that Devon was the most popular county for retired people to go and live in, as opposed to Staffordshire—

Mr. Garnier: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Gentleman, as I know that he is enjoying himself. I mentioned Somerset and Dorset; not Devon.

Mr. Dismore: We can check that tomorrow, but Devon definitely came first, and Somerset came second. I remember, because I was surprised to see that Yorkshire, my home county, was fifth or sixth. I always thought that everything was bigger and better in Yorkshire, and that Yorkshire would undoubtedly be No. 1—after London, of course.

Mr. Love: It was interesting that in the introduction to the debate, no mention was made of social class as a determinant of life expectancy. Perhaps my hon. Friend could tell us how important social class is in that regard.

Mr. Dismore: My hon. Friend is right. Socio-economic indicators are extremely important. Occupation is probably the principal determining factor. A miner who suffers from emphysema has a very short life expectancy, whereas a lawyer, or better still a judge, seems to go on forever.

Mr. Love: Or a barrister.

Mr. Dismore: Indeed. Occupation is relevant not only to life expectancy for the calculation of annuities, but to the size of the pot that people are likely to have to invest. I shall come to that later.

Caroline Flint: Does my hon. Friend recognise that pensioners are the largest group of national health service recipients? It is interesting that the Bill not only seeks to reward the few against the many, but is being promoted by an hon. and learned Member who wants 20 per cent. cuts in public services. Undoubtedly, that would affect the NHS—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) will not deal with that matter.

Mr. Dismore: You are right, Mr. Deputy Speaker; my hon. Friend was entirely out of order and I certainly do not want to take that route, which might throw me off my stride and shorten my speech.

Mr. Bryant: My hon. Friend was addressing health inequalities according to class and their clear effect on mortality rates in particular areas. He also referred to miners. Mining constituencies have some of the worst mortality rates not only because men had to work in the mines, but because of all the other social and economic factors that affect those areas. Does my hon. Friend think that more could be done to ensure that those people get a decent retirement?

Mr. Dismore: My hon. Friend is right. All I say to the hon. and learned Member for Harborough is that his Bill does nothing to help people such as my hon. Friend's constituents. Indeed, I suspect that most miners were in the miners' pension fund, which raises all sorts of arguments about surpluses. I also suspect that any who opted out and bought their own private pensions would be significantly worse off as a result of the hon. and learned Gentleman's proposals.

Lawrie Quinn: Has my hon. Friend had an opportunity to study some of the mortality figures from the recent census? I was horrified to see that mortality rates among women who live in coalfield communities are significantly higher than the national average. Does my hon. Friend agree that the workplace eventually shortens the lives not only of the men but of the women? They often had to clean the men's backs, and they also inhaled coal dust and had the same industrial disease visited upon them, which means that they have lost out in terms of life expectancy. Is that not a national scandal?

Mr. Dismore: My hon. Friend makes his point eloquently and I do not think there is anything that I can add. As I mentioned, when an insurance company sets an annuity, it takes into account variations in respect of where people live. My hon. Friend refers to precisely the sort of factors that are relevant. It is a question not only of whether people live somewhere nice beside the sea now, but of where they lived all their working-age lives and the stresses and strains relating to that area, their diet and so on.

I do not think that the action that the hon. and learned Member for Harborough proposes in trying to interfere with such arrangements will create a more favourable environment for insurance companies. He proposes stringent regulation of an industry that can currently offer diversity of service to its customers. If an insurance company wished to pursue his proposals, and thought it commercially viable to do so, it would be free to adopt such a policy. However, not a single company wishes to take that course of action. As a good free marketeer, I should have thought that the hon. and learned Gentleman would agree that that is one reason why his proposal is wrong. There is a good reason why a company would not adopt such an approach—it would go out of business extremely quickly, as it would not be meeting the needs of its customers, whether they were men or women.

Getting rid of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 in respect of the provisions raises another issue—retrospection. The hon. and learned Gentleman's proposals are entirely silent about that. As I mentioned, I was with Equitable Life for 20 years. Others have been in pension funds for longer. Mercifully, I transferred out at great expense, but that is another story. When I joined Equitable Life in the late 1970s or early 1980s—I forget exactly when—I entered into the arrangements on the basis of the projections at that time. Obviously, we have since found that they were wrong for reasons that were not envisaged. Are we now to say that all the people who

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entered into contracts on that basis 20 or more years ago should accept that those numbers have to be unscrambled and rescrambled to meet the requirements of the proposed change in respect of the Sex Discrimination Act, or is the provision intended to apply only to new insurance contracts that take effect 40, 50 or 60 years into the future?

The hon. and learned Gentleman may not have thought through the implications of his measure in that respect. If it would be retrospective and apply to annuities paid for over the past few decades but not taken out, it would have major implications for people's lifestyle projections. Most people approaching their late 40s will start to think about the age at which they can afford to retire and what their annuity will be. We know that, in practice, people now have to work longer and retire later, but they start to think about such things as their 50s approach. They will have been making their contributions throughout their working lives on the basis of where they want to be when they retire.

We know from problems in the pensions industry that many people have to think about topping up their policies, whether they are endowment policies, life policies or whatever, because of the falling value of the funds. On that basis alone, people have to think about topping up their policies. Are we now to say to people not only that they need to consider topping up their pensions for those reasons, but that they have to top them up because of the redistributive effect of the hon. and learned Gentleman's Bill? Is he telling me that I must now put in more money not for my benefit, but for that of a woman whom I have never met? That is what his Bill implies, because it does not deal with retrospection.

Ms Shipley: Does my hon. Friend agree that poorer women in our society get pitifully low pensions, that even those with a moderately good income may still receive a very low pension because of career breaks and that, far from helping women in that regard, the Bill harms them?

Mr. Dismore: My hon. Friend is right; the Bill does nothing about that. There are many other things that we should be doing and I hope that the forthcoming work and pensions report will address some of those issues. As things stand, the Bill does nothing except perhaps add to the pensions myth by telling people that they will be better off than they will be. The hon. and learned Gentleman has issued a press release saying how wonderful things would be if the Bill were passed. That raises expectations, which is one of the problems that we face in the pensions industry these days. We should be doing entirely the opposite. We should be bringing people down to earth with a bang and saying, "Unless you start to put more money into your pension scheme, you will be in trouble when you retire." The hon. and learned Gentleman's Bill is a con trick; my hon. Friend's intervention was entirely correct.

The problem extends further, as it also affects insurers. Does the hon. and learned Gentleman suggest that a person's insurance provider should have to recalculate the figures and share out the money to ensure equality between the sexes? Under such an arrangement, men might find that the projections of future pension provision, on whose basis they have been living their lives, were drastically wrong, while women in a similar position might find themselves better off. The proposals do not deal with retrospection or sorting out decisions often taken decades ago.

The disincentive to save is another important aspect of the Bill. The Select Committee on Work and Pensions has been carrying out a detailed study of pension reform and we have heard a lot of interesting arguments from experts and from the Minister. Professors have given us a detailed analysis of why some aspects of the pension credit might be an incentive and others a disincentive. The matter became extremely complicated. I am sure that the hon. and learned Gentleman would have been entirely lost, bearing in mind how little information he has given us about his Bill today. None the less, I can be sure of this: if we tell a man that he can put a pound into his pension fund but will get back only 80p when he retires, while the other 20p will go into the pension of a woman whom he may never have met to ensure that she receives the same provision, for much longer, that will be a disincentive to save.

The fact remains that the Bill would create a serious disincentive to men that would deter them from providing for their future. In the end, the breadwinner, who even in this day and age is generally the man of the family, must make such provision. If there is a disincentive to save, he simply will not do so. A terrible confidence gap already exists, for the reasons that we have discussed, and it is already difficult to convince people that they should not live on credit but put money aside for their retirement. It will be much more difficult to persuade them that they should be putting away far more money if this proposal is adopted. It would achieve entirely the opposite effect and incorporate a huge disincentive to save.

I have come to the end of my first point on the Bill and now move to my second, which concerns the Bill's effect on the size of the pot. I repeat that the Bill is a con trick. Today's pensioners face much lower nominal annuity rates than did earlier pensioners. The expectation of low and stable inflation, incorporated in the bond yields underlying annuity rates, means that they face less inflationary risk. Their income will retain its purchasing power much better than has been the case in the past. Nevertheless, the perception remains that it is unfair for people to retire with annuity income based on rates half those of 10 years ago.

Research by the Association of British Insurers stresses the extent to which the determination of income in retirement is a two-stage process, encompassing annuity rates and pre-retirement investment growth. People retiring today face low annuity rates, but their pension funds will have benefited from high growth in equities in the period before they retired. The net effect of those countervailing forces is that, for a given level of contributions relative to average earnings, an individual retiring at the end of the 1990s has a higher income in retirement than someone who retired at the start of the decade. The coincidence of high pre-retirement growth and low post-retirement returns may not continue. Life expectancy is important in that regard and I will return to the life expectancy tables from the Library to illustrate that point.

Earlier, we considered the tables on the differences between the sexes on page 13 of the research paper. I want to use the same tables to consider the differentiation over the decades for each sex. In 1901, a man's life expectancy was 10.6 years, but the projections for 2021 show a man's life expectancy to be 18.1 years. In other words, male life expectancy has gone up by 7.5 years.

Mr. Bryant: I hate to correct my hon. Friend but I do not think that he means that people were dying at the age of 10 in 1901; he means that they lived 10 years beyond the age of 65.

Mr. Dismore: My hon. Friend is correct. None of us would have been here, based on what I said. In 1901, men lived to the age of 65 plus 10.6 years, which is 75.6. In 2021, men are projected to live to 65 plus 18.1 years, which would be—[HON. MEMBERS: "83.1."] That is O-level maths for you.

Mr. Bryant: My hon. Friend could be an actuary.

Mr. Dismore: I am not sure that I could.

Between 1901 and 2021, the differential is 7.5 years. In other words, in 2021, men will live 7.5 years longer than they were living 100 years ago.

For women, the differential is even greater. In 1901, women lived 11.6 years beyond 65, to 76.6. In 2021, they are expected to live 20.8 years beyond 65, to 85.8. The differential between 1901 and 2021 for women is 9.2 years. As life expectancies continue to improve for each sex, they affect the annuity pot necessary to provide for long-term retirement.

Mr. Bryant: The actuarial expectations in the 1930s and 1940s, notwithstanding the second world war, of how long people who were born in 1926 would live, have been far outreached. People who were born in 1926 have lived far longer than was expected. It is therefore especially difficult to make clear and unambiguous forecasts.

Mr. Dismore: My hon. Friend makes a good point that goes back to the vagaries of the actuarial market when it comes to how annuities should be calculated. The Bill does nothing to address his point or increase the pot.

To increase the pot, and so allow a greater distribution for most people, one has to do one of several different things. One could increase one's contributions during one's working life. We all know how difficult it is to convince young people of the need to invest for their future. I made my pension arrangements when I became a partner in my law firm. I did not do that voluntarily, but because it was a requirement of the partnership. When I was in my late 20s, my partnership share was not sufficient for me to consider it easy to make those contributions, but in those days interest and annuity rates were high, as shown in all the research material made available to us by the Library, although not by the hon. and learned Member for Harborough.

Other sources of additional money are tax breaks—I will refer to taxation later—and better investment of the overall pot. The latter suggestion is far better than the proposals in the Bill for annuity reform. We will have to consider other forms of annuity. An annuity does not have to be purchased from the firm with which an individual has saved for their pension. We now have the open market option, which allows individuals to compare different annuity providers to maximise their retirement income. It is estimated that 90 per cent. of people would receive a higher annuity income if they exercised their open market option, but only around 30 per cent. of people who purchase annuities do so.

Mr. Pound: Like all hon. Members present, I have been educated by my hon. Friend's speech as he approaches his record. He has clearly done an enormous amount of homework—perhaps unlike some people—but has he considered the impact of the state pension credit? Everything that we are discussing will have to be recast because of the introduction of the state pension credit in October 2003. That will be immensely significant, will it not?

Mr. Dismore: My hon. Friend makes an important point that drives a coach and horses through parts of the Bill. Much later in my speech, I have a lot to say about pension credit.

Mr. Pound: I can hardly wait.

Mr. Dismore: I am afraid that my hon. Friend will have to wait a little while yet.

I have considered alternatives to the Bill's proposals for annuity reform. I think that the alternatives would achieve far greater benefits for a far greater number of people. They require little, if any, legislative reform.

The Government have taken the view that many of the perceived problems with annuities could be addressed by product innovation within the existing legal framework. The Treasury economic and fiscal strategy report 2001 states:

> "The Government ... welcomes recent moves by annuity providers to develop more flexible annuity products that will enable those pensioners for whom it is desirable to remain invested in equities. As the annuity market grows, it should aim to meet the demand for greater investment choice and higher returns. The Inland Revenue will continue to work with the industry to ensure that the tax rules do not unnecessarily restrict the development of these products and this market."

Those variable or investment-linked annuities go some way to increasing the investment choice of annuitants. Recent growth in the market has been rapid, with investment-linked annuities' share of the overall pension annuity market rising from 5 per cent. in 1998 to nearly 20 per cent. in 2000.

More recent innovation has focused on schemes that enable annuitants to purchase an annuity consisting of a series of temporary and deferred annuities. The deferred annuity guarantees income throughout retirement—a key Inland Revenue requirement for annuities purchased from approved pension schemes—while the series of temporary annuities enables annuitants to choose from a range of investment strategies appropriate to their personal circumstances and stage of retirement.

The aims of such products, from the annuitant's viewpoint, would be to increase potential lifetime income through greater freedom to choose optimally

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performing assets; to vary that choice during retirement to reflect any change of attitude to risk and reward any change in financial circumstances; to provide insurance against longevity, but with flexibility as to the extent of the cover chosen; to generate stable income but allow flexibility about the level of income generation; and, to allow transparency, which is extremely important in a stakeholder culture.

Mr. Love: Will my hon. Friend comment on the risk and reward of the new flexible annuity products, which are based on equities and the stock exchange? There is anxiety that risk may overtake reward, and that the traditional annuity may be a better product.

Mr. Dismore: Most people who hold annuities have small ones. I shall deal with that point later. The products that we are considering are vehicles for the better-off. People should not get involved in them without good, independent financial advice. However, the Bill is supposed to help the better-off. My hon. Friend made a telling point about the alternatives that I was describing, but they are genuine alternatives to the proposal of the hon. and learned Member for Harborough. Unlike the Bill, they provide greater flexibility for the people whom he is trying to help without screwing things up for everybody else.

Let me give some examples. The flexible annuities that the Prudential and Canada Life offer provide increased freedom for individuals to alter their income in retirement. The Canada Life annuity growth account enables individuals to purchase five-year annuities while the rest of the fund is invested. If an individual survives the five-year period, a survival bonus is added to the account. That is the cross-subsidy from other individuals who die during those five years. At the end of the five years, another temporary annuity can be bought at a different level of income. At age 85, the fund must be used to purchase a life annuity.

The Prudential flexible annuity allows individuals to continue to invest in the stock market and vary their income within limits until the age of 90. Had the products been around at the time, they might have been of interest to the father of my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Martin Linton), although he appears to have done well out of his investment.

The insurer London and Colonial launched a different sort of annuity, which financial advisers have welcomed as an even more revolutionary form of annuity provision. The open annuity offers a range of investment options and manages an annuitant's fund in isolation rather than pooling funds, which the traditional annuity product does. The product has been structured in such a way that any capital that remains on death can form part of the investor's estate. The Inland Revenue's approval of the annuity suggests a new flexibility in dealing with the problems that the hon. and learned Member for Harborough identified but failed to tackle. I have therefore shown that there is much better way of achieving the honourable and learned Gentleman's objective and that his Bill is not necessary.

My third point, which is the longest and most important, deals with the honourable and learned Gentleman's definition of minimum retirement income. It is the key to the Bill because without it, the measure falls apart.

Mr. Pound: It has fallen apart.

Mr. Dismore: It has fallen apart in other ways, but I shall put another nail in its coffin.

The honourable and learned Gentleman announced the Bill in a press release, which stated:

> "In order to prevent or discourage pensioners from wasting their funds and becoming dependent on the state, the Bill provides for a minimum retirement income annuity that is designed to give pensioners a guaranteed income for life above the level of state income support. The income from this will come from a retirement income fund."

Of course, that prompts the question of whether there is sufficient money to buy the fund in the first place. The honourable and learned Gentleman has lamentably failed to give a figure at which the minimum retirement income threshold should be set. Not only does he fail to do that, but the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon also failed to do so throughout proceedings on an identical measure that he promoted. They have not got a clue because they do not understand the way in which the benefits system works for real people. I suspect that the honourable and learned Gentleman rarely comes across real people.

I have had to fall back on the Library briefing, which gives a best guess at a figure, should the Bill be enacted. I am happy to give way to the hon. and learned Gentleman if he would like to say what he has in mind. He does not want to intervene, so he obviously has no figure in mind. We therefore have to fall back on the Library briefing's best guess, based on the work of the retirement income working party, to which the honourable and learned Gentleman paid great tribute.

The RIWP considered three broad options for setting the minimum retirement income. The first was based on the minimum income guarantee for a single pensioner. It was £75 a week at the time, but as of this month, it will be £98.15. From April, it will be £102.10. That shows the Government's generosity to the least well-off pensioners. However, the RIWP rejected that option because it would not provide certainty that the annuitant would remain off means-tested benefit throughout retirement. After retirement, the components of an individual's retirement income will increase in line with inflation. For this Parliament at least, the Government are committed to increasing the minimum income guarantee in line with earnings. When we are re-elected, the policy will undoubtedly continue. A minimum retirement income set at the level of the minimum income guarantee at the date of an individual's retirement would quickly fall below it during retirement.

The second option that the RIWP considered was setting the minimum retirement income at a level that represented the average income from the basic state pension and membership of an occupational scheme. At the time, the figure would have been £220. It was rejected as being too high to secure the required flexibility. Is £220 too much?

Mr. Pound: I think not.

Mr. Dismore: My hon. Friend is right.

The third option was setting the MRI at a level that represented the income produced by the basic state pension and the state earnings-related pension scheme for someone who was formerly on national average earnings. At the time, the figure was £140 a week, and will be £160 from 2003. The RIWP recommended that option on the ground that it struck a suitable balance between flexibility and certainty and marked a link between the income from contracting out SERPS and the income that would be produced by remaining contracted in.

However, £160 a week would not achieve the honourable and learned Gentleman's express policy objective of preventing dependence on the state, as I am about to demonstrate.

Martin Linton: Will my hon. Friend explain how MRI could take account of high levels of housing benefit, which are often paid in constituencies such as mine and his? How could it take account of the fact that many people do not receive full state pension? It is impossible to predict precisely the contribution that every individual will make during their lifetime to entitle them to a full state pension.

Mr. Dismore: My hon. Friend is ahead of me. I am about to develop that point at some length to explain to the honourable and learned Gentlemen where he has gone wrong in his definition of dependence on the state. His press release includes the words

> "becoming dependent on the state".

Using the minimum income guarantee or the other options that the RIWP considered will not plug the gap or prevent people from depending on the state.

As I understand the honourable and learned Gentleman's policy objective, the purpose of MRI is to ensure that anyone who buys one of the products that he is promoting will not have to fall back on the state's resources. I question that because of the wording of the Bill, which appears contradictory. Clause 2(1) states:

> "The amount of the Minimum Retirement Income shall be set for each financial year by the Chancellor of the Exchequer by order before 31st January in the preceding financial year, and he shall set the amount for the financial year in which this Act comes into force within two months of the date on which this Act is passed".

In other words, the Bill passes the buck to the Chancellor. However, we will put that to one side.

Clause 1(4)(c) introduces subsection (8) to proposed new section (1A) of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988. It states:

> "The income provided each year from the annuity under section (1A) must increase by reference to increases in the retail price index, so far as not exceeding 5%."

That is a rather convoluted way of describing it. My question to the hon. and learned Gentleman is this: is the Chancellor's discretion under clause 2 fettered by this 5 per cent. RPI rule? The Bill is entirely silent on the interaction of those two provisions.

Lawrie Quinn: Is my hon. Friend aware of the detail of the letter that every hon. Member has received from the Association of British Insurers? It states that the minimum retirement income would have to be set at a level in excess of £200 a week if individuals were not to find it necessary to claim a means-tested benefit during their retirement. Should not the hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) have done his homework and been conscious of this, and should he not have factored it in to the significant repair work to the original Bill proposed by the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) some time ago? These were the key points that we made on many occasions in Committee at that time.

Mr. Dismore: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. This is one of the major criticisms of the hon. and learned Gentleman's Bill: he has entirely failed to say what he thinks the figure should be. He has passed the buck to the Chancellor, while giving the Chancellor conflicting provisions that say neither one thing nor the other and do not interact. He has given no explanation whatever for that. If he is seriously asking the House to approve his Bill, I hope that, when he responds to the debate—which may not happen for some time—he will at least have thought up a figure which he thinks is the minimum that someone should be expected to live on.

Mr. Love: Perhaps the hon. and learned Gentleman could also comment—he did not do so during his speech—on the issue raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Pound) in relation to the pension credit. This important new benefit is now being introduced, but it does not seem to figure anywhere in the hon. and learned Gentleman's calculations.

Mr. Dismore: My hon. Friend is entirely correct. There is a whole series of questions relating to the detail of the pension credit, which I am afraid I shall have to pose to the hon. and learned Gentleman, because he took so little time to introduce his Bill and made no effort to deal with these issues.

Mr. Bryant: My hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Lawrie Quinn) referred earlier to repairs to the Bill. May I urge my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) to exercise great caution on the issue of repairs? Of course, the hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) could, if he were still interested in this debate, say that these issues could be repaired in Committee. Is not the truth, however, that the failure to consider the issue of how the MRI might stand goes to the very heart of the Bill? Is that not a reason why the Bill should not go any further, and should not go into Committee at all?

Mr. Dismore: My hon. Friend is right. This repair job needs to involve demolition and complete rebuilding. The hon. and learned Gentleman might be left with the façade of the long title, but everything else will have to go. He should start again. Frankly, the House would be well advised to reject his Bill in those circumstances.

Getting back to the point about minimum retirement income, I am concerned that the Bill contains no provision to require the Chancellor to consult anybody about what rate he should set for the MRI. In these days of political inclusiveness, I am surprised that the hon. and learned Gentleman has not included in the Bill a suggestion that the Chancellor should consult the insurance industry and pensioners' groups, some of

[Mr. Dismore]

which are very active in private sector pension provision, before deciding what rate should be set. All sorts of different figures have been suggested already, before I even started to outline the problems involved.

I am also surprised that the hon. and learned Gentleman suggests that the appropriate rate should be linked to the retail prices index. I am sure that he is serious about making sure that the provision that people make is sufficient to ensure that they are not dependent on the state, but the Bill simply would not achieve that. He might not like to hear it, but the Government have been very generous to the least well-off pensioners through the minimum income guarantee, which increases every year in line not with inflation but with earnings. We know that the intention is to increase it to more than £102 a week for 2003, and it will continue to increase and overtake the RPI increase.

The hon. and learned Gentleman and his party are not keen on the earnings link. They abolished it for the basic state pension in the early 1980s. If, at some remote date in the distant future, the Conservatives should return to government, it is possible that they might not continue this Government's policy of generosity to the least well-off pensioners by maintaining the earnings link for the minimum income guarantee. I would be happy to take an intervention from Members on the Opposition Front Bench, if they would like to give us an assurance that they would continue that policy. I see no one seeking to intervene, so it would seem that my assumption that they have no intention of continuing that policy should they ever return to government is correct.

Assuming that the present Government's policy continues, the Bill in its present form would mean that pensioners would quickly find themselves falling behind the hon. and learned Gentleman's targets and becoming dependent on the state. I am about to come to the point about housing and council tax benefit raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea, but before I do—

Mr. Howard Flight (Arundel and South Downs) *rose*—

Mr. Dismore: Ah, here we go!

Mr. Flight: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way. Does he agree with the Government's own proposals in section 5 of the revenue Green Paper to end the obligation to buy an annuity?

Mr. Dismore: If the hon. Gentleman is patient, he will hear me refer to the Government's policy at some length, because it is important that we understand where the Government are coming from. However, I am afraid that he might have to wait a little while—possibly quite a long while—for me to get to that.

Lawrie Quinn: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way to me, I think for about the eighth time. May I remind him that he has been on his feet for almost 90 minutes? Does he not agree that the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) has scored a classic own goal, just as the Conservatives did during their 18 years of government through their terrible treatment of pensioners?

Mr. Dismore: My hon. Friend is right. I am grateful to him for drawing my attention to the clock. If the hon. and learned Member for Harborough had introduced his Bill properly, I might not have had to take so long to expose all the loopholes and failings in it. As things stand, however, I am about halfway through, so I am afraid that we have a little way to go yet before I finish with the hon. and learned Gentleman's Bill. It has so many loopholes, and they all have to be pointed out.

Before that last intervention, I was talking about minimum retirement income and dependency on the state. The assumption behind the hon. and learned Gentleman's Bill seems—although we do not know, because he did not tell us—to involve something around the minimum income guarantee level. But dependency on the state comes in a variety of forms. My hon. Friend the Member for Battersea mentioned housing and council tax benefit, and that is an important point. The hon. and learned Gentleman might think that such benefits may not be of much interest to the kind of people who would have the policies that he is talking about, but a relatively large number of well-off people in London choose to rent their property. Indeed, luxury property in London is often available only for rent and not for sale. If such people were to fall on hard times, they could be thrown back on to state provision, and the Bill makes no provision for housing benefit, let alone council tax benefit, in its consideration or definition of what is or is not dependency on the state.

Dependency on the state does not simply involve central Government; it can also involve local government. Many benefits that people get from local authorities are passported through the minimum income guarantee. Should social services charges be levied, for example? In my own area, if pensioners want to get their gardening or decorating done but are physically unable to do it themselves, the council will pay for that work to be done—or it used to when it was under Labour. I do not know whether that will still be the case following the massive cuts being brought in by the Tory council in this year's budget. That could be dependency on the state, and there is a price-tag attached to it. Social services make a charge, but not for those who cannot afford it: further dependency on the state. The hon. and learned Gentleman's Bill is entirely silent on these matters.

I now come to the biggest problem of all. What about the cost of long-term care for the elderly? That issue has taxed the House at great length over the last few years. Such care is phenomenally expensive, as we all know from our debates on the royal commission reports and the changes that have come in since. We also have the added complication that, although taxation arrangements are United Kingdom-wide, different arrangements for long-term care pertain—for good or ill—in England and Wales, compared with Scotland, as a consequence of devolution. In Scotland, it has been accepted that the state will meet the cost of long-term care. I am not sure whether the Scottish Parliament has the money to do that, but that was its policy decision.

The policy has not, however, been accepted in England and Wales, where the means test still applies to the personal care element of long-term care for the elderly. As we all know, and as Opposition Members frequently point out, that cost continues to rise. The hon. and learned Gentleman provided no answer to that problem and we do not know whether he believes that the cost of long-term care for the elderly should be borne by the state or by setting his minimum retirement income at such a level that individual pensioners could absorb the cost. The Bill is entirely silent on that point, as it is on everything else to do with the definition of minimum retirement income.

I am sorry that my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North is not in his place at the moment because I am about to deal with his point about the pension credit to be introduced in October. We canvassed that issue during debates on the Bill promoted by the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon last year, and I should have thought that the hon. and learned Member for Harborough would at least have studied those debates and provided some answers to the extremely difficult problems related to pension credit.

The starting point for that issue is the Library briefing paper. If the hon. and learned Gentleman had done nothing else, he could at least have read that document before he came to the House, as it would have given answers to important questions. The briefing paper states:

> "The introduction of the State Pension Credit in October 2003 complicates the situation further, by splitting means-tested provision for pensioners into two parts. The guarantee credit will be broadly equivalent to the MIG and will be £102.10 for a single pensioner in 2003; the savings credit would top-up the incomes of pensioners with modest incomes other than the basic state pension, and is expected to be payable to single pensioners with incomes of up to £139 in 2003. It is not clear whether the policy intention of ensuring that the MRI provides an income above means-tested levels refers to the level of the guarantee credit or to the level at which entitlement to the savings credit would run out. As the current government is committing to increasing the level of the guarantee credit in line with earnings, the cut off point for the Pension Credit will continue to increase. Therefore the rate of the MRI would have to be significantly higher than the upper limit of the Pension Credit to reduce the chances of someone falling on to the Pension Credit after a number of years, as the MRI annuity will only be increasing in line with inflation not earnings."

But what about the savings element of pension credit, which is equally important? I do not understand whether the hon. and learned Gentleman thinks that the subsidy from the pension credit, which is aimed especially at middle-income pensioners, should be covered by his MRI figure, or whether that figure should be set at a level such that people who purchase an annuity under the MRI should not have to make provision for that so that they could maximise their entitlement to pension credit.

At present, there is no incentive for that sort of fiddle because one can arrange one's affairs so as to maximise one's entitlement to pension credit. Either one is entitled to it, through the purchase of an annuity, or one is not. The hon. and learned Gentleman's provision could enable people to make a benefit planning arrangement whereby they set their annuity under the MRI at a level that maximised their benefit, which could increase the burden on the state in respect of the people to whom the Bill is supposed to apply.The pension credit raises complicated questions for the hon. and learned Gentleman and, so far, he has lamentably failed to answer them, as the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon also failed to do last year.

The system that we inherited from the Tories was simple: there was the basic state pension and a low level of what was then supplementary benefit—now the minimum income guarantee. I do not know whether the hon. and learned Gentleman has kept up with the times. The Labour Government have been generous to the least well-off and are about to be generous to the next band of pensioners. The questions for the hon. and learned Gentleman arise from the pension credit, long-term care of the elderly and ancillary benefits such as housing and council tax benefits. If the Bill is to be revenue neutral, he must answer those questions.

How will couples be treated under the Bill? The difficulty that the hon. and learned Gentleman must face is that couples are taxed independently, but benefits for the elderly, including pensions, are assessed on a family basis. He has not dealt with that problem. I refer him again to the Library briefing, which states:

> "The treatment of pensioner couples is a further complicating issue. The MRI proposals—like the income sources which would constitute any MRI—are based on the individual. However, the means-tested benefit system which the MRI seeks to maintain pensioners above is based on the family. The interaction between individual income and family assessment of benefit entitlement raises the issue of the MRI over-providing for couples where both have pension entitlements from the defined-contribution pension scheme."

Let us assume an illustrative minimum retirement income of £140 per week. For taxation purposes, both partners

> "would be required to purchase an annuity sufficient to provide them with individual income of £140 per week, producing a joint income of £280 per week. Given that to avoid dependence on the MIG, they only require a joint income of £155.80 in April—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: May I remind the hon. Gentleman that if he wishes to cite quotations and read extracts from documents, such extracts and quotations should be reasonably short? The purpose of that, as "Erskine May" explains, is to maintain the cut and thrust of debate, which depends on successive speakers meeting in their speeches, to some extent, the arguments of earlier speeches. I hope that for the convenience of the House as a whole the hon. Gentleman will bear those rulings in mind.

Mr. Dismore: I am grateful to you for reminding me of "Erskine May", Mr. Deputy Speaker. The subject is complicated and I needed to set out the figures before I developed my argument.

Mr. Love: It is now just over 100 minutes since my hon. Friend began his speech. That is a reflection of the complexity of the Bill. Is not it sad that the hon. and learned Member for Harborough did not take the time to explain all the ramifications—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is in danger of being repetitive with his interventions and I can easily rule those out of order.

Mr. Dismore: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I fully accept your constraints, but I had to read that rather lengthy extract to try to set out the figures accurately so that I could illustrate—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have been extremely generous to the hon. Gentleman; more than 100 minutes

[Mr. Deputy Speaker]

passed before I intervened to make that point. However, he will be testing the patience of the House if he continues to read extracts at length, and I have therefore reminded him of what "Erskine May" says on that subject.

Mr. Dismore: I fully understand that point, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I should like to develop the argument that comes from those extracts.

The Library briefing illustrates that the tax system is based on the taxation of individuals, unless the hon. and learned Member for Harborough proposes that we should return to a joint taxation system, which would have a series of other ramifications and would open up a huge can of worms. Each member of the couple would have to have £140 a week, if we assume that to be the illustrative figure. The problem is that that would create a combined income of £280, which would be an over-provision if the hon. and learned Gentleman's test is the minimum income guarantee limit. If my previous arguments are correct and one has to take account of housing benefit, council tax benefit, long-term care for the elderly and so forth, £280 a week may not be sufficient. However, the Bill is silent on that point, which is part of the problem.

The hon. and learned Gentleman challenged me on the question of compulsion. He said that I was in favour of compulsion, and in a press release announcing the Bill, he stated that it would get rid of compulsion. I want to develop some of those arguments. The press release stated that at present it is compulsory to buy an annuity at 75 years of age with a pension pot that has been saved up over the contributory years, subject to a 25 per cent. tax-free lump sum. I stress that point: the hon. and learned Gentleman states that it is compulsory to buy an annuity at 75. However, that is not correct. It is compulsory to buy an annuity by the age of 75, but not at the age of 75. At present, one can buy an annuity from the age of 50—from 2010 that will rise to age 55—until the age of 75. There is flexibility during two decades as to when one buys one's annuity. The Bill compels everyone, whether they like it or not, to buy their annuity at the age of 65.

There is a reason for the choice of age 75. It is something called "mortality drag". Some people believe that it is better for a pensioner to wait to buy an annuity because annuity rates are higher for older people. That is a false conclusion, as that feature is only part of the story. Annuity providers set their rates by judging the life expectancy of their customers. That judgment determines how much capital they can afford to return each year along with interest to people who buy the annuities. Because older people are more likely to die, the provider can give a bigger capital boost to its older annuity customers. That is why annuity rates rise with age.

If someone decides to start taking their benefits from their pension savings, delays buying an annuity and draws income from their fund while part of the fund remains invested, after a period they could use the residual fund, with any investment growth, to buy an annuity at the rate for their age then. The residual fund needs a strong growth rate if it is to allow that to happen, and the optimum maximum age, because of mortality drag—bearing in mind your constraints, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall not quote at length from the large amount of source material that I have to justify this—is 75. The critics of the present system, who have said—at length—that age 75 is an arbitrary figure, plucked out of thin air, simply have not studied the actuarial evidence that justifies it.

Compulsion at age 65 is at the heart of the Bill for all but a wealthy few. I believe in flexibility. We need to work towards the flexible decade of retirement. People increasingly live longer and want to work beyond 65. We have received plenty of letters from people who object vehemently to being forced to retire at 65. They think that that is the worst sort of ageism, and I agree. In some jobs it may be appropriate to retire at 65, but in others it may not. By specifying 65, the Bill does not provide the flexibility that the modern age requires.

Being an hon. and learned Gentleman, the promoter of the Bill will be aware of the requirements of European Union law. I am not sure where he stands on the Eurosceptic front, but the Government are developing proposals to outlaw age discrimination in employment and vocational training by December 2006. The hon. and learned Gentleman has failed to address that serious point. The present system provides 20 years' flexibility; his provides none at all.

The Bill would remove people's current choice and instead force them to buy an index-linked annuity for each personal pension arrangement that they hold. That may not be what they want. It certainly may not be in their best interests. The opportunity, if a very small pension arrangement is held, of taking different annuity types at different times to spread risk would be removed. Using their open-market option for annuity purchase, people have the freedom to decide which type of annuity best suits their needs. The proposals in the Bill would take away that choice.

The Bill would also require the annuity to be bought by age 65, so that most people would have no option but to draw all their pension benefits from that age, whether retired or not, again limiting choice. That would introduce inconsistency and unfairness, as the requirement to annuitise by 65 applies only to personal pensions and not to retirement annuity contracts or defined contribution money purchase occupational pension schemes, which are not affected.

The age 65 rule also introduces a much larger issue. People who were saving in a personal pension scheme would not be able to contribute it to it past 65, and would have to take an annuity from that age. Those who have not made provision earlier in life or are still active and working would be allowed to continue in employment but not to save any of their earnings in a pension scheme for their future retirement unless they have a retirement annuity contract or are in an occupational pension scheme.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) said, this is a typical Tory Bill—for the few, not the many. In fact, most people would be considerably disadvantaged by a requirement to use their fund to purchase an index-linked annuity. It would remove choice, hitting particularly those with small funds who might need to maximise their income. At present they can choose whether to have a higher-income flat-rate annuity or a lower starting income but index-linked annuity, or they can utilise a number of with-profits or investment-linked annuities that are available on the market. The Bill would force everyone to buy an index-linked annuity whether or not it suited their preferences or needs.

A major criticism of the Bill is that it benefits only rich people. We have been accused of bringing the politics of envy into the debate, but I am not bothered whether the Bill would benefit only rich people; my main concern is whether it is fair between the different income groups, and between the annuitant/taxpayer and the Exchequer. If the measure is genuinely revenue neutral, I am quite laid back about it—there is not a problem. My concern is whether the proposal could penalise the less well-off, which takes us back to the relationship between pension credits and the minimum guaranteed income.

I am also concerned about whether there is equity between the different income bands. I pray in aid the comments of the ABI, which were reported as long ago as 17 December 2001 in the magazine *This is Money*, under the headline "Insurers welcome pensions Bill":

> "The Association of British Insurers said that this was a contribution to the debate on the compulsory purchase of annuities. However, association spokeswoman Emma Grainge said: 'Our general fear is that most people will have insufficient savings to take advantage of it.'
>
> She said that to get an income of more than £140 a week people would have to spend around £50,000 on any annuity, and many people's retirement funds were less than this."

We have seen that £140 has already been overtaken.

However, if the yardstick—we do not know what it is—were an income equivalent to the full minimum income guarantee amount, the fund needed to buy an annuity income equivalent to its April 2003 level of £102.10 a week, or £5,309.20 a year, for a male aged 65 would be around £70,000. Assuming that people would take their maximum tax-free lump sums, the necessary fund size would be some £94,000. If the annuity were to be index-linked, a fund before lump sum of about £120,000 would be needed. If the minimum income required to be secured under the Bill were only the difference between the state retirement pension and the minimum income guarantee—£24.45 a week or £1,281.80 a year—the fund needed before the lump sum is taken in order to provide an index-linked annuity would be about £129,000. None of those examples, which come from the hon. and learned Gentleman's previous briefing materials, would necessarily suffice to protect the state as the minimum income guarantee is earnings linked and would increase at a faster rate than the minimum pension income.

Who would benefit from all this? Most of those retiring now have pension funds of far less than those amounts. ABI figures show that in 2001 the average fund used to purchase an annuity was about £25,000, and that around 45 per cent. were less than £10,000. Incidentally, that shows why pension credit is so important. Precisely those sort of people will benefit from the pension credit. The ABI's evidence shows that most people do not have more than one pension pot. The changes proposed in the Bill would therefore benefit only the wealthier sections of the population who are able to build up larger funds. The vast majority would remain compelled to use the whole of their pension fund to buy an annuity and would gain nothing from the changes except the compulsion that removes the freedom of choice that they already have.

Mr. Bryant: My hon. Friend is making a very important point about people who may have funds in the region of £5,000, £7,000 or £10,000. Is he attracted to the idea of allowing them greater choice of serious ill-health commutation for instance, so that they could receive their amount as a lump sum, which is not of course allowed for in the Bill?

Mr. Dismore: My hon. Friend makes a very important and telling point. We could have proposed a series of flexibilities if the hon. and learned Gentleman had thought about the benefits to the whole population, as opposed to the relatively few millionaires whom the Bill is intended to help, and that point was echoed by my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley. This is not a Bill for everyone; it is for a relatively small number of people.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have now formed the judgment that the hon. Gentleman is engaging in a great deal of repetition. I remind him of the powers of Chair under Standing Order No. 42, and I may have to exercise them unless he can demonstrate in his remaining remarks that he is dealing with fresh points.

Mr. Dismore: In that case, Mr. Deputy Speaker, perhaps I can move on to deal with income draw-down, and I can do so in a relatively short time. The Bill would remove the choice of income draw-down—a benefit currently available to rich people, not poor people. I shall not deal with the draw-down provisions at great length because of the very fact that they do not affect most people.

Under the draw-down provisions, a policyholder may take a tax-free lump sum from an accrued personal pension fund, draw income from that fund subject to specified limits and defer the annuity until the age of 75, but, in practice, relatively few people use income draw-down policy to defer annuity purchase—about 16,000 people in each of the past three years. According to the Inland Revenue, the average annuity is bought with a fund of £25,000, but funds used for draw-down average about £140,000. The Bill would remove that important choice, but that would affect only relatively rich people, so I do not intend to dwell on it.

I shall now move on to my next main, substantive point, which relates to a very important minority: the Plymouth Brethren. I understand that the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) may also want to deal with this issue because he was very exercised about it previously. Last time round, we had a lengthy debate on Report on several different biblical references, and the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) found the right one in the end.

The Plymouth Brethren are a group of about 14,000 people who are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ and seek to maintain faith and a good conscience, living by scriptural principles. The basis of their objection can be found in St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 6, verses 19 and 20:

> "What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost *which is* in you, which ye have of God, and you are not your own?

[Mr. Dismore]

> For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."

Nevertheless, they believe that they are under an obligation to provide for their retirement, on the basis of St. Paul's first letter to Timothy, chapter 5, verse 8.

Lawrie Quinn: My hon. Friend brings to mind the debate in Committee on the previous incarnation of this legislation. Indeed, we had a considered and full debate. The Christian Brethren have proposed certain solutions to the theological problems that they have. Is it not surprising that the hon. and learned Gentleman was not prepared to take interventions or scrutiny on that point, which is important to a key minority group?

Mr. Dismore: My hon. Friend is right. The problem is that the Bill purports to suggest a proposal that would deal with the position of the Plymouth Brethren, but it would create a series of other problems. We have to understand where the Plymouth Brethren are coming from, so we can understand that the hon. and learned Gentleman's proposals do not deal with their problems and how alternatives, if he had had the courtesy to engage with them and consult them, might have achieved that objective if incorporated in the Bill. In fact, those alternatives would have achieved a much wider benefit for rather more people.

The Plymouth Brethren believe themselves to be under an obligation to provide for their future through St. Paul's first letter to Timothy, chapter 5, verse 8:

> "But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel."

That is the basis of the Plymouth Brethren's problems, and if we do not understand the basis of their views, how can we be sure that any vehicle to cater for them is properly designed?

Of course there are no votes in this—the Plymouth Brethren do not vote—but we must protect minorities, and the problem goes back to 1828. We ought to pursue a dialogue with them to try to find a way to meet the requirements and tenets of their faith, while satisfying the requirements of the Inland Revenue, which has its own tenets and, I am afraid to say, they are sometimes even more obscure than those of the Plymouth Brethren. In the end, however, we must try to satisfy their requirements. In their submission to the Select Committee on Work and Pensions, as part of our present inquiry, they set out in some detail—which I will not go through—alternative proposals for a locked-in individual savings account. The ISA proposals that they have put forward are something that the Treasury ought to consider as of more general benefit that just for the Plymouth Brethren. The Bill—I am afraid that the hon. and learned Gentleman in charge of it has now left the Chamber—proposes what is called a retirement failsafe fund, which is exactly the same as was proposed last time. As with the last time, however, the retirement failsafe fund is not defined within the Bill. I would have thought that hon. and learned Gentleman would have his tackle in order by now, but the Bill is silent on that point. It simply provides a Henry VIII clause to allow the retirement failsafe fund to be defined by, I presume, the Financial Secretary, through regulation. It is simply not worked out.

The proposed features of the failsafe fund, as I understand it, although they were not included in the Bill, were as follows: 150 per cent. of the fund would be required to purchase the mini annuity or the whole of pension savings would be sufficient; there would be an annual requirement to withdraw the minimum retirement income from the failsafe fund, the remaining fund would be kept separate but could be withdrawn at any time, and once an individual reaches 80 the two funds would be combined; the annual income would be the remaining fund divided by the number of years, until the individual reached 100—

Mr. Bryant: What I am confused about in relation to the position of the Christian Brethren is that the first letter of St. Paul to Timothy, which they cite as the basis for their concern on the issue, is about Church discipline and the treatment of widows. As my hon. Friend has said, they cite verse 8:

> "And if anyone does not make provision for his relations, and especially for members of his own household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever."

I do not see how the pooling process that is inherent in the process of annuities is a problem, unless one believes that that injunction is only to look after members of one's own household—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. There is a convention whereby matters raised on Second Reading are of a more general nature. "Erskine May" advises that too much detail should not be attempted, as that is for a later stage of the Bill, if reached. I rule the hon. Gentleman out of order, as he is going into too much detail on a particular point in an intervention at this stage of the proceedings.

Mr. Dismore: I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for rescuing me, as I would hesitate to engage in a theological debate with my theological hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda. He was also quoting from a different version of the Bible, which made it even more difficult. I was working from the King James version; I am not quite sure what he was working from but no doubt we can talk about that afterwards.

The problem with the retirement failsafe fund is that one can call it a proselytising or evangelical fund. There are only 12,000 Plymouth Brethren in the entire United Kingdom at the moment, but if this proposal were to go forward, that number could increase dramatically. The people who are trying to back it up might find that there was a certain loophole, which clearly could not be confined to the Plymouth Brethren but would have to be more broadly and generally available. A large number of millionaires might suddenly sign up, and the net result might have damaging consequences to the Treasury.

My main concern about the proposal is therefore that, although, on the face of it, it is a vehicle to achieve a particular purpose, it does not specify in any way how that purpose should be effected. It says to my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary, "We want you to do something to achieve broadly this effect, but we are not going to tell you how to do it." That is perhaps one of the benefits of being in opposition: one can simply say that it is for the Minister to work out the nuts and bolts. It is very irresponsible of the hon. and learned Member for Harborough to put the proposal forward without making any effort to define what it is, how it might operate, or, having consulted the Christian Brethren, whether it is what they would like. In fact, they have made clear that they do not want it after all.

Mr. Pound: My hon. Friend makes a point in connection with the number of people who might join the Brethren. From my knowledge of the Brethren, they are not an aggressive, proselytising group—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That is quite outside the scope of the debate.

Mr. Dismore: In fact, the Plymouth Brethren have proposed a different solution to their problem in their submission to the Work and Pensions Committee. They propose a locked-in cash ISA, which would not be accessible until retirement: payments into the plan would be made out of tax income, but withdrawals would not be subject to tax.

Bearing in mind your previous ruling, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I do not propose to go through the Select Committee evidence in detail. However, if the Bill goes forward, the hon. and learned Gentleman would be well advised—instead of copying slavishly from the previous Bill—to consider the evidence from the Plymouth Brethren. They offer an attractive solution not only to their own problem but to the problems of those with limited means, the people in whom I am interested. At a time of falling stock markets and equities, an alternative to an annuity would provide a useful mechanism for cash investment and would probably have a rather better yield. Similar schemes operate in countries such as America and Australia. The evidence can be found in volume III of the Select Committee minutes.

I now turn to the issue of taxation. In his very short introduction to the Bill, the hon. and learned Gentleman claimed that it was tax neutral. However, he is asking us to buy a pig in a poke. The Bill makes no detailed mention of tax provisions. The proposed new section 637B(5) of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988 says:

> "Any withdrawal from the Fund by the member under subsection (2) shall be regarded as 'income' within section 1 of this Act."

That is about as far as the Bill goes on the issue of taxation.

Although the hon. and learned Gentleman may claim that the Bill is tax neutral from the Inland Revenue's point of view, we have no way of knowing that other than in extremely general terms. We have no way of knowing whether it is tax neutral at an individual level. Even more important, we have no way of knowing whether it is revenue neutral across the piece. Although a reform may be tax neutral for the individual concerned, it can have very different consequences for the bigger global picture. That point should be borne in mind in relation to pension tax relief generally.

At present, the tax relief on pensions exceeds the tax on pensions by a huge sum—£13 billion a year. On average, £30 of every £100 paid into people's pensions contributions comes from the Chancellor. More than half the tax relief on pension contributions goes to higher rate taxpayers who make up only 15 per cent. of the contributors. Removing the current annuity purchase requirement for those aged 75 and permitting the remaining funds to be withdrawn at will or to be passed on to the pension fund member's estate on death—which is what the Bill provides—could encourage the well-off to increase their pension fund contributions substantially, even with the tax charge that the hon. and learned Gentleman has talked about in general terms. However, that charge is not referred to in the Bill and was not mentioned in his remarks today. People currently saving for a private pension use only a fraction of the possible amount of pension scheme tax reliefs available with the potential take-up of another £14 billion of reliefs within the current tax limits.

Lawrie Quinn: I am listening closely to this point. Is not the key question whether there is fiscal neutrality linked to the important issues of consumer behaviour that were clearly identified in the letter that I mentioned? The hon. and learned Gentleman appears to fail to recognise that point in the context of this debate.

Mr. Dismore: My hon. Friend is right. The hon. and learned Gentleman has not thought through the real-life consequences. Although one can create a great superstructure in theory, how people react to it might be very different. Some £5.6 billion of the unused tax relief relates to the high rate taxpayers who are likely to have substantial sums in other forms of savings and investment—big houses, for example. If only a small proportion of those savings were switched into pension schemes, the public cost of the pension scheme tax reliefs could rise by hundreds of millions of pounds each year, with the benefit going only to wealthy pensioners.

That would inevitably raise the question whether we should continue with higher tax relief for pension contributions. The only way in which the circle could be squared would, I suspect, be by abolishing higher rate tax relief. That would create far more problems than the hon. and learned Gentleman's proposals could possibly solve.

Although there could be tax charges many years down the line, when the funds finally revert to the member's estate on death there would be significant cash-flow problems for the Exchequer. Little, if any, of that extra up-front Exchequer cost would benefit the majority of people with modest pension funds who hold only limited amounts in other forms of savings.

Pensions should not become a tax-favoured savings vehicle for non-pension purposes. Tax-privileged pensions savings must be used to provide retirement income for life from no later than 75. For those with personal pension schemes, the most financially efficient way of achieving that is to buy an annuity. That is because annuities pool people's risks and ensure that they continue to receive an income from savings no matter how long they live, even if they have the great longevity of the father of my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Martin Linton) and, I hope, my hon. Friend in due course.

The press release issued by the hon. and learned Gentleman also covers what happens on death. It states:

> "On death, the capital sum, rather than going into the pensioner's estate for distribution under his/her will, is returned to the annuity provider."

That simplifies the true position to such an extent that it is just plain wrong. Any money that is left over becomes part of the overall pooling arrangement. So if someone

[Mr. Dismore]

dies early, the money goes back to the annuity provider for redistribution to people like my hon. Friend's father. It is a case of swings and roundabouts. The moment we begin to interfere with that, we start to undermine the whole system of pension funding in this country.

The hon. and learned Gentleman has come up with little more than a sophisticated inheritance tax avoidance scam. The proposals' underlying aim is to allow access to a fund that is not used in order to secure the minimum pension or to stockpile it for inheritance by heirs. The majority of people have pension funds way below the amount needed to provide the minimum income and would not benefit from the Bill's proposals. It would be elitist in effect, allowing the affluent to build up tax-privileged bequests in addition to providing a retirement income. That is not the purpose for which the pension tax reliefs, which are to become even more generous, are given. Research by the ABI on reasons for delaying the purchase of annuity funds found that only 1 per cent. of those who deferred cited inheritance motivations as a reason for delay. That suggests that the problem of inheritance is not widespread, but confined to a relatively small number of extremely wealthy people.

Having said that, it is an understandable concern that the funds used to buy an annuity could be completely lost on early death. That is addressed in the Inland Revenue's simplification review, which includes the proposal that pensions that start before age 75—the vast majority begin many years earlier—will be value protected. In the case of an annuity, the death of an annuitant before 75 would, subject to a tax charge, return the difference between the original purchase price and the total of annuity payments made before death.

The Government have produced sensible alternative proposals, which is another reason why the Bill is inappropriate. I am sure that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, have had the opportunity of reading their proposals on simplifying the taxation of pensions in the Treasury document published at the same time as the pensions Green Paper. I am equally sure that the hon. and learned Gentleman has failed to read it because, if he had, either he would have drafted his Bill differently or he would have given it up entirely. When coupled with the Green Paper, the document proposes a series of important changes to the tax regime and future pension provision which will completely change the pensions landscape.

Martin Linton: Does my hon. Friend agree that the time spent on the debate and, indeed, the time that the hon. and learned Gentleman put into the Bill would have been better spent composing a response to the Government's consultation paper, given that we have until 11 April to do so? That is clearly the way forward and would have ensured that our time was better rewarded.

Mr. Dismore: My hon. Friend is entirely right, and many people have made representations. Had the hon. and learned Member for Harborough not been so bull-headed, or so lazy as to pinch somebody else's Bill without even considering all the problems that arose from it, he might have done some homework and come to the same conclusion. As my hon. Friend says, the Treasury document is still open for consultation, and those who are concerned about annuity provision can still make representations. Both that and the Green Paper, which also deals with the reform of annuities, provide credible, practical alternatives that would benefit all, not just the few very wealthy people who would benefit from the Bill.

I do not intend to go into those other documents in great detail, Mr. Deputy Speaker, bearing in mind your earlier constraint, but I will indicate a few things that will happen. The Treasury document proposes radical simplification, which will sweep away the existing complexities of the tax rules and replace them with a straightforward lifetime limit on the amount of pension savings that can benefit from tax relief. It will allow top-ups to adjust for the vagaries of the market that we discussed earlier, and it will provide greater choice and flexibility. For the vast majority of people, the tax rules will cease to be a consideration in their pension planning.

If things go to plan and the proposals find general favour in the consultation, we will not have to wait long for reform. The Government have said that they will change the tax regime in the 2004 Finance Bill. The open-market option to which I referred earlier will become more widely available, enabling people to shop around and purchase a pension that is more advantageous to them. There will be tax simplification, including the lifetime limit of £1.4 million, which should be enough for anybody—except perhaps the hon. and learned Member for Harborough. There will be limited-period annuities and value-protected annuities. Income draw-down, which was referred to earlier, will be reformed.

The one proposal that the hon. and learned Gentleman should have been aware of, because it is the direct alternative to his Bill, is the permission to use income from unsecured funds in certain circumstances. People will no longer have to purchase an annuity when they reach 75, but their pension fund will still have to be used for pension provision. That is the answer to the Bill, as the hon. and learned Gentleman would know if he had bothered to read the Inland Revenue's taxation proposals. I have to assume that he has not read them; otherwise he would not have introduced the Bill.

Lawrie Quinn: My hon. Friend seems to be recommending preparation that the hon. and learned Member for Harborough may want to make before the Bill goes into Committee. Will my hon. Friend join me in commending to the hon. and learned Gentleman the important document, "Annuities—The Consumer Experience", produced by the Association of British Insurers? For me, that underpins the debate on the future of annuities, but obviously the Member promoting the Bill has failed to recognise that.

Mr. Dismore: I am sure that my hon. Friend makes his point exceedingly well, and if he catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, he will be able to develop those thoughts at length.

It would be regrettable if the Bill were to reach Committee stage because it requires so much heavy engineering that it would make the railways pale into insignificance. *[Interruption.]* I thought that that would wake up the hon. and learned Member for Harborough. The Bill is so flawed that if it reaches Committee, it will never come out again. The Inland Revenue proposals and the Department for Work and Pensions document "Modernising Annuities" will make it necessary to table so many amendments that it will take for ever to deal with them all.

For the purposes of the debate, I made an assumption earlier about multiple policies, but the Bill is entirely silent on the subject. At the last count, I had four private pension plans. The last time that we debated this matter, the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) said that he had 11 pension plans. We do not know whether we would have to put all our policies into the system proposed by the Bill or whether we could pick and choose. I can see that there would be many cunning tax-avoidance schemes—I could put one policy in the system but withhold the others to maintain my annuities. There could be all sorts of juggling as people bought different policies, which would not be sensible. If the Bill reaches Committee, I urge the hon. and learned Member for Harborough to consider how multiple policies ought to be dealt with.

I urge the hon. and learned Gentleman to consider transitional arrangements because, as far as I can see, there are none in the Bill. It will straddle the introduction of pension credit and the continuing growth of stakeholder pensioners, so there is inevitably potential for loopholes to be created. There is also the problem of people's existing policies. It is incumbent on the hon. and learned. Gentleman to tell everyone with a pension policy where they stand and whether their policy will have to be changed. On the other hand, he may wish to introduce transitional arrangements, in which case the Bill would apply only to pension funds to which people sign up from next year or the year after, giving them time to adjust. Perhaps the hon. and learned Gentleman intends to introduce retrospective legislation, of which the House has almost always fought shy. I think that there have only been two pieces of retrospective legislation—I can remember the name of one but not the other.

Regrettably, the hon. and learned Gentleman has failed to examine the security of investments. The Bill refers to schedule 10 of the Insurance Companies Regulations 1994, which specifies permitted investments. However, those investments could be risky. We have already discussed certain aspects of investment, and annuities are generally secured against gilts. Schedule 10, which could be used to liberalise the investment regime, may go too far the other way, so I urge the hon. and learned Gentleman to consider restricting his implementation of that provision. That matter is very serious. We have seen, for example in Equitable Life, what happens when projected returns from investment are too high. We have seen the problems that arise when pension funds rely too much on equities, and we have read in the financial pages of the Sunday papers about scandals. However, the hon. and learned Gentleman's proposal, instead of providing more security of investment, provides less. He is in favour of a wild west form of annuity, not the security that people want for their retirement.

As I draw my remarks, regrettably, to a close, I shall return to the hon. and learned Gentleman's press release, in which he sets out what he hopes to achieve in his Bill:

> "I have tried to design a Bill whose principles are simple to understand and which is free of unnecessary technicalities or detail . . . Whilst it does not cure all the problems faced by pensioners it goes some way to offering practical assistance."

I have demonstrated that the Bill achieves none of that. It is not easy to understand—although there is nothing in the Bill to understand—and is riddled with Henry VIII clauses. Definitions and figures are entirely absent. From the hon. and learned Gentleman's point of view, it is conveniently free of technicalities and detail, because he has not had to deal with them. However, when one is dealing with such issues one cannot help but get into technicalities and detail.

Lawrie Quinn: I am listening carefully to my hon. Friend, and regret that he is coming to the end of his speech. Obviously, longevity is an important part of our debate. Does he agree that that press release can only be characterised to use the language of my own industry, as a shoddy piece of cowboy workmanship?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Again, that is entirely and unnecessarily repetitive.

Mr. Dismore: I would not go down my hon. Friend's line, except to say that perhaps it is negligent with a small "n", or misleading with a small "m", or perhaps with a capital "M", to suggest that the Bill is simple to understand and free of unnecessary technicalities. The hon. and learned Gentleman has skated over all the technicalities and details that inevitably have to be addressed. I hoped that when he introduced the Bill he would fill in some of the gaps, but he lamentably failed to do so.

The hon. and learned Gentleman says that the Bill does not cure all the problems faced by pensioners, but that it goes some way to offering practical assistance. What utter poppycock! It does not provide practical assistance to 99 per cent. of pensioners. It may provide practical assistance to a tiny minority of extremely wealthy pensioners, but that practical assistance can be delivered much more effectively through taxation changes on which the Government are consulting. Such changes will not remove the flexibility and the existing practical assistance that it is available to everybody, and will not impose great restrictions on the majority for the benefit of the wealthy few. How can it be right to remove compulsion at the age of 75 from a few millionaires, and to introduce compulsion at the age of 65 for everyone else? That is not meeting the hon. and learned Gentleman's objectives.

We have no real way of knowing whether the Bill would provide practical assistance because there is no detail. The hon. and learned Gentleman has not defined his minimum retirement income. Perhaps he might have provided some benefit to the Plymouth Brethren, but the hon. and learned Gentleman has not defined his fail-safe retirement fund. We have no way of knowing about that. The fact remains that the Bill is a shoddy piece of work. It should never have seen the light of day in the previous Session. I should have thought that the hon and learned Gentleman would do a bit of learning and realise that the Bill cannot be allowed to proceed.

[Mr. Dismore]

I know that I have spoken at great length. I had to, because the hon. and learned Gentleman wasted time in his relatively short introduction. That time would have been far better spent in setting out some of the detail, instead of engaging in party political point scoring, which he said he would not do but which he inevitably did. I think I have been extremely restrained in avoiding such point scoring. I have tried to present a logical and basic analysis of the Bill. Apart from one or two occasions when I wanted to make sure that the hon. and learned Gentleman was awake, I have not engaged in the party political wind-ups in which he engaged at the beginning of his remarks, when he advanced silly arguments. Had he wasted less time on that and spent more time on the substance of the Bill, he might have made much more progress and I might not have had to speak at great length in posing so many questions to him. The fact remains that he has done a shoddy piece of work.

There are one or two other aspects of the Bill to which I should refer before I resume my place. The starting point is the commencement date. It is not a major point, but it is an important one. The commencement date for the Act will not be set by the Minister by statutory instrument or by other forms of delegated legislation, as normally happens. Clause 3(2) provides for the Act to come into force on 6 April 2005. That being so, why are we wasting time on the Bill? The Government have already said that they intend to make their own proposals in the Finance Bill in 2004. Assuming that that will happen and that the tax regime for annuities will be greatly simplified in April 2004, clause 1 of the relevant section of that Finance Bill will provide, should this shoddy Bill ever reach the statute book, for the repeal of this shoddy piece of work. That has to be. If enacted, the Bill would be entirely inconsistent with the tax reforms that the Government are already consulting on. The hon. and learned Gentleman cannot have read the proposals. Had he done so, he would have seen that what I have said is the case.

The Bill cannot be allowed to proceed. I am sorry that I have had to speak for so long, but I hope that hon. Members will understand the reasons for my doing so.

12.34 pm

Mr. Howard Flight (Arundel and South Downs): I declare an interest as a beneficiary of a money purchase pension scheme.

I congratulate my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) on securing the Bill. The hon. Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) entirely missed the point. The purpose of the Bill and the intended purpose of the debate is to allow a constructive discussion about abolishing the obligation to buy an annuity.

The Government proposed that that be abolished. Paragraph 5 of the Green Paper on revenues clearly sets out the proposal that draw-down should continue beyond the age of 75 until death. The capital protected annuity that the Government allegedly support is a slightly different way of meeting part of people's objections to the present compulsion. The hon. Member for Hendon, who is obviously a keen authoritarian, ignores the fact that people object to compulsion. For the past 10 years, I have campaigned on that issue of principle. It is a great pity that as a result of the hon. Gentleman's extreme long-windedness, the House has lost the opportunity today to discuss how we could sensibly pull together the strands that are in place.

It is extraordinary that the hon. Gentleman endorsed the Inland Revenue's approval of a Gibraltar-based offshore annuity contract that costs 3.5 per cent. and effectively achieves the underlying objectives intended by abolishing the obligation to buy annuities. That is contrary to the objection on the part of the Government and the Financial Services Authority to over-expensive insurance wrappers. Furthermore, it is pathetic to support a product that is both expensive and outside the control of the UK authorities, even though it meets the objective, rather than considering how to address the underlying problem.

My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough said that I would say a little about the Plymouth Brethren. For better or worse, the religious principles of the Brethren mean that, as a matter of conscience, they are not permitted to buy insurance products, and the failsafe alternative to the retirement income annuity referred to in the Bill would be a simple cash pot that would need to be substantially greater than the retirement income annuity, with rules to ensure that there would always be sufficient in it so that people could not blow the money and become dependent on the state.

Times have changed as the debate has gone on. The big issue is the pensions crisis, which has many aspects but is, above all, about millions more people ending up with money purchase pensions, the fact that fewer than four in 10 final salary schemes are now open to new members, and the failure of stakeholder pensions, which have achieved only 2 per cent. of the market of 5 million people earning between £10,000 and £20,000.

All that has been caused by several factors, principally the weakness and decline of corporate profitability under excessive taxation and regulatory costs. The UK market has underperformed America's by 50 per cent., substantially as the result of the Chancellor's famous £5 billion tax on pension schemes. There has been a dramatic fall in annuity pension yields.

When the subject was last debated, the Minister referred to the Inland Revenue paper on modernising annuities and in particular to graph 2, and argued that, although that showed that annuity yields had fallen from some 14 per cent. to 8.5 per cent. since 1986, in real terms, the pensions delivered for 30 years of money purchase pension saving had risen.

Given that I spent 30 years of my career in this territory, I found those figures strange, so I asked various questions of the Treasury. Although it had not been disclosed at the time, it turned out that those data were based on the extremely unlikely assumption that, over the last decade of a money purchase savings scheme, 10 per cent. per annum would have been moved into gilts, ensuring that the fund would be 100 per cent. invested in gilts on retirement. The truth of the matter is that very few people proceed in that way. The much more typical balance will be 50 per cent. gilts and 50 per cent. bonds.

Even on the basis of the assumption that was used, which should have been disclosed at the time, the pension in 2001 was the lowest in real terms since 1994 and 1990. However, in answer to my question about the position on the assumption of a balance of 50 per cent. gilts and 50 per cent. equities over the five years prior to retirement, I was told that the pension delivered in real terms was 20 per cent. lower than in any year since the Government table started in 1986, and was indeed the lowest for 40 years. With the greatest respect, overlooking the fact that the annuity pensions available from money purchase pensions have fallen dramatically is a major issue at a time when the majority of the population—some are privileged because they are in the public sector—are being forced into money purchase savings. Candidly, that is ridiculous.

What is this all about? Why is there a view out there—the ABI survey subtly reflects this position, and as it represents annuity providers, it obviously wraps it in a particular way—that it is wrong for people to be forced to buy annuities? First, there is an objection to compulsion, but there is also an objection to the risk of loss when people die shortly after retirement. Of course, people can buy annuity contracts that cover such eventualities, but the overwhelming majority do not and buy a straight annuity. There is a fear that all their pension savings can quickly be lost if they should die shortly after retirement.

Mr. Bryant: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Flight: Labour Members used a great deal of the time of the House and I wish to finish my speech fairly briefly, so I am afraid that the answer is no; the hon. Gentleman has had his turn.

The second great fear is that people are being forced to buy annuities at or near the bottom of a long-term inflation and interest rate cycle. Nobody knows what the future will hold, but it is self-evident that people who bought annuities when even straight annuity yields were 14 per cent. or more bought them at a favourable time after which there was an era in which inflation was not as high as expected, so they did very well. Indeed, people were mainly happy to buy annuities for that reason. At present, people fear that in five or 10 years' time, or perhaps sooner, inflation will rise, the purchasing power of their annuity will contract and they will have bought a product at the bottom of the market. Indeed, until and unless the Government address that problem, there is a risk that, in 10 years' time, a whole generation will feel that they have been profoundly mis-sold to as a result of Government compulsion.

The straight annuity yield is down from 14 to 7.5 per cent. However, there is a better illustration of what faces someone who is retiring. Consider a man with a wife of 62, who retires at 65, and consider that he wants a pension that will provide 50 per cent. for his wife and a degree of escalation of 3 per cent. for five years. In 1990, £100,000 bought an annuity pension of £12,500, but now it would only buy one of £4,500. That illustrates the magnitude of the increased cost of annuities and of the long-term economic cycle risk.

We must take into account the rising tide of money purchase pension savings. The amount going into annuities is already around £12 billion each year and it is growing compound at 20 per cent. As I have already said, the final salary schemes have closed in a rush after the Chancellor's £5 billion pension tax. More and more people will have money purchase pensions and it will be essential for us to work out the best way for money purchase pension savings to be converted into pensions.

There was a concern that the yields on gilts that underlay annuity investments were artificially low; there was a rising tide of money but the supply of new gilts was relatively frozen. However, the Chancellor's wrong estimates, and the potentially excessive borrowing that will now be required, look as though they will solve that problem. There may end up being an over-supply in the volume of gilts. The return on an annuity reflects gilt yields as well as longevity. Real gilt yields are in essence about the supply and demand of gilts.

The other powerful argument for addressing this issue is that the Government and the country want much greater private sector pension saving. We remember the famous objective of moving from 40 per cent. private to 60 per cent. private, and not moving in the reverse direction—although that is what we are now doing.

Fifteen years ago, when Canada effectively abolished the obligation to buy an annuity on a pension product that is very close to the stakeholder pension, and when it put in a retirement income fund that is essentially similar to the one proposed in the Bill, a product that had had no support suddenly became extremely popular. A total of 40 per cent. of Canada's population now save through the equivalent of a stakeholder pension. In Canada, it was found that the main psychological problem—until the obligation to buy an annuity was abolished—was that people had a fear and dislike of the perceived risk of losing all that they had saved in their pension vehicle if they were to die early.

South Africa, as a result of the miners' union quite rightly having had no truck with the apartheid Government, has now had for 25 years a clean and straightforward money purchase saving regime with no obligation whatever to buy annuities. That has had substantial success in delivering capital for people who are retiring—in particular, from the mining industry—to allow them to start their own businesses.

The Government's arguments against a radical approach have been that such an approach would only benefit the better-off. The underlying case is that, if anything benefits only the better-off, it should not be considered. I want to illustrate why I consider that wrong thinking. Three constituents of mine had a self-administered pension scheme that went with the business for which they had worked. The scheme had invested in all sorts of local businesses. It was extremely successful as a venture capital investor and had accumulated far more than would ever be needed for those people's pensions. They wrote to me saying that it was wicked that they had to abandon supporting small businesses simply because they were 75. They have to sell the scheme, put the money into an annuity and cannot do as much as they did in the past. That example shows why forcing people is wrong.

The Government's second argument is that the Bill would encourage too much pensions saving, but their first problem is too little pensions saving. They could not even get the figures for it right. A universally applicable exit tax on capital that leaves a pension fund renders anxieties about avoidance and excessive pensions saving by the better-off false. People's natural behaviour shows that they tend to save what they can afford for pensions.

[Mr. Flight]

If so-called clever schemes that can use pensions saving to avoid tax are outlawed, the motivation for avoidance goes away.

The key development in the Green Paper is the Government's acceptance of the principle of the argument. I have already referred to their proposal that people should be able to continue to engage in draw-down schemes after the age of 75. I believe that the Government also accept capital-protected annuities—an annuity product that allows people's estates to get back the capital if they die early.

For some extraordinary reason, the Government's position on both those matters is to require that any capital that remains after a person has reached 75 should go to the pension provider and not the beneficiary's estate. I do not understand why it can go to the estate before but not after the age of 75. Subject to a universally applicable pension exit tax, which is currently 35 per cent.—inheritance tax is paid on top of that—why is there anything wrong with allowing the residual capital to go to the estate?

As the industry pointed out, the proposals in the Green Paper are almost unintelligible. They say that the capital should revert to the provider. Can the trustee of a statement of investment, who is the provider, pay the tax and pay on the proceeds to the beneficiary's estate? That is not stated. The pension actuaries to whom I have spoken consulted the individual who wrote the Green Paper, and even he does not appear to know the precise intention.

Again, we are considering an issue of principle. There is nothing wrong with people saving for pensions and, subject to paying a fair amount of tax, for any residue to pass to their estates, which suffer inheritance tax. For some reason, the Government take a dogmatic view that, beyond the age of 75, it is morally wrong for any pension savings, even after adequate tax, to pass to someone's heirs.

The purpose of the Bill and the debate is to tell the Government to get a move on and sort out their proposals. They have introduced a bit here and a bit there, but they do not fit together or work. If the Government end the obligation to buy an annuity on draw-down and allow people to get capital back through annuity contracts, there is no logic for having one rule up to the age of 75 and another afterwards. There would also be no problem involved in tightening the tax regime to ensure full and fair taxation of any capital that exits from a pension scheme.

It is a great pity that the House has not had the opportunity today constructively to debate the issues that the Bill exposes. I hope, therefore, that it will go into Committee to enable that to be done.

12.55 pm

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in the debate on the Bill, not least because it seemed a bit ungracious of the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) to condemn the House for not allowing proper debate when he took no interventions himself. Anyway, be that as it may, I should make some declarations, although I am slightly uncertain as to exactly what level of declaration one has to make when talking about pensions in the generality. If I get to the age of 65, I anticipate drawing pensions from the BBC, the Labour party and the Church of England.

Mr. Flight: Fat cat!

Mr. Bryant: A church mouse, I fear, rather than a fat cat.

I do not think that there can be many who have that combination of pensions. I also have some AVCs with Equitable Life—sadly—and with the Prudential, and a private pension with Virgin. I do not know whether there are any financial advisers in the House who can tell me whether that is good provision or not, but if there are, perhaps they could see me afterwards.

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Paul Boateng): It is certainly comprehensive.

Mr. Bryant: I am not sure that it is very comprehensive.

The important thing that we have to decide today is whether to send the Bill forward into Committee. As in all Second Readings, the important question, first and foremost, is: is the Bill necessary in the present context? If a Bill is necessary, is this the right Bill? Is it legally correct, and, for that matter, is it politically desirable? Finally, is it amendable? If it were broadly acceptable but needed just a few amendments, it would be right for the House to send it into Committee, where we could amend it, do our bits and pieces and come up with the perfect Bill. I note, however, that when the hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) introduced it at the beginning of the day, he said that it was not perfect. It is unusual to hear Members start such a speech with an announcement that their Bill is not perfect. When we consider that this Bill has been before us in various different forms over the past few years, one might have hoped that it might have achieved a sufficient degree of perfection by now for him to have the confidence to stand up in the House and say that he had got it at least pretty well right. Clearly he did not feel that confidence.

Let me go through the issues. First, is the Bill necessary in the present context? I believe that it is not, first for the obvious reason that divergent mortality rates are significant in the United Kingdom. Several hon. Members have referred to the divergence of mortality rates between men and women and noted that there is roughly a three-and-a-half-year difference between them. It is also significant that there is a dramatic difference between mortality rates in different parts of the country and different types of constituency. My own constituency is a former mining constituency, as many hon. Members will know, and many people would assume that the poor mortality rate in the Rhondda is directly associated with the fact that people worked in the mines, even though the last mine closed in 1991, in Maerdy. In fact, industrial disease is not the sole, or even the primary, reason for the difference in mortality rates. The primary reason is the socio-economic conditions in which many people in the Rhondda live. Historically, through the rough and tough 18 years of Conservative rule, people found it very difficult to live in anything other than poverty. For many young people brought up in households with not one but two generations of unemployment, there was a general supposition that a life on benefit was the best that people could aspire to. That has meant that many people growing up in the Rhondda suffer from a whole host of medical conditions, which have led to our mortality problems. For example, there are high rates of coronary heart disease, partly due to poor diet and partly due to smoking and other problems associated with poverty.

In the Rhondda, 86 per cent. of households own their home—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): The hon. Gentleman has given a little bit of background, but now he should come back specifically to the Bill.

Mr. Bryant: I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for steering me away from steering away from the Bill.

The point that I am keen to make is that the divergences in mortality rates, which are obviously essential to the process of establishing an annuity, are important in determining whether hon. Members should choose, on unwhipped business, to support the Bill. The pooling of mortality rates, which is essential in buying annuities, is an important principle and we should adhere to it, contrary to the views of the Plymouth Brethren to which some hon. Members referred earlier.

The establishment of a separate annuity rate for men and women, as opposed to the Bill's provisions, is also important. About 40 per cent. of my constituents are pensioners and many of them are women who live on their own. The maintenance of divergent annuity rates for men and women would be very much in their interests.

As the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs pointed out, we have low annuity rates at present. That is the second important point to explore in considering whether the Bill is necessary. However, inflation is also low. That is a double-edged sword. Low inflation means that there are low gilt returns, which affect annuity levels, but, because the majority of people who buy annuities buy a fixed annuity, the prospect of low inflation in the future means that their annuity is likely to be worth more in the years to come than would otherwise have been the case. At present, there is an unusual convergence of good and bad news for annuities. I think that the vast majority of pensioners would assert that low inflation can only be a good thing for pensioners and that the Government should be congratulated on their running of the economy.

As many hon. Members would agree, we also have a strong and effective annuities market. There are more than 100 annuity providers although the majority of annuities are sold by the top 10 or 20 companies. However, the market shows that those companies provide good value and that there is strong competition. None of the changes proposed in the Bill would be of assistance in maintaining that strong and competitive market.

A further point to consider in relation to any private Member's Bill is whether other changes declared or proposed by the Govt are already in the pipeline and would make the suggested legislation unnecessary or wrong. Several changes have already been enacted, or will come into force, which make the Bill both unnecessary and wrong.

The first is the introduction of the minimum income guarantee. Several hon. Members have referred to its provisions and have pointed out that the relationship between it and the minimum retirement income suggested in the Bill would be extremely problematic. The Government have committed themselves, in the lifetime of this Parliament, to raising the MIG not in line with prices but with average earnings. I hope that that commitment will continue into another Labour term. It would be very difficult to match that commitment with the provisions in the Bill, which are very sketchy regarding the increases in minimum retirement income; the Bill simply provides that the Chancellor of the Exchequer will decide annually the level of the minimum retirement income. Despite a concerted campaign over the past 10 years for reform—which the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs mentioned—that has been waged by certain organisations in certain parts of the industry, and despite considerable discussion on the Floor of the House and in Committee of issues relating to a minimum retirement income, a major problem with the Bill is that it makes no clear and direct provision as to how the Chancellor of the Exchequer should determine that minimum retirement income.

It is not only the minimum retirement income that gives rise to difficulties. The second difficulty arises from the pension credit, which will come into force later in the year. The credit will be of advantage to many of my constituents, who have argued for a considerable time that one of the bedrocks of pensions policy must be the fact that it rewards, not penalises, those who have set a little bit aside during their lifetime, otherwise we shall be sending young people the message, "Spend as you go; do not worry about the future because in the end the state will provide." That is another danger with the Bill. Its broad message is, "Do not worry about the future. Spend. We shall try to ensure that there is some kind of failsafe arrangement, but broadly speaking use your money as you want and do not worry for the future." It is a vital and essential principle of all our pension policy that we should encourage our young people to make long-term and secure financial provision for themselves; the Bill does the opposite.

Thirdly; and perhaps most importantly the clause relating to how the Chancellor of the Exchequer would set the rate of minimum retirement income each year does not say how that would fit with the pension credit. The pension credit was deliberately intended to increase the amount of money in the household, and not to impact on benefits. But if the minimum retirement income is intended to ensure that people are not reliant on the state, as a result of not having used the whole of their pension fund to buy an annuity but having used some of the additional capital for some other projects, or for some other form of investment, how would one ensure that individual pensioners did not fall foul of the pension credit provisions?

[Mr. Bryant]

The other problem that I have with the Bill in terms of legal changes relates directly to clause 3, which is the provision for the short title and commencement of the Bill. It says:

> "This Act shall come into force on 6th April 2005"—

one year after many of the provisions that we hope will come along as a result of the changes in "Simplicity, security and choice: Working and saving for retirement", the Department for Work and Pensions document, which I am sure that all hon. Members have read. It seems very curious to suggest that the Bill should come into operation in 2005, before things that are already in the pipeline have been legislated for.

If asked for my analysis of whether the Bill is necessary in the present context, I would have to say no. Is this the right Bill? No hon. Member who supports the Bill—only two have spoken so far—has said this, but, as far as I can see, the aim of the Bill is, broadly speaking, to avoid the pooling process that occurs by virtue of people taking out their annuities and, instead, ensure that people can either use their money for other investments of whatever kind or hand on money to their estates.

What would the Bill do for the people of the Rhondda and ordinary working families in return for that change? It seems clear that the first and perhaps most dramatic effect of the Bill would be to deprive the Chancellor of the Exchequer of a significant amount of taxation. The two Conservative Members who have spoken referred to the notorious £6 billion—or was it £5 billion?

Mr. Flight: What's £1 billion?

Mr. Bryant: I can tell the hon. Gentleman; perhaps it is about time that we started to inform him that £1 billion could make a dramatic difference, especially to the people of Wales and, for that matter, 20 per cent. could make a difference to them.

Mr. Flight: It is a pity that the hon. Gentleman lacks a sense of humour. I was pointing out that it did not seem to matter to him whether the sum was £5 billion or £6 billion.

Mr. Bryant: I merely note that adding £1 billion to £5 billion increases the sum by 20 per cent. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is well used to that percentage. He accuses me of not having a sense of humour, but he might at least smile at that.

Mr. Hugo Swire (East Devon): Does the fact that that act of grand larceny on behalf of the Government only amounts to £5 billion make it better or worse than if it had amounted to £6 billion?

Mr. Bryant: If the hon. Gentleman wants to take out of public finances £5 billion or £6 billion, I would dramatically contest what he says, for the very simple reason that investment in our public services is absolutely essential to the livelihood of my constituents, who rely in very large measure on the health service, education services and so on. However, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you might suggest that I am veering rather far from the Bill, so although I should be very happy to debate that issue with the hon. Gentleman at great length elsewhere, it is important that I return to the Bill.

None the less, the important point for the people of the Rhondda is whether it would be good to remove that money from the Exchequer because it would deliver another benefit to society as a whole. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs is chuntering from the Front Bench. I think that he says that no money would be taken from the Exchequer. I therefore assume that he is trying to assert that the proposal is wholly tax neutral, and we shall hear from other hon. Member who want to contest that assertion at considerable length and with the benefit of secure figures.

The second half of the equation—this is important—is that given the way that the Bill has been drafted as opposed to the way that last year's Bill was drafted, it would leave more people eventually dependent on the state for the very simple reason that the process of determining minimum retirement income allowed under the Bill is so woolly, imprecise and ambivalent.

Roger Casale (Wimbledon): My hon. Friend is making an excellent job of demolishing the case for the Bill and he did so in commenting on the intervention, which I saw on a monitor elsewhere, made by the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight). In listening to the earlier speeches, was my hon. Friend able to form an impression of whether supporting the Bill is the official policy of the Conservative party or whether just one Member and some of his hon. Friends support it?

Mr. Bryant: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. It is always rather difficult to determine precisely what is Conservative party policy on any individual issue. I noted that a considerable number of Conservative Members were in the House at the beginning of the day, which, clearly, was a delight. It is good to see a full House, and parliamentary scrutiny of Bills is very important. It is only a sadness that so few Conservative Members have chosen to stay and listen to or engage in any of the debate, or, for that matter, to take interventions. It seems to me that that is an essential part of the rightful parliamentary scrutiny of a Bill.

Mr. Boateng: How many Liberal Democrats are here?

Mr. Bryant: There is only the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) in the Chamber. He has been the only Liberal Democrat present, and he is standing in for the hon. Gentleman who should be here.

On the face of it, the Bill is attractive. It was described as all about choice. Who could vote against choice? It is meretricious, however. As we know from "The Merchant of Venice", all that glitters is not gold. That is certainly true of this Bill, as it does not provide choice for everyone. There are many areas where we could extend choice of pension provision and how people buy annuities. In my constituency, very few people will manage to achieve the £150,000 fund that Conservative Members think of not so much as a fund but as a salary. For my constituents, a pension fund may be in the region of £5,000 to £9,000. For miners or people who have diseases that are likely to lead to their death in the next three to five years, it seems patently unfair that they cannot take the whole figure as a lump sum and be able to do whatever they want with it.

To be honest, I am grateful that the document, "Simplicity, security and choice" includes the suggestion that we should allow for commutation of the whole pension fund sum for long-term and serious ill health. I hope that the Government will make proposals along those lines, as that will be in the interests of the poorest and the most vulnerable in society. The chairman of the Conservative party, who as one of the most vulnerable members of her Front Bench is speaking on behalf of the vulnerable today, may advance arguments to that effect. I only wish that there were such arguments about choice for poorer constituents such as mine and for those who have not accumulated enormous pension funds because they have not had enormous salaries throughout their lives. Unfortunately none of that is in the Bill.

It would also be nice if not just those with serious ill health but those with small funds, which would probably not fall foul of any benefits anyway, were able to commute the whole of their pension fund. Again, that provision is not in the Bill. The only people who are to be allowed greater choice are those who will have significantly larger amounts of money in their pension funds.

Mr. Love: Is not the Bill even more insidious, in the sense that by increasing choice for a very small number of people it reduces choice for the vast majority?

Mr. Bryant: Absolutely. I am proud to call myself a socialist, and I happen to believe that the present system of annuitisation—not an attractive word—is in principle socialist, as it makes provision for all on the basis of need and the length of their lives. In contrast, 100 years ago, before the Liberals introduced the idea of a national pension, and before the Tories went through two general elections and battled through the House of Lords to make sure that we did not have pensions for everyone, what people did was what the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs wants: they had an amount of money, and they spent a bit of it until they died. They hoped that they would have accumulated enough by the time that they retired or by the time that they could no longer work—keeping their noses to the grindstone—to keep them going for enough years before they died. If, by good fortune, they lived for many years, they would fall into abject poverty. Conservative Members would be quite content if such a system continued today.

Ms Munn: Although my hon. Friend will be aware that I have not had the pleasure of visiting his constituency—[HON. MEMBERS: "Not yet."] Not yet. There are probably considerable differences between our constituencies, but I am sure that the problems of our constituents are not that dissimilar. People do not come to my surgeries or to street stalls in my constituency to raise the concerns that have been expressed by the Bill's supporters. I hear the concerns of those who have very small occupational pensions. They fear that they will be disadvantaged in comparison with others. Does the Bill do anything for them?

Mr. Bryant: I am happy to extend an invitation to my hon. Friend to come to the Rhondda, especially in the next few weeks. We will be delivering leaflets tomorrow morning in Tonypandy so, if she wishes to join me, she will be very welcome.

My hon. Friend is right. It is fair to say that not many people approach one at street stalls and start to ask about annuitisation rates. However, people are clearly concerned about pensioner poverty, and an element of that is fuel poverty. Many of my constituents live in houses that are not well insulated. Many of them still do not have gas central heating and some have outside toilets. We have a long way to go to make sure that we prevent pensioner poverty.

I know that pensioners in my constituency say, "To be honest, if my grandmother knew how well off I am now as a pensioner thanks to all the measures that the Government have introduced since 1997, she would be amazed." They are proud that this country has taken dramatic steps forward. However, there are still things that we need to do to encourage more people to stand on their own two feet. I cannot remember which pop singer sang about—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am glad that the hon. Gentleman does not remember the name of the pop singer. Will he return to discussing the Bill?

Mr. Bryant: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am glad that you have rescued me from my amnesia.

Sir Peter Tapsell (Louth and Horncastle): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bryant: I will give way, but I do not think that the hon. Gentleman has been here for much of the debate.

Sir Peter Tapsell: I apologise for that, but I came in especially to listen to the hon. Gentleman's speech. It has been extraordinarily interesting so far, but an absolute travesty of the truth.

I declare an interest: my stockbroking firm advised the National Coal Board's pension fund for many years from the 1950s. One reason why the widows of miners have such relatively good occupational pensions is that that pension fund was excellently run. The Conservative party's achievement over a long time is reflected in the fact that, when I entered politics, very few people had occupational pensions but, by 1997, about 80 per cent. qualified for them. That great social advance is now under enormous threat.

Mr. Bryant: The hon. Gentleman is suggesting that the people of Rhondda are particularly delighted with the Conservative Government's record in mining communities. If he wants to join us on the street stall tomorrow, proclaim himself to be a stockbroker and explain to the people of Rhondda what the Conservative Government did for them through denying miners compensation—

Sir Peter Tapsell: I was talking about pension funds.

Mr. Bryant: Indeed, but the hon. Gentleman suggested that he did such a good job by the miners that

[Mr. Bryant]

we should be downright grateful. He mentioned travesties. He should be ashamed of himself and, for that matter, of his Government's record in mining communities.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) and I tabled a reasoned amendment to the motion, although it has not been selected for debate. We did that partly because we were worried about how the Bill would affect the way in which men and women are treated in pension provision. Superficially, the Bill seems attractive, but the arguments are meretricious and all that glitters is not gold. By guaranteeing one annuity rate for men and women, the implication is that we would establish parity between them. The present system sets annuity rates separately for men and women. On the whole, men have a higher rate for the obvious reason that they are likely to die earlier, while women are likely to outlive their husbands and other male contemporaries.

According to annuity director rates of March 2003, a 65-year-old man who purchases an annuity for £100,000, which is rather more than many of my constituents would spend, might receive £603 a month. The comparable figure for a female is £565 a month, a difference of £38. I use those figures for simplicity's sake. They are for level annuities, but I could give other annuity figures because, broadly speaking, the same principle arises. It seems unjust that a women would receive less than a man on a monthly basis, but a man's total payments for his expected lifespan after retirement—about 17 years—would come to £123,012, whereas a woman could expect to receive £135,720 for her life expectancy in retirement of 20 years. That puts her ahead by some £12,500, which makes a significant difference.

Far from the present system militating against women, I contend that the many thousands of women in my constituency who have long outlived their husbands have done better under the present system than they would under that suggested by the hon. and learned Gentleman. If we were to pay on a unisex basis, as the Bill recommends, a man would receive a mere £123,012 and a woman would receive £144,720 if they lived to their life expectancies, but the annuity companies would say that they could not afford that and would cut annuities for men and women. As a result, the men would do considerably worse than the £123,012 and annuity rates would be cut overall.

I asked what the Bill would do for women and for men. The simple answer is that it would militate against the best interests of men and it would not improve the prospects for women. Women would not get higher annuity rates; instead, they would probably receive the same annuity rate that they get at the moment. At the end of the period, they would not have increased their amount of money and the men would probably have lost out. On the basis of justice for men and women, the Bill might seem just and desirable, but it would be wrong.

Mr. Love: Does my hon. Friend agree that the measure may prove to be a disincentive to saving, and as there is already a savings gap of between £20 billion and £30 billion, that would be of concern to the Treasury?

Mr. Bryant: I wholly support what my hon. Friend says. It is important that the Treasury and Labour Members who are concerned about these matters rigorously pursue them and give them due scrutiny.

I started my speech by asking three basic questions. The first was whether the Bill is necessary in the present context. I simply believe that it is not, for several reasons, including not least the fact that the minimum retirement income process it lays out is so woolly and non-specific that it would be counter-productive. Secondly, I asked whether it is the right Bill to be advancing at this stage. I do not believe that it is legally correct, because it would be difficult to make it work with the pension credit, the minimum income guarantee and any of the other changes likely to be made in the next year.

Thirdly, I asked whether the Bill is politically desirable. For me, to be politically desirable, a pensions Bill would have to deliver to the people of Rhondda a choice equal to that of everyone else in the country. As a socialist, I want a system that makes sure that we abolish pensioner poverty rather than simply benefiting the wealthiest in society who have accumulated funds in excess of £150,000. That is why I say that the Bill is politically wholly undesirable.

In addition, I ask whether the Bill is amendable. Despite the fact that many Tory Members are suddenly appearing in the Chamber, there is no Whip on a private Member's Bill. That means that the House must simply ask itself whether the Bill is broadly okay, even it has some imperfections, as the hon. and learned Member for Harborough admitted earlier. I do not think that the Bill is amendable. The fundamental principles on which it is based are wholly inequitable, and it is in the interests of the few and not the many. Hon. Members should not give it a Second Reading because it cannot be amended to make it acceptable to the vast majority of people in this country.

1.32 pm

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for rewarding my four-hour wait by giving me an opportunity to put my views on the record. I congratulate the hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) on introducing the Bill, although I suspect that by now he is wishing that he had taken the more cowardly route that some of us took when we drew a high place in the ballot on private Members' Bills and checked out his Bill with the Government Whips.

Perhaps I should also congratulate the hon. Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) on his great ingenuity and stamina. Most hon. Members will be gratified that he did not get his hands on a document that I started reading to keep myself sane during his speech: "Reinventing Annuities", by the Staple Inn Actuarial Society. *[Interruption.]* Oh, the hon. Gentleman does have it, does he? It contains a world history of annuities, and I was having nightmares about him starting to read it to us.

That document equipped me with one or two party political points. I was not aware, until I read it, that apart from Lloyd George's contribution on pensions, William Ewart Gladstone, the great Liberal Prime Minister, took the first step to introduce state annuities in 1864; however, the Tories repealed the measure in 1928. The document also reminds us that although today we are talking about compulsory annuities, for a long period in British history not only were annuities not compulsory; they were illegal because of the attitude of the Church. Of course, we now have an historical echo of that in the attitude of the Brethren.

Of course, the history of annuities goes back much further. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman could have reminded us that a similar debate reverberated around the Roman Senate, where annuities policy was a major issue as a result of changes introduced in 40 BC, so we have a long lineage of argument on the subject.

I support the Bill, and I am sure that the Conservative Chief Whip will be gratified to know that my troops are massing outside the Chamber ready to vote for its Second Reading.

Mr. Pound: Both of them.

Dr. Cable: Indeed. In fact, I think that there is only one, but the spirit is there none the less.

I want to emphasise the fact that there is a serious problem. There has been an attempt to caricature the Bill as a measure that is only of interest to the rich. However, there are about 4 million private pensioners and about 1.4 million occupational pensioners on money purchase schemes, many of whom are affected by the adverse trend in annuities. Not all of them would necessarily benefit from the Bill, but the number of beneficiaries would be millions rather than tens of thousands, so it is not simply a Bill for the rich.

First, I should stress that although the debate has been party political, there has been a good deal of convergence. The hon. Member for Hendon rightly pointed out that the advocates of reform have effectively abandoned the moral high ground, as they no longer argue for the abolition of compulsion, which is written into the Bill. Indeed, it would start at 65 instead of 75. The Bill therefore goes a long way in trying to meet the Government's concern. The Conservative spokesman pointed out that the Government have gone quite a long way towards accepting the need for annuities reform. I do not know whether the Financial Secretary will have a chance to confirm that, but the Library briefing says of her proposal for income draw-down:

> "It will be possible for individuals not to purchase an annuity when they reach 75".

Compulsory annuitisation is implicitly withering away as the result of the changes, which is welcome.

The problem associated with annuities is serious and is getting worse. The hon. and learned Member for Harborough spoke about the annuities calculation, and gave the example of the £100,000 pension pot which produced a £10,000 annuity in 1990. By the late 1990s, when we first started to debate the issue in the House, its value had gone down to £5,500. Now it is worth £4,500, so the position is deteriorating. The counter-argument is that people who retired in 1990 did not have such a large pension pot because they did not have the opportunity to benefit from the stock market appreciation of the 1990s. We are therefore not comparing like with like. None the less, a generation of pensioners have been ravaged by a combination of the stock market collapse of recent years and low annuity rates, and are now seriously disadvantaged.

Secondly, it is not simply the nominal rates that have fallen—there is also a problem with the real annuity rates. In previous debates, we heard the complex reasons why there is a low return on annuities. The combination of increased demand for annuities and reduced supply is to blame. In other words, the Government are not borrowing as much because of their fiscal policy. The problem will get worse, because more annuities are coming on to the market. There is currently about £2 billion-worth of annuities, which will probably rise to about £12 billion-worth by 2005. It is predicted to go on to rise to £35 billion-worth. With the collapse of defined benefits schemes and the rise of defined contributions schemes, the annuities market will grow and drive down real annuities even further, adding to the problems that have been described.

Thirdly, on the deteriorating position, for the first time it is becoming clear that there is a genuine risk associated with annuities. Until recently, annuities were seen as a safe investment. There are risks associated with inflation, but we know from the Equitable Life experience that annuities can be savagely cut. Although they are underpinned by Government securities they depend on the viability of financial institutions. If they are dodgy like Equitable—many others are drifting towards insolvency—people's annuities can be substantially capped. There is therefore a risk associated with annuities, as well as poor returns.

Lawrie Quinn: The hon. Gentleman has shown that he has done considerable preparation for his contribution. Did he study the important ABI document entitled "Annuities—The Consumer Experience", which suggests that only one in 20 pensioners will benefit from the measure? What is his party's position on that?

Dr. Cable: The hon. Gentleman is right that as of now only a small minority of pensioners would benefit. However, more and more pensioners are being thrown into money purchase schemes. For that reason, in five or 10 years' time, the number of people affected will have grown. The hon. Gentleman is also right that I spent some time preparing for the debate. I know that I am stretching your patience, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I would like to bring my remarks to an end. I am happy to debate these matters but I believe that I am required to draw my remarks to a conclusion, so I will.

I know that the Government want to deal with the issue by developing the annuities market. That is their solution to the problem. It is—*[Interruption.]* I know that I could speak for 80 minutes, but I am trying to be fair to other Members. I know that there are many Labour Members who would like to speak. The Government wish to deal with the issue through the annuities market, and there have been positive developments there. I noticed in the Green Paper that there are attempts to introduce new, more flexible, instruments, and that is welcome. There are attempts to extend the income draw-back scheme in ways that are also welcome. The problem is precisely the problem that is raised in objection to the reforms proposed from the Opposition Benches. The proposed flexible annuities can really only be accessed by people with very large pension pots. They are also very expensive—the fees are expensive and the annuities are complex. Precisely the same objection can be raised to the Minister's approach as can be raised to the Bill.

[Dr. Cable]

The effectiveness of annuities depends heavily on people having access to good financial advice. We should be having a debate—I do not think that we have ever had it in the Chamber, although we have numerous debates on pensions—on what is happening to independent advice. The Financial Services Authority is moving in directions that seem to me to bring to an end, or threaten to bring to an end, genuinely independent advice. I am also concerned that the Government, having declared their intention, I think two years ago, of trying to introduce the genuinely enlightened idea of pro bono advice, working with the citizens advice bureaux, seem now to have dropped the idea. That would be a useful adjunct to pensions policy to help people navigate their way through the complexities of annuities.

I have already taken 10 minutes, and I have much else to say, but I shall be happy to give way to Labour Members—

Caroline Flint: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Cable: —including the hon. Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint), who would like to say something.

Caroline Flint *rose—*

Dr. Cable: I would rather give way to the hon. Lady to enable her to make a speech, which I am sure she wishes to do.

1.42 pm

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Ruth Kelly): I start by congratulating the hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) on his success in the ballot. However, I would say that even before the ballot had taken place, the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) had made it clear that the Conservative Member who achieved the highest place in the private Members' ballot would have the privilege of relaunching the Bill that was introduced last year by the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry). That being so, I am not quite sure that congratulations are in order. Perhaps I should extend my commiserations to the hon. and learned Gentleman.

The hon. and learned Gentleman introduced his Bill eloquently but also with great brevity. Indeed, he did so with such brevity that I am tempted to wonder whether he learned anything from the debate that took place on these matters last year. Indeed, he admitted that the Bill was an exact replica of the measure that was introduced last year. He has not even attempted to correct any of the obvious deficiencies that became apparent during last year's debate.

I shall mention a few. I intend to expand upon them in greater depth as I develop my argument. First, there is the cost to the Exchequer, which could run into hundreds of millions of pounds. Secondly, there is the restriction of choice for the vast majority of pensioners, albeit with the extension of choice in certain directions for a few privileged pensioners. Thirdly, there is the impact on the gilts market. It is not at all clear that the gilts market would in any sense be able to cope with the hon. and learned Gentleman's requirement for index-linked annuities for everybody at the age of 65. Fourthly, there are arguments surrounding the compulsory introduction of unisex annuities, and those were well rehearsed by my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore). Fifthly, there is an inherent conflict between the Bill and the Government's desire for flexible retirement and active ageing.

Despite those obvious deficiencies in the Bill, it is helpful to have the debate in order to set out the Government's approach to some of the issues. I was interested to hear the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) admit that the Bill's purpose was to provoke debate, and that he did not stand by the substance and detail of the Bill, despite the fact that the Bill is, as far as I understand it, current Conservative party policy—a surprising admission.

As hon. Members know, the Government encourage people to make private pension provision for their retirement by offering generous tax incentives. Contributions paid by both individuals and employers to occupational and personal pension schemes, including stakeholder pension schemes, get full tax relief, as do pension fund investment returns and capital gains. After—

Mr. Garnier *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question put, That the Question be now put:—

The House proceeded to a Division.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. One Lobby has been emptied but there seems to be a delay in the other Lobby. Is there any chance of checking that out?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman can leave such matters to the Chair. I ask the Serjeant at Arms to investigate the delay in the Lobby.

The House having divided: Ayes 127, Noes 29.

Division No. 105] **[1:47 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Cameron, David
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Curry, rh David
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Fox, Dr. Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl

Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howard, rh Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, rh Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, rh Oliver
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lilley, rh Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Mackay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Randall, John
Redwood, rh John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Stanley, rh Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Tyrie, Andrew
Walter, Robert
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. George Osborne and
Mr. Nigel Waterson

NOES

Allen, Graham
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Byers, rh Stephen
Casale, Roger
Corbyn, Jeremy
Dismore, Andrew
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kelly, Ruth *(Bolton W)*
Kemp, Fraser
Lammy, David
Linton, Martin
Love, Andrew
McCabe, Stephen
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Rosemary
Mandelson, rh Peter
Munn, Ms Meg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Quinn, Lawrie
Shipley, Ms Debra
Skinner, Dennis
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Nick Ainger and
Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe

Question accordingly agreed to.

Question put accordingly, That the Bill be now read a Second time:—

The House proceeded to a Division.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I ask the Serjeant at Arms to investigate the delay in the Lobby.

The House having divided: Ayes 127, Noes 26.

Division No. 106] **[2:04 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Cameron, David
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Curry, rh David
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flight, Howard
Forth, rh Eric
Fox, Dr. Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howard, rh Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, rh Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, rh Oliver
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lilley, rh Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Mackay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Randall, John
Redwood, rh John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Stanley, rh Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Tyrie, Andrew
Walter, Robert
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Adrian Flook and
Mr. Nigel Waterson

NOES

Allen, Graham
Bryant, Chris
Byers, rh Stephen
Casale, Roger
Corbyn, Jeremy
Dismore, Andrew
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kelly, Ruth *(Bolton W)*
Kemp, Fraser
Lammy, David
Love, Andrew
McCabe, Stephen
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Rosemary
Munn, Ms Meg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Quinn, Lawrie
Shipley, Ms Debra
Skinner, Dennis
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Nick Ainger and
Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 63 (Committal of Bills).

Caroline Flint: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have been here since early this morning for the whole debate, except for a few minutes when I left the Chamber. I represent a northern seat, and I feel that more representatives in the House should have had an opportunity to speak in the debate.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I understand the hon. Lady's point, but I hope that she is not challenging the authority of the Chair.

Mr. Garnier: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) may address her remarks rather better to the hon. Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore), who spoke for two and a half hours and managed to encourage 26 or 27 Members to support him.

Mr. Love *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Food Labelling Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

2.20 pm

Mr. Stephen O'Brien (Eddisbury): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

I am delighted to have the opportunity to present and seek support for the Bill. This is the third attempt to address—albeit in amended form—and, I suggest, meet, the somewhat ill-defined objections to clear, simple and, above all, honest food labelling in England and Wales that the Government have thrown in the path of similar Bills on previous occasions.

I am very grateful to all the Bill's sponsors for their support. They include my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles), who introduced a similar Bill in the last Session; my right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry); my hon. Friends the Members for Epping Forest (Mrs. Laing), for Huntingdon (Mr. Djanogly), for North-East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt), for Poole (Mr. Syms), for Chipping Barnet (Sir Sydney Chapman) and for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham); my hon. Friends the Members for North Shropshire (Mr. Paterson) and for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin), who are here today; and my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Ann Winterton), who is also in her place today and whose constituency neighbours mine in North Shropshire.

Shona McIsaac (Cleethorpes): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. O'Brien: I do not have much time, so if the hon. Lady will forgive me I will not give way.

In the very truncated time that is left to me, I should like to find out whether the Government agree that the Bill should proceed to Committee, given that many of the arguments have been heard in the House already, not only in the 1999-2000 Session, but in the last Session. The Government's principal objection has been primarily that the Bill might possibly flout European Union law.

We must ensure that our farmers and consumers alike are served. We all know that British shoppers prefer to buy British if they can, but that fact does not underlie the Bill. What underlies the Bill is the fact that our farmers are blighted, and their stress and concern continue unabated. I have been privileged to represent the farmers and other constituents of Eddisbury for three and a half years, and the farming and rural communities have had a terrible time because the Government have chosen not to promote the rural economy. Indeed, they have taken specific actions that have damaged it.

I hope that the Government will now realise that the Bill provides a tremendous, wholly appropriate opportunity to tie together once again the interests of producers and consumers. That link used to exist until the Government decided to transfer the responsibility for food labelling to the Department of Health. Although I welcome the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr. Lammy), to his place, it is a shame, to say the very least, that the consumers and producers have not been regarded as part of the single value chain.

Important and appropriate safety issues in relation to public health have sometimes been given over-dominance, which has inappropriately and unfairly decried the tremendous achievements of British farmers and food producers, who apply the highest production standards to all forms of foodstuffs. I have therefore deliberately amended clause 3, which caused the Government such problems.

The Minister will have noted the radical change that has taken place since a similar Bill was debated in the House. I therefore hope that, in the short time that he will have to reply, he will ask his colleagues to support the Bill in its progress to Committee, where we can at least debate such matters in detail. Unquestionably, private Members' Bills are not always perfectly drafted, but that is why they are fine tuned in Committee.

We could ensure that the current wording of clause 3 in no way damages our relationship with Europe, or flouts or contravenes EU law or regulations. On the contrary, the Bill is intended not to discriminate against or restrain trade, but to ensure that no unfair, anti-competitive provisions apply to our farmers. Indeed, in the three years since I first raised this issue in the House, France and other EU member states have stolen a lead on us. They have got ahead of us on the basis that they do not have a problem with country-of-origin labelling or with applying their requirements for minimum standards of production and making sure that that is understood, if they believe that they can get away with it, on their packaging. We should not therefore feel that we must resist that, as the marketplace has become even less of a level playing field. The proposal is intended not to restrain trade—I am a passionate believer in free trade—but to promote it. At the moment, our farmers are subject to an illegitimate restraint on their chances to export not only to EU member states but to other countries.

More importantly, our farmers face competition from imports that, even if they are legal—of course, illegal imports should be far better policed by the Government through other provisions—have labelling that causes a problem. Even today, outrage was shared by Members across the House that, for example, a Union Jack can appear on Danish bacon simply because it was cured and spiced in this country, even though the pork was raised in Denmark. I have nothing against Danish bacon other than that Denmark has not yet implemented the harsh and costly regime on stalls and tethers that we have applied, for animal welfare reasons, in this country. Our pig farmers are much to be congratulated. I am very pleased that not only the National Farmers Union but the National Pig Association have given full backing to the Bill, as they have done in the past. They have also applauded the amendments made to the Bill and its drafting.

More importantly to Labour Members—who, I dare say, will have made the equation that consumers are more aligned to voters, on a crude political basis—consumers want the measure. The National Consumer Council and the Consumers Association both fully back the Bill. They cannot understand why there is such an objection from Government, other than that it may contravene EU law. Let us be clear: we should be able to apply public health and food safety standards for British consumers in this British Parliament. While the Bill is not in any sense intended to be Europe-bashing or Brussels-bashing, as has been claimed in the Government Whips' handout notes in the past, it is important to recognise that it is intended to promote both fair trade and free trade and, above all, to give us the right to look after the interests of our farmers and consumers and to stop the unfair, anti-competitive practices that are hurting our farmers unnecessarily by restraining free and fair trade.

I therefore urge the Minister to respond immediately after I finish my speech, as time is pressing. It is a shame that our discussion has been truncated, but that is the nature of Fridays. I hope that I have been able to focus precisely on the issue—as you can imagine, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have prepared chapter and verse on the detail of EU law. As I am sure that the Minister will have done his homework, he may have the opportunity, in the short time remaining, to accept that the Bill should go to Committee for the sake of British farmers and British consumers alike.

2.28 pm

Roger Casale (Wimbledon): I am delighted, in the short time that remains to debate this important Bill, to follow the hon. Member for Eddisbury (Mr. O'Brien). I agree that it is a shame that, because of the time taken on a previous Bill, we have little time left on this occasion to debate it. I part company with him when he says that he is quite prepared, despite the shortness of time, not to have his Bill debated, especially as we debated the Bill last year, and we discovered a number of flaws in it. That in itself is an indication of why we need to continue that debate. If we do not have time to complete the debate today, I am sure that there will be future occasions on which the debate can take place.

My constituents are extremely concerned about the issue of food labelling. So far, however, I have had no letters from any of my constituents complaining about the existing regime. The issue is important to them and we must consider it. However, if a proposal is likely to lead to considerable administrative changes and inconvenience, we must make absolutely sure that we get the changes right. I do not—

It being half-past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed on Friday 14 March.

Remaining Private Members' Bills

PENSIONS (WINDING-UP) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

To be read a Second time on Friday 21 March.

HEALTH AND SAFETY AT WORK (OFFENCES) BILL

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [31 January], That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Debate to be resumed on Friday 4 April.

ANIMALS (ELECTRIC SHOCK COLLARS) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

To be read a Second time on Friday 11 July.

CROWN EMPLOYMENT (NATIONALITY) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

To be read a Second time on Friday 14 March.

National Child Care Strategy (London)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Ainger.]*

2.31 pm

Ms Karen Buck (Regent's Park and Kensington, North): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise issues of grave local concern that have wider ramifications for child care strategy, particularly in London.

The importance of the early years agenda to the social and educational development of children, especially children from the most disadvantaged backgrounds, does not need to be restated. More can be lost or gained by tackling the impact of disadvantage between the ages of two and five than at virtually any other stage in life. Important, too, is the contribution that quality affordable child care can make to enable parents to enter the workplace.

Progress made under the auspices of the national child care strategy is to be warmly applauded. A great deal has been achieved in recent years, especially for three and four-year-olds, and in the overall expansion of after-school and holiday provision across the country. However, in the time available, I would like to focus on two closely related sets of concerns regarding early years services in London, and, in particular, in my two home boroughs of Kensington and Chelsea and Westminster.

The decisions now being taken by those councils—they are not isolated examples, because I understand that the London borough of Southwark is set on the same path—undermine the central objectives of the child care strategy. The situation is slightly complicated by the fact that elements of the child care strategy that are entirely sound in principle and work effectively in some parts of the country are less effective in London because of the combined impact of exceptionally high costs and complex demographics.

To take the most important illustration, if the child care tax credit reached a wider group of parents and was as capable of meeting the same proportion of costs in a mainstream community nursery in my constituency as it is in another equally deprived but cheaper part of the country, the situation could be different. That would not make right what I believe to be ill-judged and isolationist decisions by the councils, but there would be the potential—currently lacking—for ensuring that properly planned child care expansion works better than it is doing.

For the record, the sets of decisions that have led to where we are now are as follows. They are the proposed closure of two nursery schools—Maxilla and Ainsworth—by Kensington and Chelsea council; the withdrawal of Kensington and Chelsea council's subsidy to three community nurseries—Maxilla, Colville and Swinbrook; and reduced funding by Westminster city council to its pre-school learning alliance, its contracted play provider, Westminster Play Association, and a number of other grant-funded early-years projects. However, I am happy to say that, last night, Westminster council agreed to some offsetting additional funding to help with some of the cuts.

The package of cuts put forward by Kensington and Chelsea council two years after the deeply unpopular closure of the Ladbroke day nursery is virtually a masterclass in how not to model an early years policy or a strategy for working with the community. That is odd, given that the council was given the highest performance rating only a few weeks ago.

The package cuts across the model for integrated services set out in recently published guidance on new children's centres. The Maxilla nursery centre, which combines a nursery school and centre for the under-threes and provides extended care, is the prototype for the children's centres that the Government rightly want to develop across the most deprived wards. It offers nursery care and education under one roof and looks after new babies to five-year-olds, until the children enter school. The centre is complemented by drop-in and crèche facilities for parents. It also has the capacity to provide baby care, to which Kensington and Chelsea council has taken particular exception, and offers extended year and extended day provision, which is especially valuable for working parents. It takes a particular type of perversity to wreck the Maxilla integrated nursery centre when Government guidance on the promotion of children's centres is being issued, yet that is exactly what Kensington and Chelsea council is doing.

Alongside the proposed destruction of the Maxilla centre, the council intends to close a second nursery school, the Ainsworth. That is also a popular maintained school with scope for further development to offer extended day and extended year facilities as and when resources allow, but it is being sacrificed to save money. That decision also seems to run counter to the Government's preference for retaining maintained nursery schools, and I hope that the Minister clarifies that when she replies.

The removal of subsidy from three community nurseries—Maxilla, Swinbrook and Colville—will have two immediate effects and could cause longer-term destabilisation. Parents not currently attached to the labour market will be priced out of child care services in those nurseries, so polarising the general nursery user profile between relatively high-earning parents and those who are entitled to free places by virtue of social services need criteria. However, many parents are in the middle. Those who are attempting to rebuild their lives—perhaps after experiencing homelessness or other trauma, or because they are refugees engaged in study to convert the qualifications from their homeland for use in the United Kingdom—will lose out. Indeed, the removal of subsidy will even affect them while they are looking for a job to pay their child care fees.

Those parents who are working and entitled to the tax credit could face a shortfall not of the permissible amount—the 30 per cent. contribution anticipated by the rules—but of at least double what they receive from the credit. The child care tax credit assumes a maximum contribution of about £40 a week for one child, but the unsubsidised cost of a community nursery place is likely to exceed £200 a week, requiring a parental contribution of more than £100 a week, which is increasingly the case for nursery provision across inner London in particular. The incentive to join or remain in the labour market for lower-income working parents is not immediately obvious, yet we know from research carried out by the Department for Work and Pensions that there is a particular problem in London in respect of lone parents who work and that affordable child care and exceptionally high housing costs lie at the heart of the problem.

Before dealing with the wider implications of what is happening in North Kensington, I want to draw the Minister's attention to the fact that councillors for the majority Conservative group have explicitly and publicly stated that they want alternative sources of Government funding made available to the community nurseries to replace the subsidy that they are withdrawing. They expect the nurseries, all of which are sited in wards that are among the 20 per cent. most deprived in the country, to make up the shortfall from sources such as sure start, the neighbourhood nurseries initiative or even the new children's centre funding, while the council enjoys the benefit of retaining the subsidy.

Parents are understandably bewildered and upset. They see the new Government-funded programmes that are investing in their neighbourhoods offset by cuts in council grant. The nursery closures and cuts in existing provision take place alongside the opening of new neighbourhood nursery facilities. Those are welcome and excellent initiatives, but they, too, may run into similar funding difficulties when their revenue component tapers out, leaving them with unsubsidised charges that are likely to exceed hugely what can be offset by the child care tax credit.

I deliberately did not tie this debate to provision in Kensington and Westminster because, although the decisions on those local issues deserve to be challenged, some wider implications need to be addressed to close loopholes in the child care strategy. Before I close my remarks, therefore, I shall run through a few questions, some of which I hope the Minister will be able to respond to now and others, which are more detailed, that she could answer later.

In his covering letter informing me of the proposal to withdraw subsidy from three nurseries, Councillor Lightfoot, the executive member for social services in Kensington, stated:

> "You will be aware that the decision in relation to the community nurseries reflects the emphasis of government policy, which is on providing funding for childcare direct to parents via the tax credit rather than to local authorities."

That raises several questions. Was it ever the Government's intention to see local authority investment in child care reduced as parents draw on the child care tax credit?

How are we to address the problem of child care where the cost significantly exceeds the maximum allowable claim under the tax credit, as it does, especially in inner London? What can be done to tackle the exceptionally low take-up of the child care tax credit, again especially in inner London, where only 2 per cent. of parents who receive child benefit are receiving it? Is it appreciated that, in any event, a flat-rate subsidy effectively discriminates against areas of higher cost, which is only partly offset by higher wages?

Is the Minister satisfied with the way in which local councils have funded children's information services, run by their early years partnerships but funded via an element in the local authority grant settlement? Those partnerships are likely to be at the forefront of take-up campaigns on the tax credit. Is the Minister satisfied that

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[Ms Karen Buck]

all that funding is being handed over, because that has certainly not been the case in the London borough of Westminster? Will she do what she can to make sure that local authorities are at the forefront of take-up campaigns on the child tax credit and its child care component?

Is the Minister aware of the exceptionally high capital costs that affect nurseries in London, feeding through into the much higher charges levied on parents? The capital allocation for the neighbourhood nurseries initiative did not recognise the cost of building in central London, and many sources of capital were already committed when the initiative was announced. If councils do not give sufficient priority to child care, it is exceptionally hard to make it sustainable. Without additional capital, Westminster's neighbourhood nurseries initiative could easily collapse. What provision can be made to assist with London's exceptional capital costs?

The questions that I have raised on capital and revenue costs need to be seen not only in the context of what is happening in Kensington but in light of the Daycare Trust's latest child care costs survey, which found that the typical cost of a nursery place in London is already £149 a week, which is £17 above the maximum set for the tax credit. What guidance are the Government giving to ensure that existing services are not lost to the community, and in particular, are not closed as a result of cuts in discretionary expenditure by local authorities? Is it acceptable for a local authority to seek directly to replace its own funding with Government funding linked to tackling disadvantage? Does the Minister believe that it makes sense for a local authority to close two popular nursery schools, as in Kensington, while overseeing the building of a new nursery under the neighbourhood nurseries initiative within walking distance?

Is the Minister aware of the susceptibility of discretionary early years services, such as play and playgroup provision, to cuts imposed by local authorities, and if so, what can be done to protect them? In Westminster, the recent grants round saw a 25 per cent. reduction in funding for the pre-school learning alliance, which has already led to many parents withdrawing their children. Within a few weeks, 72 parents have lost places as playgroups have closed and the effect of fee increases has bitten. Before the fees for after-school play services were negotiated down by parental and political pressure, they threatened to jump to around £400 a year, which for an unemployed family is an unrealistic charge.

Does the Minister accept that there is a problem with funding services for under-fives, holidays and after school that are provided to unwaged families, especially in disadvantaged areas? A modest charge for such services is not unreasonable, especially for working parents, and even more so when such charges can be offset by income from the tax credit for lower earners, but surely there is a real risk that the children whom we most want to benefit may be priced out when their parents only get by on income support or a comparable income. Obviously, there is scope for some funding to be put into services in sure start areas, but that does not always seem to work in practice. In any event, as we know, many low-income and unemployed parents live just outside the wards that fall into the category of 20 per cent. most deprived, but are themselves families in need. The ability to offset funding problems with sure start resources therefore does not exist.

Kensington and Chelsea council intends to proceed, as I have said, with plans to close two nursery schools and replace them with nursery classes. Research confirms that nursery schools provide higher quality and better outcomes than nursery classes, which is of great importance to parents and communities in areas of deprivation and social stress. Can the Minister clarify the Government's position on closure proposals for maintained nursery schools, especially in areas of deprivation?

The national child care strategy has brought both resources and a proper focus to the vital early years, which is important both for the sake of the children and in underpinning an employment strategy for parents. The national child care strategy is being seriously undermined in parts of London such as Kensington by blinkered policy making. Moreover, there is an urgent need to accept the impact of London's needs and costs on service provision. The range of child care services for people not currently in work is being squeezed hard, and that will hit our neediest children hardest. The working families tax credit is not reaching enough working parents on lower incomes, and may have a structural weakness that prevents it from doing so in high-cost areas. Child care costs, particularly in inner London, are so high that the child care tax credit is not plugging the gap.

I hope that the Government will help me and above all local parents to stop Kensington and Chelsea council destroying its excellent child care facilities. I also hope that we can find solutions to some of the wider problems facing us in our attempts to deliver top-class child care to our children.

2.46 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Maria Eagle): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck) both on obtaining this debate and on the clear way in which she has set out the issues. She asked me rather a lot of questions, so I apologise if I do not deal with them all this afternoon. However, I shall of course attempt to deal with them in correspondence after the debate.

My hon. Friend is well known in the House for the sharpness and assiduity with which she looks after the interests of her constituents. The children and parents of Regent's Park and Kensington, North have been well served by the way in which she has raised the issue of the national child care strategy in London. Unfortunately, they have not been well served by the plans for child care drawn up by Kensington and Chelsea council and Westminster council, to which she has drawn attention—quite the opposite, in fact. I am appalled by what Kensington and Chelsea council proposes to do. My hon. Friend set it out, but it bears repeating—it proposes to close two maintained nursery schools, Maxilla and Ainsworth. As my hon. Friend made clear, Maxilla nursery centre provides the kind of integrated service that the Government want to encourage and that parents in the area wish to have. It offers a wide range of services, including nursery provision, education and drop-in crèche facilities, and has the capacity to provide baby care and wraparound care. My noble Friend Baroness Ashton, who has ministerial responsibility for sure start, intends to visit it soon.

To close such a facility and replace it with nursery classes in schools will entail the loss of a range of services as well as integrated wraparound provision, which the national child care strategy sets out to encourage. Parents in the area rightly perceive the change as a cut in service levels. I am afraid that Kensington and Chelsea has form when it comes to the closure of maintained nursery provision because, as my hon. Friend mentioned, it closed Ladbroke day nursery two years ago. The Government recognise that maintained nurseries generally offer high-quality early education from experienced and able staff, and often have unrealised potential for providing more, so we do not want them to close. We are currently consulting on the revision of the existing regulations and guidance on school organisation plans as well as statutory proposals, about which my hon. Friend asked. The new guidance, which we intend to come into force by 1 June this year, emphasises the fact that nursery schools generally offer high quality provision and that

> "closure proposals should not generally be approved".

That is a presumption against the closure of such schools. Once the guidance is implemented, any local authority considering the closure of a maintained nursery school would have to be satisfied that closure was in the best interests of local children and families, and would need to consider factors such as the impact on the community caused by the loss of any such facility, and alternatives to closure. It does not seem to me from the correspondence that I have seen, which my hon. Friend has kindly provided to me, and from the information that she has given this afternoon, that Kensington and Chelsea has any good reason to close this provision. If it does, I would be happy to have it pointed out to me.

I also deplore the fact that the council plan to remove subsidy from three community nurseries Maxilla, Swinbrook and Colville. I take the opportunity to make it clear to my hon. Friend that the council has not contacted the sure start unit or any Minister to discuss any of the plans to close or remove subsidy from those nurseries.

The fact that the council argues that nurseries should be able to make up their shortfall from sources such as sure start, the neighbourhood nurseries initiative or children's centres flies in the face of the aim of the national child care strategy and goes directly against the undertaking that statutory authorities, including local authorities, give when they receive sure start funding. That undertaking must be agreed to before sure start local programmes are approved. The statutory agencies that are responsible within the catchment areas are required, among other things, to give a commitment to sure start principles. These principles include a commitment that money will be used to provide additional services. So they undertake to maintain existing spending on services for children under four to ensure that sure start funds are not used to replace funding which is then withdrawn. That appears to be—it is certainly what my hon. Friend is suggesting—what is happening in this instance.

Kensington and Chelsea has two sure start programmes, and it has signed up to the principles. My hon. Friend and her constituents may well want to ask it whether or not it thinks that it is honouring the commitment.

It seems that the arguments that are being used to justify these plans overtly admit that the council is in deliberate and flagrant breach of the promises which it made. If that is the case, that is reprehensible, and I hope that the council will reconsider its approach.

My hon. Friend made reference to a plan by Westminster council to reduce funding to its pre-school learning alliance. She asked me for the Government's view. She is of the view that it would result in the closure of playgroups and provide less money for holiday and after-school play services. These are the sort of services that are very valuable to parents when they are looking for child care. I emphasise that Westminster council is in receipt of sure start moneys in respect of three local programmes. It, too, has undertaken not to siphon money off but to use the resources to provide additional services. I fail to see how it can argue that it is meeting this commitment in view of what my hon. Friend has said, though I was pleased to hear her say that her representations and those of others may be leading to the council reconsidering its position. She mentioned that some offsetting moneys were being provided. I am glad to hear that.

The national child care strategy is there to ensure that every parent can access affordable, good quality child care. We know that this can help to tackle child poverty by enabling parents to choose work as the best route out of poverty. It can improve health, reduce crime and improve children's achievement levels at school. The child care review, which was conducted last year, found that children, parents and communities particularly gain when child care, early education, health and family support are offered together. There are significant pay-offs in offering these services to disadvantaged young children.

The review concluded that there was a strong case for the Government to invest in new, good quality child care. Existing services should be expanded and should place more emphasis on health and family support. New investment in child care services needed to be backed by strengthening the role of local authorities in ensuring delivery.

So in the 2002 spending review, the Government committed themselves to just such an investment—doubling the money available for child care by 2005-06. Children's centres, which join up education, care, family support and health, will provide a better service for children, parents and communities. They will reach at least 650,000 children in the 20 per cent. most disadvantage wards in England by 2006. That is the aim.

The idea that the Government are somehow switching their resources to tax credits is nonsense. We are investing resources of £1.5 billion by 2005–06 direct to the providers of such provision, and that included local authorities. This should mean that there will be an additional 250,000 new child care places by March 2006, on top of the earlier target of creating new places for 1.6 million children by March 2004. We shall increase that through measures such as targeting assistance to a wide range of providers in disadvantaged areas, and a greater

[Maria Eagle]

use of schools as bases for wider and family services, including child care. To the extent that local providers remove provision that is already in place, it is more difficult to achieve these goals.

The Government are not only interested in more places, however. We know that we need better places, too. Quality is important. That is why we introduced the new national framework of quality standards for child care, regulated by Ofsted. We shall continue to work with Ofsted to improve the quality of child care, so that parents can work, learn and study, confident in the knowledge that their children are in a safe and stimulating environment. We also know that child care needs to be more affordable. Some £370 million is available per year through the working families tax credit to help parents with child care costs. The new tax credits that come into effect next month will improve on the current system in a number of ways.

My hon. Friend asked me some specific questions and I shall try to deal with some of them in the remaining time available. She quoted from a letter to her from Mr. Lightfoot, who is the cabinet member for social services and health in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. He stated in that letter that

> "the direction of travel of Government policy on subsidy to child care is for this to be channelled directly to parents either in the form of vouchers or tax credits rather than through local authorities".

That is a travesty of our policy. We are providing funding through tax credits, yes, but we are also increasing funding to local authorities.

My hon. Friend asked whether it was the Government's intention that local authorities' investment in child care should decrease as parents draw upon the child care tax credit. The short answer is no. Any local authority that uses that as an excuse to withdraw funding does not understand our policy. The child care element in the working families tax credit is a carefully targeted means of support. It does not cover all parents who use child care, and it was never intended to do so.

So, although the Government provide financial assistance to some parents to meet the costs of child care, and also offer pump-priming and sustainability funding to some providers, local authority investment is still central to providing child care services more generally. It is wrong of the council to represent such a position as Mr. Lightfoot does in his letter.

The new tax credits being introduced next month represent the latest step in the Government's strategy to reduce child poverty. The child care element of the new working tax credit will build on the child care tax credit, providing support for working parents using eligible child care. The child care element retains many of the characteristics of the child care tax credit, but improves on it by being more flexible when a family's circumstances change, and by it being paid direct to the person in the household who is mainly responsible for child care.

By extending the range of eligible child care to include approved or registered home child carers in the parents' own home, the new arrangements will be particularly beneficial to families with disabled children, and parents who work shifts when conventional forms of child care may not be available. The Government are currently considering how to extend this arrangement so that more working parents can benefit from Government support for this highly flexible form of child care. Given the difficulties that many central London boroughs are having with child minder provision, linked to housing costs, supporting the availability and affordability of child care in the parents' own home may be particularly beneficial.

I know that my hon. Friend is concerned about levels of take-up of the child care tax credit. I can assure her that, since the introduction of the working families tax credit in 1999, the Government have been committed to maximising awareness of tax credits, and ensuring that all those who are eligible can make a claim. The child care tax credit has consistently been publicised by us as a key component of the working families tax credit. There has been a considerable amount of publicity for the new credits that begin next month, including a campaign with four distinct phases that began last September. This publicity campaign is backed up by a dedicated telephone help line and guidance on the Inland Revenue website. There is also a series of information leaflets, including one dedicated to the child care element of the working tax credit, aimed at parents and child care providers. So far, the response to the awareness campaign has been very encouraging.

Publicising the availability of the child care tax credit is not the job just of the Inland Revenue. As my hon. Friend made clear in her remarks, it is also the job of other statutory agencies such as local authorities. They, too, should play their part in encouraging take-up, and should not be withdrawing subsidies from nursery provision in circumstances where take-up of the child care tax credit is low.

My hon. Friend also has concerns about the extent to which the national child care strategy is concerned with helping parents who are not in work and not seeking work. As I have indicated, the Government want accessible, affordable and good-quality child care to be available to all parents who want it. We are putting in unprecedented resources to help us to get to that position, but we recognise that there have been problems with the availability of child care. There are shortages in most child care markets, and they are particularly acute in deprived areas, where providers often struggle to be financially viable. That means that we have to prioritise where resources go and we have targets to ensure that we do so, but inevitably, we must attach the highest priority to ensuring that accessible and affordable child care exists for those who work.

I know that my hon. Friend asked me more questions to which I need to reply. Given the time remaining, I fear that I shall have to undertake to write to her outwith this debate in order to satisfy her with regard to some of those points, but I hope that the remarks that I have been able to fit into the time available have at least answered some of her questions.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at Three o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 25 February 2003

[MR. EDWARD O'HARA *in the Chair*]

Employment (North Wales)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Mr. Woolas.]*

9.30 am

Mr. Martyn Jones (Clwyd, South): I am delighted to have the opportunity to debate employment in north Wales and to give the Chamber a chance to reflect on the Labour Government's positive achievements in the north Wales economy.

Labour Members have a great deal to be proud of in north Wales. However, I am sure that my Front-Bench colleagues will not allow that success to be usurped by any hint of complacency. It is essential that our employment successes in the region are sustained, and that can be done only in a vibrant economic environment—one that the Government have skilfully and successfully maintained since coming to power in 1997.

I am sure that many of my hon. Friends will want to speak this morning, so I intend to keep my remarks as short as possible. However, I am delighted to see at least some representatives here from other parties. One, a Conservative Member, is not from north Wales but he is none the less welcome. It is a refreshing change to see the Conservative party showing an interest in employment in the region; it did not seem to do so when it was in power and had Members in north Wales. I look forward to hearing about the party's support and praise for what Labour has done for the north Wales economy since 1997, and for the levels of job creation in the region.

I am delighted also to see a representative of the Welsh nationalist party here. Constituencies such as Meirionnydd Nant Conwy have benefited most from Labour's policies over the past six years, and they have experienced the largest falls in the number of jobless. Against that background, it is little wonder that the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Hywel Williams) should have come to pay tribute to the excellent work done by the Government not only by protecting jobs in those constituencies but by maintaining the right economic conditions to allow companies to expand and create more jobs for places such as Pwllheli and Blaenau Ffestiniog.

Finally, I am of course delighted to see here today so many of my hon. Friends from north Wales. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mark Tami) would have told us about the exciting work going on at Airbus.

Chris Ruane (Vale of Clwyd): He is in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Jones: Yes, he is on parliamentary business in Northern Ireland. It therefore falls to me to mention Airbus at Broughton. Recent investment has not only protected jobs in that part of north Wales but ensured that hundreds of jobs in Welsh supplier companies throughout Wales will benefit. In that vein, I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Clwyd (Chris Ruane) will tell us about the huge success of the Optronics technology and incubation centre in St. Asaph.

I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Mon (Mr. Owen) will tell us about the exciting future that lies ahead for Holyhead, and about the plans for the ferry port and the possibilities for Royal Air Force Valley. That much-needed investment provides hope for a part of Wales that has lagged behind for too long.

I initiate this debate because it is worth reminding ourselves of exactly what Labour inherited when we took office in 1997. Opposition Members like to promote the myth that Labour inherited a very happy ship; if only that was the case. Nationally, 3 million people were unemployed, and 250,000 young people had been unemployed for over six months. One million jobs had disappeared during John Major's years as Prime Minister. The economic landscape in north Wales was equally bleak. People should remember the Tory legacy that we inherited: the national debt had doubled between 1992 and 1997; interest rates were above 15 per cent. for one year and above 10 per cent. for four years; and inflation was over 10 per cent.

Let us contrast that decline in economic achievements with what Labour has secured in the six short years since it came to office. North Wales is enjoying its lowest unemployment for 27 years, and youth unemployment has been cut by 76 per cent. We have the lowest inflation for 30 years—and the lowest in Europe—and the lowest long-term interest rates for 40 years. We also have the lowest mortgage rates for 50 years, which is saving home owners an average of £2,400 a year compared with 1979.

Wales is top of the UK league for business support grants. The rate of job creation is 10 times higher than the UK average, and 36,000 new jobs have been created since 1999. North Wales has built up Europe's highest concentration of food manufacturing and processing businesses. That is an incredible turnaround in the fortunes of the north Wales economy, and that is precisely why we re-elected the Labour Government in 2001.

Before Opposition Members jump up and down, I should add that there have been individual setbacks along the way, and none has been more serious than those in my own backyard, in Wrexham. As the Minister knows, there have been job losses in recent months. Most notably, 230 jobs were lost at Owens Corning before Christmas, and 300 jobs went at Sharp Electronics earlier last year. There were quite separate reasons and circumstances behind those job losses.

In Corning's case, the increase in global competition in recent years has affected the Wrexham plant's competitiveness. The message from that is that all companies must study their costs so that they stay competitive, retain market share and hold on to jobs. That is nothing new, and it will always be the case in the truly global economy that we have today. Sharp's reasons for job losses were based on the acute decline in demand for video recorders and the probable rise in demand for DVD players.

[Mr. Jones]

Both sets of job losses were a great blow to Wrexham and its prosperity, but the overall economic context in north Wales is one of stability and increasing prosperity and confidence. It is against that background that new jobs continue to be created across the region. The examples of job losses that I have given are extreme, and it is disappointing that we experienced them in north Wales. However, the day-to-day success of the economy provides a very different picture, and I will briefly tell hon. Members of the success stories from our region.

Last year, clothing retailer Matalan made a huge investment of £1.1 million in Rhyl, creating 100 new, non-tourism jobs for the constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Clwyd. Local construction company Watkin Jones is expanding its operation at the Britannia park in Bangor. That will create 70 new jobs, taking the total at that site to 500 or more. Again in Bangor, the Book People—one of the UK's largest direct mail booksellers—has opened a new facility and created 180 permanent jobs. Interestingly, ETL Solutions will expand its work force in Blaenau Ffestiniog, in the constituency of the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd), to 25. That is the result of private finance and regional selective assistance from the National Assembly.

Those are not symptoms of an economy in decline; far from it, they are a testament to an economy that is confident, vibrant, attractive to investors and a good bet for prosperity and growth. In discussing the success stories, it is important to recognise Government support for the creation of such an environment. I congratulate the Welsh Assembly on backing north Wales entrepreneurs. Through such mechanisms as the Assembly investment grant and regional selective assistance, small and large companies have secured direct help from Cardiff.

The Assembly investment grant is discretionary and it is aimed at smaller businesses making capital investment in Wales. It helps companies to expand, to modernise or to restructure and assists with the setting up of new businesses, which are crucial in encouraging new ideas to flourish in north Wales. Regional selective assistance is a focused, discretionary grant scheme administered by the Assembly. It contributes towards the fixed cost of capital investment projects that will help to produce or safeguard jobs in the assisted areas.

I pay tribute to the work of the Welsh Development Agency in the whole of Wales, not just in the north. Labour's success has been not only in grabbing big headlines but in creating the right conditions for small and medium enterprises to start or expand in a way never before envisaged. On these Benches we recognise that small businesses are the backbone of the north Wales economy, and they make a massive contribution to the region's wealth and success.

Finally, I make a plea to the Minister. An improvement that will help north Wales greatly in the coming years is the introduction of broadband technology. The Welsh Affairs Committee, which I have the honour and pleasure of chairing, recently reported on broadband and made recommendations to the Government. The Committee fully supports the Assembly's aims and objectives, as set out in the document "Cymru Ar Lein", or "Online for a Better Wales". However, many of the objectives will be realised only with the support of the United Kingdom Government.

Wales lags seriously behind regions of the UK in many aspects of the exploitation of information and communications technology, and there is a danger that areas in which services are slow to become established will suffer from a growing digital divide. Businesses, individuals, public services and the economy of north Wales can only benefit from investment in broadband services. I shall end there, so that my hon. Friends can have their say about their constituencies and the economy of north Wales, and about the success story and the opportunities that lie ahead.

9.42 am

Hywel Williams (Caernarfon): I congratulate the hon. Member for Clwyd, South (Mr. Jones) on having secured the debate. It is timely, because employment, or lack of it, has been a central concern of Welsh politics, not least in north Wales, for many years. We must look at the long-term picture. I am happy to play a part in success stories, as is my party, and I shall refer later to a number that have been brought about in my constituency by objective 1 funding. My party welcomes the fall in long-term unemployment, particularly the scourge of youth unemployment, which has led to the problem of migration from north-west Wales. The problems associated with unemployment have affected north-west Wales over the life of many Governments. We have experienced the solutions proffered by successive Governments, including the big project, the instruction to "get on your bike" and the injunctions to be more enterprising which come with the—usually unspoken—condemnation that we Welsh people have some sort of congenital deficiency in the enterprise department. Those answers have never been more than partially successful. Projects such as building nuclear power stations mopped up medium and short-term unemployment to a degree, but some projects brought long-term costs with them.

Albert Owen (Ynys Môn): The hon. Gentleman mentioned nuclear power. Does he accept that Wylfa nuclear power station in my constituency, which is the only nuclear generator left in Wales, contributes a quarter of Anglesey's GDP? It is very significant as it is the largest employer; it has been there since the 1960s and could last another 10 years. Instead of dismissing it, will he agree that it makes a major contribution to the local economy?

Hywel Williams: That is an interesting intervention. There is a nuclear power station on Anglesey, and hon. Members will recall that nuclear power was put on the back burner by the announcement yesterday, so I am not sure that the Government share the hon. Gentleman's confidence in its long-term future. However, Anglesey's economy is certainly dependent—some might say over-dependent—on large-scale projects. That is the point that I am making.

Studies such as that done by Lovering on the building of Trawsfynydd nuclear power station show that big projects have often had a negative effect on local economies, depriving local enterprises of their best and most skilled workers, who are drawn away by bigger pay packets. However, those may be available only during the construction phase and, in the long term, only for a minority of workers. I know of local workers employed on a succession of big projects who had to keep moving on: for example, once the Dinorwig pump station project was completed, they moved on to the channel tunnel. When that was completed, who knows where they went?

For those people at least, coming back to north Wales was not an option because the local economy was going through another big post-project slump. That is quite apart from the serious consequences for the local economy of the siphoning off, away from the area, of the profits of big enterprises. Small businesses spend locally. Big ones, on the whole, do not. McDonald's, of course, purchases and delivers everything from its centres, from the buildings to the ketchup on the tables.

Those considerations apply equally to the long-standing injunction to the people of north Wales to "get on your bike". Getting on their bike brought some relief to the more mobile and the more desperate, but it distorted local unemployment figures and denuded our economy of the very people whom we need to ensure long-term prosperity. Generation after generation has had to leave north Wales—and the valleys as well, for that matter—to work elsewhere and to contribute to the prosperity of other places. That is to say nothing of the negative effect of that migration on Welsh language and culture.

As to our supposed lack of entrepreneurial spirit, we might call that interpretation a classic case of blaming the victim. Economic activity is weak, and that is presented essentially as the fault of individual economic actors, rather than as being caused by more fundamental, long-term structural factors such as low investment, concentration of Government funding in the south-east and lack of venture capital. There is low investment in structural economic goods, such as railways, roads and, as the hon. Member for Clwyd, South mentioned, broadband.

I understand that the ludicrous suggestion has been made that the broadband map for Wales, instead of being Wales-based and following the objective 1 and non-objective 1 areas, as the National Assembly has argued, should be based on a division of Wales, linking north Wales with the north-west of England, mid and south Wales with the midlands of England, and Cardiff with Bristol in a putative Severnside. That is reminiscent of the discredited economic thinking of the 1950s, with its wilful disregard for the unity of our country. It pays no heed to the business reality of working in the context of economic planning by a Government for Wales at a Cardiff-based National Assembly. I ask the Minister to assure the Chamber that the proposals are to be dumped.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): The hon. Gentleman seems to be ignoring the economic reality too. He will know that the people of north Wales tend to look towards the north-west of England to do business, and that there is great interaction between the two areas. The same applies to south Wales and Bristol. That is a two-way street, but the hon. Gentleman seems to want it to be completely cut off, instead of wanting proper interaction between England and Wales.

Hywel Williams: On the contrary. Conservative and Labour Governments devolved power to Cardiff, and the structure for economic planning in Wales is the Assembly. That is why the objective 1 map is cut into east and west, and why broadband should be planned on a Wales basis. That is the context within which businesses, large and small, must work. They do not look to the north-west for economic development; they look to Cardiff, to the WDA.

There is an over-concentration of Government investment in south-east Wales, and especially in south-east England and the Thames valley. Wales, and north Wales in particular, gets nothing like its fair share of Government research and development spending per head of population. We would receive a great deal more if we had a regional policy that actively directed Government investment and jobs away from the golden triangles of south-east Wales and south-east England.

North Wales suffers from a lack of venture capital, and the Venture Capital Association showed in its recent reports that venture capital is overwhelmingly invested in the south-east of England—48 per cent. is invested there. Those are private investment decisions, but they take place under a Government who are obsessed with developing south-east England rather than the English regions or Scotland or, for heaven's sake, Wales.

Chris Ruane: The hon. Gentleman is right to point out past mistakes, but will he give no credit for action that has been taken, such as the establishment of Finance Wales, by a Labour Administration in Cardiff to make venture capital more accessible in Wales? Will he give credit for the research and development centres in St. Asaph in my constituency, the Optronics project and the centre at Parc Menai in Bangor?

Hywel Williams: Indeed, I began my remarks with a welcome for the growth in certain types of employment. Per head of population, however, north Wales has not had its fair share of investment. I hope that the hon. Gentleman accepts that. He and I should be working to increase the proportion of research and development spending.

The north Wales economy is weak and less able to sustain growth from inside—the Chancellor's famous "endogenous growth." The economy has many very small enterprises of one or two persons. In other circumstances those could be the engine of economic renewal and growth, but they struggle to prosper in a hostile climate without the capital backing to weather storms and to expand. When a business in my constituency catches a cold it can prove fatal.

Not for nothing are north and west Wales an EU objective 1 area; they are defined as such by their low GDP, which is the result of low investment and low levels of economic activity. The Catalyst report of December 2002, "The Challenge of a Longer Life—Economic Burden or Social Opportunity?", illustrates the regional element clearly. It shows that between March and May 2000, the activity rate for men aged 50

[Hywel Williams]

to 64 and women aged 50 to 59 were 61.3 per cent. in Wales, compared with 76.8 per cent. in south-east England. We have an under-employed work force, and that is a long-term structural problem.

That is also, however, an opportunity, as I am sure hon. Members will agree. We have the work force; we have people with the life and work experience to take jobs, if there were jobs available. Unemployment in north Wales is higher than in many other parts of the country. Last month, at 4.8 per cent., unemployment in my constituency was the sixth highest in Wales. I will not argue now about how we arrive at those figures, but the broad point is that unemployment in north Wales, and in north-west Wales in particular, is higher than elsewhere. *[Interruption.]* Indeed, as I have already said twice, we have a seen a welcome drop in unemployment. However, I am concerned that in my part of north Wales unemployment remains higher than elsewhere. Why does that disparity exist?

I see the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen) busily working on his speech. Perhaps he would like to include the following statistic: although unemployment in my constituency is the sixth highest in Wales, unemployment in Ynys Môn is the second highest at 5.9 per cent. That compares with 2.9 per cent. for Wales as a whole.

There are hopeful developments, and I pay tribute to Government agencies and those entrepreneurs—in small and large businesses—who are making sterling efforts. I note briefly the small business sector in my constituency, which is overwhelmingly important. Small businesses form the major part of Gwynedd's economy and are the potential engine for growth. It is a truism, but if every small business employed one extra person, we would be out of the mess that we are in. However, there are hopeful developments, such as Gwynedd council's objective 1 scheme, the business development grant, which is funded with European money. Extra money will come from London eventually.

Chris Ruane: Delivered by Labour.

Hywel Williams: Eventually. That cost someone his job in Cardiff. He is now doing penance by taking the Hunting Bill through the House.

Chris Ruane: Very skilfully.

Hywel Williams: Indeed. We all extend our sympathies to him.

The business development grant to fund new jobs in the small business sector in Gwynedd has been hugely popular and tremendously oversubscribed. The capital set aside for two years has been exhausted in only a few months. That is an excellent example of the local public sector priming and supporting organic economic growth, with support from the Assembly, the Government and the European Union. Before hon. Members point it out, Gwynedd has so far received approval for objective 1 grants to the tune of £12 million, which is very useful indeed.

Another example of potential job creation is in a sector that sometimes sets people's pulse racing: call centres. I say "potential", because on the WDA's list of 164 call centres in Wales, which employ more than 20,000 people, only one is in Caernarfon. That is the Manweb centre, which employed some 25 people when I visited it some time ago. Those are valuable jobs, but there are only 25 of them. There is another call centre that, as far as I can see, does not feature on the WDA list, which is the Galw centre in Porthmadog. That is a rural project supported by the Cymad rural development agency, but it employs only six people. That, with the 25 jobs in Caernarfon, is the sum total of call centre employment in my constituency.

There are some interesting points in the WDA's brochure for call centres. The WDA points out that Cardiff has half of call centre employment and one third of the centres. Newport has 20 per cent. of the jobs and 10 per cent. of the centres. Swansea has 20 per cent. of the jobs and 13 per cent. of the centres. There is room for growth. Some 1.1 per cent. of the people employed in call centres in the UK are in Wales.

Mr. Martyn Jones: Is it not the case that call centres tend to be based in areas where the accent is recognised as being understandable? Consequently, there may be a problem in Caernarfon.

Hywel Williams: I doubt that my constituents would agree that their accent is not understandable. With such matters it all depends on where one starts. After all, London is a long way from everywhere. However, the hon. Gentleman raises an interesting point, and I shall refer to language skills.

The vast majority of call centres are located in Cardiff, Swansea and Newport. Some 75 of the 164 call centres listed by the WDA are in the south-east—42 are in Cardiff—yet only 12 of those listed are in north Wales, and only one is in Caernarfon. On the hon. Gentleman's point, one would assume, perhaps naively, that in a bilingual county some call centres would be located in areas where there is an unemployed work force that includes older people with life skills to help them in their work, or that they would be located in areas where there are linguistic skills, so that the service can be provided in both the languages used in the country. There is no reason why call centre work cannot be remote from the main centres in, say, Cardiff or London—that is the blessing of the new technology.

What does the WDA tell us about linguistic skills? It is quite instructive. Of course, the WDA works in the private sector, but its pitch is that 14 per cent. of staff speak major European languages and 16,000 foreign nationals live in Wales. There is not a single mention of the Welsh language, but given that Government call centres deal with the local population, rather than foreign businesses and exports, there is a strong case for considering the issue.

Albert Owen: Is the hon. Gentleman aware of a call centre in my constituency which deals with travel information? It provides a full bilingual service and employs disabled people, giving them an opportunity to come into the workplace. Unfortunately, private sector funding is wanting, but the centre is a huge success, and I agree with the hon. Gentleman that others are too.

They do not have to be in Cardiff; the centre in my constituency serves the whole of Wales by providing Wales-wide integrated bus and train information.

Hywel Williams: The hon. Gentleman makes a valuable point; indeed, it makes itself. However, there must be the political will to site centres, particularly those that provide Government services, away from the golden triangle in the south-east. We are looking for that political will from the Government, and I ask the Minister to give us an assurance that proper consideration will be given to locating the new Jobcentre Plus call centre in north Wales and, if possible, in north-west Wales. The centre will create 250 long-term, rather than fly-by-night, jobs, which will be well paid by local standards. If we have a call centre in Swansea, we also need one in the north-west, for the reasons that I outlined earlier.

The nature of unemployment and employment in north Wales is instructive for developments in the UK, where the not-so-hidden hand of Government favour has made the south-east of England massively rich, while making it increasingly difficult for people on average incomes to live there. The Minister will no doubt note that help is available, but RSA grants, for example, are falling, as the *Financial Times* noted yesterday. We need a proper interventionist regional policy for Wales and the UK. Investing in the poorer regions in the north and the west is a political choice, and it is a question of priorities.

10.2 am

Ian Lucas (Wrexham): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, South (Mr. Jones) on securing a debate on the essential issue of employment in north Wales. It is particularly important in the Wrexham area, which is often described—particularly by me—as the economic powerhouse of north Wales.

Wrexham is commonly associated with manufacturing employment, and 28.5 per cent. of employees in Wrexham are in the manufacturing industry. Interestingly, that is more than twice the UK average, which shows that manufacturing in Wrexham is strong, vibrant and continuing.

However, Wrexham also has an intensely successful service sector. When I first moved there 16 years ago, the town centre was in the process of redevelopment. Locally, it was called a bombsite, and it remained in that condition for seven or eight years. My hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, South is nodding sagely; he clearly remembers the situation well. I am delighted to say, however, that hon. Members who visit the town now will see how vibrant and strong a cultural centre it is. Its cinemas, shops and pubs regularly attract people from poorer climes such as Chester. Friday nights are a delight to behold and are often very busy.

The service sector is attracting finance and good jobs, which we should not decry, because they play an important part in our economy. They are often flexible jobs, and we should encourage rather than criticise the creation of such jobs when we discuss unemployment. It is telling that so far in the debate we have heard little about the service sector.

I shall concentrate on modern manufacturing because it is especially important in my constituency, as I mentioned. I do not want to talk about the past and the traditions of mining at Llay, Gresford and Bersham in Wrexham, and steel making in Brymbo in my hon. Friend's constituency. With due respect to the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans), a tradition of inward investment has developed over the past 20 years, especially in Wrexham. Two substantial companies from Japan—Sharp Manufacturing, as already mentioned, and Hoya Lens, a Japanese company—have invested heavily in Wrexham and have been very successful for many years.

Sharp Manufacturing is an interesting case in point. It has developed worldwide expertise in renewable energy, especially in photovoltaics, which, given the publication of the energy White Paper yesterday, are very much in the news. The development of that new technology in Britain is not as advanced as in other parts of the world. The successful 100,000 roofs programme in Germany has led to the domestic introduction of photovoltaics, so that renewable energy is used in households much more widely than it is here. That is also the case in Japan.

Sharp knows what an excellent work force it has in Wrexham in north-east Wales, and I hope that the energy White Paper will also show that Sharp is a worldwide investor and that Wrexham, and Wales, are great places for the future development of renewable energy and investment in photovoltaics. I hope that the chairman of Sharp Manufacturing, whom I shall meet later today, will understand how strongly members of the Government believe that renewables must have a future and that there should be investment in photovoltaics in Wrexham and Wales.

Hoya Lens is a very interesting company that benefited from inward investment—before 1997, to give the then Conservative Government their due. Last autumn, it secured a visit from the lord lieutenant and received the Queen's award for export—a tremendous achievement for the company, and the result of the hard work of its management and employees. It has become clear in my dealings with the company and on my constituency visits that one of the reasons for Wrexham's success in manufacturing is the close working relationship between management and trade unions. They talk to each other, deal with difficult times together, and share the spoils of success. Any business must succeed on that basis. It is sensible to adopt that approach, and to work together especially when times are difficult. The best example of that, of which we are all aware, is the excellent work done by the AEEU and the Airbus company in the immediate aftermath of 11 September and the flexible, sensible and long-term way in which the company and the work force responded to that crisis.

We must not forget that not only Airbus in north Wales provides employment to workers in our area. Only last week, I visited Mayflower Aerospace in Llay in my constituency, which works closely with Airbus and supplies components to it. A huge and developing aircraft sector is developing in north-east Wales that we must cultivate, strengthen and develop.

Wrexham is in one sense a victim of its own success, because for many years it had grant-aided status. I have said that there was substantial inward investment in the past. Because of that success and the fact that Wrexham's unemployment rate is now 3.2 per cent., compared with over 20 per cent. 20 years ago, it no longer has grant-aided status. That means that the town

[Ian Lucas]

and the economy must compete with objective 1 areas to the west and east, which obviously has its difficulties. Benefits that were offered in the past cannot now be offered to certain companies to bring them to Wrexham. We must therefore do all that we can within the local economy to ensure that there is the right infrastructure for development.

At times, there are disappointments. My hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, South referred to the jobs lost at Owens Corning last autumn. We face intense competition. It is clear whenever I talk to representatives of industry in my constituency that that is the one thing that is constant. There is competition from other objective 1 areas, as we have heard. There is also competition from abroad, including from the developing countries in central Europe—the accession countries—which can often offer lower wages and sometimes cheaper jobs. They may not be able to offer the same skill levels as our area, but they are certainly real competitors. Companies often move to such areas if there are setbacks in our economy.

There is also developing competition from the far east. We are all aware of the intensity of the competition in a worldwide market and a worldwide economy. Therefore, we must create a strong infrastructure. By infrastructure, I mean two things—a strong physical infrastructure and a strong education and training infrastructure.

I shall deal first with the physical infrastructure. The Wrexham industrial estate in my constituency is huge. It has employers such as Kellogg's, Tetrapak and JCB Transmissions, which employ large numbers of workers with a high skill level in excellent jobs. The estate has been very successful in competing with the different areas of the country and the other parts of the globe to which I have referred.

The one thing that the estate lacks, as I often hear from managing directors and trade union representatives on the estate, is a decent road connection. The current road connection is along Hugmore lane, and is precisely that—a lane. It is not good enough that such a developed and intensely successful industrial estate should have a road connection of that nature. That has been discussed for the past 20 years, so it was a matter of grave concern when the Welsh Assembly Government recently decided that a proposal for a link road to the industrial estate should be rejected. I should like my hon. Friend the Minister to pass on in his discussions with the Welsh Assembly my concern that the necessary road infrastructure is not being provided. That disadvantage for the local economy needs to be addressed.

The second type of infrastructure that is necessary in a high-skill economy such as north-east Wales is the one that will create the strongest and best work force. That involves close links between education and industry. I am very happy with the work to develop close links with local industry that is being done by the North East Wales institute and Yale college, which are in Wrexham, and by Deeside college, which is outside my constituency. One reason why north-east Wales in general and Wrexham in particular have been able to develop as they have is that they have a good, loyal work force and a strong culture of learning, developing and extending skills. The nature of the work force that we need means that that has to be done with major universities and learning institutions, and I welcome that great work. We need to extend it, but we are seeing real benefits and the prospect of improving our work force and making them even more competitive.

One area that needs development in my constituency is the culture of entrepreneurship, which is lacking generally in north-east Wales. In Wrexham, there are 2.24 registrations for VAT for every 1,000 adults compared with a UK average of 3.41. That is a consequence of there being no great tradition of entrepreneurship in our area, and we have often looked to larger employers to provide work. That is beginning to change, partly because of the good work done by the Welsh Assembly Government with European funding for projects that aim to provide skills to villages that have a mining or steel background.

In places in my constituency, such as Llay and Gwersyllt, work is being done with the local council to develop an entrepreneurial culture and improve employment prospects in those areas. That is a long-term goal, and it will not happen overnight, but progress is being made. If we are to have a strong economy in the long term, we need a society in which individuals start their own businesses and eventually take on employees themselves. That has not been common in the past in our area, but there is no reason why it should not be in the future.

The view from Wrexham is positive. We have a strong manufacturing economy, but we need to do things better and cultivate an atmosphere of entrepreneurship for smaller companies. Unemployment has fallen substantially in my constituency since 1997, and we must continue to work to reduce it further. I am confident that with low interest rates, a strong economy and a loyal work force, that will be done.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Two hon. Members have indicated that they want to contribute, and I remind them that there are three Front-Bench spokesmen and the winding-up speeches must start at 10.30.

10.18 am

Chris Ruane (Vale of Clwyd): I shall keep my comments as short as possible. I am aware that some Members have taken 20 minutes for their speeches, but I hope to give my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen) at least half the time left.

The economic success in north Wales has not been an accident or a legacy of the Conservative party. It has been the result of deliberate actions of the Labour Government since we came to power in 1997, and I can give examples. Labour has secured objective 1 funding for Wales, especially for Denbighshire and Conwy, which were left out initially. Labour has utilised grants in Wales to develop parks such as the St. Asaph business park, which was developed under the Tories 11 years ago but created only 100 jobs in seven years. Under Labour, some 1,500 jobs have been created since 1997, and an extra 1,000 are expected. There will be as much development in the next eight months as there has been during the past eight years.

We should also consider the heritage lottery, which under the Conservatives was used for the playing fields of Eton and to spend £12 million on the Churchill diaries. Labour's philosophy is to use the heritage lottery funding for places where there is heritage, architecture and poverty and to benefit towns such as Denbigh and Rhyl, which between them will receive a £12 million package. We have [illegible] had social justice, with the minimum wage, which has helped the poorest in our society. The Conservatives said that that would cost hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of jobs, but that has not occurred. In my constituency, unemployment has decreased by almost 50 per cent.

When the Conservatives were in power, there were no further education colleges in my constituency, but under the Labour Government two have been established, in Rhyl and Denbigh, giving access to education for 4,000 local people. The Labour Government have provided the infrastructure, but the extra jobs have been provided by the hard work of local business people in my constituency. Those business people include John Sutherland from Vanguard, Mike and Shaun Walsh from Anglia Building and Tony Palframan from Phoenix Glass, ably supported by Steve Pender. They are local lads, some of whom grew up on the same council estate as I did. They are contemporaries of mine who have prospered through their hard work and have provided employment opportunities for hundreds of people.

Under the Conservative Government, there was no foreign inward investment in my constituency, but under this Government two key investments have been made—by TRB, a Japanese automobile component manufacturer, and Pachem, an Austrian company, providing work for more than 200 people. There are large employers in my constituency such as Thales and Hotpoint, which between them employ more than 1,500 people. Some of those jobs, especially at Thales, are highly skilled—50 per cent. of satellite glass that circulates the globe is made in Bod St. Asaph.

There are also successful small employers in my constituency, such as H & D Fitzgerald. Heather and Dennis Fitzgerald employ only 10 people, but their company is the chief density calibrationist in the world, and exports to 70 countries. CMG Payroll is involved in intermediate labour force, which is key to getting long-term unemployed people back to work. Clogau Gold, one of the foremost jewellery brands in the whole of the country, is in my constituency, as is Tweedmill, a retail and tourism development that is one of the top 10 tourist attractions in north Wales. Tweedmill had growth of £900,000 in 1996 and £7 million this year. I could mention many other companies—Buckle Insurance, Craig Bragdy pottery and Caradon, for example. There is, therefore, a good tale to be told about my constituency. The Government have provided the infrastructure, but the people in my constituency have created the wealth, jobs and opportunity.

Looking to the future, we will need to look after the traditional sectors—retail, agriculture, tourism and energy—which have all been hit hard over the past 10 to 20 years. However, we must also diversify and create specialisms. In an earlier intervention, I mentioned that the speciality in my constituency was opto-electronics—the optic project based in the St. Asaph business park. That project has a £50 million investment objective, which will create 22 new companies every two years, and an estimated 900 highly skilled jobs. That will make north Wales, and St. Asaph, one of the top opto-electronic centres in the world. That is what we should be aiming for. We do not want crumbs from the table—we want the best for Wales.

We should concentrate on specialisms, whether it be software in Bangor, opto-electronics in St. Asaph or aerospace in the Deeside area, and should train our young work force in those areas. Education and training are key to such development. Our universities—I hope that Wrexham will obtain university status—and our further education colleges should be tied into local training for local needs, not only to support the companies that are currently in the area, but to attract new companies in future.

We have a bright future. Will the Minister consider the issue of structural funds, which will come to an end in 2006? We have done great things with structural funds. My constituency, and the wider county of Denbighshire, have the highest draw-down in Wales—£140 for every man, woman and child, and those funds have been put to good use. Will the Minister ensure that we get a good deal after 2006 and that there is justice both for my constituency and for Wales?

10.24 am

Albert Owen (Ynys Môn): I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, South (Mr. Jones) on securing this important debate.

Unemployment has affected my constituency rather more than other constituencies in Wales. Throughout the 1980s and the early 1990s the levels equated with those experienced in the 1930s. It is said that during the period of boom and bust in the 1980s, Anglesey just got the bust. That is a little unkind, but the period resulted in mass depopulation which had a profound effect not only on the economy, but on the social and cultural fabric of north-west Wales and Anglesey in particular. Our young people were haemorrhaging away as a result of the lack of job opportunities.

There has been good news since 1997. According to the House of Commons research department, unemployment in my constituency, based on residence base rate, stood at 2,451 in December 1997. That fell to 1,855 in December 2002, which represents a drop of 36 per cent. in that period. Equally impressive is the fact that in the last 12 months unemployment fell by 15.4 per cent. However, that rate is still too high at 5.6 per cent. compared with the Welsh average of 3.5 per cent. However, male unemployment was over 18 per cent. for the whole of the 1980s. Before I was elected to the House I was a manager of a centre for the unemployed. I saw at first hand the blight that high unemployment is on communities and individuals.

I support the thesis that the Government set out that low unemployment and low inflation can co-exist through sensible macro-economic policies and planning. The impact of Government policies such as the minimum wage has also been profound in my area. It has benefited more than 2,000 low-income families. Indeed, of those 2,000 families almost half saw their wages double from £1.80 an hour to £3.60 an hour. Instead of the downturn forecast by the Opposition, jobs have been created since the introduction of the minimum wage.

[Albert Owen]

I mentioned the macro-economics of the Labour Government but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Clwyd (Chris Ruane) said, it is down to the businesses themselves. We must create the confidence. The policies that the Government have introduced have helped, but we need the infrastructure. Roads are a basic form of infrastructure that was sadly lacking during the 1980s. The dualling of the A55—the road to opportunity—stopped at Llanfair PG under the Conservatives. It was meant to link Chester and Holyhead on the way to Dublin. I can recall lobbying the Wales Office when this Government were elected. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales was the Under-Secretary of State at the Welsh Office at the time and he gave the go-ahead for that road-building project so that we got that basic infrastructure.

I do not accept that north Wales, north-west Wales or Anglesey are on the periphery. That is just a London-centric, Cardiff-centric view. Anglesey is at the heart of the British Isles, bang in the middle between mainland Wales and the island of Ireland. We need to look westwards. That is what happened when the port of Holyhead submitted a major bid for objective 1 status so that it could attract trade from Ireland. I was happy to lead a delegation to the Under-Secretary of State for Wales, my hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn (Mr. Touhig), and to the Secretary of State for Transport after I had met with the Minister for Economic Development from the Welsh Assembly and Members of the European Parliament.

It was a real partnership of Westminster, the Assembly and Europe working together that secured that £3.4 million bid. In addition to that sum there was £9 million of private investment, making Holyhead the principal port on the western seaboard. It enjoys the benefits of the Celtic tiger economy. The fastest growing economy in the last 20 years has been in Ireland. The Irish tiger merges at Holyhead with the Welsh dragon. The claw and the paw meet. It gives a real Celtic lead to economic revival.

As there is not much time, I will concentrate on another major job boost in addition to the port of Holyhead, which is RAF Valley. At a time when jobs have been contracting in military bases throughout the United Kingdom, last year 100 additional jobs were announced at RAF Valley in the private sector working with the military establishment. This is a huge boost to the area; 90 of those jobs will be highly skilled civilian jobs. The employees will learn their trade and work and live in the area rather than having to leave the area after training as was the case during the 1980s and 1990s.

My campaign is to get civil aircraft landing at RAF Valley. It has huge potential and it has been underused for many years. The only people who use it now are rich individuals who fly in on chartered flights. I want to see a people's airport there that can bring business people to the area, who can link up with the rest of the United Kingdom. That is important. I hope that the Minister will continue to help; I know that the Wales Office has been proactive.

Confidence is growing in my area because the Government have invested in its infrastructure. It is wanting on new technology such as broadband, as my hon. Friend the Member for Clywd, South and the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Hywel Williams) said. We must work together to achieve a proper infrastructure in new technologies. Yesterday's White Paper will be of great assistance to us. We should run with that and say that north Wales is the place for renewable energy. Let us be proactive. In the port of Holyhead we are talking about constructing windmills that can be put out to sea anywhere. Let north Wales have those skills and develop in a positive way.

10.31 am

Mr. Roger Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire): I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Clwyd, South (Mr. Jones) on obtaining the debate. He welcomed all hon. Members to the debate this morning, including some hon. Members who were not actually present, but he neglected to welcome me. I am concerned as to why I was left out.

Two hon. Members here are refugees from the Standing Committee on the Hunting Bill. It must be a great relief to them to have the opportunity to debate the serious issue of employment in north Wales. We have had a good debate. The one aspect that I expected to be given more prominence but has been left out is the public sector, which is very important in Wales and, of course, in north Wales. Not only does it provide employment, job opportunities and a promotions system and job progression that are sometimes unavailable in smaller companies that are active in the Welsh economy but it contributes hugely to the quality of life that people enjoy in north Wales.

I supported the increased investment in public services. One of the problems will be providing training and education for people in social services and the health sector, from care workers to consultants. We desperately need more opportunities for training so that those skills can be made available. The same applies to education. There is a shortage of teachers in many disciplines in schools in Wales.

I would like to make one point in particular to the Minister about public sector employment. The two-tier system in public services that have been put out to tender is a scandal. For instance, in a number of local authorities in Wales where residential homes have been externalised, employees who transferred over were protected by the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 and are now protected by contracts of employment. However, people employed after that time often have much worse terms and conditions, with much less pay and holiday entitlement. It is a scandal, and I am pleased that the Government have announced that they will do something about it. I urge the Minister and the Wales Office to play a full part in ensuring that the situation changes as soon as possible.

Manufacturing has been mentioned. Other speakers have demonstrated a huge swell of optimism, but things are not so rosy everywhere. I think particularly of KTH Wales Limited, the aluminium forging company in Llanidloes, which has experienced great difficulties. It has lost almost 250 jobs, which is a huge burden for a small community—in terms of the proportion of the population in employment, it is the equivalent of 25,000 jobs lost in Cardiff. I am pleased that both the Secretary of State for Wales and the Assembly's First Minister have shown a great interest in the matter and are working well with the action committee on Llanidloes.

However, there are lessons to be learned. The first is that problems can arise if a small community depends on one employer who gets into difficulties. Secondly, Wales has previously been sold as a country that can bring to inward investors the benefit of low unit costs based on low pay rates. However, with the enlargement of the European Union, there is a danger that such businesses will move to other areas with low wages. The Government have not merely to reduce unemployment but to improve the quality of the employment that is available to people in Wales, so that Wales can compete on the basis of more and better skills rather than by turning out low-value products that are dependent on a low-wage economy.

My final concern is the transport system in Wales. The hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) has mentioned that Cardiff is involved in the economy of Bristol and the west country. Cardiff and south-east Wales could be involved with the economy in north Wales as well if there were better transport between south and north Wales. That would make for very large improvements, not only in north Wales but in mid-Wales. There seems to be no real determination to put that right. I hope that the Minister will address the issue, because it is key to improving the economy of Wales—especially in the north.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): I agree with what the hon. Gentleman has just said. I urge, through him, that Ministers intervene in the question of the proposed cut in franchisees' costs by the Strategic Rail Authority. The all-Wales franchise will inevitably mean further cuts in railway services.

Mr. Williams: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. I hope that the Minister will address that issue as well. The hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen) made an important point about improving RAF Valley so that air transport could be spread throughout Wales. A hub and spoke system based in Cardiff would ensure that air transport, which is so necessary for the development of modern industries, would be available to the whole of Wales.

The challenge to the Government is not to reduce unemployment, although there are unemployment blackspots where particular effort is needed, but to improve the quality of employment in Wales so that young Welsh people have the opportunity to stay in Wales and have a full career based in the businesses there.

10.39 am

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): I congratulate the hon. Member for Clwyd, South (Mr. Jones) on securing this debate. I hope that it will not replace the St. David's day debate, which was to be held tomorrow but has, for understandable reasons, been moved. I hope that there will be an announcement shortly as to when it will be rescheduled.

If this debate has proved anything, it is that there will not be a referendum on the euro during this Parliament. Not one Member has mentioned the importance of joining the euro to the vitality or economy of Wales. That is important, and I noticed it.

The hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Williams) mentioned the importance of the public sector—heck, we know that. It has grown dramatically since 1997, not only in Wales but throughout the country. I was interested, though not surprised, to read the Government's plans for the Welsh Assembly. It is proposed to scrap the post of Secretary of State for Wales and to reduce the number of Westminster MPs who would be able take part in debates such as this, but to increase the number of Assembly Members in Cardiff by eight. That is another example of growth in the public sector created by the party to which the hon. Member for Clwyd, South belongs. That is not the way to create a vital economy in Wales, and certainly not in north Wales.

I think that it was the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Hywel Williams) who said that London was a long way from north Wales. In many respects, Cardiff is also a long way from north Wales. It seems that north Wales is losing out, and we need to refocus to ensure that all parts of Wales benefit from any upturns or increased economic vitality in the United Kingdom.

From travelling around Wales, I must say that Ynys Môn is one of the most attractive parts of the United Kingdom, never mind Wales, and I am very fond of it. The hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen) mentioned RAF Valley. He did not have enough time to go on at length about it, but I agree with him completely. It is important that something is done about the regional airports in Wales, and to consider how commercial traffic can be facilitated in getting to Ynys Môn and north Wales generally, to open up the area. It is important that business people do not think, "Goodness me, Ynys Môn is five hours away by road from many parts of Wales, never mind England." If we can open the region to commercial traffic and show that business people can get from parts of England into north Wales very quickly, it would boost employment prospects.

Albert Owen: Does the hon. Gentleman realise that RAF Valley is not only easily reached from England but is only eight minutes from Dublin airport?

Mr. Evans: The hon. Gentleman mentioned looking westwards. Swansea is also looking to get a hub in Ireland and then in the huge markets of the United States of America. There is no reason why RAF Valley ought not be looking ambitiously at such potential.

The hon. Member for Clwyd, South mentioned broadband, which is important. We do not want Wales to be left behind in the information technology revolution; nor do we want rural areas to be left behind in comparison with urban areas. He also mentioned call centres, and there is no reason why north Wales ought not to get its fair share of them. He was skating on thin ice when he said that callers could not understand what people in north Wales were saying. Many call centres are located in Scotland, and people there might be accused of suffering from the same disadvantage.

Mr. Martyn Jones: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way during such a short speech. The people who establish call centres reckon that the accent in southern

[Mr. Martyn Jones]

Scotland is considered trustworthy, and therefore useful. I am sure that that is also true of Caernarfon, but at the moment that is not certain.

Mr. Evans: The ice is getting thinner every time the hon. Gentleman speaks.

I want to concentrate on agriculture, a sector in which there are real problems in respect of incomes in north Wales. The incidence of suicides among depressed farmers is much higher than for the rest of the population and we must try to tackle that. Manufacturing has been mentioned and is also vital. The DTI manufacturing advisory service, Cymru, has produced a glossy supplement. It is the first edition, but unless it helps manufacturers throughout Wales, I hope that it will be the last. We want real help and the best way to accomplish it for businesses and for services is to listen to what they are saying.

A list was produced of factory units facing closure over recent months. Eastern Europe and the greater attractiveness of EU accession countries has been a problem, and we must do all that we can to retain our employment. Hon. Members will recall the survey of Welsh businesses conducted by the Federation of Small Businesses, which highlighted as a major problem the volume, complexity, rate of change, interpretation and implementation of EU legislation. That helps to explain why businesses are not expanding as they should be. Red tape is a real problem.

The front page of today's *Financial Times* states:

> "The Better Regulation Taskforce will report Whitehall officials to the National Audit Office claiming that they are producing 'poor quality' assessments of the burden of new red tape. The British Chambers of Commer[illegible]ates the cost of regulation to business has climbed by £20 [illegible]since 1998."

Something must be done about that, and we need to reflect more on the burden of red tape. We have all received in the post the "Have You Heard? By Law" leaflet outlining all the health and safety rules and regulations that businesses have to comply with. It specifies a host of rules and regulations that people have to abide by and it is estimated that it would cost £100 for the entire pack to be displayed in offices

Is it not time that we talked to businesses and offered a commonsense reduction—perhaps a bonfire of unnecessary regulations as well as the bonfire of quangos that we were promised a long time ago? Our businesses—particularly small businesses, which have always been the engines of employment growth in local areas—must be given every opportunity to expand. The hon. Member for Caernarfon was right to refer to small businesses, rather than the bigger boys, sourcing and networking locally. We should therefore give small businesses in north Wales as much support as possible.

I have noticed a touch of complacency in the debate. I fully understand what Government Members are doing, but we must be more realistic about the problems of north Wales. Transport infrastructure is one key problem that requires attention. The perceived remoteness should be completely eradicated. North Wales people have the skills and a good quality of life, which means that businesses would be welcome to start up there.

Sadly, in Ynys Môn, unemployment stands at 5.9 per cent., substantially higher than in areas such as Montgomeryshire and north Cardiff where unemployment is 1.7 and 1.9 per cent. The disparity between areas of the lowest and the highest unemployment in Wales is considerable. I am not the greatest enthusiast for the National Assembly of Wales, but we should encourage it to redirect its attention to the problems that I have mentioned. I recall that during the halcyon days of 18 years of Conservative Government the Welsh Development Agency commanded great respect as an institution and secured a good deal of inward investment. Now it is competing against several development agencies throughout the United Kingdom, so the competition is stiffer.

I hope that the Minister will start to address some of the problems that I have mentioned today. There is no reason why we should not work together to try to lift the burdens of taxation and national insurance contributions—a tax that will start on 1 April—and all the other rules and regulations that hamper businesses in Wales. We should let those businesses grow. We will be looking carefully to see whether, in the Budget, the Government will start to pay a little more respect to the hard work, energy and commitment that our businesses give to the people of Wales.

10.50 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Don Touhig): In the short time available to me, I shall try to respond to all the points raised this morning.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, South (Mr. Jones) on securing this debate. It has been an important debate and we have heard many interesting contributions. Unemployment has fallen in every region of the United Kingdom since the 1997 general election, and it has fallen also in every constituency in Wales. In particular, since 1997, north Wales has seen unemployment fall by 40 per cent., youth unemployment by 84 per cent., and long-term unemployment by 61 per cent. Furthermore, Wales has seen the biggest increase in employment of any part of the UK and the biggest fall in the inactivity rate.

I think that all hon. Members accept that a major factor in that change has been the new deal programme. New deal is working hard in Wales; it has delivered substantial reductions in long-term unemployment and long-term youth unemployment. The better Wales target is to help 30,000 people under 25 years of age to leave unemployment and move into work or training by April 2003. That target is being achieved; by September 2002 more than 27,000 young people had already secured jobs.

That is a significant achievement, and I pay tribute to the staff of the employment service, Jobcentre Plus. There has been a sea change in the way in which the service focuses on getting people into work and on making sure that people can move from benefits into work. There are now 61,000 more jobs in Wales than there were last year. Despite the hits caused by the job losses that hon. Members mentioned, Wales continues to attract new job opportunities. That large increase in the number of jobs in Wales represents a high proportion of the total job increase in the UK as a whole; it is real evidence that the employment gap between Wales and the rest of the UK is closing. We are moving towards full employment.

In his pre-Budget report, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer confirmed an extra £2.3 billion of planned public investment in Wales over the next three years. We should contrast that with the 20 per cent. cuts proposed by the Opposition. That investment will put Wales on the road to becoming a high-quality, world-class economy. That is vital to our future prosperity. For instance, the £427 million of objective 1 funding committed to 759 projects in Wales is expected to create more than 6,000 jobs.

To create jobs, we need more businesses with enterprise and innovation, and with a commitment to invest and develop. In recent weeks, I have seen for myself that we have such business in Wales. I visited Airbus with my hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mark Tami). What a company that is; it has a huge commitment to investment and to modern apprenticeships. That is the way forward for such companies. I also visited rural Wales, and saw Rachel's Dairy near Aberystwyth. That small business, started by one person, has now expanded to provide quality jobs producing and marketing good Welsh products, which is so important.

I went with my hon. Friend the Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Mrs. Lawrence) to visit Petroplus at Milford Haven; that is an exciting development. I visited also a small industry, Llanboidy cheese, which works hard and is developing a market for Welsh products. That is to be encouraged. Wales has people with the vision, ambition and enterprise necessary to make businesses grow, and we need to encourage them.

The pre-Budget report contains good news for business in Wales. Business success means rising employment, and a stable tax base means that we can fund our public sector investment. Corporation tax has fallen for 5,900 companies in Wales, which is also to be welcomed. The first half of 2002 saw more than 2,000 new businesses created in Wales—a 60 per cent. increase over the same period in 2001. On top of that—it is a startling figure—the number of self-employed jobs in Wales is rising. About 165,000 people now run their own businesses in Wales—that is 13.3 per cent. of the work force, compared to 11.9 per cent. in the United Kingdom. That is encouraging, as it shows that we have the confidence to go out and start businesses and help our economy to grow.

As a result of the Government's measures, the unemployment rate in Wales is now lower than the average of the European Union average, the United States and Canada. It is now at the same level as that of the United Kingdom. Such achievements are possible only in a stable economy, with low inflation, low interest rates and low unemployment. We have succeeded at quite a lot in the past few years, but there is still a great deal to do. Colleagues have mentioned that there is no room for complacency, and that is right.

I want briefly to respond to comments made during the debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, South insisted that there should not be complacency, and there will be none. Working in partnership with the Labour-led National Assembly we shall push forward our agenda for investment and the growth of the Welsh economy. We certainly remember, as he reminded us, the legacy left by the Conservative Government.

My hon. Friend also raised the important issue of broadband. The Government have responded to the Select Committee's report—which highlighted good practices in the NHS in Wales—and we are working closely with colleagues in the Assembly to deliver broadband across Wales as quickly as possible. That is our objective.

The hon. Member for Caernarfon (Hywel Williams) welcomed several measures that have reduced unemployment. He highlighted difficulties in his constituency, but unemployment has fallen by 60 per cent., which I am sure he welcomes as much as we do. I found it hard to follow some of his arguments. He seemed to suggest that there was a major conflict between large and small employers in an area. I understand that some difficulties can exist, but I think that the mix is essential for the expansion and growth of the economy.

I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman developed an idea that was somewhat isolationist with respect to broadband. The broadband provision that is planned will provide economically viable geographical parcels throughout the United Kingdom. Public consultation led by the Department of Trade and Industry has shown that the restriction of the parcels to Welsh national boundaries is not what business wants; that is not what is required. My colleagues in the Assembly have agreed to be bound by the outcome of the public consultation. The DTI and Assembly officials are working closely together to secure the maxium broadband coverage across Wales.

The hon. Gentleman made an important point about the Jobcentre Plus call centre. I take every opportunity to encourage the development of such projects, and always, like my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, bring to the attention of colleagues in Government the need to think of Wales as somewhere to locate. Shortly I shall be in Swansea to open the Pensions Agency. That shows that the Government are investing by moving Government facilities and jobs where appropriate.

The hon. Member for Caernarfon mentioned the drop in regional selective assistance grants and referred to a *Financial Times* article, of which I have a copy. The DTI has made it clear that regional selective assistance is demand led. Companies are required to bid for the funding. If bids have fallen back, that is the reason for a reduction in RSA.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham (Ian Lucas) made some important points about the strength of the manufacturing industry and the service sector in his constituency. We certainly want to encourage that. My hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Clwyd (Chris Ruane) also spoke about the importance of public investment in his constituency. He talked about structural funds post-2006, and the Government are currently considering their response to the cohesion report. Discussions will take place between our Department and other Departments, and our Assembly colleagues.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen) expressed his appreciation of the investment that has been made in his area to reduce unemployment. I

[Mr. Don Touhig]

know how hard he has worked to bring about investment in the port of Holyhead in particular, and that is very welcome.

The hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Williams) raised the issue of the two-tier system in the public sector. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I will play a full part in developing the Government's views and policies. I am glad that the hon. Gentleman welcomes the recent initiative that we announced. He made particular mention of KTH at Llanidloes. I know what a blow the news was to the community. The First Minister in the National Assembly has asked Team Wales to investigate how we can respond and help there.

I can reassure the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) that the St. David's day debate will be rescheduled and will take place shortly. He touched on regulation and the problems that it may cause to business. The Government are committed to ensuring that regulation is fair and effective. We are trying to provide as much protection as possible to business and industry in that context. The Government have listened; they listened and responded accordingly when business and industry suggested that they could reduce the administrative burdens of the national minimum wage.

Last week I was in Belgium. I was struck by the fact that unemployment levels are higher there. I met Ministers and officials who were impressed by our efforts to reduce unemployment. In particular, they were pleased to hear about our new deal initiatives. In spite of the worst global slowdown for nearly 30 years, Wales is achieving great things—more jobs, more opportunity and more investment. Every constituency in Wales is benefiting. We have achieved much and we must be confident. It is important to show the confident face of the new Wales. We may be on the edge of Europe geographically, but there is no reason why we should not be at the heart of Europe economically. The first step is to have confidence in ourselves and Welsh business and industry. If we all work together and show that confidence, Wales will have a good future. We will build on the strong economy and develop prosperity for all our people.

Credit Card Industry

11 am

Mr. Barry Gardiner (Brent, North): Even though he is my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, South (Nigel Griffiths), I trust that, as a good son of Hawick, the Minister will not object if I ask him to take a mental journey with me to the other side of Scotland, to where I grew up in Glasgow. Whenever yer mither wantid a pint o'milk, we bairns would be sent doon the street tae Cuthbertson's dairy. The milk would be there in the crates, but there'd be nae wifie tae tak yer thruppenny piece, so ye'd leave it in the honesty box.

It is many a long year since I have seen an honesty box—some would say, "What do you expect when you move down to live among the English?"—but lo and behold, I walked into the Terrace Cafeteria yesterday and found, by the coffee machine, a brand new honesty box. I considered that a tremendous omen for the debate, because I am calling for an honesty box in the credit card industry, albeit one of a slightly different nature.

Last week, the Office of Fair Trading reached a preliminary conclusion that MasterCard was charging an unjustifiable fee to retailers' banks for every transaction processed. The effect of that 1.1 per cent. charge on the value of every transaction is, of course, passed on to consumers in higher prices. The regulator announced that

> "these fees act like a tax on retail transactions that is paid by all consumers in shops that accept credit cards".

Given that there are about £84 billion worth of transactions each year, that amounts to £924 million.

Charges and fees in the credit card industry are therefore topical, but I wish to focus the Minister's attention on the other side of the industry—the card companies' relationship not with the retailer but with the consumer. Last year, the deputy director of the Isaac Newton Institute for Mathematical Sciences, Dr. R.E. Hunt, submitted a memorandum to the Treasury Committee's inquiry into interest rates in which he stated:

> "Despite 'assiduous research', there are still some obscure aspects of the charging regime which it has been impossible to deduce even from the small print."

Dr. Hunt is a lecturer at the university of Cambridge department of applied mathematics and theoretical physics, so if that is impossible for him, it is almost certainly as clear as mud to the average consumer. As he says,

> "The need to read the small print significantly increases the difficulty of the calculation. Various vital facts are buried there."

In this debate I have one aim. Quite simply I want to make the small print bigger. I want to dig up the hidden charges and make them explicit, so that every consumer can know up front what they are getting when they decide on a particular credit card.

About a year ago, the Department of Trade and Industry asked APACS—the Association for Payment Clearing Services—to participate in its consultation process on the workings of the Consumer Credit Act 1974. Its submission, which I am confident that my hon. Friend the Minister will acknowledge, was extremely detailed and helpful. It focused on credit card annual percentage rates, how they should be presented to the consumer and how they should be calculated. Let me explain the problem. The APR represents the total charge for credit. Indeed, it is defined as such in the Consumer Credit (Total Charge for Credit) Regulations 1980. However, there are different ways of calculating the total charge. The assumed length of repayment, and the impact of such things as annual fees and minimum monthly repayments can be varied, so perverse results occur. In some circumstances, a card that would charge £4,040 to repay just £2,500 has an APR of 14.9 per cent., whereas a card that would charge a more modest £3,127 to repay the same £2,500 has a higher APR of 16.4 per cent.

The consumer tends to imagine that the APR is simply the annualised interest rate applied to the outstanding balance after the credit-free period has elapsed in any month. It is not. The APR is, at best, a one-dimensional view of the cost of credit on any card, and the number of customers for whom it is directly relevant is small. The APR is of no relevance to the 34 per cent. of credit card users who recently claimed in a Mintel study to pay off their balance in full each month. Of far greater relevance to such people is the size of any annual fee or the length of any interest-free period before repayments must be made.

The credit card companies have, over the past few years, begun to introduce other, hidden costs, such as late payment fees, which are usually about £20, one-off fees on foreign transactions, which are usually around 2.75 per cent. per transaction, and fees for going over one's credit limit, which are, again, about £20.

Another hidden cost is the transaction fee and interest chargeable on cash advances. Many issuers charge 2 or 3 per cent. of the transaction on any cash advance, subject to a minimum of £5. On a relatively small cash advance of £50, for example, the transaction fee is a whopping 10 per cent. of the transaction. Indeed, using a credit card to obtain cash is one of the most expensive ways to borrow money. Many issuers charge higher interest rates on cash advances than on purchases, despite already levying a cash advance handling fee, so the eventual cost to consumers who do not pay their balance off in full can be enormous.

Unsurprisingly, such matters are generally not in the promotional material that credit card companies send out. Even those things that may be heavily promoted as benefits of the card can have hidden costs. Many cardholders believe that if a 50-day interest-free period is provided, all new purchases will accrue no interest charges until that 50-day period has elapsed. In fact, that will normally be the case only when there is no unpaid balance left over from the previous bill and the new purchases during the current month are paid in full before the due date. If an unpaid balance is hanging over, the new purchases will attract interest from the date of purchase, and the grace period will not apply. Once again, the small print will catch the consumer out.

Fundamentally, the Minister can approach this consumer problem in two ways. First, he can impose standardisation of product on the industry, which is to say that each credit card company can calculate its key financial indicators in exactly the same way, and offer essentially the same interest on the same intervals, with the same interest-free periods and the same fees and handling charges. Secondly, he can ensure that there is absolute transparency about the fees and charges that each company levies, and impose standardisation of presentation of costs and benefits, so that the consumer can easily compare one card against the other. If the Minister chooses the first route, he diminishes consumer choice; if he chooses the second route, he increases it and educates.

The honesty box is a way of achieving the second option. It obliges every credit card company to standardise the presentation of all the relevant information about its credit card in a grid format, so that a customer can see, just by looking at the honesty box, how that product compares with another. I would dearly love to claim that the idea is original, but in speaking of the honesty box, I must at least be honest. It was first thought of by Senator Charles Schumer, who led the passage of a Bill to that effect through the US Congress in 1988. The honesty box is part of the United States' Truth in Lending Act, and it requires the disclosure in a tabular box format of all financial information that it considers the consumer will need when evaluating a credit card offer.

In this country, the honesty box has already been adopted by the Nationwide, but although this is welcome, we should remember that the benefits of the honesty box flow from comparability, not from virtuous unilateralism. The benefit of honesty and humility here is that I can claim something much better than originality; I can claim that it works. In the United States, the Schumer box, as it is known, is regarded as an integral element in the drive for greater consumer transparency. It empowers people to make the correct decision about which credit card may be most appropriate to their needs. It does this, not by forcing companies to provide information that is not already available in the small print, but by drawing together all the disclosures spread throughout the text into one readily understandable and easily comparable matrix.

I was delighted to learn that the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, South was to respond to the debate, as I know that he is passionately committed to consumer protection and just as passionately committed to consumer choice. I am confident that he, like me, wants to see not a standardised product but genuine competition with different products offering different benefits at different prices to the consumer. It is essential that we bear it in mind that consumers' needs vary; some may require a credit card that charges a low rate of interest because they choose not to pay off their balance in full each month. For them, other benefits such as cashback or air miles are minor considerations when choosing a card. For those who usually pay all their balance but who travel as part of their work, it may be extremely important to know what penalty charges are incurred for late payment and what handling fees are levied on foreign transactions. Those who always pay in full by direct debit will have little regard for the APR or for late payment penalties; however, they may find it useful to compare cashback or gift incentive schemes.

The honesty box should include all the indicators. A full list would include an introductory interest rate on promotions; balance transfer interest rate; purchase interest rate; cash advance interest rate; cash advance

[Mr. Barry Gardiner]

handling fee; annual card fee; credit limit; minimum repayment; date from which interest commences; interest-free period; order in which payments are applied—that is chronologically or to higher interest-attracting transactions first; a tariff of charges and penalties for breaking conditions of the agreement; insurance on goods purchased, travel insurance and other insurances; cashback; reward schemes; and affinity schemes.

With so many variables, it is scarcely surprising that consumers can make substantial savings on the cost of using their credit card by choosing one that suits their needs. It is equally unsurprising that most consumers cannot find out which card best matches their needs when the information is hidden away in the small print of the 1,300 credit card brands available in the UK. It has been calculated that if all the consumers who pay off their balance in full each month switched to a cashback card, they would save a total of £125 million per annum. Lack of transparency is one of the main hindrances to consumers capturing that benefit.

However, if the honesty box is to be effective, it must cover all methods that companies use to market to consumers. It will not be enough for card companies to place the box solely on their printed promotional material. They must also supply information when they advertise their products on the internet or via multi-media text messaging, and even over the telephone. In short, we need to be comprehensively prescriptive, and prepare for all the emerging media of modern marketing. Consumer choice does not end when the customer has signed their credit card agreement. Card companies must send a revised honesty box each time that they change any of the fees listed. In that way, the consumer will be guaranteed simple financial information on which to base their financial decisions.

I welcome the Department of Trade and Industry review of consumer credit, but the Minister knows as well as I do that that review and any legislation that arises from it is unlikely to manifest itself in the immediate parliamentary future. Equally, I welcome the Government's submission this month to the EU draft consumer credit directive, which stated that

> "information should be clear and comprehensible, and key information should be presented as a whole".

That is exactly what the honesty box ensures. I urge the Minister to do whatever is in his power to implement it now.

11.15 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Nigel Griffiths): My hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) has done Parliament a great service in raising an important issue that touches on the lives of so many people. Like my hon. Friend and, I believe, all hon. Members, I recognise that consumer credit and debt are important to us all. My hon. Friend has developed considerable expertise in an area that I take equally seriously and that the Government are taking steps to address. He gave us some shocking examples of misrepresentation of facts and lack of clarity. At a time when personal debt is increasing, it is important that the public fully understand what is involved in credit card transactions.

I am grateful to the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux for supplying me with its latest figures on indebtedness, which show a dramatic increase in the number of debt inquiries that it handled between 1996–97 and 2001–02, from 789,000 to more than 1 million. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor will take some comfort from the fact that the numbers of tax debt and utilities debt inquiries have dropped, and the number of housing debt inquiries is also down; however, the NACAB inquiry figures show that the number of consumer debt inquiries has increased the most, from 406,000 to 647,000. That is why the debate is so timely.

We need to be especially vigilant about the information available to consumers. Of course I want all consumers to be able to master their finances: I firmly believe that people need to be able to take appropriate decisions about their finances, and to understand the choices that are open to them and the implications of those choices. That lies at the heart of the issue raised by my hon. Friend. We in Government need to be able to create the right regulatory framework to facilitate a competitive market environment and to ensure appropriate consumer protection. Transparency of credit agreements is vital—we must look at the amount of small print in agreements, and identify ways in which lenders can minimise the risks and agreements can be made easier to understand. That is critical to a successful market in credit, in which there is fairness on both sides.

We are taking two key actions. Having set up the taskforce on over-indebtedness—I will come to its workings and findings in a moment—we have also undertaken a review of the provisions of the Consumer Credit Act 1974. The taskforce on over-indebtedness has considered the question of transparency in consumer credit agreements in some detail. It recommended that all lenders should be required to provide certain key financial information to potential borrowers in a clear and understandable format. It has reviewed existing cancellation rights, examined the content and form of credit agreements and considered how small print could best focus on the main rights and responsibilities of consumers, explain the key terms and, most importantly, use plain language.

The working group has been firmly backed by the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Miss Johnson), who is responsible for consumer affairs. She endorsed demands on the part of consumers for sufficient information to enable them to answer the three key questions: how much will it cost me as a consumer, how much will it cost me if it goes wrong—my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North mentioned the £20 charge, which is not widely known about—and can I afford it? That means that consumers need information about whether or not the loan is secured, whether the interest rate is fixed or variable, the term and total cost of the loan, and the total amount payable.

APRs can be helpful when comparing different credit deals, provided that the level of advice to which my hon. Friend referred is adhered to, but the frequency, number and amount of repayments are also important. Consumers should know whether a deposit is required and whether there are any additional charges, cancellation rights or early settlement terms. The taskforce on over-indebtedness indicated that the information is already required under consumer credit legislation; the purpose of today's debate is to highlight the failings in the enactment of that legislation in the handling of consumer credit and credit deals. As my hon. Friend said, the key is how the information is presented to consumers. It must be presented in a way that is clear and easy to identify and understand. We are examining the statutory requirements on pre-contract information and the format and content of credit agreements.

My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary is consulting on revised regulations and inviting suggestions on improvements for consumers as part of the current review of the Consumer Credit Act 1974. She is well aware of the need to take action on greater transparency, alerting people to the effects of reducing the minimum payments on credit card balances, and the need for clear guidance to consumers on how credit card cheques work. She spelled out those details in her response to the over-indebtedness taskforce's work. The Act is now almost 30 years old. It was enacted to regulate consumer credit at a time when the market was far smaller and less sophisticated than it is today. We need to update the regulatory regime and ensure that it is relevant to the modern credit environment.

We are determined to implement our 2001 election manifesto commitment to tackle loan sharks—another subject that my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North is particularly interested in and concerned about on behalf of his constituents and all consumers. The consultation document published by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary entitled "Tackling loan sharks—and more!" has elicited many helpful responses, and she will publish the response to that consultation next month. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North and other hon. Members will take a keen interest in that.

My hon. Friend discussed in some detail the merits of what he called honesty boxes—illustrative tables in credit advertising and literature that set out in a clear, standard format the key rates, charges and benefits. He advocated that they be adopted as an industry standard to allow consumers to make informed and accurate comparisons between the terms and conditions offered by different lenders. I entirely agree with that approach. Consumers must be able to shop around and make clear comparisons between the offers made by different credit card companies.

The Department of Trade and Industry has met the OFT, APACS—the card issuers trade association—and consumer groups to discuss a standard format for advertising interest rates. As my hon. Friend said, it is difficult for consumers to compare different credit card offers. Lenders make different assumptions about usage, so a 6.9 per cent. APR on one credit card is not the same as a 6.9 per cent. APR on another. That was not Parliament's intention when it ensured that APR information would be made available to the public, and such a situation does not help consumers—indeed, it can lead them to make the wrong decision.

I am pleased to tell hon. Members that agreement has been reached on the need for a standard format. There is enthusiasm for adopting the type of honesty box that my hon. Friend described. As he said, it is already a legal requirement in the United States of America, where it is called the Schumer box, after the senator who championed it. My hon. Friend will be pleased to know that we are also giving active consideration to the merits of taking such an approach to other credit products. In that way, consumers may in time become familiar with the format in which key information is provided.

Our Government are pursuing the most radical overhaul of consumer credit legislation for a generation. It is being presided over by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary and shows our commitment to ensuring that consumers are informed and protected. The changes are long overdue, and the speed of change in the credit market over the past decade, particularly in relation to credit cards, has highlighted the need for up-to-date, flexible legislation that provides the appropriate levels of consumer protection.

Like hon. Members, we recognise that it is ultimately for individuals to reach decisions about the commitments that they make, and that is as it should be. However, those should be informed decisions, and people must have information that allows them to compare different offers. They must be allowed to see what interest rates will be charged and be able to work out what they will end up paying for credit. Most important, they must be able to compare one company's offer with another's. That is why the Schumer box in the United States has so much to commend it. It is also why the Gardiner box—I hope that it will be known by that name, because my hon. Friend has championed the issue—is such a viable option in this country and it should be given active consideration.

There is no doubt that we have a mature and valued consumer credit market, and we are well ahead of countries such as Germany in terms of the possession of credit cards by individuals. People can therefore make purchases remotely and do not have to carry around large amounts of cash. All hon. Members greatly respect and value the industry, and we welcome its fullest co-operation in ensuring that it adopts the best practices. My hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North has outlined one of them, and he commands widespread support.

11.29 am

Sitting suspended until Two o'clock.

Urban Post Offices

2 pm

Mrs. Annette L. Brooke (Mid-Dorset and North Poole): I am pleased to introduce this important debate at such an apposite time. Against a background of 3,500 post offices being closed between 1979 and 1997 and the closure of a further 1,700 up to the end of last year, the first post office closures under the urban reinvention programme are being confirmed. Furthermore, 1 April looms, when the phasing-in of all benefits to be paid through the banking system will begin.

My constituency is made up of both rural and urban areas, and I emphasise that I am concerned for the future of all post offices, but it seems sensible at present to concentrate on urban post offices. There is the question of how an urban post office is defined: in principle, that should be straightforward, but I am aware of at least one dispute over a post office which has been designated as urban, but which currently serves a small community surrounded by a green belt.

I come to this debate having heard confirmation of the first closure in my constituency under the reinvention programme: Hillbourne post office, which is 10 minutes from my constituency office. In addition, local media are reporting proposed closures in Poole and nearby Christchurch. I am sure that the number of hon. Members supporting this debate reflects the level of concern across the country.

There have been many debates on the future of post offices. We all accept that post offices form a vital part of the social fabric of our country. In the suburbs of my constituency, there are many distinct communities of which the local post office is the focal point. The people most dependent on those post offices are the elderly, the disabled, single parents and the less well-off.

The local post office is often the last retail or cash outlet in the community. I have heard stories of elderly people making a trip to the post office every day, sometimes just to buy a single stamp. The visit performs the vital function of keeping them physically active and providing social contact with others. In addition, a post office being located within a shop carries spillover benefits through the provision of goods for customers and extra spending in the overall business. The closure of a local post office can have adverse effects on many people's lives, and it is important not to focus merely on commercial viability.

The performance and innovation unit report on the Post Office published in June 2000 made 24 recommendations, including shutting some urban branches to improve the prospects of those remaining, and investing in the remaining branches to make them more attractive. The proposals announced last October identified £180 million to fund the closure of urban post offices, with grants for updating individual post offices limited to £10,000. It is to be welcomed that the special fund for deprived urban areas has, at long last, been announced.

I am going to quote the Minister, I am afraid. He said that a rational case could be made for changes in the post office structure and that

> "a properly planned, properly managed process, which will protect access to the post office network in every urban area" —[*Official Report*, 15 October 2002; Vol. 390, c. 229.]

was desirable. It is very difficult to disagree with that statement. However, today we have an opportunity to evaluate the progress made so far. It is difficult to argue that there should be no closures, but I cannot accept that 3,000 post offices—one third of all urban post offices—should be shut.

Post office business has been declining for several years. Until recently, dealing with benefit payments still accounted for about 40 per cent. of post office income, but the rush to introduce automated credit transfer in April 2003 has really been the final straw for many postmasters. There may well be efficiency arguments for the change, but consumer wants are important.

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry wrote to all MPs in October 2002. He said:

> "We have been keen to listen to the concerns of all our customers. They told us that two of the most important things to them were still to be able to collect their money from the Post Office and to be able to collect it weekly. Both of these options will be available."

Letters outlining the options for benefit recipients who currently collect their benefits at the post office are being sent out on a phased basis to a total of 16 million people. The options are the ordinary current account in a bank or building society, the new basic bank account and the Post Office card account. By 10 January this year, 103,000 customers had opted for payments to be made to bank or building society accounts, but only 26,000 had opted for a Post Office card account. Only the Post Office card account will allow cash to be collected from post offices. It is therefore important that the post office competes with the other options on a level playing field. If our post offices are to survive and if the Government are determined not to defer the changes, it is essential that the process be handled well.

Sandra Gidley (Romsey): Does my hon. Friend not agree that there are alarming reports suggesting that the Post Office card account has not been adequately promoted and that most people are unaware of the advantages of having such an account? That is especially true for those whose current accounts are in deficit, because their benefits will be funding their overdraft. Many people do not realise that a Post Office card account would give them access to the cash.

Mrs. Brooke: My hon. Friend makes some important points. For example, applying for a card account seems much more complex than applying for other accounts. Is it necessary to refer potential customers to a call centre? It seems that recipients are being actively discouraged from using Post Office card accounts, and the agencies do not seem to be promoting them as strongly as the other options. The National Federation of Sub-Postmasters is concerned that the Department for Work and Pensions is planning to encourage existing customers to open a basic bank account rather than a Post Office card account.

Many are concerned about the start date of April 2003. For example, there seems not to be a significant gap between the trial for the Post Office card account and its widespread implementation. The timing of the dispatch of personal identification documents to eligible benefit recipients is another matter for concern. The pilot scheme in Tyne and Wear showed that many people were not prepared to have their benefits paid into bank accounts or card accounts. They refused to choose any of the options, but I have yet to hear a full explanation of what will happen after 2004 to those who continue to refuse. An exceptions service is due to be introduced, but when will full details be published? Will the Inland Revenue, the Veterans Agency and the Department for Work and Pensions all use the same exceptions service? With only 34 days to go, many questions remain.

I am particularly concerned about how the new system will operate for the blind and partially sighted. Indeed, I tabled an early-day motion on the subject, and I hope that many hon. Members will sign it. The cash machines already installed in nearly all post offices present a problem for many blind and partially sighted people. In a letter of 21 January to the Dorset County Association for the Blind, a local benefits manager wrote:

> "I have spoken to our head office, who tell me that before the machines were installed there was extensive consultation with the RNIB, who did approve the final design."

That misinformation is alarming. The Royal National Institute of the Blind is asking the Post Office to introduce a new PIN pad, and in the meantime to offer an alternative to those who cannot use the existing PIN pad. The current pad has a small display with little contrast, its small keys are very close together and people have a particular problem finding the number 5.

I understand that the RNIB's initial recommendations were ignored. I was pleased to hear today that the problem is at long last being acknowledged. A spokesperson for the Post Office has admitted that mistakes were made in the development process and that

> "we have not acted upon the representations from the RNIB and other disability groups."

Will the Minister tell us today exactly what will happen? How much precious money will have been wasted? More importantly, what provisions will be made for blind and partially sighted people and when will such provisions come into effect? I hope that a specially designed PIN pad will be available at every post office along the lines of the big button phone. Those suffering from arthritis, for example, will also require suitable equipment.

Age Concern is worried about elderly people being required to remember a personal identification number, a concern with which I have every sympathy. Exceptions will have to be made for those unable to cope with such a system. I have real anxieties that people who forget their number or who lose it will be unable to access cash for a few days. Some of those who receive benefits and pensions are among the most vulnerable in our society, and confusion and hardship must be avoided. In addition, anything that makes the collection of cash from post offices more difficult will affect the income of the whole operation and will deal a body blow to the whole network. There is a case for deferring the implementation of the programme for direct credit payment for the time being.

The other side of the coin is that there should be support for initiatives to increase footfall into post office branches to generate more income. Sadly, the Government announced the end of the "Your Guide" initiative, which was designed to turn post offices into information centres. Perhaps the Minister will outline what plans the Government have to support initiatives to generate more income from post office branches. Failing to protect current income on one hand while failing to support other replacement income streams on the other will mean maximum cuts in the network not minimum ones.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): Does my hon. Friend agree that the case that she makes is often entirely undermined because the Post Office, when asked what the contract would be, is very unclear, and those who want to make a financial contribution do not know the score? Does she remember that several times I raised with the Minister's predecessor and with others a case in the Elephant and Castle? There, someone wants to run a post office and is willing to make it income generating with other business. This person has tried to get goalposts for setting up a business from the Post Office, but they can never get any that do not move. That must change if post offices in my hon. Friend's constituency and in mine are to continue.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That is rather a long intervention.

Mrs. Brooke: I thank my hon. Friend and agree with all that he says, which fits in well with what I intend to say about the closure of the post office in my constituency. There, the postmaster was happy to accept the proposed package. His business had been declining for a long time, and he had already given up on the shop in his business as it was not even worth his while to employ staff. He did not want to stay around to watch his business decline still further with the introduction of ACT—indeed, he was pretty demoralised several years ago, after the Government made their first announcement, when he realised what would befall post offices in 2003. Perhaps that had already taken the heart out of his incentive to run his business and contributed to its decline.

The agreed procedures were adhered to: posters were put in the window, local councillors and the local MP were contacted. I visited local post offices to see how the customers were reacting. They were upset, but they understood the postmaster's position, as they were aware that it had been a long time since they had queued at that particular post office. There was no petition and no general outcry against the closure of the post office. It was regrettable and a nuisance, but customers knew that a well-respected postmaster was making the best business decision, given the pay-off. There were several post offices within the required distances, and details of alternative provision were clearly set out.

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): Does the hon. Lady accept that it does not make any difference if there is a local outcry or a petition? There was a petition with 1,000 signatures and an enormous local outcry about the Stanpit post office in Christchurch, and Postwatch objected. Despite all that, the decision to close the post office was rubber-stamped.

Mrs. Brooke: That is precisely my fear. Let me make it clear to the Minister that I do not object to all post office

[Mrs. Brooke]

closures. I am aware of one that is quite sensible. What frightens me is mass closure and the fact that individual circumstances are not considered.

I made representations, in my view, thoughtfully and not confrontationally. I asked about the post office that was likely to pick up customers. What parking arrangements would there be for disabled people? Was there sufficient capacity to provide a good service at peak times? The letter that I received from Post Office Ltd. confirming the closure told me that parking for the disabled was a matter for the local authority—thus pushing the problem on to someone else—and that the postmaster had indicated that he could cope with the expected extra customers. There was no mention of any investment of £10,000 or even £1,000 to improve the facilities. Where were the proposals for the brighter, better surviving post offices? I was very disappointed with the reply, because some good changes could have been made to ensure that that post office would survive.

How many post offices whose proposed closure prompts an outcry, as described by the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope), will be reprieved? One feels that once the poster goes up, the result is a foregone conclusion. There is a case for some closures, but we are on a slippery slope in assuming that so many urban post offices should be closed. I fear that the Government are helping us towards the slippery slope by insisting on rushing ahead with ACT.

I should like to see the evidence of investment in surviving post offices and a real attempt to change the business management culture in the Post Office. I should like to see details of the Government's plans for supporting initiatives to promote extra business in surviving branches. If we cannot have "Your Guide", which many of us thought was rather good, what can we have? We all have a part to play in encouraging people to use their local post office before they lose it.

2.17 pm

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Manchester, Central): The Government deserve congratulations on one part of the post office closure programme: the decision about post offices in some of the most deprived urban areas. I have a vested interest—you have a similar one, Mr. Deputy Speaker—in that every ward in my constituency is in the bottom 10 per cent. according to the measures of deprivation used by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. The Government negotiated with the Post Office an agreement that in those areas no post office should close if there was not another one in a half mile radius—as opposed to the mile radius used as the standard in closures nationwide. The problem is that although the Government have put up the money, the Post Office is not honouring its agreement.

After a Westminster Hall debate on 5 November—a bonfire of Post Office vanities, so to speak—David Mills, the chief executive of the Post Office, wrote to me about my remarks. He said:

> "I refer to your comments alleging a closure programme by 'deception' and 'subterfuge' and your accusation about 'deception and lying on the part of the Post Office's most senior management'."

No doubt he was very upset, but the accuracy of my comments has been borne out by the actions of the Post Office even since he wrote to me.

I want to draw the Minister's attention to some post office closures in my constituency. The closure of the Rusholme sub-post office predates the present closure programme. For a long time, the Post Office insisted to me that it was actively seeking new premises to which to relocate the sub-post office. When Mr. Mills wrote to me in November, however, he already seemed to have given up the ghost. He said:

> "It is regrettable that the Rusholme branch had to close in the first place but at least there is now a better prospect of Post Office services in the area being maintained in the longer term."

That was the first official notification that I had received that the Post Office had given up looking for new premises. The local community and I are entitled to object strongly to the closure programme that the Post Office has implemented by deception.

The situation got worse, however. One local sub-postmaster—hon. Members will see in a moment why I do not give his name—told me about a meeting that he and other sub-postmasters had with Post Office middle management. One manager told them, "Of course, the closure of Rusholme is a matter of interest to only one or two Members of Parliament," by which he meant me and my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman). It is unacceptable for managers to say that the issue is trivial when many of my constituents have been extremely inconvenienced and are deeply aggrieved by the Post Office's programme of closure by subterfuge.

In his letter, the chief executive referred to the decision to close the Lower Oldham Road post office. The Post Office said that it was closable because it was within 0.4 miles of the next nearest post office, at Newton street. That post office is in a very busy part of the city centre, but the closed Lower Oldham Road branch lies in an area of enormous deprivation, and many elderly people depended on it. That aside, we have constantly disputed the distance given by the Post Office, and one local community activist, Richy Carrothers, walked from the Newton Street branch to the Lower Oldham Road post office with a measuring wheel. He discovered what we had always maintained—that the distance is more than half a mile. The Post Office is wrong, and I have to accuse it of cheating; that is what its actions amount to. It is not difficult to measure the distances involved, and if Richy Carrothers can do it, the Post Office can. I am still waiting for it to rescind its decision, because it is in breach of the spirit and the letter of the closure programme.

The result is that people are nervous about the future of post offices in the whole of my constituency. The Clarendon Road post office in Whalley Range is up for sale, but the rumour is that it will be summarily closed and that the Post Office will allow it to disappear from the system. That is the concern among local people, such as Chris Paul, who are campaigning to keep it open. The Post Office always says that it is not breaching the letter of its programme and that there are reasons for a closure, such as the lease running out. Of course, such things happen in business, but a Post Office that plans its affairs should understand how must time is left on a lease, and it should be able to say whether a lease needs renewing or whether alternative premises need to be found.

I appeal to my hon. Friend the Minister to talk seriously to the Post Office and to make it aware of my strong challenge to it. Specifically, it is carrying out a programme of closure by deception, and the problem is being compounded by the unacceptable remarks of its staff in private meetings.

Mr. David Lepper (Brighton, Pavilion): My hon. Friend has remarked several times on the veracity of comments made by the Post Office. Does he agree that its public reputation has suffered because of its handling of the consultation process? I have in mind the Havelock Road, Bates Road and Ditchling Road post offices in my constituency. The date for objections was set nine days before the Postwatch consultation meeting in the constituency. Members of the public who attended the meeting rightly expected their views to be taken into account, but the Post Office had no intention of listening to those views at the consultation meeting.

Mr. Lloyd: My hon. Friend makes a powerful point on which I wanted to conclude. I tell the Minister that in the end the Government will come under criticism if the Post Office mishandles the closure programme. The examples given by my hon. Friend, and those from my constituency, have led to great cynicism among the public.

I make a plea to the Minister to get a grip on the Post Office. Can he persuade it that the kindest way to describe its handling of matters so far is "clumsy and inelegant"? I prefer the words I used earlier—what has happened amounts to cheating and lying, although that is less elegant on my part. The issue matters enormously, because the Government accept that the Post Office is a vital link, especially in the most deprived inner urban areas, where it is often the only facility around which the community can base itself. Numerous other local small businesses depend on that facility. We want to fight to save our post offices, and we look to the Minister to help us to make the Post Office honour its responsibilities.

2.25 pm

Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire): Like the hon. Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole (Mrs. Brooke), who commenced this debate, I should like to mention the fact that rural post offices in my constituency have closed down. I am sure that all hon. Members are equally concerned about post office closures, whether they be in towns or villages. For pensioners to have to travel miles by bus from their village to a neighbouring village or town to get a pension is as unacceptable as it is for those in towns to have great difficulty in accessing post office services.

I am especially concerned about the Downside post office in south-east Dunstable. The Post Office recently announced that it intends to close it on 19 March, in spite of the fact that it is the first post office closure in the whole country to which Postwatch, the consumer watchdog that works on behalf of all post office users, has formally objected. That raises the question of what the purpose of Postwatch is if, after having considered the cases of some 300 post offices in which it acted responsibly and did not formally object to closure, it is overruled by the Post Office the first time that it objects. Hon. Members are entitled to ask what is the point of the consultation exercise.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): I met the chairman of Postwatch today. Postwatch is incensed about the closure that my hon. Friend mentions. Downside is the right post office to keep open in Dunstable, yet it is likely to be closed solely because that suits the Post Office, rather than because it suits the customers.

Andrew Selous: I am grateful for that intervention from my Front-Bench colleague. I look forward to his support and that of the Minister in our ongoing campaign to keep Downside post office open, or, failing that, to open a new one almost immediately next door to it.

I share the concerns expressed by the hon. Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd) about the consultation. My view of that process is that it is, frankly, a sham. I was given the great honour of being asked to chair the public meeting at which the closure of the Downside post office was discussed. A wide range of community organisations attended the meeting: officers from the town council and the district council, local councillors from all the different parties, the head teacher from the local lower school and many people from the local community. The meeting lasted well over an hour and a half. However, in the formal response that I received from Mr. George Hooper of the eastern area, there was not one reference to any of the concerns that had been raised. What is the point of consultation if concerns are not addressed by the Post Office at a public meeting? That leads to considerable cynicism among our constituents about the role of Postwatch and the consultation.

Mr. Chope: Does my hon. Friend accept that Postwatch also believes that the fact that it deals only with the customer relations side of the Post Office adds to the public's cynicism? It is concerned that people think that this is all a public relations exercise and that those in the Post Office who are involved in taking the decisions have already made up their minds and nothing will change them.

Andrew Selous: I wholeheartedly agree. That is the impression that my constituents and I have. We will appreciate anything that the Minister can do to change things; I know that he is as concerned as the rest of us.

Mr. Mike Hancock (Portsmouth, South): It is interesting that in the case of the closure in my constituency, the Post Office agreed to come to a public meeting only yesterday, a week after the closure was announced, and not before.

Andrew Selous: Exactly the same thing happened in my constituency. Some of us were cynical when the Post Office said that it was extending the consultation process, and our cynicism has been borne out. The concerns raised at the meeting have not been addressed in the letter that I received from the Post Office.

The Post Office claims that there is a neighbouring post office less than half a mile away. The furthest part of the Downside estate is well over a mile and a half from any other post office. A large number of its elderly residents do not have cars and cannot access public transport easily, if at all. There are also many young families, who will have great difficulty travelling a mile and a half with children in pushchairs, through an estate

[Andrew Selous]

and up the busy A5 main trunk road to the next available post office. It is unacceptable for such people to have to do that.

I have already heard that many home helps, who collect pensions and other benefits for elderly residents in Downside, will be unwilling to go to the next nearest post office. Distance is not the only measure. What about topography? Dunstable is a hilly town; people will have to go up and down hills and endure the considerable traffic pollution along the main trunk road—with its danger for young children—to get to the nearest post office.

Despite the fact that Martins, a huge national business, with a branch some 20 yds from the threatened post office, has offered to run a post office from its premises, the Post Office has had what I can only call the arrogance to claim that there is not a business case for a post office in that location. Martins is already a successful, thriving business in that parade of shops. Surely the addition of post office services will bring extra revenue, so how can the Post Office claim that it is not a viable business? That is not a decision for it to take; the management of Martins and the local branch want to go ahead, but the Post Office is apparently unwilling to countenance the idea.

My second major concern is the reason that the Post Office picked that particular post office in Dunstable. No post office closure is ever popular; there are downsides to the closure of any public facility. However, there are several post offices close together in the centre of Dunstable. If one had to pick a branch to close—the Post Office lost £163 million last year, so I understand why it would want to make closures—it would not be that particular one.

I am also worried because the Post Office seems to have done no analysis. The only other post office on the south-west side of Dunstable is owned by a group of stores that has been bought by Tesco, which has publicly said that it does not intend to maintain the post offices in those shops. There is therefore a danger that the other post office on the south side of Dunstable, albeit not very convenient to get to from Downside, will also close. There is evidence that the Post Office has not considered the sustainability of neighbouring post offices.

Downside is situated in the Manshead ward, which is already in receipt of single regeneration budget funds. It is ridiculous that on the one hand the Government are pumping about £750,000 into that ward to sustain and revive the community, while on the other hand they are taking away a vital community facility. It looks amateurish; it is as if the left hand does not know what the right is doing. The good work that the SRB money will do will be undermined by the closure of this post office.

When Mr. Hooper of the Post Office came to the public meeting, he said that it would lose up to 41 per cent. of its income because of the transfer of benefits and pensions to automatic credit transfer. That is a huge loss of revenue for any business. The Government have to bear responsibility for taking that amount of income away from post offices. It is worrying. As a member of the Select Committee on Work and Pensions I visited the new Pension Service call centre in Burnley; the first in the country. Mention of the Post Office and its card account is made only right at the end of the script that will be used by all the telephone operators when our constituents ring in to claim their pensions. It is an afterthought; all the other options are pressed on people first. Only if they fail to pick any of the other options are they offered the Post Office option—they almost have to hold out for it.

The Department for Work and Pensions seems to be working against the Post Office and our constituents' ability to access local post office services, in another example of unjoined-up Government. I implore the Minister to have words with his counterparts in the DWP to do something about this issue.

I raised the issue of the Downside post office with the Minister's office two weeks ago and I am grateful that he is here to respond to the debate. I look forward to his response with interest.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. O'Hara): Order. Hon. Members present will note how many wish to contribute to the debate. The wind-ups must start on the hour.

2.37 pm

Linda Gilroy (Plymouth, Sutton): I had not intended to make a contribution to the debate, so I shall be brief. I congratulate the hon. Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole (Mrs. Brooke) on securing a debate on such an important topic. Post offices are very much part of the fabric of our society and it is important that we enable the future survival of their network.

The truth is that people are not using post offices as much as they used to. Whereas a few years ago 26 per cent. accessed their benefits and pensions payments via bank accounts, that figure has now gone up to 42 per cent. We know how that has happened: reference has been made to the number of Government agencies, from the Veterans Agency to the Inland Revenue, that are seeking to modernise their services, and to the payment of working families tax credit and pensions.

We have to try to balance the consequences for post offices against our duty to safeguard taxpayers' money. It is important that those various agencies are able to get the benefits they deliver to people at a minimum cost to the taxpayer. However, the Government are investing £1 billion in rural and urban post offices over the next few years to try to help them to make the transition through change that is happening in any event as people change the way in which they do business, using cash machines and the internet as well as making direct debit transactions through their bank accounts. The investment of £1 billion is not insignificant, but post offices are concerned about the changes none the less. The problem is as much the uncertainty as anything else—trying to work out what their cash flow and business will be, particularly in the next two years, is fraught with uncertainty.

I thank my hon. Friend the Minister for meeting a delegation of four sub-postmasters from the Plymouth district recently, and one reason why I wanted to make a contribution to the debate was to put on record some of the issues that we were able to explore with him. We discussed the way in which the forms do not give a level playing field when people are considering whether to open a Post Office card or bank account, and the Minister has agreed to examine some aspects that were drawn to his attention. Post offices are keen to make the most of their new role in banking, but the sub-postmasters made the point that people do not see the Post Office as a bank. As the banking services are introduced, there is a huge job to do to change the public perception of what post offices can do with and for people.

We are talking about some 9,000 small businesses facing considerable uncertainty in the coming year or two. That is the number in urban areas, and I think that the number in rural areas is similar, if not greater. The post offices are small businesses run by enterprising people who are part of the fabric of the community, and one thing that came out of our discussions, to which I hope my hon. Friend the Minister will refer in his concluding remarks, was the positive way in which he greeted the point that the Royal Mail and Post Office will not give independent advice to those post offices as small businesses in their own right. That is for all the reasons referred to by hon. Members, not least because some of the best post offices are not necessarily the ones that the Post Office wants to survive.

Post offices are run by enterprising business people. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will comment on the work that he can do with the Small Business Service and the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, South (Nigel Griffiths). They should examine how the Small Business Service can help those post offices during the next two years by examining them as individual businesses, not as the Post Office views them.

What are the new opportunities for post office services? How can they make the most of them? What opportunities exist for them to diversify, especially locally? They should consider the work that they pick up everywhere, from local authorities to housing associations, and how to make the best of those opportunities. In cities such as Plymouth, after the urban reinvention programme and the emergence of the network through that, is there a case to set up some sort of co-operative that will help post offices to examine the opportunities for local business, as opposed to what they do with the Post Office nationally?

I conclude by thanking my hon. Friend the Minister for meeting the sub-postmasters, and I look forward to his response. I apologise in advance if I have to leave in the middle of his comments, because I have another delegation from Plymouth to meet. I do not get many from as far away as Plymouth, but they are up to see me about the local health service.

2.43 pm

John Barrett (Edinburgh, West): Like other hon. Members who have spoken today, I have rural post offices in my constituency. There are three of them, but it is the urban post offices that we are here to talk about today. In my constituency, 18 post offices are classed as urban and, like the rural post offices, they are under threat because of the uncertainty surrounding the way in which benefits and pensions will be paid in future.

Urban post offices are threatened by the reinvention programme. Its title implies a positive development, but it is a closure programme. As Postwatch has said, the estimate of approximately 3,000 closures is too high—such a large number of closures is unnecessary. We are seeing a plan that suits the Post Office. Some closures may be necessary, but there must be a co-ordinated approach with a comprehensive list for each area.

Hon. Members talked about distances, but it has been pointed out that distances can be arbitrary. They can cover hills, or areas that have a good bus service and are between neighbouring post offices. Often, the best alternative would be if two post offices merged, but the Post Office is picking off individual post offices, which may not be in the best interests of the community. I want a comprehensive approach to a service that many people, especially pensioners, disabled people and the elderly, find absolutely vital.

Constituents such as Val Murray, who came to my office, will have real problems if their local post office closes. The next post office might be within an acceptable distance, but the distance of a mile can be a real problem if there is no bus service and someone does not have a car. A mile will not be a great problem in other parts of my constituency where the vast majority of householders have cars, but it will be a problem in other areas.

Individual post offices have not yet been named, but I am concerned about the consultation process. Examples given by hon. Members show that process to be seriously flawed. The one-month consultation does not give many community groups, community organisations and individuals the opportunity to play their part, nor does it lead them to believe that the Post Office is likely to listen.

A third of urban postmasters expressed an interest in closing their branch, but most people are interested in a compensation package until they find out what it is, and who can blame them? Most people asked whether they would be interested in discussing compensation for early retirement or redundancy would want to know what the package was.

People are constantly given the reason that there are too many post offices too close together, but one only has to look in any city street and see Starbucks, Costa Coffee and Café Nero to know that it is not just the distance between similar businesses that makes them survive or not be viable. Individual small businesses are often part of a larger business, and in most areas—certainly in most cities—we would certainly be closer to having bigger, brighter and better post offices if they were regarded as vibrant small businesses that could be encouraged.

Some 8,000 people in my constituency have signed a petition to say that they are worried about the future and are concerned about the plans that are yet to unfold. Many people do not know what the impact of ACT will be. They also wonder where the universal banking services are. There is confusion ahead, and if we are to find a way forward, we should accept that post offices are parts of other businesses.

The closure programme will have the same effect on post office services that the Beeching cuts had on the railways. We will look back and say that it was definitely a mistake. Post offices are one of the best retail networks in the country and, I believe, the largest retail network in the United Kingdom. We should build on that, make use of it, and work in conjunction with local authorities,

[John Barrett]

banks and tourism agencies to develop those businesses. We should use information technology, whether in the form of cash dispensers or the web.

Some post offices may close, but they should not close just because they are too close to another post office. They should be allowed to close only if the service can still be delivered. Any idiot can close down the least profitable part of a company and then say that they are getting a better return on the capital invested, but if the urban reinvention programme means what it says, it is time to reinvent the Post Office. It should come up with something better than the current closure programme. Pensioners, the elderly, carers and those who use the service deserve that, and the Post Office will deserve a hard time in many communities if it does not listen to local concerns during a consultation period, which is often much too short.

2.49 pm

Mr. Robert Syms (Poole): First, I congratulate my neighbour, the hon. Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole (Mrs. Brooke) on securing this important debate. Poole recently suffered a major blow with closures in Bourne Valley, Newtown, Hamworthy and Stert. The latest closure announced—it is out for consultation—is of the much loved Heatherlands post office just off Ashley road. I agree with what other hon. Members have said: the consultation is something of a sham. If we are at the start of a process that may end in the closure of many post offices, the consultation process should be far more robust and pay attention to the concerns of people on the ground.

I also agree with the comments about the morale of sub-postmasters. I think that most of them have concluded that there is not much of a future. There seems to be a lack of trust in the Post Office with regard to putting sub-postmasters' interests at the heart of things, so they are taking the package and running. One cannot criticise them for that, but it does mean a diminution in service for most of my constituents. I have many elderly constituents, and mobility is a very big issue. We receive all the standard letters, which talk about alternatives within 0.8 of a mile, 1 mile or 1.5 miles, but it is difficult for many of my constituents who are not mobile to get to local post offices. Post offices still provide important services for the community and are an important source of advice.

In Poole, many of my constituents are considering what is next and are very concerned about what the future will bring. The post office programme is happening at the same time as BT is closing many of its telephone boxes, so public services are tending to be substantially diminished. There is a general concern, and I hope that the Minister will be able to give us reassurances today.

I agree with the hon. Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole that there are concerns, particularly at the Dorset County Association for the Blind, in respect of cash machines in post offices. The hon. Lady explained the concerns well. If the Minister does not have an explanation today, I hope that he will at least go away and consider the matter, because the community is concerned.

2.51 pm

Mr. Mike Hancock (Portsmouth, South): I apologise to the Minister and my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole (Mrs. Brooke) for not being present at the beginning of the debate. Like the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Linda Gilroy), I was at a meeting with a delegation from my constituency.

I am delighted to be able to take part in the debate, because a number of post offices are under threat in my constituency. Since 1 January, two have closed—that is, one has physically closed and another will close in a couple of weeks. I shall focus on the process of consultation. The Post Office informed me on 31 December that the Langstone Road post office was to close. Despite the fact that it was a holiday period, we were told that the deadline for consultation was 3 February. However, even though there were barely three weeks, more than 1,500 people signed a petition and hundreds of letters were written. All three parties on Portsmouth city council supported a campaign to keep the post office open, and there was widespread support for the campaign led mainly by the Portsmouth pensioners association.

Despite all that, and despite four attempts to get representatives of the Post Office to come to a meeting, all offers were declined until after it had announced its decision to close the post office. If we are to have consultation, why do not people come clean and say that it is a sham and that people should not waste their time campaigning? If the example of Langstone Road post office is anything to go by, no one else could come to any other conclusion. Those events were mirrored in the decision to close Castle Road post office in Portsmouth. The process was exactly the same, although I believe that even more people objected to that closure. Again, no effort was made to find a compromise or alternative properties in which to locate the post office.

My mind goes back to the succession of debates that we have had in the House over the past year and a half in which Ministers have given assurances that they would promote the sub-post office network and that efforts would be made to give people a proper choice in how their pensions and so on were paid. However, we have heard about the experience of the hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) at the call centre in Burnley, where he was told that the Post Office was the last thing to be mentioned when people sought advice.

I am convinced that the urban post office has a part to play in our communities. The constituency I represent is probably one of the smallest, although it may be one of the half dozen most densely populated in the country. The people suggesting that in a city such as Portsmouth a journey of half a mile across pretty major roads is not difficult for elderly people to contemplate have obviously never tried that journey on foot.

I have read the explanation for the various alternatives offered to people after the most recent closure. One suggestion is that there is an alternative post office 0.6 miles away along busy roads—but on level terrain. There is no public transport available. The other alternative is 1.5 miles away along busy roads—although crossings are available and the terrain is level. I do not know where the people who write that sort of letter come from, but they talk about elderly people or young mothers with their kids in a pushchair walking a mile and a half in a busy urban environment like the centre of Portsmouth. People who write such letters are completely out of touch with what the Post Office suggested it would have, which was an urban network of post offices that related to communities.

The two closures that have taken place in Portsmouth since the beginning of the year are the tip of the iceberg. Like other hon. Members I believe that the closure of urban post offices will accelerate. but in whose long-term interest is that? One group who will be sadly disadvantaged are the communities who want post offices to flourish. People will not use the post office unless the services it provides are services that they want. The Post Office does not do enough to attract customers into its urban sub-post office network. That is apparent to anyone who has seen how difficult it is for any sub-postmaster or sub-postmistress to get new attractions into their post office. There is resistance across the board to what they want to happen.

I am bitterly disappointed that we have had to have this debate again today. I believed the Government when they said that they would do all they could to sustain the urban post office network, but that has not been borne out by any of the evidence that they have provided. Again, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole on securing the debate. I hope that the Minister will show slightly more commitment and that he will say that enough is enough—that the Government will do more to protect those post offices that are left and that we will not have any more sham consultations. He should not ignore 1,500 people, a unanimous city council decision or the groups that actively serve the community when they ask for positive consultation. Let no Post Office official ever again write to say that he will not come to a meeting until after he has made a decision to close a post office, but that he will come to explain to people where they can go in future. That is wholly unacceptable.

2.57 pm

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): The hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) and all those present for this debate and our constituents feel collectively that we are the victims of a Government confidence trick. The PIU report before the last general election made 24 recommendations, and in accepting them the Prime Minister said he would work positively to ensure that all sub-post offices were able to become government general practitioners. That is what he said before the general election. I raised the matter with him at Prime Minister's Question Time before I knew of the threatened closure of the Stanpit branch post office in my constituency. I accused him of

> "bribing sub-postmasters with £180 million of taxpayers' money to close down their services".

His response was:

> "we are putting in a lot of extra investment so that those sub-post offices that can survive and that have a viable future are given one."—[*Official Report*, 6 November 2002; Vol. 392, c. 281.]

The Stanpit post office had a viable future, but Ministers and Government policies have taken it away. When the Prime Minister referred to investment he really meant redundancy money. At £180 million, that works out at an average pay-off of £60,000 for each sub-postmaster.

This is a cruel confidence trick and the involvement of Postwatch merely increases the cynicism. What is the point in having a consumer protection body with no power to prevent the closures? It involves itself in consultation, but in the few cases in which it objects to the closure, such as the one referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Bedfordshire, and the case of the Stanpit post office—nothing happens. It is just an expensive process in which the poor consumer is the loser.

It is no wonder that the Prime Minister finds it difficult to sell his Iraq policy to the British people when on something as straightforward as the future of urban post offices, he is proved to be someone who uses words that are open to different interpretations. He has now lost the confidence of the people.

2.59 pm

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole (Mrs. Brooke), who has performed a useful service in giving local colour and flavour to a big national problem. What we are witnessing is a collision in slow motion, and we are beginning to see the casualties. Last week, I visited a local postmaster who is being paid up under the programme. He is being compensated for his business, but he is in his early 50s and has no prospect of an alternative livelihood. He has given up his life and holidays to serving the local community, yet he is embittered and feels a lack of support. There are many like him.

I shall focus on several specific issues. The first is the nature of the mass closure movement. As my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, West (John Barrett) said, the concept of urban reinvention is a bit of a joke. Those who have some memory of how the story evolved will remember that, four or five years ago, a series of parliamentary questions were tabled by the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell), myself and others about what ACT might mean to individual parliamentary constituencies. They were days when the Government and the Post Office were more open, and we received a helpful answer. We were told that the implications of losing the £450 million income were a 40 per cent. cut in the network of post offices and a closure rate of 70 or 80 per cent. in densely populated urban areas with low-income customers, such as inner-city Manchester and south Portsmouth.

The Government have now packaged those effects in what they call an urban reinvention programme, but we are seeing the direct logical consequence of that loss of income. We are supposed to be protected by provisions that ensure that post offices will be rationalised but remain open, and that 95 per cent. of people will have access to a post office within half a mile. However, the contributions of the hon. Members for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) and for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) and of my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) explained the problems. There are problems of logistics, as half a mile up a steep hill is not the same as half a mile on the flat, and half a mile across dual carriageway is not the same as half a mile across a park. People could be switched to a post office that has different opening hours, is congested or does not offer a full range of services. There

[Dr. Vincent Cable]

will be many other problems, such as people with walking difficulties being directed to a post office without a car park.

There must be a proper mechanism to ensure that when such difficulties become apparent, there will be a legitimate system of appeal and discussion with the authorities. For reasons that have been given, particularly by the hon. Member for Christchurch, the Postwatch mechanism is not strong enough—indeed, the situation is worse than that, because a deliberate attempt is being made to conceal information. For the past few months, I have been trying to get the Post Office to give me a list of the post offices that will be closed. There is no reason why it should not give me such a list. If we had it, rather than simply deal with problems case-by-case as they arise, we could map a picture of how our areas will be affected and make rational judgments about which closures to support and oppose.

The Post Office has refused to give me the information, but it is available. It has been given to Postwatch, but it will not pass it on to us. I have asked the Post Office the reason for that, and it said that it is obliged by a code of conduct to give Postwatch the information, but it is not obliged to give it to us. At some inconvenience to itself, Postwatch has agreed to give me and other hon. Members the information, but why is the Post Office—in effect, a Government operation that is funded by £400 million of taxpayers' money—operating in such a high-handed, arrogant and unco-operative way? I have written a rude letter to Mr. David Mills about that, but the Minister should take the point to heart. The Government are paying for the programme, and the Post Office is a public service. They should insist on more transparency.

Mr. Robathan: I have similar problems. I have been trying to find out from the Post Office which post offices have closed in each of the past few years. It said that it does not know and that it does not hold such details centrally. That must be nonsense—every organisation must know what outlets it has.

Dr. Cable: The answer is that the Post Office does know, but providing the information would be too inconvenient. There is no more to it than that.

Eighteen million consumers face a major social change. The Minister, for whom I have a great deal of respect and who usually handles his brief extremely well, managed to insult most of our constituents by responding to a question on consumer impact by saying that this was merely getting rid of ration book technology and that people should get up to date. People have positive reasons for choosing to use the Post Office system, but at present there is an enormous disconnection between people's clearly expressed preferences and what is happening.

The National Federation of Sub-Postmasters recently commissioned a very professional survey through MORI to ascertain what consumers wanted. The results were clear: only 6 per cent. of pension and benefits recipients who have a current account said that they would prefer to get their benefits by ACT. It also found that more than 93 per cent. of people who have a bank account and 83 per cent of those who do not said that they would prefer to continue to receive their pensions and benefits in cash rather than by ACT. That is an 80 or 90 per cent. preference. However, that preference is not being responded to. I received a letter this morning from the Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the hon. Member for Croydon, North (Malcolm Wicks), giving me the latest figures on the take-up of the Post Office card account. Of 215, 000 replies, only 16, 940 requested a Post Office card account. That is only 5 per cent. What happened to the 80 or 90 per cent. who wanted to have this system but who have not requested it? That is odd.

Thanks to my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole, we had part of the explanation. First, the process of getting the cards is extremely complex and difficult—requesting the personal invitation documents, presenting them, and going through the application process. We also know that people have been actively discouraged. Whatever tactful words Ministers may use at the centre, we know that junior officials further down the departmental food chain have been told that they must get the numbers down—that that is their job. Some of them have been quite abrasive in going about it. People have told me that they have been threatened—"Get into the bank or you will lose your benefits or suffer delays in your payments." Little sensitivity is shown at that level.

People have been discouraged in other ways. Department for Work and Pensions promotional literature makes it clear that there is a preference for a bank account. The Inland Revenue, when talking about tax credits, does not even give people the option of having a Post Office card account. Of course, it is clear that the Treasury is driving that blatant and cynical attempt to discourage people from using post offices.

Linda Gilroy: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that it is incumbent on us to ensure that our services are delivered at the lowest possible cost to the taxpayer?

Dr. Cable: Yes. In her contribution, the hon. Lady acknowledged that there has been discouragement in Plymouth. She is correct to say that a more efficient system of electronic transfer would create savings. That is why we cannot simply make appeals to keep the old system going. We must find new sources of income for the post office network.

Several hon. Members asked about what had happened to the Government's promise to introduce a general practitioner system. We know that "Your Guide" was trialled and that it was a success. However, the Government decided not to back it. However, we were left with the thought that the Government saw merit in providing a general practitioner information service through the post office network. Perhaps the Minister will tell us what happened, as such a service would help to make the network more viable. Can the Minister tell us what is being done to make more use of the post office network to encourage electronic commerce? That could generate additional income. There is enormous potential synergy between large numbers of people coming into their post offices to use technology to order goods and to use post offices for delivery. The Post Office offers a good logistics system, but little is being done by the Government to promote it.

The hon. Lady is right to say that the future of the post office network must have a sound economic foundation. We are not asking for indefinite subsidies, but there are other ways to achieve that. However, since the PIU report was published, the Government's approach to alternative sources of income has been wholly passive.

Finally, I wonder about the readiness of the system. I understand that the electronic payments system that underpins the Post Office card account was to have been trialled three months ago, but that the trials are still taking place and are not due to finish until a mere five days before the new system comes into effect. That is contrary to all good practice with complex IT systems. We know that the IT systems used in Government Departments have been chaotic and unsuccessful. I want some assurance from the Government that the electronic underpinning of the Post Office card account system is properly organised and fully ready for D-day.

3.10 pm

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): Mine is the 10th speech in this debate, and I suspect that none of the speeches have given the Minister much comfort. I congratulate the hon. Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole (Mrs. Brooke) on initiating the debate. It is probable that almost everybody will have agreed with everything said in all nine speeches—and probably in the 10th—because we all come to the subject from the same position.

We are talking about a sustainable future for all post offices, whether Crown, rural or urban. We have heard how communities value post offices. However, they face a crisis. The world is changing and more people will use ACT, but the crisis is happening now. At least 40 per cent.—it was suggested a moment ago that it is 45 per cent.—of post office network revenue comes from the payment of benefit transactions. That will be scrapped over the next two years from April. The question is what will happen then.

The urban deprived post office fund will do a little to help. Hon. Members may recall that the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister expected the fund to become operational in the summer of 2002, but it was finally announced on 30 December. Another £150 million a year for the next three years will be available for rural post offices. That will have an impact, of course, but what then? The cynics will say that those three years will take us neatly past the next general election.

What is the sustainable future for the post office? The hon. Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole spoke about the bias against the Post Office card account. Some may not know that there has been a spat between the DTI, which looks after the Post Office, and the DWP, which provides the money to pay the post office network—backed, of course, by the Treasury. The DTI lost the argument, because the purpose of changing benefit payments is simply—and understandably; I do not knock it—to save public money. It will save between £400 and £430 million a year. If that money is taken from the post offices—ACT will cost the DWP next to nothing—what will the post office network do for income?

I reiterate briefly the journey made by the Post Office card account customer. It is about how people can be deterred from asking for a card account. The first stop is that the customer gets a letter asking him to supply some account details; no further action is required. However, those who do not supply account details have a further 18 further steps to take before being given a Post Office card account. The form is designed specifically to ensure that people can receive their payment anywhere so long as they choose ACT.

Documents from the DWP make no mention of a Post Office card account, nor do those from the Inland Revenue. They have no box to tick, and do not include a question asking whether people want a Post Office card account. Sub-postmasters have been forbidden to advertise them, and they are not allowed to market them. The Post Office card account is third on the list of options that will soon start appearing in post offices.

A parliamentary question was answered yesterday by the Department for Work and Pensions about housebound pensioners accessing Post Office card accounts. It said that some housebound pensioners might find that a bank account may be better to meet their personal needs. Yet again we are being pushed in that direction. I would say that they should be allowed to choose. A letter from the Veterans Agency, which is part of the Ministry of Defence, states:

> "Additionally, we have had so many requests for this option"—

that is the Post Office card account—

> "that it may take us time to respond to all the requests . . . please rest assured that this does not mean we have not actioned your request, it simply means that due to the high demand, it will take some time to take the required action of 23,000+ requests."

So, people do want Post Office card accounts. I say to the Minister that he should let them choose.

Child benefit was one of the first benefits to be transferred to universal banking. Will the Minister tell us what concerns have been expressed to him about the money that is intended to benefit children going into joint bank accounts? He and I are of an age, and he might recall the debate some 30 years ago, when there was a concern that feckless and possibly drunken husbands or partners might get their hands on the money and waste it. That is the main reason why it is always paid to the mother. Has the Minister any such concerns? Perhaps society is so much better now that there are no deprived or excluded mothers who might suffer.

I was glad to hear the four Liberals who have spoken so well, especially the Minister for Twickenham—I am sorry, the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable); that was not a Freudian slip. I disagreed with very little that he said. I was glad to hear of his support for the Post Office. The Liberals are good at campaigning and we all know their campaign pack, which says:

> "The last post? Start campaigning now and just keep going!"

[Mr. Andrew Robathan]

It is a cracker and received a massive response. The pack continues:

> "'Our . . . post office is . . . vital,' say the residents of Bloggstown. . . . There has been a massive response to the Lib Dem campaign to save local Post Offices".—

although it has yet to start—

> "'Both locally and nationwide the Liberal Democrats are getting a very positive response to our campaign,' said Joe Bloggs".

John Barrett: Will the hon. Gentleman comment on how that fits in with the Conservative campaign in Dumfries and Galloway, which is being run on almost the same lines?

Mr. Robathan: I am sure that that is an excellent campaign, but it does not contain junk like this:

> "We have had an excellent response to our campaign, with hundreds of local residents signing the petition . . . Post Office campaign heads for Downing Street."

That is the stuff. And then, wonder of wonders, it is

> "designed to be printed as a double sided A5 election day leaflet. It should be delivered to supporters (and those we are squeezing)".

I should like to tell the hon. Gentlemen and Ladies of the Liberal Democrats that that was designed for last May's local elections when we won a seat from them in Gilmorton, notwithstanding all that junk.

Nevertheless, Liberal Democrats have made many good points. The issue is the future of the Post Office. The PIU report of some 32 months ago was welcomed by the Prime Minister with the words,

> "I welcome this report which the Government fully accepts."—[*Official Report*, 15 October 2002; Vol. 390, c. 240.]

The problem is that it has not been enforced. There is no e-commerce, there are no one-stop shops, there is no internet learning and access. Loyalty to the post offices around the country, of which we have heard today, is remarkable. They are valued by people in all communities, even though they might not always go into them. I went to Lutterworth post office last week during constituency week and the sub-postmaster told me now concerned he was about his future. That is a big post office in a big town. I heard, also, that people who had applied for Post Office card accounts, although they had given no telephone number, were being telephoned by the Department for Work and Pensions to ask them whether they really wanted them.

What is the future? Everybody wants to know. The Government should come clean. What are the long-term plans? After the next election, and after £450 million has been spent, what then? Will the Minister tell us about the discussions between the National Federation of Sub-Postmasters and the Post Office that are going on now? I understand that they are completely bogged down because there can be no agreement yet about how much money can be awarded for each benefit transaction, or financial transaction, for a card account. He will say that it is not his responsibility, but I fear that it is. We know that the problems of the post office network are huge. However, it is a great asset, with over 17,000 outlets, reducing under the urban network reinvention Programme to 14,000 or 15,000. It offers a great opportunity for a dynamic retailer and we all wish to see the post office network continue. Sub-postmasters, the public, towns, villages, pensioners, mothers and everyone else who ever uses a post office want to know what the long-term policy is. What is the sustainable future? We are talking about a publicly-owned asset, funded by public money. We want to know whether the post offices in question will still be here in 10, 20 or 30 years.

3.19 pm

The Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness (Mr. Stephen Timms): I too start by congratulating the hon. Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole (Mrs. Brooke) on securing the debate. It has been an excellent, useful discussion and, as she said, very timely. The issues raised are relevant to almost every Member of the House. There are very few who will not be affected to some degree by the unfolding of the programme.

The hon. Lady was helpful in providing an example of how the process is supposed to work. She agreed that the Hillbourne post office in her constituency should close, and she described the process, which worked well. I think that her one disappointment was that she did not see evidence of the improvement in the remaining post offices that should be an important part of the process. Applications for funding under the investment grant scheme are now being made, and we shall begin to see the benefit of those investments. Whether any are progressing yet in her area I do not know, but the opportunity exists. As a result, improvements will be made leading to the bigger, brighter, better post offices that everyone agrees are the right way forward for the network.

I do not accept the charges of deception made by my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd). I am sorry that he used that term. He might be right about the inelegance, another of the terms that he used, and I shall certainly look into the points that he—and, indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Lepper) and the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock)—raised about the process. The examples that those hon. Members gave do not sound to me like instances of the process working as it should. Nevertheless, I am grateful for the example provided by the hon. Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole of the process working properly. Both the Government and the Post Office intend that her experience, rather than the one recounted by some hon. Members who have spoken, should be the common one.

Central to our policy is the need to maintain a viable nationwide network of post offices, accessible in every part of the country. The process of rationalisation and modernisation in the urban network will involve some hard choices and some disappointments, but the process is essential, if we are to achieve our objective and strengthen the viability of the urban network in the changed business conditions in which it operates.

I welcome the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Linda Gilroy). We had a useful discussion with the sub-postmasters from her constituency who came to see me. My hon. Friend made several helpful suggestions, including the one about the Small Business Service, which she has, I know, raised with the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, South (Nigel Griffiths), who has responsibility for small businesses. That approach may well be very useful.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) for his kind remarks about the way in which I discharge my duties. I should like to reciprocate with a compliment to him, but I do not apologise for what I said about moving beyond ration book technology. The successful network of post offices that we all want will have to be based on good technology and modern services provided in ways that meet today's needs, not on simply continuing to use systems that were invented in the second world war, when ration books were in use.

I do not agree with the hon. Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole that we should delay change. It is essential to proceed. I expect the card account to be available in April as has always been planned. We shall over a two-year period transfer benefit recipients on to the new arrangements in a carefully planned way. That will certainly be a case of very good practice in implementing an IT system, drawing on the lessons learned from the past. My hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton gave some figures showing that if the Post Office tried to continue by simply carrying on doing things as it has always done them, especially in its benefit business, but in other respects as well, it would dwindle and its turnover would decline. Instead, it needs to use new technology. We have invested £500 million in technology for the Post Office to ensure that it has a viable and attractive future by offering services, especially banking-based services, which the new technology will allow.

The hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) spoke about the case of the Downside post office in his constituency. He raised some persuasive points in his contribution, and he has, as he said, already raised the matter with me. I am not in a position to comment on the circumstances in his constituency, but I tell him that it is essential that the observations of Postwatch are weighed very seriously indeed in the process. That is not only my view, but that of Post Office management as well. The hon. Gentleman made an interesting point about the possibility of the post office moving into the newsagents next door. I shall pursue the points that he made.

The hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) was rather less thoughtful and constructive in his contribution. Unlike him, we take the view that when sub-postmasters choose to leave the network because they can see that their business is dwindling, it is right that they receive a payment in compensation. The hon. Gentleman suggested that the payment in question was rather large, and he talked about it as a bribe. However, that payment is what the postmaster would have expected to get if he sold his business two or three years ago. That is a fair payment for people who are leaving the Post Office, and who, as the hon. Member for Twickenham said, have served their communities for a long time. However, in addition to the funding that we have provided for that, we have also made available up to £30 million for investment in improving the post offices that remain. Applications to that fund have now started to come in.

Mr. Chope: Does the Minister accept that that must be matched funding? In the case of Stanpit post office, the Purewell alternative was told that its facilities were adequate already, so it would not qualify for any additional funding. Furthermore, if the objective is to encourage people to visit post offices, why are the Government discouraging people from using the Post Office card account?

Mr. Timms: The hon. Gentleman is wrong on the second point, but on the first point, there does need to be matched funding from the postmaster. That is absolutely right. The real boost to the post offices that are left is that they will gain additional customers from the post offices that are closing. Given the prospect of more business and the offer of a grant, it is reasonable that postmasters should be asked to make a contribution towards the cost of that expansion. I expect that offer to be widely taken up.

On the hon. Gentleman's second point, we have been clear right from the start of the process that everybody who wishes to continue to receive their benefits in cash at the local post office every week will be able to do so, either through an ordinary current account or through one of the new basic bank accounts that are becoming available, which can be fully accessed at any local post office, or through the Post Office card account. People can choose the option that suits them best.

A number of hon. Members talked about the PIU report, which started the debate and which the Government entirely accepted. It is important to recognise why the urban post office needs restructuring and why the income of the Post Office network has declined. The reasons date back over a long period. Past under-investment is certainly one factor, but greater mobility and changes in shopping and financial habits have also sharply reduced customer numbers.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (John Barrett) said that the Post Office had the biggest retail network in the country. Actually, the Post Office has the biggest retail network in Europe. The network is very large indeed and is highly trusted, which is one of the Post Office's great assets and a reason why I am very optimistic about its future commercial prospects. Other networks, such as those of the retail banks, have also been scaled back, and post office networks in other countries have been through similar changes. I understand that in Germany, consistent profitability of the post office network has been achieved by reducing the number of post office branches from 30,000 to 13,000. That reduction goes a great deal further than is proposed in the UK. Other countries have also embarked on a similar process—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Time is up.

Carers

3.30 pm

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): I welcome the opportunity to highlight the issue of alleged fairer charging for the receipt of home care services. The starting point for this debate, to which I welcome the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr. Lammy), is the issue in November 2001 by the Department of Health of guidance to local authorities entitled "Fairer Charging Policies for Home Care and other non-residential Social Services". In practice, that has effectively entailed the extension of means-testing for the provision of and payment for such services, despite the pledge made by the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) when shadow Chancellor in 1995 to ensure that means-testing for elderly people would be brought to an end under a Labour Government.

Let us be fair and clear. There is what might be considered a positive side to such a policy: the very poorest and most vulnerable people in our community pay nothing for the receipt of services on which they depend. The negative side of the policy, which it is my business to highlight, is not merely that rich people end up having to pay substantially more for their home care services, but that a great many people who can in no sense be considered rich will face exponential rises in their costs. Even when they are not paying the maximum, which they do if they have savings over £19,000, they inevitably have to pay an enormous amount more. If they have substantial savings under £19,000, they still face big increases.

What is the effect of the policy in Buckinghamshire? Previously, the maximum charge was £38.50 per week. Bucks county council social services department estimates that 52 per cent. of adult social care clients now pay nothing towards their care because any charge would take their net income below the trigger for charges of £122.69 per week. Many who paid the old county council maximum of £38.50 now face astronomical rises of three, four, five, six or even seven times the level that they previously paid. The maximum in Buckinghamshire is £280 a week. It can readily be seen that people who previously paid under £40 per week now face a massive increase in bills.

Consequently, it is scarcely a surprise that I have been besieged with scores of letters from constituents from Lillingstone Lovell, Luggershall, Buckingham, Aston Clinton, Chearsley, Haddenham, Fairford Leys, Winslow, Ford, Lower Hartwell, Quainton, Long Crendon, Waddesdon, Stewkley, Drayton Parslow, Wing, Cublington and other areas besides. All are aggrieved about their increased costs, but I will highlight three cases.

First, a 92-year-old lady living in Buckingham who previously paid £38.50 a week is now confronted with a bill for £81 a week. For the benefit of the Chamber, I shall quote her:

> "Needless to say, I have never received a high wage, but despite this I have endeavoured to be careful with my money and saved as much as I have been able. I now find that I am being penalised for my thrift, as I now have to pay the maximum charge for my home care services, whilst many, who have not taken care of their money, have their care provided free of charge. That seems to be anything but fair and would be totally unnecessary if only the Government would increase the county's grant."

Secondly, a constituent in Stewkley informs me that her husband, having previously enjoyed relatively good circumstances, had a stroke 16 months ago. She says that it has affected his right hand side

> "and he is confined to a wheelchair. He now has a cancerous ear which has to be dressed every two days as grafts were not successful. He can only stand with support and cannot get to the lavatory unaided. He sleeps with a urine bottle between his legs at night which he manages to change with his left hand when full, hopefully not spilling the contents. Everything now depends on me. I am older than he is (80 on January 3), have an extremely painful hip which I am waiting to have replaced any time now and I am not in very good general health. I cannot sleep due to the pain."

Previously, she and her husband paid £88 every four weeks for magnificent service from carers, whom we all admire. The cost is now to rise to £840 every four weeks which, not surprisingly, is beyond her means.

Thirdly, I highlight the case of Sally Davis, MBE, from Quainton, which has been publicised in my local media and has become something of a cause celebre in the community. She suffers from multiple sclerosis and, as she has savings of more than £19,000, is eligible for the highest charge of all. Previously, she paid £38.50 a week. Initially, Buckinghamshire county council thought that she would have to pay £176 per week. Now it has been assessed that she is likely to face a bill of £264 per week for her home care services. She is wheelchair-bound. In order to enjoy the independence and dignity in her home that she is entitled to expect, she needs those services.

I appeal to the Under-Secretary to recognise the nature of the existence of people such as Sally Davis who suffer from serious disabilities. Everything costs. There is a cost for gardening, a cost for shopping, a cost for cleaning, a cost for the maintenance of a car, and a cost for a driver to take her in that car to the places where she needs to go. She has been consistently aided and supported by a neighbour, David Leeming, who on the strength of his experience has founded the Really Caring Group.

I stress that Mr. Leeming has legitimate concerns about, and criticisms of, Buckinghamshire county council and the way in which it has applied the policy. I am open-minded about those criticisms. It is vital not just that there should be an appeal system but that the county council should ensure maximum awareness of the opportunities that that system offers. In addition, there is a powerful argument for a very thorough—perhaps more thorough and exacting than hitherto—assessment of disability-related expenditures that such clients necessarily incur and which have to be factored into the equation when determining the costs that they should pay. Even taking account of those criticisms of the county council, we must recognise the fact that for it to cut the maximum charge from its present level of £280 per week to £100 per week would cost it £700,000 a year.

I want to put the essence of the problem to the Under-Secretary as fairly and concretely as I can. In order to maintain what is customarily described and readily understood as a standstill budget, in order to cover inflation, the Government's national insurance increases, rises in demand for services and some Government-imposed additional responsibilities, Buckinghamshire county council would have to impose a council tax rise of 4.1 per cent. In order to pursue the anti-waste policy of spend to save, of which the Government approve, the county has to incur further expenditure amounting to an additional 0.3 per cent. rise in council tax. Resource equalisation—shifting money from the shire counties to the Government's friends in the north—involves a massive increase of 7.5 per cent. in Buckinghamshire's council tax. As a result of largely inspector-driven improvements in social services—Buckinghamshire county council already spends significantly above its standard spending assessment—the council is required to increase council tax on a phased basis by 1.5 per cent. per year for some time. Furthermore, a 1.4 per cent. rise in council tax is required for the increase in expenditure on education from the council's chosen figure of £201 million to Ministers' preferred figure of £206 million. Buckinghamshire is spending 27 per cent. above its SSA, but has the second lowest allocation in respect of social services of any authority in the country. The reality of £126 per head contrasts with the shire county average of £149 per head—£23 below that average—and the national average figure of £180 per head.

The Government—both the Minister for Local Government and the Regions and the Minister of State, Department of Health, the hon. Member for Redditch (Jacqui Smith) take this view—have argued that Buckinghamshire should have implemented the policy in two stages. The council's view is that that would imperil its finances, which are already under pressure as a result of its discriminatory and unfair treatment by the Government.

The royal commission on long-term care, which reported under the auspices of Sir Stewart Sutherland in 1999, recommended the provision of free personal care. I do not necessarily cavil at such a policy, which would certainly be widely popular with our constituents and would avoid means testing and the inevitable injustices that flow from it, but Buckinghamshire estimates that it would cost £4.5 million a year. The difficulty is that the Government want to pursue a policy whereby payment is based on needs, but people cannot afford these exorbitant and astronomical rises.

The Aylesbury Vale carers association drew attention to the real danger that people, fearful of being unable to cope, will opt for a short cut and, because they are worried sick about being plunged into debt—when an anti-debt culture defines their very being—will decide instead to reduce the care. I should like to refer, in all sincerity, to the moving and important letter that I received from Isobel Houlston, a carer support worker at the association, who highlights that very anxiety:

> "Some people receiving domiciliary care services are so concerned"—

she is referring to the alleged fairer charging policy—

> "that they are planning to reduce their care packages. One anxious carer says that her father may cut his homecare by half, but as he is totally dependent upon this care she will feel obliged to step in and fill the gap. As a result she will risk losing her job. It seems that the Social Services are unable to prevent people from reducing their care packages, even if this places them at risk of neglect or harm, or places unmanageable pressures on already over-stretched caring relatives and friends."

I do not doubt for a moment the good intentions behind the Government's policy. I have even gone so far as to concede—the world is not made up of all right on one side and all wrong on the other—a beneficial side to an aspect of the Government's policy. Those who pay nothing will gain: in many cases they pay nothing on account of their low incomes, which are nothing to do with fecklessness or improvidence. Such people are in low paid work and cannot afford the high costs, so they deserve to receive care for nothing—and I say that to the Under-Secretary without qualification or hesitation. However, I appeal to him to see the other side of the argument. People may suddenly face massive increases in their costs as a result of the local application of a nationally driven policy.

The Under-Secretary may say simply—although I hope that he does not—"Well, it's up to the county to do it differently. It should phase the policy, make concessions, show compassion, and recognise the need to support people better." He should recognise that it is difficult for a council to do that if it does not receive adequate monetary support from the Government.

Let there be a partnership between the Government who are seeking, perfectly legitimately, to implement their policy at national level, and the councils that are expected to give effect to that policy at local level. If councils are to do so in a way that is fair and effective, they need the resources and the wherewithal. I appeal to the Under-Secretary for those resources, and I await his reply with interest.

3.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. David Lammy): I congratulate the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) on securing a debate on an issue that is of great concern to his constituents, and that has aroused much interest in Buckinghamshire. I also congratulate him on the manner in which he opened the debate.

I will explain some of the reasons why we needed to introduce the guidance on charging for home care. When we came to power, there were considerable variations in charging policies between councils. The Audit Commission's report, "Charging with Care", published in May 2000, exposed the full extent of those variations. Many issues needed to be addressed.

Councils' policies were inconsistent across the board. That meant, for example, that a person in Birmingham might have to pay nothing for their home care, whereas someone in the same circumstances in a neighbouring council—say, Wolverhampton—might have to pay the full charge. Councils' policies were not transparent: users and carers often did not have an understanding of how charges were calculated. In some places, the systems and procedures that councils adopted were obscure. The policies had the effect, in many cases, of reducing income to unacceptably low levels.

The hon. Gentleman concentrated on the concerns of those with limited savings. It should however be emphasised that for many people in the previous system such unacceptably low levels of income were par for the course. Councils could charge people on low incomes or benefits, with the result that those people could be living on an income that was below basic income support levels.

The policies could also be a disincentive to work. If a council decided to take a user's earnings fully into account, there was little incentive for that person to seek

[Mr. David Lammy]

or remain in work. Moreover, disability benefits could be taken in charges, without taking into account any disability-related expenditure.

Against that backdrop, and in the light of those problems, it was right for the Government to act. In November 2001, we issued guidance to councils entitled "Fairer Charging Policies for Home Care and other non-residential Social Services". It is worth mentioning that councils, users and others had been asking for guidance for some time. The context was that the councils asked and the Government responded, and it is right that that should be put on the record.

The new guidance will have a number of benefits. A user's net income will not be reduced below basic levels of income support, plus a 25 per cent. buffer. I am not sure that the hon. Gentleman mentioned that. Users will not be charged a flat rate without taking account of their resources. Councils must take into account ability to pay and disregard earnings, thus removing a barrier to work for disabled people. The overall approach of the guidance is that local councils will retain real responsibilities and some discretion in charging policies. For example, it will still be open to councils not to charge, and some across the country will decide not to do so. It is right that I place that on the record too.

If councils charge, they must decide what proportion of costs to recover through charges. The guidance sets out essential requirements to ensure fairness in assessing a person's ability to pay a charge and to ensure consistency with the Government's overall social care objectives and policy on social exclusion.

Mr. Bercow: The Minister is right to highlight the 25 per cent. point, which I do not dispute. Does he however accept that it is intolerable that Mrs. Sally Davis, to whom I referred a few moments ago, should face a bill that is both £10,000 more than the previous bill and £10,000 more than her income?

Mr. Lammy: The hon. Gentleman may not like my saying this, but a key determinant of what Mrs. Sally Davis faces are the conclusions reached by the local authority. In Buckinghamshire in the past, a flat rate was charged regardless of income—whether one was very poor, moderately well-off or very well-off. The authority then implemented the current system over a short period, which I shall come to. Mrs. Sally Davis finds herself where she is largely because of the way in which the system has been implemented.

I turn to the funding that the Government have made available to Buckinghamshire, which was a key part of the hon. Gentleman's remarks. Because councils retain substantial responsibilities, it is vital that they give proper priority to the key processes, including consultation, communication with users and reviews. The guidance includes advice on those issues and obliges councils to undertake effective consultation.

The hon. Gentleman referred to savings. The guidance states that councils may take account of a user's savings, but are not obliged to do so. Savings may be taken into account to calculate tariff income on the same basis as set out in charges for residential accommodation guidance. Currently, tariff income is assessed if the user has savings of between £11,750 and £19,000. Users with more than £19,000 may be asked to pay the full charge for the services. That is more generous than some previous policies, when a quarter of councils had saving limits as low as £3,000.

Providing incentives to work is an important issue. I want to make it clear that our policy is to encourage and enable people, including disabled people who wish to work, to do so. Charging policies should avoid creating disincentives to work. That remains our objective. Our intention in the draft guidance was to propose that councils treat earnings more generously than other income in order to ensure incentives for disabled people to work. The argument advanced during consultation for more generous treatment of earnings was convincing.

The guidance on disability benefits requires that they may be taken into account as income only if councils also assess a user's disability-related expenditure. That means a more sensitive test of the ability to pay a charge where a council wants to take benefits such as the disability living allowance and attendance allowance into account. That would ensure that charges do not reduce a user's net income to below basic levels of income support, plus a 25 per cent. buffer. That approach will allow disability-related expenditure at levels higher than the benefit concerned to be taken into account. The outcome would be that many users with high care needs would not pay a charge, or would pay a lower charge. Many users commenting on the draft guidance regard the proposals as a positive advance, although I acknowledge that some want us to go further.

I must say to the hon. Gentleman that it is a balancing act, and one acknowledges that some people may be dependent on the policy objective of a particular local authority. Nevertheless, we were right to issue that guidance; indeed, local authorities asked us to do so. It was right that we included safeguards for people, especially those on low incomes. It was also right that we had that 25 per cent. buffer and that it is up to the local authority to decide whether those that can afford to pay do so. How that should take shape clearly pertains to the implementation of the guidance.

We said that the guidance should be implemented in two phases: from 1 October 2002, users receiving income-related benefits will have their net incomes protected from charging, as already described. Users whose disability benefit is taken into account and who receive more than 10 hours' home care weekly will have their disability-related expenditure individually assessed. The guidance specifically states that councils should not introduce new policies to charge against disability benefits without also assessing their disability-related expenditure.

Mr. Bercow: I understand what the Minister says about phasing, but whether the policy is phased in over two, five or 25 years does not matter to my constituent who has to pay £840 every four weeks rather than £88 every four weeks, or to Mrs. Sally Davis who faces a 400 per cent. increase. Those constituents cannot, and will not, afford to pay it.

Mr. Lammy: There are three issues. First, Buckinghamshire council was on a flat rate. Secondly, phasing is important. Had Buckinghamshire council followed the guidance, it is likely that the hon. Gentleman's constituent would not be in the situation that he describes until April 2003. Thirdly, I was about to explain the consultation process that needed to take place to ensure that proper benefits and assessments had been made that might also pertain to the eventual outcome of that constituent's costs.

From 1 April all other parts of the guidance will be implemented. That includes any users whose disability benefits are taken into account—including those who receive 10 hours or less home care weekly—having an assessment of their disability-related expenditure. Those parts of the guidance that provide for a minimum-required treatment of savings will also be implemented. All users who receive a charge assessment should also receive expert benefits advice.

Several practical difficulties have arisen from Buckinghamshire county council's decision not to implement the guidance in two planned phases. The approach is not mandatory, but there were very good reasons for proceeding in such a way. Any council that decides to implement the guidance more quickly than suggested needs to take care not to underestimate the amount of work that implementation will involve. The council would also need to take sufficient time to ensure that it anticipated and resolved any unforeseen problems of implementation. To that extent, I draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to what the guidance says at paragraph 20 or thereabouts. As seems to have happened in Buckinghamshire, a failure to consult properly could lead to inappropriate decisions and could be detrimental to users. The county council's decision—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Financial Flows (NHS)

4 pm

Ms Julia Drown (South Swindon): The national health service plan sets out a vision of prompt, convenient and high-quality services that treat patients as partners, and the Government have worked hard to make significant progress towards that end. There has been major investment in the NHS as well as huge reform, and that is ongoing. However, I am sceptical about the proposed reform in "Reforming NHS Financial Flows", and I am pleased to have the opportunity to raise some of the potential problems.

My first concern is that Members of Parliament have not been properly informed of this major change in the way in which NHS institutions are financed—a change that could ultimately have a huge impact on patient services. MPs did not receive the discussion document, and this is the first parliamentary debate about it. That is surprising, given that the proposals have the potential to recreate the Tories' disastrous internal market. The proposals will have significant political ramifications and should be subject to adequate parliamentary scrutiny.

Part of the background to the document is the principle of supporting patient choice. No one wants to say no to choice, and I certainly support the Government's use of choice for patients who have been waiting a long time and who can be referred to other units. However, making it a Government priority to provide choice for all patients at all times may lead to distortions in the NHS that overall will not produce the best patient care. Creating a system in which people who have to wait less than a month for treatment are given a choice between two hospitals should not be a priority over getting down longer waits in the health service. For example, 102 patients are waiting between 10 and 12 months for orthopaedic operations at Swindon's hospital, and 1,070 are waiting up to 10 months. Focusing on reducing those waiting times is the priority for my constituents.

The truth is that, to create choice, surplus capacity is needed, and despite the huge increase in health service resources, few parts of the health service have surplus capacity. I would not support creating surplus capacity in some parts of the country if the funds could instead go to meet the real shortfall in resources elsewhere.

The document says that patients will benefit from the ability to choose between providers, knowing that funding will not be an obstacle. However, that cannot happen. To keep control over the budgets, commissioners will have to set limits—cost and volume contracts—so when the contract is complete or ahead of schedule, funding will be an obstacle to the ability of patients to exercise choice.

At the centre of the new proposals is the move towards a nationally agreed set of prices in an attempt to make commissioners focus on the quality and volume of service provided, thereby minimising the transaction costs and conflict involved in local price negotiations—getting hospitals to manage costs efficiently, and creating greater transparency and planning certainty in the system.

[Ms Julia Drown]

However, the national tariff will not be a national tariff. The Government have said that each hospital will have the national tariff altered to reflect the local market cost factor, so they themselves are saying that there will be different prices in different areas. The Government's document also makes it clear that commissioners will have to cap the number of operations that they can buy, because they have to manage their budgets. If a hospital says to a commissioner, "We'll give you a cost and volume contract and offer 10 per cent. more procedures free above the cap," their price per patient will not be at the national tariff. The hospital might gain from that, but such deals would in effect bring back price competition to the NHS. Will the Government outlaw hospitals making such offers?

The system in Victoria, Australia that is cited allows bonuses when waiting list targets are hit—again moving prices away from the tariff. Will that be allowed here? Using a national tariff seems to ignore the way in which costs are built up in the NHS. There will always be cheap hospitals and expensive hospitals. Some cost differences can be categorised crudely and summed up by a market forces factor, but others cannot be categorised so simply. High land costs or building costs could mean that a procedure at one hospital is more expensive, while the same procedure at an asset-poor hospital will necessarily have lower costs. That can happen within primary care trust areas, but it is at PCT level that the market forces factor applies.

Is it right that the hospital on land of a higher value makes a loss on each operation that it does, even if it is at least as good as other NHS providers? If a hospital finds itself in that position, will it be allowed to sink into deficit, ultimately seeming unviable, even if it provides excellent services? How would the Government react if a PCT were following all the Government guidelines and achieving the targets, but because of the costs in local hospitals could do so only by massively overspending? Would commissioners have to send their patients further afield? Is it right that a hospital on cheap land necessarily makes a profit on each operation because of that? Will the system definitely lead to the best use of NHS moneys and the best patient care for our constituents? Where is the incentive for efficient hospitals to stay efficient if they get more than they need for their procedures?

The cost of any procedure depends on what else is happening in a particular trust. It is good practice in busy hospitals to have an operating theatre reserved for emergency work only, so that other operations do not have to be cancelled. However, if that theatre is used only 50 per cent. of the time, theatre costs in the hospital would be spread over fewer operations than in a hospital that uses its resources 100 per cent. of the time. The national tariff will be calculated from averages across the NHS, which would probably imply a funding level at nearer the 100 per cent. usage of theatres rather than the ideal emergency theatre capacity level. The hospital that runs a quality service will make a loss on that aspect of its service. Is it right that it is penalised for running that quality service?

Many complex details affect the cost of treatment at each individual hospital. Those are best understood by the individual managers at a local level, and negotiations on price for clinical services should remain in the hands of those best suited to judging value for money—those commissioning the services. However, as I shall explain later, it is wasteful to draft each year's contracts at such a level of detail.

I have shown how we will not have a national tariff, and how hospital and commissioners may start talking about prices, but even if prices were not altered by hospitals doing deals with commissioners, commissioners would not necessarily ignore the difference in prices between different hospitals in the way that the Government intend. Prices will be different because of the different market-led factors that are reflected in prices, so it would be tempting for commissioners, if they could, to send their patients to areas where the market costs happened to be lower.

Let us consider a procedure costing £2,000 on the national tariff. That procedure will cost £2,029 in Swindon, £2,060 in Oxford and £1,968 in Bath. That is £100 cheaper in Bath than in Oxford. That could be a hip operation, of which our PCT in Swindon buys 400 per year, mostly from Swindon. If they could be bought from Oxford, and the PCT had the choice, it could be worth it trying to move 100 operations from Oxford to Bath, freeing up money to treat an additional nine patients. That looks like an efficiency improvement and a patient gain of 9 per cent., but the tariff price may not reflect the reality of NHS resources. In the example, Bath may employ expensive agency nurses to see the extra patients while Oxford nurses are underemployed. That would not be a good use of NHS resources.

I described earlier how hospitals would be able to offer deals to give PCTs different prices from the Government's set tariff. Even if the Government outlaw such deals, how can they stop commissioners and hospitals having effectively the same conversations as happened on prices in the internal market, and still happen to an extent today? Commissioners will be interested in how the prices they pay compare with actual costs in hospitals, so the talk will be about profits and losses made in each hospital on each procedure. If I were a commissioner and knew my local hospital was getting more money than it needed for a particular operation, I would say that the excess funding should go towards the first stage of its next investment plan. There is danger of the same complex internal market discussions on price occurring but in a different format.

That points to my major concern: the proposed financial flows will reintroduce competition and an internal market into the NHS. The Tories' internal market was a disaster. It promised money following the patient but did not deliver it. It used clinicians, managers, accountants and administrators in wasteful exercises of questionable benefit to patients. The costs of hospitals were divided into the individual procedure level to become prices, which were then added back together again with volumes to create a contract sum to argue about with each commissioner. That destroyed valuable co-operation in the NHS. The administration was like digging a hole and filling it up again—not the sort of job creation needed in the NHS.

A recent research study from Bristol showed that the internal market was, if anything, detrimental to health. It suggested that between 2,000 and 4,000 more people died from acute heart attacks in hospitals subject to competition between 1991 and 1999 than would have been the case without competition. How are the Government going to avoid a repeat of the wasteful Tory internal market?

Commissioners will have to negotiate their contract and look at the data for each service, so management time will be wasted number-crunching, rather than about examining particular services where changes can deliver better health for communities. The time of clinicians, accountants and administrators will be diverted into bureaucracy and away from analysing resources in the NHS. As with the internal market, that is likely to cause huge frustration for NHS staff.

Given that procedure costs are different in different hospitals, why are the Government proposing to pay hospitals the same procedure price? Does the evidence suggest health benefits from the new proposal? To take the Swindon example, our acute trust is looking forward to the new regime because its costs are below the national average, so it will be well rewarded by the new system. Conversely, the PCT is likely to be in an extremely difficult position because when the trust's prices are increased in line with the national tariff, it will have to pay more for the same level of activity that it currently buys at the cheaper local rates. The PCT had a serious deficit to start off with; the last thing that it needs is to have to pay more money for the same level of activity with no promised increase in quality of services. More funds will go into acute services when the real pressure is to develop mental health and community services. How will Ministers respond to such difficulties arising from Swindon and elsewhere?

Even if hospitals are not in competition with each other over prices, will they not compete over activity? If a clinician knows that 10 more patients can be squeezed in at £2,000 each, and fixed costs have already been covered, that will make a big impact on the budget. Similarly, a department losing those 10 patients will have a major hole in its budget, perhaps leading to cuts in its services. Once again, I ask whether that is the best use of resources.

To reduce transaction costs and disputes, the Government should adapt the block allocations that were used in the 1980s, which are partially in use now. The current system is too bureaucratic and needs to be simplified. That would mean not individually pricing everything, but concentrating commissioner and provider discussions on where changes could be made to services in order to focus money where it is needed most, which would encourage co-operation between providers who would not be in competition at all except at annual budget rounds. Having worked in the NHS when the system was like that, and having seen the difference between it and the internal market, I can testify that the advantages of co-operation are real and tangible. The Government are missing an opportunity by failing to develop such a system now.

Part of a new approach should be to encourage—or perhaps even insist on—more benchmarking exercises that provide a genuine comparison between similar services in different hospitals, in respect of staffing levels, clinical outcomes and patient satisfaction. That would help to achieve best practice across the NHS.

I agree with some parts of the plans for 2003–04, which are basically a sophisticated waiting list initiative. The proposals dictate the price at which additional waiting list cases will be paid for and, similarly, the sums that will be taken away if the initiative is not met. Given that that is above the standard block contract agreed for the previous year's activity, it should not lead to any long-term instability or unfairness in hospitals. It could mean some commissioners paying more than they need to for waiting list initiatives, which I regret, but it has the advantage of simplicity for a small portion of NHS budgets and will not create massive competition.

However, the price will also be used as the sum to take away at the full cost level if the normal level of activity has not been achieved, which could create real difficulties for hospitals. If a shortfall in activity has been caused because a hospital, despite doing all it could, was unable to recruit, and covered by using more expensive agency nursing, could we justify taking fixed costs, which represent far more than it costs to treat patients, away from that hospital? I imagine that the Government would describe that as penalising poor performance. However, if all reasonable attempts had been made to treat patients, would it be justified to penalise a hospital that was already under great pressure? A true partnership, which the Government want to develop, would understand such circumstances and negotiate a way forward with that hospital. The policy could lead to serious instability in hospitals.

Finally, the system again seems questionable when the national tariff is to be used with private sector providers. Many private hospitals are already doing well, and should be able to perform operations at not much more than marginal cost. To pay the full cost would give additional and unnecessary profit to the private sector, at the expense of public sector providers that would be able to put the extra funds to better use.

I have outlined only some of the potential problems. The Government know of the experience of Victoria, Australia, where a system led to what is called DRG creep—the coding of diagnosis-related groups of procedures to more expensive bands. That is a further worry for Swindon's PCT, and additional administrative audits would be required to counter it. Is that the best use of NHS resources?

I hope that the Government will look again at their plans for 2004–05, to encourage more co-operation between hospitals and commissioners. Commissioners should be allowed to concentrate on the few areas that they can change in a year, rather than trying to consider every service all the time. Administrators, accountants and managers should not be used on number-crunching exercises or on trying to come up with clever deals; instead they should be considering whether the real resources of the NHS make the best use of funds in the interests of the health of the community.

The proposals set out in "Reforming NHS Financial Flows" need to be revisited and revised. I am not convinced that a national tariff would work; it fails to take account of the various complexities that I have laid out. It could work if it were used to fund only out-of-area flows of patients. However, used for all activities, the plans are bureaucratic and likely to introduce competition between hospitals.

The Government may point to countries that have developed similar systems, and say that the system led to a better use of hospitals, but our starting points are not the same. Fixed costs for a procedure would of course be

[Ms Julia Drown]

a better replacement for the US system of specified fee-for-service agreements. However, there is no evidence to show that that system has been tried or that it has improved English health services.

The proposals are too close to the failed Tory internal market to give the public confidence that they will work in the interests of patients. I hope to see a parliamentary and NHS-wide debate on the proposals, and a consideration of alternative systems of funding hospitals—systems that encourage co-operation, not competition.

4.17 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. David Lammy): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South Swindon (Ms Drown) on securing a debate that is important to all our constituents. My hon. Friend mentioned a great deal and it is unlikely that I will be able to respond in full. I therefore undertake to write to her to follow up points that I cannot answer now.

The way that money moves around health care systems has always been and still is an important area of policy, both in this country and elsewhere, which is why the debate is so important. In the NHS of tomorrow, patients will have greater choice. That is fundamental to the debate. There will be a greater plurality and diversity of services, and NHS organisations will have greater freedom. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State put it, we cannot run the NHS solely from Whitehall.

The NHS has received and will continue to receive a substantial growth in funding. The budget in 2002 set out an annual average increase of funding for the NHS in England of 7.4 per cent. in real terms over the five years 2003–04 to 2007–08. To get the best out of those extra NHS resources, we are establishing a system of payment by results. My hon. Friend knows that in April we increased taxes, in large part to fund the reform that we want in the NHS. Those tax increases must bear results.

I want to consider how things work now and why we need to change the way in which money moves around the NHS. The current system has no inbuilt direct financial incentives to improve access, deliver efficiency or reduce costs. In fact, areas that are not meeting targets are often given additional funding to help meet those targets. There are no financial mechanisms to support the movement of patients between providers. In fact, hospitals that are doing well are often prevented from using spare capacity by budget ceilings. We want to create a system that facilitates sustainable reductions in waiting times and helps to match capacity to demand. We need to be able to support patient choice by ensuring that funding can follow patients. We want to reward providers who provide services efficiently, and above all we want a new system that is both fair and transparent to all. I make it clear that financial flows in themselves will not achieve that, but all hon. Members know about a plethora of Government policies aimed especially at national standards that also go along that path.

Ms Drown: My hon. Friend says that there are no incentives and currently no way in which money can follow the movement of patients, but will he confirm that it is in the hands of commissioners to reward that performance, to place contracts with the more efficient hospitals and to give incentives to organisations to change health practice if that is what the commissioners want to achieve? There is nothing to stop them from doing that, and some very good commissioners do so.

Mr. Lammy: My hon. Friend makes a good point, but that has not been the case—it is not the everyday, every week or every month practice of the overwhelming majority of commissioners currently in the NHS.

My hon. Friend made some very valid statements about the previous regime and the purchaser-provider split. That split occurred not only in this country, but in other western democracies such as New Zealand and the United States of America. However, we now need to go one step further, embed that, and see that choice and access as a key part of the NHS, so that my hon. Friend's constituents, if they cannot get an operation in a particular trust, have the choice to go somewhere else, and so that financial flows assist that process.

Our commitments from this year are to introduce a regime under which all providers are contracted for a minimum volume of cases to achieve waiting time reductions for key waiting list procedures. Providers will lose money on a cost-per-case basis for failure to deliver the volume of services they are commissioned to provide, and they will earn extra resources on a cost-per-case basis for additional patients that move to them. In the medium term, we will move to a system in which all activity that takes place in acute hospitals is commissioned against a standard tariff, using either health care resource groups or other appropriate measures.

Those changes will mean that instead of providers being paid according to block agreements, as sometimes happens now, they will all be paid for the activity that they actually deliver according to a national tariff. My hon. Friend expresses concern that the tariff is not truly national. I want to assure her that there is a national tariff, but that it rightly reflects the differences in purchasing power across the country. In time, the national tariff will apply to all providers of NHS treatment. Local commissioning will focus on volume and quality, not price. That is vital—not price. Through the market forces factor, it will take into account unavoidable cost differences across the country, including variations in the cost of land and wages.

Ms Drown: Is my hon. Friend saying that the Government will outlaw the sort of deals that I referred to, whereby a hospital could offer a local commissioner 10 per cent. more operations for free?

Mr. Lammy: My hon. Friend makes a specific point. However, I cannot stand here today and outlaw all the various scenarios that could arise. It is important that the policy beds down. This is a complex matter that has preoccupied the minds of great health economists throughout the world. It is likely that as the national tariff develops it will need adjustments and tweaking. Providers who operate more efficiently will be able to retain most or all of the surplus that they generate for deployment in their trusts for the benefit of patients and staff. However, we will support less efficient providers to help them to improve, and, where necessary, we will bring in new management through franchising.

We recognise that the transition to the new system may be challenging for some parts of the NHS. My hon. Friend and others expressed concerns at the implications in the changes for trusts with particularly high or low costs. To facilitate this, we will introduce the standard tariff in a very limited way from this year. In the first year, it will not apply to baseline levels of activity; thus it accounts for only 0.5 per cent. of hospital spending. This first stage will allow the service time to learn to use the new tools effectively and will incentivise additional activity in key areas without causing financial destabilisation. That is one reason that I do not want to get into the business of giving undertakings at this point. We will handle the transition path for trusts by introducing the national tariff carefully. We are developing proposals to ensure that primary care trusts and other health care trusts can manage the transition without causing significant financial instability.

In the three minutes available to me, I want to emphasise that this is not a return to the internal market. The new financial system sets out to avoid the mistakes of the old internal market, under which, as the Secretary of State pointed out, purchasers dictated through administrative contracts where patients could be treated and the NHS undertook prolonged negotiations over the price of each service provided by each hospital. Every purchaser had to keep and update a complex list of all the prices for every hospital with which they dealt. The internal market was unfair; it had a two-tier system of GP fundholders and others, and it lacked openness and co-operation. The new system of payment by results will be different. Patients will, in time, be able to choose the hospital in which they wish to be treated and the time of their referral.

That choice is important. I witnessed the exercise of that choice last week, in St. Anne's hospital in my constituency. Patients from all over north-east London and parts of Essex are exercising the choice to have their cataract operation done at St. Anne's if there is a waiting list at their local hospital, and ambulance transport to St. Anne's is available to them. Patient choice will be vital to future developments. PCTs and other commissioners will know precisely what the cost of treatment will be and that it will be the same treatment wherever the patient is treated. Prices will be set and regulated nationally. Hospitals will not be able to offer special deals or prices to attract work or to keep it; they will compete on quality, access, waiting times and standards.

Those changes are not happening in isolation—payment by result is just one tool available to PCTs—nor are they just about acute elective work and sucking activity into secondary care. We will continue to develop and to refine the system as we progress.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes past Four o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 26 February 2003

[MR. FRANK COOK *in the Chair*]

Refugee Benefits

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Mr. Kemp.]*

9.30 am

Mr. Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden): I am grateful to Mr. Speaker for selecting the issue of benefits for refugees and asylum seekers for debate. When I first clashed with the Prime Minister on it, I was astonished by how many Members—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The word "clashed" worried me.

Mr. Lilley: Opposition Members sometimes clash with the Prime Minister during Question Time. I was astonished by how many Members, not least Labour Members, said that the issue of immigration and related matters is becoming bigger in their constituencies, that people are angry about some issues and that there is a danger of that anger fuelling the growth of extremist parties, or even being vented directly on immigrant communities. Today, we hear reports of a Labour Minister pandering to those feelings by saying that he will no longer deal with asylum seekers at his surgery.

I want to make it clear that, in my view, the vast majority of refugees and economic migrants are decent, ordinary people who want to better their lot and that of their families. They are simply responding to a situation created by others. In the matter of immigration, immigrants are as pure as driven snow. If people want to vent their spleen, it should absolutely not be on individuals who have come here from other countries, but on Ministers and their friends in the liberal media who have fuelled the inflow from abroad to unmanageable proportions, aggravated the resentment of people already here by saying one thing and doing another, and suppressed, or tried to suppress, debate by accusing their critics and opponents of racism and inhumanity whenever they make reasonable proposals for reform. I want to use the specific issue of benefits for refugees and asylum seekers to illustrate those points.

On 22 January, the Prime Minister responded to a well-aimed criticism from my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition by brazenly boasting that he would be removing benefits from asylum seekers who claimed after they had entered the country. I welcomed his decision to reinstate a measure that I first introduced and I invited him to admit that he was mistaken in allowing benefits to be reinstated in 1997, as that led to the number of asylum claimants doubling fairly soon afterwards.

I asked the Prime Minister to say how many extra asylum seekers we had to receive and support as a result of five years of mistaken policy. He characteristically denied all that, although he later—it was perhaps post hoc, ergo propter hoc—responded with his pledge to halve the number of asylum claimants coming to this country.

Let me remind the House of the history of the benefits changes affecting refugees and asylum seekers. In October 1995, I announced proposals to remove the right to benefit from all those who claimed asylum after entering the country on false pretences. After a debate in Parliament, regulations implementing that measure were introduced on 5 February 1996. I acknowledge that I was initially reluctant to introduce those measures. I would always prefer to restrict entry to this country, rather than make conditions less attractive or benefits less generous to people once they had entered. However, I was persuaded that action was necessary, as the number of asylum seekers had risen tenfold in 10 years.

Our share of the number of asylum seekers coming to European countries had trebled and, indeed, over the past couple of years, it had fallen on the continent while rising in the UK. That was partly, though not entirely, because countries such as France and Belgium time-limited benefits to 12 months and there were none thereafter. Italy gave no benefits at all and consequently received only 1,800 asylum claims.

What is more, it became clear that we were giving benefits that could not really be justified to three categories of people. The first was those who entered the country illegally. They had broken the law, and it seemed wrong to reward that by giving them entitlement to benefit. To come to the UK, they had invariably crossed other safe countries, where they could and should have claimed asylum and to which they could return if they did not like the terms and conditions facing them here.

The second group was people who entered on false pretences—those who did not just "fail to claim", as it is often put, asylum on arrival at the port of entry, but claimed to be here for some other purpose than claiming asylum. For instance, they claimed that they were here to study and showed that they had access to a course, they claimed to be tourists or visitors, or they claimed to be here on business. Usually, such people had visas. Invariably, they had had to convince either the visa authorities or the immigration authorities that they possessed the means to support themselves and that, once in this country, they would not be a burden on the taxpayer. In those circumstances, it seemed wrong to extend to them the right to benefit simply on the basis of uttering the magic words, "I claim asylum."

Finally, there was a third category that I will not dwell on today because, I regret to say, it does not feature in the Government's latest measures. We withdrew the right to benefit from those, even if they had entered and claimed asylum at a port, who were subsequently found not to be genuine asylum seekers. They were thus placed on the same footing as British claimants of benefit who, once having their claim rejected, were not allowed to claim benefit while appealing against the initial decision. We do not allow that for British citizens, because we know that, if we did, everybody would always appeal against any rejection of an offer of benefit as they could

[Mr. Lilley]

thereby prolong their right to it. There seemed to be no reason to offer better conditions to asylum seekers than we offered to our own citizens.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): For clarity, will the right hon. Gentleman tell the House how asylum seekers can legally come to Britain?

Mr. Lilley: They can arrive at our ports and say, "I seek asylum". However, if the Liberal party wishes to create a situation in which a person can go to an embassy or high commission and say, "I would like to come to Britain and claim asylum," it should make that known to the electorate. We already have a system whereby, having reached these shores, any inhabitant of the globe has the right to enter, claim asylum and then claim benefit, appeal against any refusal of a claim, have a judicial review, claim under human rights legislation and prolong the process.

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lilley: Yes, but when I have finished answering the previous question, if I may.

It seems to me unwise in those circumstances to make it even easier for those who wish to come here for economic purposes to exploit the system.

Mr. Gerrard: Will the right hon. Gentleman explain exactly which benefits he thinks that anyone arriving in this country has a right to claim?

Mr. Lilley: They have the right to claim benefits provided by the Government.

Mr. Gerrard: Which benefits?

Mr. Lilley: If the hon. Gentleman does not know, I am sure that the Minister will explain to him in due course. The benefits were originally social security benefits, but they are now provided by the Home Office with the help of local authorities and funded thereby. I am here not to spell out the difficulties, but to recount the history.

People prefer, and are advised, to make their claim for asylum once they have entered the country rather than at the port, as it then becomes more difficult to deport them. They have to go through a deportation procedure rather than just a removal procedure. We were therefore rewarding those who were most canny or best informed about how to make it more difficult to remove them when they were found not to be genuine.

Despite those powerful arguments, Labour party Front Benchers "strongly opposed"—those were their words—the measures, describing them as uncivilised and inhumane. A string of epithets were used to demonise and denigrate my party, the measures and me.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield): And your Ministers.

Mr. Lilley: And my excellent Ministers.

It was predicted that the changes would result in widespread destitution, and churches were encouraged to open shelters. Happily, those fears proved to be grossly exaggerated. Partly as a result of the benefit changes and partly because of changes introduced by the then Home Secretary, the number of people entering this country and claiming asylum after getting through the ports fell from 30,000 in 1995 to 17,000 in 1996, and to below 16,000 in 1997. The overall numbers, which include those claiming at port, also fell by 40 per cent. between the 12 months before the measures were introduced and the 12 months afterwards.

There were two court challenges to the changes that I introduced. The first came in June 1996 and challenged the use of secondary legislation to introduce those changes. The courts ruled that that should have been done by primary legislation. I accepted that, and within days introduced an amendment to legislation then passing through the House to give primary legislative authority, which both Houses endorsed, for the changes.

There was a second challenge in the February before the 1997 general election, and, again, it was upheld by the courts. It could easily have been reversed, either on appeal or through primary legislation, but the incoming Labour Government chose not to appeal against the court finding, nor to legislate to reinstate the arrangement that the courts had overthrown. They simply endorsed the court's ruling, and allowed benefits and support to be re-established. They could scarcely have done otherwise without inviting charges of hypocrisy, given what they had so recently said. What happened? The number of claimants doubled, and then doubled again, even though that in some neighbouring continental European countries was declining.

Before last Christmas, the Government underwent a Damascene conversion. Normally, there is more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 who know no repentance, but this was a case of one Pharisee taking to the very sin that he had once most sanctimoniously condemned. In short, the Government decided more or less to reinstate the regime that I established in 1996. They did so, of course, with a minimum of debate, and amendments to legislation were introduced at the last minute in the House of Lords.

There were precisely 15 minutes of debate in the House of Commons, as the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) pointed out at the time. Characteristically, he used most of them. There was no debate at all in the House on the statutory instrument implementing those changes.

Those Members of Parliament who used such strong and severe language against the parallel statutory instrument that we introduced must feel shame that they did not even pray against an identical measure introduced by their Government. We have had little debate—democracy has gone out of the window, along with integrity, under this Government.

Mr. Mitchell: My right hon. Friend has already answered my question, but did any Government Members, either Back Benchers or Front Benchers, pray against the regulations that they opposed so bitterly when he introduced them?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend is quite right to emphasise that point. None did, neither from the Labour party nor from its subsidiary, the Liberal Democrat party, although Liberal Democrat Members were at least honourable enough to oppose the measure when we were given 15 minutes to debate it on the Floor of the House.

There is a further twist to the sorry tale. Last week, the court rejected the Government's new measure. It is no longer simple to appeal or reinstate such provisions by primary legislation, as it would have been in 1997. The decision was made under the Government's human rights legislation—their own measure, which was deliberately introduced to allow judges to judge Parliament and to rule that the Government were mistaken. That puts the Government in a quandary. We should ask them to face up to the problems that they have created. One of the most important human rights of all is that of the British people to govern themselves through Parliament and set their own laws, and not have laws laid down for them or reinterpreted by judges according to their human rights impressions, prejudices and subjective opinions.

Simon Hughes: Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that the High Court judge who dealt with the matter last week made it clear that he was only interpreting the will of Parliament? He relied on what Parliament said and the proper interpretation of the statute passed by us, including our obligations under the Human Rights Act 1998.

Mr. Lilley: Above all, the latter. The judge was operating under an Act passed by the Government. It gives judges the power to exercise a subjective judgment over the whole sphere of our operations.

Simon Hughes: The Act was passed by Parliament.

Mr. Lilley: Indeed, and against my vote. If and when I become Home Secretary, I shall introduce legislation to alter that position. I shall restore the supremacy of the British people through a British Parliament in the making of laws.

We must hold the Government to account and we must make Ministers eat their words, however unpalatable the diet. They must eat them in public and accept that they have performed a complete volte-face, in the meantime making the situation impossible to remedy. The Government have for five years presided over a benefits regime for refugees and asylum seekers, which they adopted deliberately and which they now admit is a serious problem. They face a massive inflow resulting from their changes and they want to reinstate the very Conservative measures that they originally reviled, but they can no longer do so because of legislation that they introduced deliberately to restrain Parliament.

Ms Karen Buck (Regent's Park and Kensington, North): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that Home Office research has confirmed that there is no indication whatever that asylum seekers coming to this country have knowledge of either the benefit system or the particular workings of the asylum application process? The link that he is making between the ability to claim benefits and the desire to claim asylum in this country is not evident.

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Lady is saying therefore that the fact that the number of asylum seekers halved after the measures were introduced and that it doubled after they were reversed is a pure coincidence. She is asking us to accept that people do not send back messages to their country saying that their application was successful and that they are here, being looked after and doing well. The message is about not the details of the benefit system, but the fact that there are no problems and that people do not have to bring resources with them to live here.

People have to provide resources to live en route and they may have to pay tens of thousands of pounds to undertake the journey, but they do not have to provide for themselves when they arrive here. All they have to do is convince the authorities, when they receive their visa, that they will be able to support themselves. The hon. Lady's argument is that people pick at random which country they go to and are entirely unaffected by circumstances in different countries. She is suggesting that the fact that they pass deliberately through other safe countries to come here does not reflect their overall impression of the situation here.

Ms Buck: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lilley: I am drawing my remarks towards a close to allow other Members to participate. The hon. Lady can spell out her points later.

I fear we have reached a point at which the problem is too great to be solved simply by restoring the Conservative status quo ante on benefits. We can now tackle the problem of unrestrained inflow to this country only by regime change and renegotiating, or resiling from, the Geneva convention on asylum seekers. I support and endorse the proposals of my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin), the shadow Home Secretary, on that front. We need a change from the shameless and incompetent regime in this country to a regime with the openness, humanity and integrity of my right hon. Friend and his excellent team. I hope that we see that change sooner rather than later.

9.50 am

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): The debate so far has taken the course that I expected. There has been a lot of rehashing of history from six or seven years ago. I noted that the title of the debate was "Government policy on refugee benefits", but we have heard precious little about refugees and everything has been about asylum seekers.

I am often struck by something when I attend such debates as this. At an event last Saturday, it was put to me that some of my colleagues in this place are not terribly knowledgeable about asylum. I said that we all have to specialise to a degree and that if I were asked about the Government's policy on agriculture, I would be found to be woefully ignorant. The person to whom I was speaking responded—at the time I thought that it was flattering, but I now realise that it was true—by

[Mr. Neil Gerrard]

saying, "At least you wouldn't talk about agriculture policy, but people who know very little about asylum feel perfectly able to get up and make speeches about it." That has been amply proved this morning.

May I go back over the history of how we got here today? I do not want to dwell too much on 1996 but there has been some rewriting of history this morning. What happened in 1996 was very simple: there was an attempt to deny asylum seekers inside the country from applying for mainstream benefits. The right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) was the architect of that policy. At the time, it was predicted that the policy would cause destitution and lead to people living on the streets, and I am confident that it would have done if there had not been two court decisions. One decision said that the measure could not be introduced using secondary legislation, which led to changes to the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996—the primary legislation. After that, a court decision in February 1997 said that local authorities would have to use the National Assistance Act 1948 to support asylum seekers who were otherwise destitute. If that had not happened, we would have seen people on the streets, just as people are now on the streets as a direct result of the policy that the present Government have implemented, which I shall talk about in a moment.

The result of the events of 1996 was a complete shambles in the asylum system. Some people were supported on benefits while some went to local authorities and local authorities incurred expense. Pressures were placed on local authorities in London and the south-east, and we still have to live with some of those. The right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden was the architect of that shambles, which we inherited when we came into government in 1997. If he had been so keen on introducing primary legislation to deal with the Court of Appeal decision in February 1997, there would have been ample time to pass a simple one-clause Bill before the general election in 1997. The incoming Labour Government in 1997 were right not to try simply to reverse existing legislation, but to try to find an alternative mechanism meaning that asylum seekers would not be supported by local authorities, but by the Home Office through the National Asylum Support Service. Whether we got that right is another matter, but it was a perfectly legitimate and correct decision.

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire): Is it not true that the major problem was that the then shadow Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), was in an impossible position? He believed that to reverse the decision of the courts would lead to people starving on the streets; he was totally wrong in that.

Mr. Gerrard: I do not think that my right hon. Friend was wrong about what would have happened. There is already evidence that the implementation of section 55 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 is leading to people being destitute and living on the streets.

Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Indeed, did Mr. Justice Collins not describe such situations in the decision on 19 February?

Mr. Gerrard: Absolutely. Those situations were the foundation of the case heard by the judge. If the hon. Member for North-East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald) examines the evidence for the court judgment earlier this month, he will see that evidence spout out.

In 1999, the system changed and vouchers were introduced, against the advice of many Labour Back Benchers. The system proved to be the disaster that some of us predicted and was removed in the 2002 Act. Unfortunately, it has been replaced with something that will be even worse.

The issues raised by the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden are frequently mentioned in debates such as this one—specifically, how the benefits and support given to asylum seekers affect the number of claimants. The rationale presented for each of the past four Acts—the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993, the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996, the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999, and the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002—is that benefit support acts as a draw and that cash in asylum seekers' hands leads to more applications. It is assumed that genuine asylum applicants would apply at the port of entry the minute that they stepped off the boat or plane and would not apply in-country. No hard evidence has ever been produced that backs up those claims.

On the question of genuine applicants claiming at the port, over the past 10 years the difference between the success rates of asylum claimants in-country and at the port of entry has not significantly changed; any change has been negligible. In fact, for a considerable number of years, the rate of success for in-country applicants has been higher. No hard evidence supports the assertion that a port claimant is more likely to be a genuine applicant than an in-country one. The figures vary from year to year, but no significant patterns back up that assertion.

On the suggestion that people come to the UK because they know about the benefits system and the cash, I am sure that many hon. Members will have had the same experience as me of sitting in constituency advice surgeries and dealing with people who were born in the UK and have never stepped outside the country. They come along with the type of problem that arises from a failure to understand the benefits system, such as failing to claim for a benefit for which they are eligible, failing to know when they should have claimed something or failing to understand the consequences of a late claim for benefit.

We see such problems all the time involving people who have lived in the UK all their lives. The idea that someone sitting in the middle of another country 1,000 miles away will do a detailed calculation and say to themselves, "If I make an asylum claim in Germany, I'll get this amount, if I make one in France I'll get this and if I make one in the UK I'll get this" is ludicrous.

Mr. Lilley: Can the hon. Gentleman explain why Italy, which alone in Europe has no benefits for asylum seekers, also has the lowest number of claims, even though it is one of the main sources of entry of asylum seekers?

Mr. Gerrard: I suspect that for some years there have been very large numbers of people working illegally and living on the streets in Italy. The claim that the Italians have somehow solved the problem cannot be justified. That raises the question of why people go to particular countries.

There is a variety of reasons why people come here. People come to a country because they know someone who lives there; or there may be long-standing connections with that country. Some Commonwealth countries have been the source of significant numbers of asylum applications to this country when there have been problems there. The civil war in Sri Lanka led to significant numbers of Tamil asylum seekers coming to the UK.

People go to a country where they can speak the language, and English is probably the commonest second language in the world. I am sure that I will never be in the position where I have to flee this country because I am being persecuted—

Mr. Lilley: Wait until the Whips get at you.

Mr. Gerrard: I am not worried about that. I would not want to go to France, which is the nearest safe country. It is not that I have anything against the French, but I would be looking for a country where I know people, or where I can speak the language. Those are the factors that have an impact on where people go to try to claim asylum.

Ms Buck: Will my hon. Friend accept that a criticism can be made of the system in this country regarding processing times? Historically, decisions have taken so long both to complete, and then to exercise if there is a deportation consequent upon them, that this has become a pull for asylum seekers. Does he accept that in 1997, and even today, the processing time for appeals is up to two years? For the first six months of my time as a Member of Parliament the system was clogged up with cases of applicants who had submitted their asylum application in 1992 or 1993, and who by 1997 had not heard a word from the immigration and nationality directorate.

Mr. Gerrard: That is absolutely right. If we want a system that will deter people who are not genuine applicants, we will not achieve that by fiddling around with the benefit system, or by policies of deterrence in legislation. If we want a policy of deterrence for a fraudulent applicant, a decision must be made quickly and efficiently, and subsequently enforced: that is something that we have singularly failed to do over 10 years.

The Government inherited a huge backlog in 1997, which then got worse. As an incoming Government we accepted the Siemens computer system that had been ordered for the Home Office. It was claimed that it would solve all the problems and reduce staffing levels. That was built into the Home Office budget of 1997. Unfortunately we went along with that, and the result was that the backlog increased, rather than decreased. It is only now that we are starting to get on top of it and turn it round.

If we want to deter people from making fraudulent applications, the knowledge that they will not buy two, three or four years in the country by making that application—the knowledge that a decision will be made quickly and efficiently and will be enforced—is the most powerful deterrent. We would have done far better if we had not bothered with any of the last three Acts, and had simply got the systems within the Home Office working properly and efficiently.

I want to say something about the serious position that we are currently in, and which we got ourselves into by aping what was done in 1996. The Home Office's justification for where we are, which was given to the court recently, is that there is widespread abuse of the system because, for example, some people enter to work illegally and claim asylum when they are found out, while others run multiple claims, or have already claimed in safe countries, or have to wait for weeks and months before they make a claim.

Unfortunately, I am unaware of the Home Office ever having produced evidence to back up the assertion that many people wait weeks and months before they make their claim. I tabled parliamentary questions about how many people apply for asylum within a week and a month and three months and six months of being in the country, and about the relative rates of success of applicants, and I was told that the Home Office did not have that information—that it was not kept. However, the bald assertion is made that many people wait for weeks and months before applying so we must do something about that.

Simon Hughes: No answer was given to the question that I asked about the impact of the 8 January legislation. No figures have yet been forthcoming from the Government. No adequate monitoring is going on, even at this stage.

Mr. Gerrard: That is correct.

There is another crucial point about how this new legislation will be applied. There was a very short debate—only 15 minutes long—in which several hon. Members wished to speak but were unable to do so, and during which a question was asked about how reasonable we would be with regard to people who did not claim asylum at the port of entry. The Home Secretary said:

> "We need to be reasonable and to take into account the trauma that people experience. We need therefore to allow a reasonable period before we presume that people have come into the country for another reason and have been sustaining themselves, and that when they could no longer do so they decided that the asylum system would sustain them".—[*Official Report*, 5 November 2002; Vol. 392, c. 199.]

The Home Secretary dwelt on the need to be reasonable, and in meetings with hon. Members, Ministers went further than that. They said, "We are not in the business of penalising people who have been in the country a few days: you need not worry that we are going to behave unreasonably and penalise people who have only been in the country a few days or a week or two. We want to catch people who have been here three, four, five or six months before they make an asylum claim. They ought to be able to justify why they now need support." If the regulations had been interpreted in that way—the way that we were told they would be—the Government might well not have lost the court case this month; they would have found it much easier to persuade the court that they were behaving reasonably.

[Mr. Gerrard]

However, what is actually happening is that people are being refused the day after they arrive in the UK—and, in some cases, on the day on which they arrive in the country—because instead of claiming at the port of entry, they made their way to Croydon to make a claim.

The regulations are being applied in a totally unreasonable way. By losing the case now we have created a far worse problem. It must be dealt with. I am unsure how we are going to extricate ourselves from this; that depends on what the Court of Appeal decides. However, we have certainly created a problem, and it is of the Home Office's making because it has applied the regulations not in the way that we were told that it would, but differently.

This discussion has illustrated that the debate about asylum support is based on the premise of deterrence—that being tough through legislation will deter people from coming here and applying for asylum.

The Prime Minister said that he wants to see a 50 per cent. cut in the number of applications by September. That target is ludicrous. It is something over which we have no control. We should be able to control the rate at which we make decisions. We should be able to control the rate at which we remove those whose applications have been rejected. We should be able to control the rate at which we deal with applications, but controlling the rate at which applications are made is a completely different matter.

The approach taken by Governments of both parties over the past 10 years, before and after 1997, has been based on the premise that we can deter applications through legislation. My hon. Friend the Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck) is absolutely right to say that if we want to deter fraudulent applications, we must look at the mechanisms, not the legislation. Decisions must be taken quickly, and they must be enforced.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): To pursue the hon. Gentleman's argument that mechanisms are important, does he not accept that one of the great failures of the system is that, because people know that the appeals process can take up to two years and that most appeals are likely to fail, they can effectively disappear? There is no real deterrent because when the time comes to deport those people, they have flown the nest.

Mr. Gerrard: There is no doubt that people can disappear, but they could do so whatever system we had in place if they were determined enough. Time and again, people turn up in my constituency surgeries five years after I first saw them—they have not disappeared—because nothing has been done to deal with their applications. That is the real problem, and it could be dealt with far more effectively than we are doing through the recent legislation. Even the legislation brought in by the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden was a failure; it was in force until 1999, and applications went up significantly during that period.

I suggest that hon. Members look at the pattern of the figures from the past 10 years. If they were put on a graph and plotted against each piece of legislation that was supposed to make it more difficult to apply, we may see a temporary drop before the figures go up again. The pattern of figures can be related much more closely to external events such as those in Afghanistan or Kosovo than to any legislation.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Perhaps I should remind the House that it is customary in the 90-minute Adjournment debates to commence the first of the three winding-up speeches 30 minutes before the termination of the debate. I hope that hon. Members will take account of that. However, if we start the first of the winding-up speeches before 10.30 am—in other words, before the 30-minute limit—I hope that the three Front-Bench spokesmen will take account of that and take no more than one third each of the remaining time.

10.13 am

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield): I rise with the appropriate level of trepidation to make my maiden speech in this Chamber. I am particularly pleased to support the matter raised this morning by my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley).

I strongly support the case put by my right hon. Friend. I am relatively familiar with it, having been a junior member of his ministerial team when the events that he described took place at the end of that Government's term of office. Because there has been some debate about precisely what those events were, I took the opportunity to consult the excellent reference and readers' services section of our Library in order to determine the precise chronology. I received a letter from the Library, which stated:

> "The Social Security (Persons From Abroad) Miscellaneous Amendments Regulations SI 1996/30 came into force on 5 February 1996. The Regulations were announced in a ministerial statement on 11 January 1996 and later debated on 23 January 1996.
>
> The Regulations were challenged in the Court of Appeal and on 21 June 1996 judged to be ultra vires. Following on from this judgment, a ministerial statement was made on 26 June 1996 to inform the House of the Government's intention to reinstate this policy through primary legislation. Lords amendments were made to the Asylum and Immigration Bill 1995-96, debated in the Commons on 15 July 1996 and the policy was reinstated by the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996."

Those are the facts of the matter, and my point, which echoes the comments of my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden, is that the subsequent progress in policy suggests that the Government have cynically manipulated and toyed with asylum seekers and refugees. They should therefore apologise on the Floor of the House for the cynical way in which they have handled policy.

It is important that there are principles of responsible opposition. The hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Lynne Jones) is attending the debate, and she and I were on the radio earlier this morning, telling our constituents in the midlands about today's debate on Iraq. She supported the amendment to today's motion, while I supported the Prime Minister, and the Opposition will support him in very large measure later today. We will do so because he is right, and that is how the Opposition should behave on all policies—they should be responsible. On the firemen's strike, for example, we have supported the Deputy Prime Minister when we thought that he was right. I make those points because I think that it is wrong for the Opposition simply to oppose Government policy willy-nilly or to take cynical advantage of it if they think that it is right. My charge, however, is that the Prime Minister and others have cynically sought to exploit asylum policy and genuine refugees in their handling of policy.

In the interests of greater accuracy, I obtained a copy of early-day motion 264, which was tabled on 11 January 1996. It prayed against the Social Security (Persons From Abroad) Miscellaneous Amendments Regulations 1996, which I quoted earlier. The essence of those regulations has now been integrated into Government policy, even though early-day motion 264 prayed against such a policy—it was the exact reverse. The six signatures on that early-day motion included those of the present Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community Safety and the right hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley). They also included that of the right hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), who was formerly the shadow Secretary of State for Social Security. That is particularly hurtful, given that he is my Member of Parliament when I am in London. Indeed, he also represented my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden when he lived in Islington. The next signature was that of the Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the hon. Member for Croydon, North (Malcolm Wicks), who is here today. The final two signatures were those of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Prime Minister. They are the guilty six, who cynically prayed against and attacked the policy of the Conservative Government, which included my right hon. Friend. However, they have now been forced to admit that it was correct. They were wrong, and my right hon. Friend was right.

However, it does not stop there. On Second Reading—I took hon. Members through the chronology a moment ago—the now Foreign Secretary, no less, said:

> "How typical of the Government"—

that of which my right hon. Friend was a Cabinet member—

> "that, instead of seeking to cut delays, they cut people's benefit."—[*Official Report*, 11 December 1995; Vol. 268, c. 720.]

The right hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury was shadow Secretary of State for Social Security at the time and subsequently became a Secretary of State. He spoke about the inhumanity and injustice of our policy, saying that it was "contrary to common humanity". Those were the words that he used to condemn a policy that he and his party have now been forced to admit was correct. Such was the level of obloquy and condemnation as regards my right hon. Friend's policy that he met the Archbishop of Canterbury to explain the position—a policy that the Prime Minister copied when he went off to see the Holy Father last weekend.

The end of that chronology—which I can see has the Minister's rapt attention—ended on 23 January 1996, when my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden, in splendid form, took the House through the matters in question. He demolished all the arguments that the then Opposition presented and said much the same as he has said today, showing that he is consistent on this matter. He rose to speak at 10.25 pm—not a time of day at which the House now sits, much to my regret. My right hon. Friend was rewarded with what was then an enormous majority of 15—279 to 264 votes in support of his case, which he has made again today.

I have described in such detail the chronology of what happened because I want to demonstrate that, in contrast to the Conservative party, which in opposition takes, as I said earlier, a responsible view about the issues of the day, the Labour party in opposition was completely irresponsible. I believe that that fact should be exposed. As my right hon. Friend said, the figures for asylum applications, which were rising in 1995-96, fell as a result of his action. As a result of this Government's action, they have rocketed.

Ms Buck: The asylum statistics for the period in question show that the number of claims fell between 1995 and 1996 from 43,000 to 29,000. The dramatic fall occurred before the introduction of the Conservative Government's policies. If the benefits relationship is so tightly connected with asylum applications, as he and his hon. Friends claim, can the hon. Gentleman explain how asylum applications increased fourfold between 1989 and 1990, and halved after 1991, when there were no changes to entitlement to benefit?

Mr. Mitchell: I have looked carefully at the figures, and the graph shows that when it was known that the proposals of my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden were being brought to Parliament—and when they were discussed and implemented—there was a fall in the number of people applying. The level then rocketed. The figures are something like 30,000 for 1996, as the hon. Lady said, and, in 2000, nearly three times that. If she considers carefully, she will see a direct correlation between the disincentives to abuse the system that the Government of which I was a member introduced and the effect on the figures of a lack of disincentive.

If the Labour party had stuck with integrity to our policy, instead of seeking narrow political advantage by opposing it as I have described, three significant—and, I hope the House will agree, desirable—events would have taken place. First, thousands of bogus asylum seekers would have been deterred from coming to this country. That is the evidence of the figures; it is the evidence that my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden gave at the time; it is the evidence that anyone seriously studying these matters today would accept. In addition, the public stigmatisation of asylum seekers—something rather bravely alluded to by the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard)—would be much less today if the system had had greater integrity.

The second desirable effect would have been that genuine asylum seekers would have been advantaged, because the system would not have been cluttered up by those who were not genuine. That would have made possible a system that would more accurately and speedily have given a fair and proper deal to the genuine asylum seekers who have always been welcome in this country.

Ms Buck: The hon. Gentleman claims that the Conservative Government's policy on benefits was

[Ms Buck]

effective and should have been adhered to, but what is his comment on their policy on administration of asylum claims? The backlog of unprocessed claims soared throughout the 1990s.

Mr. Mitchell: The hon. Lady is correct on that point, but it cannot be right to make the matter worse by increasing the number of those in the system who are so clearly bogus. The truth about the advantage that the original Conservative Government proposals gave to genuine asylum seekers is that, over the four months during which the policy was in place, there was a 20 per cent. fall in the number of applicants.

Thirdly, the cost to the taxpayer is so much greater because of the cynical manipulation of that important policy area by the Labour party. When the proposals were introduced by my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden, his Department estimated that they would save £300 million per year. I know that the Labour party does not worry much about the cost to the taxpayer—it sprays taxpayers' money around without reforming public services—but the cost to the taxpayer of that one act of cynicism and hypocrisy was about £300 million per year. I hope that the Minister, with whom I sparred when our positions were reversed in the 1992–97 Parliament, will have the integrity to come not to Westminster Hall but to the Floor of the House and give a wholehearted apology.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I ought to clarify a matter of detail. This is the Floor of the House. Its standing is equal to that of the other Chamber.

Mr. Mitchell: I am grateful for your correction, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I want to make it clear that an apology now will be entirely acceptable. However, the Government, who have had to eat their words on the matter, should apologise to the House and to the taxpayer for what has happened. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden said, not one of those in the Labour party who oppose Government policy prayed against the order when it was brought before the House. That is astonishing. That, too, could be incorporated into the Minister's apology when he makes it to the House.

Ms Buck: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way yet again. I repeat the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow. When the measure was being introduced in the House, the clear indication was that it was to be applied to individuals who had been in this country for some time—three months was mentioned—under student or other visas and who then made applications, which they had to justify. No indication was given to me or to my hon. Friend that the measure was intended to catch those who had been in the country for only a few hours before making their application.

Mr. Mitchell: The hon. Lady is making a fist of defending the position and the policy of her party. However, I hope that she will have the integrity to accept that there has been a 180 degree turnaround on the matter. My central point is that an opposition party that cynically, against the interests of public policy, sought narrow political advantage against the Government of the day has now to eat its words and propose a policy that is almost identical to that introduced by my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden.

Mr. Heald: Does my hon. Friend recall the Home Secretary saying, last February, that asylum seekers

> "should lodge their claim as soon as they arrive if they expect support from the Government"?

That does not sound like three months, does it?

Mr. Mitchell: It certainly does not. My hon. Friend is absolutely right. What a contrast with the words of today's Foreign Secretary, who has inveighed against the very things that the Home Secretary now supports. There should be radical change in the way in which the policy on asylum seekers and refugees is implemented. The proposals of the shadow Home Secretary merit wide attention across the parties. I hope that on this occasion the Labour Government will not indulge in narrow party political advantage, but will look seriously at the proposals and will endorse them just as they have been forced to endorse the proposals of my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden, which are the subject of the debate.

10.29 am

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): I am conscious of your guidance, Mr. Deputy Speaker, so I will speak for 10 minutes on the subject, which I am happy to debate. I have never resisted this debate and it is perfectly proper to raise the issues. The right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) has been consistent in his general view on the subject as a Minister and in opposition, but I do not understand—I say this respectfully—how his political expressions on such issues are reconciled with the faith that he and I share, which teaches much about looking after the stranger at the gates. The great faiths of the world judge humanity not only by how we treat out own, but by how we treat others, and Christianity is among those.

I want to make some points about the general background, which the right hon. Gentleman painted in. First, as other colleagues have said, we live in a world in which it is nonsensical to imagine that we can manage the number of people who apply for asylum in Europe in general or in the UK in particular. That is a consequence of wars, rumours of wars and many other things. I note in passing that a small number of the world's asylum seekers come to Europe and the other rich bits of the world. Most go to the much poorer parts, such as Pakistan and the central African countries. That is why the Government's target is almost incredible, although targets for other things would be much more understandable.

Secondly, I put to the right hon. Gentleman the question of how people should be expected to make a claim, as two rights are involved: that to claim asylum and that to be granted it. By definition, one cannot have the second until one has the first. His answer would be valid if everybody knew what was the system and if the system worked, but the truth of the matter, as shown by all the evidence, including Home Office research, is that most people do not know that the system can allow a person—possibly with no visa, passport or papers—to travel to Britain and then make an application. The world is not like that. As the right hon. Gentleman knows, people often come with no visa, papers or passport, through facilitators or on their own. In fact, we increasingly check people outside the UK—on the other side of the channel, for example—so that they cannot even get here in many cases. The Government have always failed to address the question of how we can properly allow people to put their claims lawfully.

The right hon. Gentleman asked me whether I thought that we should therefore allow people to make claims in embassies and high commissions around the world. I have argued that, rather than cause people to cross the world, it might be sensible to start a programme under the auspices of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees whereby people could put their case at the British, American, French or any other embassy in the country nearest to them if they felt that that would be safest. That would require an improvement in local administration, but it would be a way to allow cases to be dealt with much nearer to where they came from. Of course, there are management and administrative issues—I understand that.

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Gentleman is breathtakingly frank. He would make it possible for anybody who can get out of their country to go to the local British embassy and ask to come here. Does he propose any limit on the numbers, such as my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) proposes, or does he propose that the Geneva convention should remain in force and that an unlimited number should thereby be enabled to come to this country?

Simon Hughes: I apologise if I have not sent the right hon. Gentleman a copy of the booklet that I wrote last year, which I have given to the Prime Minister, the Home Secretary and other Ministers. I shall send him a copy. I do not propose that we have a quota system. We cannot fix an upper limit, which is the proposal of the right hon. Member for West Dorset. That proposal seems incredible, because numbers are not determined by anything that we can manage. I have proposed that there should be responsibility sharing.

Although, technically, the processing of the application of someone who arrives and puts their case to a European mission or to a country in the European Union would be taken by that country, over five or 10 years we should share the numbers across the EU, so that we will not be playing the nonsense game of passing the human parcel, which we are playing at the moment. We put up our barriers so that more people go to France, and the French put up their barriers so that more people come back here. We need to share responsibility, and all EU members need to take their fair and even share. That, surely, could be negotiated. To the Government's credit, they are now thinking about those things, but they have not yet begun to implement them.

Thirdly, there are all sorts of answers to the "Italian question"—that is, "Why don't so many people go to Italy?"—apart from that given by the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard), who made the point that many people may be there who might not have been legally recognised. One reason is language. Many of those who seek asylum have fled civil war in former British colonies such as Sierra Leone, where English is the main language. English is, after all, one of the three main world languages. People also come to Britain because of our reputation for human rights and decency. That is surely a good thing, which the World Service, the Government and the British Council seek to propagate, and to which many in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as other places, respond.

All those things mean that we should respond positively and reasonably and decently. Britain is the world's fourth most economically successful country, and for 300 years it has believed through its law that people should not be left destitute. We must also continue to uphold the principles of the welfare state.

Mr. Gerrard: I have had the chance to look at the figures for Italy, and it is striking that between 1997 and 1999 the number of asylum seekers rose eighteenfold. Although it has since dropped, the rate in 2001 was still four times that of 1997. That illustrates the point that playing the numbers game is extremely unhelpful.

Simon Hughes: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. It is naïve beyond belief to think that there is a direct link between the changes in the law and the number of asylum seekers.

This new law was first introduced in the House of Lords to much criticism. Lord Filkin was asked about problems that might arise on the as-soon-as-reasonably practicable test for applications and on the lack of an appeal review, even though the Labour party briefing at the time said that there would be an appeal review. He ignored those questions.

As the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden said, we had a quarter of an hour of debate on the matter in the Commons. That was entirely unsatisfactory. Worse, the guidelines were published only on 7 January—the day before the measure came into force—and those who had to interpret them had one day to do so. The guidelines were extremely general and nondescript. They depicted some refusal scenarios, but only in the most general way, and the interpretation was very loose.

I also agree that the position of the Labour Government is exactly contrary to that of the Labour party in opposition. Indeed, the Labour Government have now gone further, because the Home Secretary did not suggest an interpretation that if there was no application on the day, an applicant would be turned down. That was not what he said and there was no indication that that was expected. Something entirely different has happened.

I recommend that people read the very good judgment of Mr. Justice Collins, who has also been president of the Immigration Appeal Tribunal. He is not a maverick judge, nor a party political judge. He is well-respected, competent and knowledgeable, and he quoted many others in a very clear statement of the law. I hope that all who read the report of this debate also read what the judge said. They need only look at two of the examples among the six cases to see the nonsense of the current interpretation, which, mercifully, the courts have decided is wrong. I refer to the first and sixth cases.

[Simon Hughes]

The first concerns a 26-year-old man who left Iran, where he was persecuted for converting to Christianity. He sought help from a solicitor, but the day after he arrived he was turned down. The second is that of a 20-year-old Iraqi Kurd who arrived in a lorry on 8 January. On the same day, he walked for three hours, with no money and no English, and was told to go to the Home Office in Croydon. He too was turned down. The Home Office interpretation was absolutely scandalous—it goes against the common decency that this country is supposed to stand for.

The Home Secretary's mistake was then to suggest, after the judgment had been made, that the law should not be interpreted by the judges, even though the Human Rights Act and this law have been strictly interpreted by a judge who said that that is what Parliament intended. There is a famous maxim that no matter how high we are, the law should be always above us. Happily, these Ministers, like all others, must act within the law.

My party opposed these proposals, and continues to do so. We sincerely hope that the courts continue to uphold the fact that they are being wrongly interpreted. I believe that we will be vindicated and that the Home Secretary will seek to change the proposals at his peril. I hope that Parliament and the courts will find any such change unacceptable, improper and against all traditions of the decent British response to refugees that I hope, and hoped, a Labour Government would uphold.

10.40 am

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire): I say to the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) that we shall have to see what the Court of Appeal makes of that.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) on securing a debate on this important subject. Over time, he has, in a sense, been vindicated. I was a member of his team between 1995 and 1997, as was my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr. Mitchell). As my hon. Friend said, we both remember how those who are now members of the Government attacked proposals to remove benefits from in-country asylum seekers. It was a vicious attack, but the truth is that when they came to power they were unable to follow sensible asylum policies for some years because of the vitriol that had been poured on my right hon. Friend. The fact is that from the time that the announcement was made in 1995 until the Conservative Government left office, the number of asylum seekers fell dramatically from 30,000 a year to 16,000 a year.

Asylum seekers have cost this country dear financially, and it has also caused a great deal of misery to many asylum seekers that the Government have followed a weak approach. The result of that has been a substantial increase in the amount of money that the country spends on asylum support. The numbers have also increased. Many of those people are simply not genuinely claiming asylum. They may, as my right hon. Friend said, be decent people seeking a better life, but they are not asylum seekers within the law as it stands.

We heard an interesting speech from the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey, whose approach to these matters has always been one of open house. He believes that ways should be found for people who want to come to this country from abroad to be able to do so, and to do so legally. That would be an open invitation, and goodness knows what the numbers would be if the policies that he has always advocated were pursued.

I agree with the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) about one thing: one problem over the years has been how long decisions on asylum cases take. We need speedier decision making, but the changes in the law that the Government have made with the Human Rights Act and so on are not likely to lead to that. In fact, in almost every asylum case that I have ever read, the courts have said that there should be even more inquiries and an even more laborious, long-winded process for cases to be determined. If he disagrees, I am happy to take an intervention.

Mr. Gerrard: I have certainly not held back from speaking up when I thought that the Home Office was making a mess of things, but the rate of decision making is improving considerably, with new applications especially being dealt with much more quickly.

Mr. Heald: We can all say amen to that, and if speedier decisions are being made, that is a good thing, but the fact is, as the hon. Gentleman said, it is still a slow process. I am sure that he is right: if the process were speedier and if people were removed when their cases failed, a better deterrent would be in place.

I should mention the Prime Minister. We have heard about the Government's shuttlecock approach to policy in the area, and three years ago he said:

> "From April 2000, the new system will be in place, with new rules on benefit and new holding centres being opened up, so that claims can be processed quickly and we shall be able to get the numbers back down again."—[*Official Report*, 2 February 2000; Vol. 343, c. 1035.]

Well, it did not work out like that, because since then the direct cost of asylum support has increased from £375 million to £1.094 billion in the most recent year for which figures are available. One has to ask whether the Government have got anything right in that area.

The Prime Minister is claiming that he will halve the numbers this year, but, as the hon. Member for Walthamstow said, not many of us believe that that will happen. All kinds of claims have been made during recent years. When the voucher scheme was introduced, it was claimed that it was vital and that it would save money—it certainly did not. It was also said that if cash benefits were reinstated those would cost £500 million a year more and that there would be a huge pull factor generating thousands of additional claims. What have the Government done, two years later? They have reinstated cash benefits.

Ms Buck: That is self-defeating logic. The introduction of the voucher scheme, the National Asylum Support Service and the dispersal programme should, following the logic of the hon. Gentleman's own party, have resulted in a reduced pull factor, but they simply did not. That confirms the argument that my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow and I are [illegible]ing, which is that the entitlement to support is largely [illegible]levant in the bigger picture. Many other factors are in play, ranging from the world situation to labour markets, English and other languages, and the administrative workings of the immigration and nationality directorate. Those are far more important in addressing asylum seeker numbers.

Mr. Heald: We obviously do not agree on those matters. The international examples that I could go through if I had another 10 minutes would prove that the hon. Lady is wrong.

On asylum support and the benefits system, the written answer that I received from the Minister for Citizenship and Immigration shows that when NASS began work in April 2000, there was no investigation service that could consider issues of benefit or asylum support fraud. It took NASS 13 months to introduce an operational unit. One thing that we know about any sizeable benefits budget is that there will always be people who try to abuse the system, and the hon. Member for Walthamstow has acknowledged that there are always cases of fraud. How negligent it was of the Government to leave NASS with no protection for 13 months.

Will the Minister give us any reason why that important budget was significantly underprotected for more than a year? Why is there no record of the total asylum support fraud discovered by NASS? Why does it not know how much money it has uncovered as being taken fraudulently from the system? It knows how many cases there are, but not how much money is involved. Why is there no estimate of the total asylum support fraud perpetrated since NASS was established?

My right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden introduced systematic reviews of benefit fraud when he was at the Department of Social Security. That was an important measure in establishing how much fraud was taking place. Why has nothing similar been done in NASS? We know that it has investigated 4,600 cases, of which 1,400 ended in termination of support, which is why I cannot understand this answer from the Minister:

> "The National Asylum Support Service (NASS) does not keep a central record of the level of fraud in individual cases."—[*Official Report*, 10 February 2003; Vol. 399, c. 539W.]

Why on earth not?

The benefits fraud hotline, which was introduced by my right hon. Friend—he and I launched it outside Richmond house—was a successful way of tackling fraud. I know that this Minister is concerned about that issue, but when I asked the Minister for Citizenship and Immigration what measures there are for passing information from the hotline to NASS for investigation, she said:

> "There are no formal arrangements for referring calls to the Benefit Fraud Hotline and the Targeting Fraud Website to NASS."—[*Official Report*, 27 January 2003; Vol. 398, c. 707W.]

Why on earth not? Why did this Minister say, in answer to my question on the subject, that such allegations are passed directly to the immigration service and NASS?

If I had longer, I would go on, but I shall come to my final point. In respect of benefit fraud, there has been much profiteering on the part of landlords. The hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs. Ellman) has posed a series of questions in the House on the housing provided to asylum seekers and the people who provide it. What protection is there against landlord fraud in the system?

10.50 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Malcolm Wicks): I, too, very much welcome this important debate, which was initiated by the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley), who is, of course, a former Secretary of State for Social Security. I agree with his opening remarks: these are matters of growing public concern in this country, throughout Europe and, indeed, further afield, so it is important that politicians representing the great democratic parties of the country lead the debate in the right direction, rather than shirking it. We may disagree about that direction, but we need to face the issues.

We must confront the racists and lead the debate in an important direction. That is a point that the right hon. Gentleman makes, and has made elsewhere. Also, we should face up to the difficult issues for our communities and the tough decisions that must be made. There is nothing more destructive to our democracy than people, perhaps for well-meaning reasons, attacking Members of Parliament from both sides of the House who raise legitimate issues, and throwing at them the charge of being racist. There is nothing more loathsome. If there is talk—even if it is misguided—in the pubs, on the streets, on the estates and in the communities about an issue, and the only place not talking about it is Parliament, our democracy is in trouble. That opens the gateway to the British National party, and perhaps other fascist parties. It is important that we engage in the issues without fear or favour.

We are all agreed that for many years—indeed, centuries—this country has opened its arms to people seeking refuge, many of whom were fleeing terror regimes. Many of them have been of enormous benefit to our economy and our country. We also agree that if asylum seekers face destitution, it is right that we should provide them with some financial support.

I regularly see asylum seekers in my constituency office and will continue to do so. Indeed, I last saw one on Friday. During the debate, I thought of a constituent I met a couple of years ago. Her story, which I believed entirely, was that she was picked up by soldiers in Uganda because she was associated with an opposition political movement. In the back of a lorry, she was systematically gang raped by many of the soldiers. She was able to flee her country and came to Britain, only to discover from her doctor that she was HIV-positive. A significant number of people are at that end of the continuum.

[Malcolm Wicks]

There are others, however, such as another constituent who told the immigration authorities many years ago that she was coming here for a couple of weeks of Christmas shopping. After a couple of years, when the immigration authorities were chasing her, she started studying. When the authorities chased her further, she announced that she was applying for asylum. I am not naive about the range, across the continuum, of those who apply for asylum.

Mr. Lilley: I am grateful for the admirably balanced way in which the Minister approaches such issues and the recognition that we should neither suppress debate on them nor pander to those who hold negative views about asylum seekers.

Will the Minister comment on the announcement by the Minister for Transport, who represents Warley and who will see only people who are on the electoral register, but not asylum seekers, at his surgery? Does the Minister think that such a statement panders to the animosity felt by some people towards asylum seekers? That animosity would be better targeted at those who created the situation, not the asylum seekers themselves.

Malcolm Wicks: I do not advise colleagues on either side of the House on how they should run their constituency offices. I have my own approach to such matters. Given that my constituency is Croydon, North and bearing in mind the ethnicity there and the fact that a significant number of asylum seekers are associated with Croydon for obvious reasons, I give them what advice I can.

As soon as someone is given exceptional leave to remain or is accepted by the Home Office as a genuine refugee, he becomes entitled to the same social security benefits as anyone else. That is a long-standing principle of the benefit system. There has been confusion and loose terminology in relation to refugees because, when someone becomes a refugee, he is a successful asylum seeker. In a way, the issue is simple. Such people then become entitled to social security benefits. That is why I am here, as a Minister at the Department for Work and Pensions, rather than a Home Office Minister. Understandably, however, the debate has ranged more widely than that subject.

I hope that the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden will forgive me if I do not debate the Lilley legacy and Conservative chronology. The Conservative party is going through one of those stages when it is terribly interested in itself, but such a view is not always widely held. Before I come to refugees, I wish to refer to the improvements that we have made to the asylum system.

Mr. Heald: I hope that the Minister tackles the problem of fraud in the system and how that system is protected. The budget of £1.1 billion is substantial, and legitimate questions have been posed.

Malcolm Wicks: Those are reasonable questions that I shall draw to the attention of my Home Office colleagues. We are determined to bear down on fraud across the piece. Our Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 created the Home Office-administered National Asylum Support Service, which, since April 2000, has, when required, provided assistance and accommodation to all new asylum seekers. That is a separate system for asylum seekers. It should not be confused with that for those who are granted asylum and who are then dealt with by my Department in respect of social security benefits.

Measures introduced by the previous Government meant that asylum seekers who had made an application while in the country or who were appealing against a negative decision were denied benefits and were, in some cases, suffering real hardship. We ensured that there would be a safety net for such people to allow them to receive the support that they needed. We also recognised that better targeted support for asylum seekers was not enough on its own. We needed to deal with the growing backlog of people waiting for an asylum decision.

Although there is no scope to discuss the numbers now, a range of factors are involved. Benefits are important, but the international reputation of our country, language, the presence of different ethnic communities, the efficiency or inefficiency of immigration services at given points in time and the fact that Britain is the head of the Commonwealth are all significant in terms of employment opportunity. We are getting on top of the problem. The removal rate, although lower than we had hoped, has increased to about 12,000 people per month. In many ways, the immigration service is improving. We are on target in respect of 2002–03, and 65 per cent. of claims should receive an initial decision within two months. Those who were given the status of genuine refugees are allowed social security benefits in the usual way.

I shall write to hon. Members if I have missed any points, but the subject is obviously complex ethnically and politically in terms of policy, and particularly complex in respect of administration and delivery. We need to achieve the right balance, as I believe we are doing, between granting genuine asylum to those fleeing outrageous and wretched regimes throughout the world, of which there are too many, and ensuring that there is proper control against abuse.

Area Based Initiatives (Cornwall and Scilly)

11 am

Andrew George (St. Ives): I am delighted to have secured a debate on this important subject. I know that the Minister has a deep knowledge of it because she has been involved with her Department's work addressing the complexity of the area-based initiatives that come down from the Government. It is hard to imagine that the subject will be the stuff of tabloid headlines, although I argue that it is of deep concern to many people throughout the country. However, the terminology and the complexity of the subject make it impenetrable to many for whom it is important.

As the subject is unlikely to attract gladiatorial debate and argument, I hope that the Minister and I will be able to generate more light than heat in our debate. Given the Government's efforts and the work of the regional co-ordination unit—and before that, the performance and innovation unit—on area-based initiatives, I suspect that the Minister and I might be pursuing a similar agenda; I certainly hope so. I hope that she does not think that she can bat away my worries as ingratitude because I, and the people of Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, are grateful to the Government for recognising the social exclusion that exists in the communities—in other words, poverty and deprivation. Those worries are being addressed in several ways and I am grateful for the effort, focus, priority and finance that have been seen. I am also grateful to the partnership of the communities, those who are deprived, the Government, and MPs in securing objective 1 status a few years ago.

When defining area-based initiatives, I shall include the objective 1 programme because it is relevant and knits together with many of the programmes that we shall discuss. Although there have been entertaining attempts to rewrite history and claim credit for achieving objective 1 status, a partnership did that. The people themselves championed the campaign for the designation, statisticians recognised the distinctiveness of Cornwall, which achieved statistical separation, and the Government campaigned successfully in Europe to drive home the advantage so that we got the designation. The Minister and I may share success, but we also share an interest in getting things right.

What do we mean by an area-based initiative? I know that the Minister knows but, for the record, I shall use a definition from a Government document. It is a measure

"to tackle social exclusion and deliver improved services in the most disadvantaged areas."

That quote comes from the regional co-ordination unit's "Review of Area Based Initiatives", which was published in October 2002. For example, among the many initiatives in Cornwall are: objective 1 integrated area plans, single regeneration budgets, neighbourhood renewal programmes, health action zones, healthy town initiatives, healthy living initiatives, market town initiatives, vital villages, sure start, Cornwall action team for jobs, the neighbourhood nursery scheme, the partnership development fund, the skills development fund, the rural key fund, the rural renaissance initiative, the community champions fund, community chest, the community empowerment fund and the safer communities initiative. Simply by listing the initiatives and their titles, I make the point that I believe both the Minister and I understand. In the regional co-ordination unit report of October last year, Cornwall was cited as an example of where the plethora of initiatives was creating problems. The situation was not created by God, as if it were something natural. It is unnatural; it is manmade, so we can do something about it. The report identified more than 100 partnerships operating in Cornwall. All those are run at the same level by professional bodies.

It is my estimate that, taking all the partnerships together and including objective 1, we are looking at a budget of about £650 million to be spent in Cornwall over the next five years. That includes match funding, which inevitably has to be matched with other money in many of those programmes.

The primary point that I wish to make—I sent a note to the Minister's office to make clear my questions—is that although I am grateful for the funding, as many people are, the system that has been created has resulted in confusion and bewildering bureaucracy. Far from generating initiative, it has created initiative fatigue, strategy fatigue, vision fatigue, mission fatigue and fatigue within communities. There is a barely disguised intolerance of the confusing array of jargon and bureaucracy, which people find almost impossible to penetrate. I think that the Minister will have some sympathy with that point.

What action have the Government taken? I appreciate that they have identified the problem. The study in 1999 by their performance and innovation unit resulted in the report "Reaching Out—the role of central government at regional and local level", which was published in February 2000. It resulted in further work by the regional co-ordination unit and its report "Review of Area Based Initiatives", published in October last year. In that report, the unit accepts the problems of partnership overload, increased bureaucracy and the lack of integration of many of the schemes. There are many problems, not least the number and complexity of area-based initiatives in areas such as Cornwall. The different time scales and requirements of each of those do not dovetail well.

So far, where there have been partnerships, the response of the Government has been to set up local strategic partnerships. We now have partnerships for partnerships and that local strategic partnership has to produce a strategy, so that is a strategy of strategies. We now have super-partnerships and super-strategies, creating another layer of bureaucracy on top of the existing layer. We have the problem of duplication. Each partnership tends to create its own bureaucracy. Many of the organisations that I am talking about have facilitators and their own strategy and administrative procedures, all of which add to the web of bureaucracy that people have to face.

There is also the issue of perverse outcomes, such as different interpretations of state aid rules by, for example, the neighbourhood renewal fund and the single regeneration budget. Many of those people in local government who were consulted before the debate say that the interpretation of state aid rules on projects that are coming forward are not always consistent across all the programmes. Another example of a

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perverse outcome is when two Government initiatives result in competition for the same funds and, in effect, suppress one potential outcome.

I shall give an example of a market town in Cornwall. I have to be careful about this. The private sector body funded under the neighbourhood nursery scheme through the Department for Education and Skills is competing with sure start, funded by the Department of Health. Both are trying to set up pre-school provision in the area, competing for the same public funds. Because the public funds are limited, only one of them will be successful. That is an example of two bureaucracies being established, which compete to attain the same objective. The outcome is perverse, resources are wasted and there is a duplication of effort. That is happening on manifold occasions throughout Cornwall in many of the initiatives that I have mentioned.

There is also inefficiency. The regional co-ordination unit report states that the audit bill of Kerrier district council has quadrupled in five years as a result of the work done by that council to prop up its commitment to the bureaucracies and partnerships with which it finds itself engaged. The same professionals turn up to different committees under different titles and frantically run around keeping all the balls in the air to maintain their involvement in the partnerships in each of the initiatives.

Under community regeneration in objective 1, the Cornwall Voluntary Sector Forum, Cornwall rural community council and the diocesan Board for Social Responsibility in Truro produced a report identifying that the £4 million for community regeneration under objective 1 is being spent largely on bureaucracy establishing the integrated area programmes and producing the strategies, but very little is being achieved on the ground. One response from Richard Bayley, the Plymouth director of the Government office for the south-west, questions the bulk of the money used for regeneration in Cornwall going into bureaucracy and strategy. Some of the money goes into what is euphemistically called capacity building.

The most useful capacity building that can be undertaken, however, is to teach local communities and give them the knowledge to negotiate the systems created by the Government. It is assumed that poverty is caused by the incapacity of the people and communities rather than geography and economic circumstances beyond their control. In fact, the capacity building that is required is the building of the knowledge and confidence to become cynical of the whole process in order to extract money from the system. Many community organisations find that the best way forward is cynically to manipulate the system because there is no other way for them to obtain finance from the system to allow community groups to prosper. There are many reasons for concern about the way in which area-based initiatives operate, but I do not have time to go into detail about the other impacts.

In discussing social exclusion, we are talking about poverty. The poverty industry is now one of the most prosperous in Cornwall. I am sure that, to an extent, targets have been met and the poor are benefiting, but a tremendous bureaucracy has been established through which the money and effort must be driven in order for the poor in Cornwall to benefit significantly. As a result, there is a great deal of initiative fatigue and barely disguised intolerance on the part of those involved.

I have asked the Minister several questions in advance of today's debate. For example, what estimate has been made of the amount and proportion of available funds for Government-agency-sponsored area-based initiatives that has been spent on productive purposes to deliver goods on the ground? How much has been employed for non-productive, preparative, administrative, team-training capacity-building activities? Has the Minister's Department estimated the impact of such a high number of area-based initiatives on Cornwall and the productivity of those initiatives? Are there more effective ways to reduce the non-productive costs of running those schemes? By what measures do the Government estimate the success of ABIs in satisfying their own targets and the targets of local authorities? When will the Government stop adding to initiatives and mainstream the successes? Are local strategic partnerships here to stay, or are they another short-term experiment? If so, what does that tell local authorities about Government attitudes?

In conclusion, if we got rid of the middle person and took the bureaucracy out of the system, we would be able to distribute some £650 million across, let us say, 10 per cent of the population, and give each poor family in Cornwall about £10,000 a year. If we gave it to them in vouchers to buy child care, security or better housing they would spend that money in an effective way. Rather than going through processes that are about greater control, perhaps the Government need to let go.

Cornwall county council has recently been given an excellent billing by the Government for the way in which it runs its services. If it is so excellent, and the Government are in favour of devolution, perhaps it is time that the Government gave Cornwall county council and other local authorities the opportunity and freedom to run these programmes themselves.

11.16 am

The Minister for Social Exclusion and Deputy Minister for Women (Mrs. Barbara Roche): I appreciate the way in which the hon. Member for St. Ives (Andrew George) has introduced and conducted this debate. He is quite right: we are speaking about serious and important issues. He and I have had long discussions about Cornwall and objective 1 during the process of negotiation.

I want to speak about the policy thrust behind the area-based initiatives, and about how these initiatives are working on the ground. I hope to give the hon. Gentleman some comfort that we are making progress in eliminating bureaucracy and amalgamating initiatives where we can. I agree that we do not want to have cumbersome bureaucracy standing in the way of delivery.

The policy thrust in delivering area-based initiatives is to narrow the gap between deprived neighbourhoods and the rest of the country, so that within 10 to 20 years no one should be seriously disadvantaged by where they live. It is unacceptable that those living in our poorest communities so often have the worst schools and public services. Our aim is to deliver economic prosperity, safe communities, high quality education, decent housing and better health to the poorest parts of the country.

Area-based initiatives have a key role to play in reaching that aim. They are important for trying out new ideas and giving scope for innovation. Across the country, the Government are investing around £2 billion over 10 years in the 39 new deal for communities areas; some £1.9 billion over five years through the neighbourhood renewal fund in the 88 most deprived areas; and some £500 million in 522 sure start programmes.

Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly include some of the United Kingdom's most deprived neighbourhoods. Earnings in Cornwall are 33 per cent below the national average. Coping with the impact of economic changes on the traditional industries of fishing, agriculture and mining has been a painful experience. Overall unemployment in Cornwall has come down to around the national level but remains persistently high in some areas. There has been a hard-fought campaign in Cornwall to bring those areas to attention at national and European level.

As the hon. Member for St. Ives amplified, Cornwall has almost the full range of United Kingdom Government area-based initiatives, as well as some very significant European funding: that is because of the great difficulties that communities in Cornwall face.

Objective 1 is bringing in £308 million of European money to raise the economic prosperity of the area. That is also levering in other public and private sector funds. That is achieving a considerable amount: it is supporting projects delivering broadband, which is important for Cornwall's regeneration; it is providing venture capital to business, which is vital because we need to stimulate the growth of small and medium-sized enterprises in Cornwall; it is also supporting the additional activities of such marvellous ventures as the Eden project, which is having a big impact on the local community; and it is expanding Dairy Crest's creamery in the area. All of those things are very important.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned bureaucracy. I am sure that he agrees that there must be a robust process for project appraisal, because significant sums of public money are at stake. However, we try to ensure that that process matches the size and nature of the projects. I assure him that I will keep a vigilant eye on that. If we are dealing with a comparatively small sum of money, we must ensure that the due diligence that we have put in place is not excessive. Several projects that are under way provide funding for small-scale activities: they have been specifically designed to make access to funds as simple as possible for community bodies, small and medium enterprises and farming and fishing businesses.

Andrew George: The Minister rightly points out that due diligence is required, and that there must be a robust audit of how public funds are spent and whether they are spent properly. However, given the plethora of sizes and scales of operations and the numbers of initiatives, does she not accept that it would be far better to devolve the responsibility for that task to one organisation that is accountable to the local community than to have the current manifold arrangements?

Mrs. Roche: I have some sympathy with the sentiments that lie behind that point, and I will address it as I develop my arguments.

The neighbourhood renewal fund brings an extra £5.5 million to the districts of Penwith and Kerrier. The fund aims to improve core public services and narrow the gap between deprived neighbourhoods and the rest. A new NRF-supported minor injuries unit at the Camborne Redruth community hospital will save residents of Cornwall's largest built-up area the 30-mile round trip to Truro. That is a good example of how things are made to work on the ground. The community contribution to that project was particularly impressive.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the mainstreaming of services. The health action zone aims to improve local healthcare services. I will come on to how we have mainstreamed some of the principles that lay behind health action zones.

The Camborne/Pool/Redruth success zone is raising the aspirations and employability of young people from three to 19 years of age who live in the former mining area. Its projects include a hi-tech classroom of the future and work-based, accredited, key-skill qualifications. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman agrees that those are key examples of what is happening on the ground.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned sure starts. There are six sure starts in Cornwall, including two in his constituency. They aim to give children the best possible start in life and some of the things that they are doing, such as establishing fathers' groups and child minding networks, are key to ensuring that delivery goes where it is most needed—to the local community. Many more activities are going on.

Let me deal with the important points about complexity raised by the hon. Gentleman. He was right to say that we need to consider the difficulty, raised in the report of the performance and innovation unit, of there sometimes being a plethora of initiatives and too much bureaucracy. We have done so; indeed, we have been quite radical. I led a review of our area-based initiatives, and I recognise that there are too many funding streams and sometimes a lack of integration in Whitehall. We realise that we need also to mainstream many initiatives. A good idea that has been exploited in an area-based initiative should be transferred to mainstream services. There is too much red tape, with each programme having its own rules and its own monitoring and evaluation requirements, which makes it difficult for local people to access funding.

The regional co-ordination unit looked at 40 initiatives in eight reviews. I announced the results in October 2002. That led to a significant reduction in the number of separate funding channels. We have cut bureaucracy, and we are trying to champion change from the bottom up. The Government office is now developing single local management centres to work up proposals for the better co-ordination of area-based initiatives locally, and to identify the changes required at Government level to help ABIs focus on delivery.

The hon. Gentleman was right to talk about the county council. We want to include councils in the process and to give them more freedom and flexibility.

Andrew George: I appreciate the attempt to bring these initiatives together in the Government office. I welcome the fact that they are being brought together, and the involvement of the county council and other

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councils is also welcome. However, does the Minister accept that it would be far more acceptable to local people if that responsibility was devolved to a democratically accountable local body like the county council rather than being held out of Cornwall in either the regional development agency or the Government office for the south-west? With the best will in the world, those bodies are less approachable and further from the people who are supposed to benefit from the schemes.

Mrs. Roche: But that is exactly what we have done with the establishment of the local strategic partnerships, which are here to stay. We have given them direct control over the neighbourhood renewal funding. That is a real partnership between community groups, the local statutory bodies that deliver the services and the local authority. We are keen to develop more local flexibility.

Much good work is already going on in Cornwall. The west Cornwall local strategic partnership has begun work on bringing together the ABIs in the Penwith and Kerrier districts—exactly what the hon. Gentleman seeks. The Government office's objective 1 team and the regional development agency are working on joint application forms and the joint appraisal of projects. Work is under way better to link the objective 1 integrated area plan teams with other initiatives. A great deal is going on. We also want to see a strengthened role for local strategic partnerships in directing the initiatives and funds towards deprived areas, and much more mainstreaming of good practice. I assure the hon. Gentleman that we shall be keeping a close eye on that, as the Government office seeks to develop those ideas further with all our partners in Cornwall.

Local strategic partnerships in Cornwall as elsewhere are taking a key role in promoting the effectiveness of area-based initiatives. There are now some 326 established LSPs in England. It is still early, but it is clear that they are starting to become effective in co-ordinating neighbourhood renewal. The thrust of local strategic partnerships was to cut the plethora of separate partnerships; they were doing important and worthy things but it was leading to partnership overload. Experience shows that they are having some success.

The Government remain committed to reducing the gap between deprived areas and the rest. We are confident that the area-based initiatives will lead to progress and to the renewal of our communities. I assure the hon. Gentleman that we will also reduce bureaucracy and red tape by bringing those initiatives together, and that we shall seek to ensure that they are delivering on the ground to the communities that need them most.

11.29 am

Sitting suspended until Two o'clock.

Small Businesses

2 pm

Mr. Iain Luke (Dundee, East): I am glad to have been successful in the ballot for precious moments in Westminster Hall, as I have sought this debate for some time. I wish to review the critical role played by the small business sector in the economic performance of the United Kingdom. I hope that we will have a wide-ranging debate and I look forward to contributions from hon. Members who represent different parts of the UK. Given his track record in office, I am sure that the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, South (Nigel Griffiths), will listen intently to the debate and take up the points that are raised.

My constituency in Scotland has had a poor track record in small business start-ups. Despite the fact that we work within the United Kingdom economy, more than one issue differentiates small businesses in the UK context—and, indeed, in the English and Welsh context—and the Scottish small business sector. I shall explore those issues in the debate. The United Kingdom Government have a responsibility to take action to ensure that structural inhibitions are tackled and smoothed out, so that we gain our objective of prosperity for all.

We are holding our discussion at a time when the global economy is beset by uncertainty and worries about recession. That is all the more reason why we must do all we can to foster enterprise and innovation, and to ensure that the heartening rate of small business start-ups is maintained and improved. It is worth making the point that, in the face of global economic problems, the UK has performed better than most of the industrial world. Although gross domestic product shows significant falls, it remains positive compared with our European and G7 partners.

It is true that the Scottish economy has suffered particularly badly from the global downturn. The primary impact has been on the electronic communications industry. It has also affected the small business sector, which has a fine track record of exporting to and tapping into markets throughout the globe, outwith and within the European Union. The knock-on effect of the economic downturn in markets that were initially seen as good for Scotland, has had an impact on the growth of its small businesses.

Scotland has suffered great shrinkage in its manufacturing capacity. It has a lower growth rate than that of the United Kingdom as a whole. The debate now taking place in the main Chamber emphasises the uncertain international situation. Such a problem means an even bigger squeeze on share prices, markets and the confidence of markets throughout the world. But despite the uncertainty and flux, the nature of the macro-economic situation in the United Kingdom and in Scotland is good. Indeed, only yesterday in Dundee, an article in *The Courier* about the latest Scottish economic report, which is published by the Scottish Executive, stated that growth would occur in the Scottish economy in 2003. Moreover, growth is expected to be higher this year than previously, which is good news for Scotland. That also shows that the economy throughout the United Kingdom seems to be picking up.

Let us consider macro-economic aspects, such as low inflation, low unemployment, low interest rates, record numbers of people in work, and especially improvements in the rate of small business start-ups, which are evident from the figures issued by the Treasury and the Department of Trade and Industry last November. All those things hold out the promise of a strong economic recovery in the coming years. Figures recently issued by Barclays showed that more than 91,000 new small businesses commenced trading in the first three quarters of 2002; that is an increase of 14 per cent.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): Were there 91,000 start-ups in the UK as a whole, or only in Scotland? Does the hon. Gentleman know the figure for Scotland?

Mr. Luke: The figures apply to the whole of the UK. I do not have the figures for Scotland, but I hope to have them in future to provide evidence of differentials in growth.

One of the best ways of fulfilling the hopes that I have raised of an economic recovery is to ensure that the small business sector is fostered. It is important to remember that the small business sector comprises the vast bulk of the British economy: it encompasses 90 per cent. of the 3.7 million business operations in the UK. It is necessary to highlight the importance of the small business sector and its contribution to the creation of wealth, employment and business activity in the UK. Although it is usually bigger businesses such as British Airways and BAE Systems that receive media attention and attract glamour, these businesses—only 7,000 of which employ more than 250 people—form the tip of an iceberg.

Given the nature of business growth, many larger businesses are now becoming much more footloose. Many are wholly or partly owned by concerns and shareholders outside the UK; as a consequence, they are much more prone to relocation outside the UK economy and to radical downsizing in times of economic difficulty. To draw from local experience, over the past year Levi Strauss & Co. has left the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross), and ABB Power T&D Ltd has closed its premises in my constituency, Dundee, East.

The typical British business is a small business that employs 10 or fewer employees. Many are family businesses, and most are sole traders. They are firmly located within the context of the British business environment, and the continued robust health of small businesses is an essential component of the UK's better economic performance at a time of global and European downturn. Despite the disadvantages of an overvalued pound and the UK's continuing exile from the eurozone, a survey conducted last year by the Federation of Small Businesses showed that 22 per cent. of small businesses continued to trade strongly with European Union countries.

Despite that positive evidence, the sector continues to experience serious problems that inhibit better performance. They were clearly identified in last year's survey by the Federation of Small Businesses: lower costs and overseas competition have an impact on how businesses operate in this economy; there was a big problem with access to finance; and the ability to employ staff was circumvented by the costs that had to be borne. Access to business advice, transport costs and access to education and training for staff also scored highly as problems in recent surveys. Those problems were identified as of great concern to small businesses in the UK.

Given the growing importance of our trade with the European market, which will soon have a population of almost 340 million, one major factor in the continued well being of the sector is our early entry into the eurozone. Many small business men and women will join me in welcoming the announcement in June of the progress that is being made towards satisfying the five economic tests, which is scheduled to be announced by the Chancellor. I hope that soon afterwards we will have an early and successful referendum and an early and unimpeded entry to the eurozone. That will give certainty to the UK's trading position and remove the extra cost of the artificially strong pound values that burden the UK.

Funding in general is a specific problem. The ability to access funds to promote growth is a worry north and south of the border. The Government should be doing more to address the real concern on both sides of the border about the ability to achieve business growth.

Mr. Andrew Love (Edmonton): Does my hon. Friend accept that the formation of new businesses is relatively secure in the United Kingdom economy and that the problem lies with taking small businesses with fewer than 10 employees and growing them into medium-sized and larger businesses? Surely that is the main area that we ought to be looking at.

Mr. Luke: I take my hon. Friend's point. I agree with him in the main, although there is a factor in the Scottish context that inhibits the growth of small businesses; I shall talk about it later. Throughout the UK, to grow from a small company with less than 10 employees to a larger company with between 49 and 250 employees is a big leap, and further finance is needed to ensure that the gap is overcome. I thank my hon. Friend for allowing me to make that point in response to his intervention.

The Government have done a lot to remove the red tape and the bureaucracy about which many complain. I am sure that the hon. Member for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham) will make the point that there is too much bureaucracy. The Government have done great things on removing red tape, on taxation, and on statutory requirements for thousands of businesses. Progress has been made in those areas, but there is a need for more. I am sure that the Minister and others in their discussions with the Federation of Small Businesses will continue to focus on those prime areas of concern.

As a new Member of Parliament with a special interest in such matters, I have visited many small businesses in my constituency and, whenever possible, I have taken the opportunity to engage in dialogue with proprietors, directors or sole traders. They continue to refer to the burden of bureaucracy that hampers their growth and business operations.

Only this week, when people knew that I would be making a contribution to the debate, I had a phone call from a small sole trader in Dundee, who said that, in the

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past, he had been successful in obtaining contracts for small jobs for Government Departments in and about Dundee, but because of European procurement requirements, he was removed from the tendering contract and lost out to a company that had a base in Dundee, but was at the larger end of the small and medium-sized enterprise range and had consequently relocated outside the city. Therefore, the work that is being carried out in the Government Departments in the city is provided by a company located outside the city boundaries—indeed, at some distance from the city. That small business man feels greatly aggrieved. When we look at procurement policies and the way in which Government Departments contract out work, we should at least make some leeway for local small business operators.

Another major area of concern is transport costs and transport infrastructure, which is vital to all the peripheral parts of the UK and which is clearly linked to successful business start-ups and continued profitability. My own area, the north-east of Scotland, is seriously hampered by the lack of modern, high-speed road and rail links down the east coast. The Minister, who represents a seat in Edinburgh, will be only too aware of the poor road links between our part of the country and the rest of the UK—the A1 is very poor. He will also be aware of the concern expressed by hon. Members who represent Edinburgh about the reprioritising of railway investment in the east coast main line through the latest Strategic Rail Authority investment review, which puts back any investment, particularly north of Edinburgh, into the very distant future—perhaps the next millennium, if things go the way that they have in the past. I hope that the Minister will take that up, because it is a cause of concern to many small businesses in Scotland.

I referred earlier to the general underperformance of the Scottish economy when viewed against overall UK economic performance. The "Lifting the Barriers to Growth in UK Small Businesses" survey conducted last year by the Federation of Small Businesses showed a vibrant, ambitious small-business sector flourishing in Scotland. Nevertheless, the survey also showed the clear distinction between the UK-wide business environment and that in Scotland.

Scottish small businesses are showing a much more youthful profile than ever before, and the Scottish small business sector can boast the highest proportion of wholly female-owned small businesses in the UK. However, on the downside, the number of small business start-ups is lower than the UK average. Business owners in Scotland are more likely to have bought a going concern or inherited a business than those in the rest of the UK. On the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton (Mr Love), that means that there are not as many start-ups in Scotland as in the rest of the UK. That must be addressed.

Business turnover is lower in Scotland than elsewhere in the UK, and the number of employees per business is also lower. That is a consequence of Scotland's businesses being subject to more cost constraints in their business activities. Scotland remains the area of the UK in which small businesses find the burdens of transport costs, fuel and road tax most onerous. Some 62 per cent. of those surveyed last year expressed dissatisfaction with Scotland's road infrastructure and its links to UK and European markets.

The use of technology in Scotland's small business sector is comparable with that in the rest of the UK, but access to ISDN and broadband is considerably more limited. Despite the technological differences, there is a clear desire for involvement in new ventures to improve marketing, increase research and development, and break into overseas markets. The ability to achieve those goals and to improve the ability to compete is severely hampered by the divergence I mentioned between the business environments in Scotland and in the UK overall. Poor access to broadband particularly affects my area: access is very bad there, even for Scotland. However, much of the country enjoys unlimited access to broadband.

A great percentage of small businesses have not been able to achieve and sustain real growth because of a lack of access to investment capital, and we must address that as soon as possible. Earlier, I referred to high transport costs resulting from not only fuel prices, but geographical location. Because of the smaller nature of Scottish small businesses, they feel a relatively greater impact on overall costs and eventual turnover from taxes in general, and environmental levies in particular. All that affects the ability of Scottish small businesses to invest in long-term growth and viability.

I freely admit that the remedies and responsibilities for those problems fall not only to this Parliament but to Holyrood. To be fair, considerable progress has been made on such matters, with the Westminster Government cutting and slashing taxes in last year's Budget to ensure that small businesses enjoy more advantages. The Scottish Executive played their part, too, falling in line with the Department of Trade and Industry's new manufacturing and innovative strategy, and announcing new resources to boost joint academic and industrial ventures. I hope that that will increase new start-ups in, for example, life sciences and medical biotechnology, especially in areas such as Dundee. Dundee has a good track record of creating new small companies involved at the sharp end of technology, especially computer-game technology.

Much remains to be done. We must constantly review how we handle the thorny issues of economic growth, both north and south of the border.

Mr. Gareth Thomas (Harrow, West): I apologise to my hon. Friend for missing the first couple of minutes of his contribution. Does he share my hope that the Minister will also address the difficulties that small businesses face when trying to access affordable insurance cover? The cost of insurance cover, if businesses can get it, has multiplied by five for some businesses.

Mr. Luke: I am happy to respond to that because small businesses in my area have brought that issue to my attention. The growth of the cost of insurance cover during the past few years has been unbelievable. Given the insurance industry's problems, that must be tackled. Larger companies have easier access to insurance because they have a larger financial base than small businesses. Small businesses might not grow or might go into liquidation because they are unable to get such cover, so my hon. Friend's point is well made.

I was talking about the need to examine the way in which we manage our policy, and I referred to two specific aspects. The first is the role of enterprise companies and development agencies north and south of the border. If there are problems of divergence between the Scottish and UK growth figures, we must examine ways in which enterprise companies—in this case, the national company Scottish Enterprise—deal with that. We must continue to review their roles and what happens in England where there are development agencies.

Mr. Love: My hon. Friend mentioned the low growth rates of Scottish small businesses compared with that of small businesses in the rest of the United Kingdom. Scottish Enterprise picked up on that issue, set up a special project and invested substantial resources to assist the formation of small businesses in Scotland. As I understand it—the Minister might comment on this—that has not yet produced the additional formation that one would expect. Does my hon. Friend know any reasons why there is such difficulty in forming small businesses in Scotland?

Mr. Luke: I know about that from my constituency experience. I appreciate the national strategy that Scottish Enterprise has put in place, but I do not believe that the strategies employed by enterprise companies in the locale exert real pressure at the grass roots and the coal face for the implementation of the policy. There is no discussion about strategies required for local areas. There is a need to examine not only the national operation of Scottish Enterprise and the development agencies south of the border, but the way in which money channelled through national or regional agencies by Government is to get down to the grass roots. Scottish Enterprise Tayside, the local enterprise company in Tayside, has lost its way on many such issues and it should be more focused. The Government should ensure that it is refocused.

Although the fact that the structure of the companies does not allow for political input might be a good thing, it removes the ability of politicians in Westminster and the Scottish Parliament to give a political and economic focus. We are involved with the trends and we know what is happening in the national economy. That would assist local enterprise companies to devise their strategies accordingly.

Mr. Kerry Pollard (St. Albans): My hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love) said that small businesses are not doing well not only in Scotland, but in several regions of England. Apropos of that, the eastern region is doing really well. There is a culture in the region of getting up and at 'em and a culture of small businesses. However, large businesses have been the norm in other areas of the country, and it is difficult to achieve a culture change from one to another.

Mr. Luke: I happily accept that I am speaking from a Scottish perspective. I examined the figures issued last year by the Treasury and the Department of Trade and Industry, and there are obviously divergences throughout the United Kingdom. Much of that happens for the same reasons as in Scotland: there are peripheral areas served by poor infrastructure and they are affected by the way in which their development agencies work. Although I am speaking from a Scottish perspective, the national Government must do more to refocus the priorities that it sets.

I made these very points in the debate on the Scottish economy in the Scottish Grand Committee last week. Given that Scotland has a separate Parliament, there may be a need to create a cross-border consultative body based on the Irish model, where Ministers meet on a regular basis to discuss the structural problems that affect Scotland's contribution to the UK economy. There could even be a quarterly meeting of Scottish MPs and MSPs to review not only the work of that ministerial body, but also the work of the bodies in Scotland that are charged with creating economic growth and prosperity.

That would give a focus to the work in Scotland and tie it in constitutionally more closely with the workings of the UK Government. In making this suggestion, I reject the arguments put by the Scottish National party. I do not see anyone from the SNP here today, so I do not know what interest they have in the Scottish economy. They did not perform well last week: their concept of financial autonomy—for them a back door for independence—does not hold water. The argument put by the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond)—who is not here today—in the pages of business section of *The Scotsman* yesterday is a recipe for the break-up of a successful economic arrangement that would mean job losses and the loss of work and prosperity in Scotland. I am sorry that there are no SNP Members here to put their case on that point.

Mr. Gareth Thomas: My hon. Friend's contribution has focused on the whole range of general issues that affect small businesses and the climate within which they operate. Will he acknowledge that Scotland has a proud tradition of community-owned small businesses? There is a range of specific issues that affect such businesses, relating to the nature of the legislation and the way in which that legislation has fallen behind company law.

Mr. Luke: Given my previous experience in local government and economic development, and as one who was very much involved in the fostering of small community businesses, I am happy to argue their case and praise their activity, but north of the border they have lost their way—I am not sure about the situation in England. I agree that we need to refocus their structure and address the way in which they can channel funds and prosper.

Credit unions have been a big success in providing funding and bringing corporate co-operative action together. There is a need to look at that sector, because it is a good and useful vehicle for creating small business ventures that are collectively owned. There is a need to consider different models outwith the normal models, such as sole traders or small partnerships, by creating community-based organisations. That is something that I know the Government are keen to do, and in Scotland, there has been an emphasis on that in the past.

I am glad that we have had time to stage this important debate. It reminds us that we should never forget or belittle the contribution that small businesses make to the economic life of this country. Without

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doubt, they are the wellspring and the fountain of regeneration in the British economy. We must make sure that new companies appear, grow, become larger employers and provide prosperity, services and employment throughout the British economy. The massive multinationals often steal much of the economic limelight, but without the solid base of the small business sector, the British economy would be built on weak foundations.

I know that the Minister has done a great deal in this area and I look forward to hearing what more the Government can do to sustain and encourage small businesses. Earlier this week the Secretary of State for Scotland had meetings in Scotland to discuss the role that the Government could play, and I hope that those discussions with small businesses and business in general will pay dividends. The Government have made tremendous efforts to promote growth in the future and set the scene for the eagerly awaited economic upturn.

There will, no doubt, be criticism of the Government and of some of their policies, as well as claims that they have not done enough to foster small businesses, but the figures show that there has been considerable growth, and in that light, the charges appear unfounded. Hopefully, the Government will make the case—I am sure that the Minister will—that small businesses in the UK benefit from the least-regulated regime in Europe. I hope that we can do more to reduce that regulation.

As we are discussing issues relating to the Scottish economy as well as the UK economy, I am sorry that no SNP Member is present. I am sure that their leader is in the House, although I would have thought that he would have ensured that there was a representative in this Chamber to speak on behalf of his party in this debate.

I hope that the Government will take note of what is said in this debate, and that they will examine the infrastructure and structural problems in the Scottish economy in relation to the UK economy. The Federation of Small Businesses has been active in putting the case for small businesses. Only yesterday, in the business section of *The Scotsman*, John Downie poured scorn on the manufacturing plans in the Scottish manufacturing steering group report. At the end of the day, the Federation of Small Businesses makes a positive contribution to the work of the Government, by ensuring that they do what they can to ensure that small businesses are fostered. It is essential that we do all that we can to ensure that that growth continues.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Frank Cook): Order. I see hon. Members rising who have not notified me of their intention to speak. In 90-minute Adjournment debates, it is customary to commence the first of the three winding-up speeches no later than 30 minutes before conclusion, which means that there are now 29 minutes for open debate. I ask those hon. Members who are seeking to contribute to bear that in mind, not only in their personal contributions, but in interventions that they make or accept. We must start the first of the three winding-up speeches by 3 o'clock.

2.32 pm

Ms Meg Munn (Sheffield, Heeley): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, East (Mr. Luke) on securing this debate. I am pleased to have the opportunity to take part, because I also have an interest in small businesses in the north of England, although obviously my hon. Friend is from a bit further north. I shall focus on the importance of small businesses to strong regional economies and, in doing so, I will identify particular ways of doing business. There are some business organisations in my part of the world that could be employed in other parts of Britain. I shall also focus briefly on women entrepreneurs.

A couple of weeks ago, the regional development agency, Yorkshire Forward, launched its 10-year regional economic strategy and focused on the skills that will be needed for the region to progress over the next 10 years. It also identified the need for more small businesses and greater growth. I am especially pleased that in Sheffield, as well as the usual business support that the Government have introduced, for example, through the Small Business Service business links programme, we have agencies that offer support to businesses to help them become established, to grow and succeed.

Sheffield chamber of commerce is one of the most successful in the country. I attended an event last week when it took over responsibility for the Sheffield enterprise agency, which takes referrals from the Small Business Service to help people to launch their businesses. The most interesting speech of the evening—even more interesting than my own—was from a young woman who had been in the beauty business for only eight weeks. She was clearly very experienced in her area of work. She had worked for major companies such as Yves Saint Laurent or Yves Rocher— Yves somebody-or-other, anyway—and had managed the training for people throughout the UK, but she decided that she wanted to have a better work-life balance. She wanted to use her skills to set up her own beauty treatment business from home, and she had been enabled to do that with the support of the Sheffield enterprise agency.

Sheffield chamber of commerce also has responsibility for the south Yorkshire international trade centre, which works with businesses to see how they can take advantage of the opportunities to export to the EU and more widely. That scheme is recognised as successful. Those involved with the trade centre enjoyed Prince Andrew's visit last month, during which he learned about the work that is being done there.

We are not only interested in businesses created from one model. In Sheffield, we have a long-established co-operative development agency, and I am especially pleased that more than 10 per cent. of the Labour co-operative MPs have taken an interest in the debate and are present today. That shows how important mutuals and social enterprise are to the economy. It is pleasing to know that work is being done to put into action the Department of Trade and Industry's clear aim of more support for social enterprises. I welcome the proposals for a more supportive legislative environment, and I welcome the fact that in future each business link must plan to support social enterprises. I would be pleased to hear from the Minister about that area of work when he has the time to respond.

There are some excellent examples in my constituency. Heeley city farm is not just part of the city farm movement; it has expanded to provide training through the new deal, it has a garden centre and café and it has just been awarded money to develop a large community composting scheme. Next to that we have Heeley development trust, which is a community-owned organisation that manages community resources. That provides a particularly interesting model, because it tries to do what the Government want such organisations to do. It aims to own buildings and rent them out, so that it can move from being grant-funded to being self sufficient. Sheffield Rebuild is also a good example of social enterprise, and it is one of the fastest growing businesses in Sheffield. It trains young people entering the construction industry, and it supplies building services to social housing providers in Sheffield. It recently won a special social enterprise award in the inner city 100 awards.

Small businesses struggle, and I have visited some in my constituency. The owner of Ponsford's furniture store told me that one of his real problems was how to deal with the range of issues involved in running a small business without a large supporting personnel department and particular expertise. For that reason, I welcome the red tape busting roadshow initiative led by the Yorkshire and Humber chamber of commerce, which travels throughout Yorkshire giving advice to small businesses, such as telling them where they can go when they have a problem. The reality for many small businesses is that certain problems do not arise every day: they may come across some issues only every now and then. By offering small businesses signposts to the organisations that can help them, they may become less isolated and more confident in dealing with the range of regulations.

One arguments says that we should have less regulation, but I will talk later about women in business and about the benefits that they have received from various changes that the Government have introduced. We must recognise that such changes are often beneficial to the business community and to the economy, and that it is important to enable small businesses to deal with the relevant issues.

Hon. Members may know that I asked a question last week about the DTI's work on developing help for women entrepreneurs. I was able to use that to highlight the fact that a survey undertaken by Global Entrepreneurship Monitor 2002, which is a worldwide survey of entrepreneurial activity, showed that in Yorkshire and Humberside women are leading men. I received some good press coverage about the Yorkshire lasses—a term that I do not take offence at.

Although women are ahead of men in Yorkshire and Humberside, the level of entrepreneurial activity is still low compared with the eastern region, which my hon. Friend the Member for St. Albans (Mr. Pollard) mentioned. Overall, men in the UK are twice as likely to set up a business as women. If women were setting up small businesses at the same rate as men, there would be 100,000 new businesses a year.

What can be done? A range of things can be done. When I first went to the Sheffield business club I was surprised to see the number of women there. Many of them, like the young woman I mentioned earlier, had been working for somebody else, but had decided that they had the skills and ability to work on their own. They were getting support from other people through the Sheffield small business initiatives and advice on where to get help. Those women were feeling their way through, and, as the young woman said last week, starting to feel more confident in realising and living their dreams. There are some wonderful examples of successful businesses. The Minister was complimentary about Diva, which is a female-run, public relations company in Sheffield that recently won three awards. The women there have told me that they now need help to move on to the next stage. That is an area that my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love) mentioned earlier. The Small Business Service is to provide support for fast-growing businesses.

Other aspects of Government policy also help women, such as improved child care resources. Indeed, many women are going into the business sector of child care. There is the increased financial support for families, such as the child tax credit, and higher child benefit, which enables women to afford child care and gives them the space to set up their businesses. There is also the Government's strategy for more flexible working, which means that parents are better able to combine their working lives with their family responsibilities. I do not believe that that causes problems for business, contrary to what some might say. When businesses can adapt to that strategy and positively embrace it, they keep their staff and do not have the expensive problem of recruiting additional people.

I know that many other hon. Members want to contribute to the debate, so I shall conclude. We want more small businesses to grow and to be provided with more support. Some of the organisations that operate in my constituency could be replicated elsewhere to support people going into business. We want to encourage a range of support, especially child care, to enable women to go forward and take up opportunities.

2.42 pm

Mr. Gareth Thomas (Harrow, West): I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, East (Mr. Luke) on securing the debate and on the way in which he made his case. He was absolutely right to praise the campaigning work of the Federation of Small Businesses, and in his comments about the Scottish National party. However, he might also have expressed surprise at how few members of the main Opposition party could be bothered to be here for such an important debate.

I want to focus on three issues, two of which have come up in the interventions that I have made on my hon. Friend. The third and perhaps parochial point concerned west London. I represent a seat in west London. The west London economy provides two and a half times as many jobs as the City of London, but the issues facing the area receive significantly less column inches than the City of London. Recent research by Business Link for London has highlighted a range of issues. If we could sort those out, west London's economic performance could be even stronger than it is at the moment in the small business area.

Many small businesses feed off large, flagship developments. In west London we shall benefit from the modernisation of Wembley stadium, the new terminal 5

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programme at Heathrow and the White City development. Those flagship developments have brought transport capacity in the west London area into stark relief. One issue that I urge the Minister to take back to the Department and to continue to promote in discussions with colleagues in the Ministry for Transport is the importance of Crossrail for the west London economy. I also urge the Minister gently to promote the need for more investment in trams and intermediate forms of travel in the west London economy. The Croydon tram link has proved, beyond wildest expectations, the benefits of investment in intermediate forms of transport for the south London economy. Frankly, we want the benefits in west London as well. The 140 bus route from my constituency to Heathrow would be an ideal route for such investment.

I want the Minister to tackle the difficulties facing small businesses over insurance cover. Compulsory employer's liability cover and public liability insurance are two particular aspects of insurance cover that I had in mind. An AXA survey published in December suggested that some 210,000 small and medium-sized businesses have no employer's liability cover at all. The construction sector has been especially badly hit by the rising cost of premiums for insurance cover. Given that such cover is a legal requirement, many businesses face the choice of either trading illegally, closing down the business or trying to pass on the cost of the increased premiums. For many businesses, all those choices are difficult and may result in a move away from reputable companies to those less keen on sticking to legislation.

The Government have recognised the considerable difficulties over insurance cover. In last year's pre-Budget report, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced a review that would be conducted by the Department for Work and Pensions. The Office of Fair Trading is also studying the market for liability insurance cover. How is that work progressing? If the Minister could give us some details on that, several firms in the construction, repair and modernisation sector in my constituency that are currently faced with that most pressing problem would have more confidence.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Ms Munn) referred to the not-for-profit small business sector. The Minister will be aware of the strategy set out in the report published last year "Private Action: Public Benefit". The strategy aims to review the issues facing the not-for-profit sector, recognising that the legal forms available to such businesses are certainly not appropriate as they stand. The report made a series of recommendations on the need to modernise the law on industrial and provident society legislation beyond the legislative reform already initiated by my hon. Friend the Member for South Derbyshire (Mr. Todd) in his private Member's Bill. The report also recognised the need to bring into law much more quickly than at present the industrial and provident society rules and regulations in comparison with company law where appropriate.

I hope that the Minister will be able to shed some further light on regional development agencies and whether they are being encouraged more fully to recognise the potential of social enterprises. I look forward to his response.

2.48 pm

Mr. Kerry Pollard (St. Albans): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, East (Mr. Luke) on securing the debate. I also congratulate the Minister on his proactive approach to small businesses. He and his team have a high and increasing reputation for all their efforts in the small and medium-sized enterprises sector. There is no doubt that the SME sector in the United Kingdom has helped our economy through the global slowdown. Without that, we would be in a much worse situation. The SME sector as a whole must congratulate itself on achieving that.

In the UK, it takes one day to set up a small business; in Europe, it takes many weeks. That is how we view small businesses here and how we ought to encourage them to set up and react. Recently, an Act was passed here that enabled a small business to fail, get up, dust itself off and start all over again. That is more good news, delivered by this Labour Government.

There are of course problems for the small business sector. A small business man will say, "All I want is for Government to get off my back; I want no rules, no regulation, no forms. I will pay some tax when I feel like it. I want to be left to run my business as I want." That is not the real world, no matter how much some would like it to be. I know that the Minister is doing his level best to apply a light touch. There are problems with factoring, which is a major issue for small businesses, and with the high and increasing costs of insurance. My hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love) referred to that. Costs rose by as much as 50 per cent. and sometimes 60 per cent. year on year; that is a huge burden for small businesses to carry.

I draw to hon. Members' attention the example of a small, very successful business in my constituency. It is called Hocking NDT; NDT stands for non-destructive testing. It is a small firm that specialises in testing aircraft parts, and it is vital that it does its work properly. Two of its employees decided that they could put the technology to use on rail track. At present, people test the track by walking along it at a speed of about 1.8 mph. The two employees designed a device that can be attached to the front of a train to go at 65 mph, doing exactly the same job. That is revolutionary. Two employees of a family concern did that in their own time. The device has now been patented.

That is an example of the entrepreneurial skills that we have in this country in abundance. We must encourage those skills to ensure that small businesses flourish. That will help our economy by providing jobs and tax revenue. It is the way forward. I am sure that the Minister will come up with solutions to some of the problems that hon. Members outlined. I will shut up now to let others speak.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I call first Mr. Love and ask him to speak briefly.

2.51 pm

Mr. Andrew Love (Edmonton): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I had not intended to speak, so you are right to ask me to be brief. First, I echo the comments of every hon. Member this afternoon on the contribution of the small business sector to the British economy. When speaking of the economy, we always think of the largest companies such as British Airways and British Petroleum, and of course they make a major contribution. However, small businesses are major and growing employers and wealth creators in our economy.

I wish to raise with the Minister a point that I made earlier in an intervention: our problem in the United Kingdom does not seem to relate directly to the formation of small businesses, although there are regional variations. Our economy seems to have a relatively buoyant formation of small businesses. Where our economy does not seem to be operating as effectively as it should is in developing those small businesses into medium and large businesses. Germany has a very large middle business sector that is a major contributor to its economy. We must return to that issue time and again to make the most of business formation and business growth to help the economy and to provide employment.

Every hon. Member touched on regulation. However, if we leave behind the sterile debate that often goes on in Westminster we shall find that we need balanced, reasonable regulation for small businesses. Regulation should not be a burden on them; it should help them to achieve their functions more effectively. In my capacity as secretary of the all-party small business group, I have listened to numerous debates about the concerns of business, both here and in my constituency, and I accept that we should reduce regulation. However, whenever we discuss which regulation should not be applied it becomes difficult to find anyone who can suggest what to do. Whichever regulation is suggested—whether it concerns minimum wages, working families or health and safety—people of every political hue claim that important safeguards and regulations must remain for the sake of both employees and employers. We must get away from sterile debate and accept that regulation is here to stay. We shall never get rid of it, but we need to find a balance by keeping the right regulation and getting rid of that which is not appropriate.

One of the main ways in which we can find that balance is to have a change of culture at Westminster. All the pressures in Parliament are for more and more regulation. We need to create pressures that will reduce regulation. I shall not list all the factors that go towards increasing legislation, but I shall touch on one that has helped to reduce it. I pay tribute to the Conservative Government—I do not often do that, so the hon. Member for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham) should listen carefully—for the formation of the Deregulation Sub-Committee. That produced a number of measures that have reduced regulation. However, the real impetus to start the process came from the Labour Government when they transformed the Deregulation Sub-Committee into what is now the Select Committee on Deregulation and Regulatory Reform. The speed of deregulation has accelerated greatly in the last couple of years. That is a first step along the road.

We need to take other steps; I suggest two in particular. First, Government Departments should have placed upon them a duty to report on how they have deregulated as well as regulated, so that the public and Parliament can know what is happening. Secondly, the Deregulation and Regulatory Reform Committee has a co-ordinating role to fulfil. It should look across Government Departments to see what is done by each of them in order to reduce regulation and, if necessary, to scrutinise departmental activity and call to account Ministers whose Departments are not performing that function. If we add those measures together, we shall have a significant impetus towards deregulation. We shall then have a sensible way forward: at the same time as we create regulation, we shall also reduce it where it has become redundant. That would satisfy the small business community and would play a major part in allowing it to grow and to contribute even more to the economy.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I call Mr. Lazarowicz to speak very briefly.

2.58 pm

Mr. Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh, North and Leith): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, East (Mr. Luke) on securing the debate and I apologise to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and other hon. Members for having missed part of it. In two minutes, I shall make two brief points.

First, I suggest to the Minister that it is always important to consider not just the good things that he and his Department are doing to promote small business. Like many hon. Members, I am impressed by the way in which the Government have simplified the regulatory framework. However, they should also look at the effects on small businesses of other policies. Businesses in my constituency have raised with me the effect of the current investigation by the Office of Fair Trading into pharmacies. Lindsay and Gilmour, which has its head office in my constituency, runs some 10 community pharmacies in different parts of Scotland. The company is worried that its ability to run those outlets as small businesses might be affected by the review of pharmacy provision. I am not in favour of a protectionist approach to small businesses, but we must consider how they are affected by wider policies.

Finally, the Federation of Small Businesses has commented on what it sees as the unfair burden on the self-employed, as opposed to incorporated businesses. The Government have done much to encourage the sole trader, but there is a strong case for shifting the balance further to ensure that the self-employed enjoy some of the advantages of incorporated businesses when they start up. Let us not forget that many small businesses are not necessarily the fruit of a carefully thought-through business plan or a strategy for business development. Often, they start as someone's hobby or spare-time activity, which then expands into a business. Many such businesses fail, but many others succeed, and we should do what we can to encourage them.

3 pm

Brian Cotter (Weston-super-Mare): I congratulate the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. Luke) on securing the debate. He made many interesting points, and I particularly welcome his remarks on the euro, because it is important to highlight the problems in terms of manufacturing companies' productivity. I also echo the hon. Gentleman's concern about broadband. Work is going on, but many rural areas are still not connected, and I hope that the Minister will give the point serious consideration.

[Brian Cotter]

The hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Ms Munn) made some key points about women in business. She also highlighted the fact that the Government and others had introduced many initiatives—about 180 of various sorts—to help groups in the business community, such as women. I urge the Minister to recognise the need to pull together and examine those initiatives so that they can be made more generally effective. At present, as the hon. Lady said in relation to Sheffield, they are very effective only in certain areas.

Yesterday, I met a member of the Afro-Caribbean business community, and we talked about its problems. There is also the issue of young people. I hope that the Minister will take all those issues on board.

At this stage, I should declare an interest. I am the director of a small manufacturing company, which obviously means that I am very interested in and welcome the debate.

As hon. Members have made clear, small businesses are an important factor in this country's economic thrust. They make up a large proportion of businesses, employing people and generating jobs and money. They are also community based and recycle money into the local area, which is important in terms of keeping areas going. The same is not true of the big supermarkets, whose money goes to a central pot and, for all I know, offshore. Another important aspect of small businesses is that they provide diversity and choice in local areas, and cater for local needs and interests.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) particularly wanted me to refer to an organisation called Computer Village, in Bath. It recently received an award for excellence as a computer retailer. Given that it comes up against big companies, that is a tribute to the way in which small businesses effectively deliver services.

I come from a manufacturing background, and I pay tribute to a manufacturing company in my constituency called Nickel-Electro, which has 60 employees. I recently visited it, and its innovativeness shows that small firms are often more ambitious and interesting. They can drive things forward because they are more contained and can take decisions quickly, in a way that big businesses often cannot. I congratulate those two companies.

Many hon. Members mentioned red tape, and we need to raise the issue frequently. I say that particularly because the payroll costs of small businesses are something like £288 per employee; a big company would pay only a fiver. The business rate is also disproportionately weighted against small companies. I urge the Government to consider those points—the payroll and bureaucracy costs and the business rates for small business being so large.

A report was recently published on regulatory impact assessments. I have served on several Standing Committees, and I have often urged the Government to consider doing regulatory impact assessments for Bills. Ministers consistently say that they are doing so, but I consistently see them not doing it well enough. I urge the Government to consider what happens in the Netherlands, where a separate organisation has the job of making an impact assessment and examining the ways in which, for example, small businesses might be hit by legislation. That would be better than the blanket statement that a Bill would cost £350 million—or whatever figure it might be.

Other hon. Members have mentioned the Small Business Service. Liberal Democrat Members welcomed that initiative, but I am a little disappointed. The initial concept was that the service should provide a robust, strong voice for small businesses; it would be independent of the Department of Trade and Industry and would say what needed to be said. It is not fulfilling that purpose terribly well, because it is not sufficiently independent. The head of the service should by now be a household name—someone who is known for fighting on behalf of small businesses, someone who would cause the Minister to quake in his shoes a little, someone who is ready to hammer him into the deck. That seems not to be happening, and I hope that something will be done to address that particular problem.

The Government took a long time to respond to the Cruickshank report, but small businesses still express concern about the banks, about interest payments and about the difficulty of switching from one bank to another. I hope that the Minister will refer also to that.

The hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) and others referred to insurance matters. I see the chairman of the all-party small business group, the hon. Member for St. Albans (Mr. Pollard), nodding his head—he, too, referred to them. I urge those hon. Members who have not yet done so to put their names to my early-day motion on that matter. I am glad to say that the Government listened. Two reports were organised, one from the Department for Work and Pensions and one from the Office of Fair Trading. I think that the DWP report will be published shortly. I hope that both reports will be addressed quickly by the Government because the problems need to be tackled urgently.

I know of companies whose premiums have increased by 600 per cent. and more. For one company in my constituency, the cost of insurance went up from £9,000 to £48,000 in one hit. The Minister will agree, I am sure, that that is not tenable, and I hope that the Government will address the issue. I have met many representatives of the insurance industry as well as of business. I try, as we all should, to work alongside them, but we want openness and clarity on the subject. I think that the Small Business Service should have been fighting harder on that front, helping those companies whose premiums have been unfairly raised simply because they operate a certain category of business. Within those categories, some are more risk-prone than others. Risk management is an issue that could be covered.

I am glad to see that the problem suffered by newsagents has been addressed after the report of the Office of Fair Trading. There are many problems for small businesses and I am worried, in particular, about local pharmacies. They are so important to the local community, but they are currently at risk. I hope that the Minister will address such a serious issue. I thank the hon. Member for Dundee, East for calling the debate.

3.10 pm

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): I begin by declaring an interest that is specified in the Register of Members' Interests. I congratulate the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. Luke) on introducing such an excellent debate. Many local examples have been cited of exactly how vital the small firms sector is to the economy. The hon. Gentleman rightly spoke about the need to foster innovation and entrepreneurship, and put such matters in the wider Scottish economic context.

The hon. Gentleman was right to chastise SNP Members for not turning up here today. Time and again, they have gone on about how they are the friends of small businesses, yet they do not bother to attend such an important debate. The hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) said that I am the only member of the official Opposition who is present. I must point out that, when we debated the Industrial Development (Financial Assistance) Bill on Monday, only one Labour Back Bencher was present. Many other things are going on today. There is an important debate in the main Chamber, so it is good news that so many people have turned up here.

The hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Ms Munn) made the good point that the burdens, particularly the overall impact of red tape, fall disproportionately on small firms because they do not have the resources or the personnel to deal with them. She also flagged up sign posting. Will the Minister explain the progress of the Department of Trade and Industry's business support review? There are many schemes to support small businesses, but they are often faced with a plethora of schemes and the situation becomes confusing. The hon. Lady was right to flag up female entrepreneurs. We all want more women in business.

The hon. Member for Harrow, West referred to employer and public liability. That was also picked up by the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare (Brian Cotter). The Minister will note that exchanges were made on such matters during Department of Trade and Industry questions. In fact, I have referred to two horror stories of companies whose premiums have rocketed sky high. The hon. Member for Harrow, West asked about the reports of the Department for Work and Pensions and the Office of Fair Trading. Many firms cannot wait any longer. As the hon. Gentleman said, a few are trading illegally now and many others need respite quickly.

The hon. Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love) made the interesting point that not enough small businesses move from small firm status to the middle size—mittelstand—status. That is a fair observation. I do not know whether research has been done on such matters. Obviously, in Germany many more smaller firms can move on. That is perhaps because there is not the tradition in Germany of small businesses trying immediately to go public. Many companies have come on to the A market, but it would be interesting to see how many of them started as small companies and how many of the equivalent companies in Germany decided to remain privately owned, middle-sized businesses.

The hon. Gentleman was right to talk about the regulatory impact assessment regime. He referred to the need to widen the Deregulation and Regulatory Reform Committee, so that we have deregulation reports from Whitehall. That is an extremely sensible suggestion. I wish to put another idea to the Minister. The Government could build on the small firms loan guarantee scheme. I know that the Government and the Confederation of British Industry are keen on such an initiative. The scheme has been a huge success. The Minister will be aware that since it started in 1981, more than 80,000 loans have been guaranteed. The value of those loans is now well over £3 billion. The average size of a loan is about £37,000. The scheme plugs an important funding gap for small businesses.

I hope that, when the Department of Trade and Industry considers the business support measures and puts in place a review of them, it will think about expanding the scheme. I notice that that will be in the submissions of many trade associations and small business organisations to the Chancellor for his Budget. After all, when such firms succeed—and most of them do—the money gets paid back. The Government only guarantee the loan. I ask the Minister to consider carefully whether the small firms loan guarantee scheme could be extended to various other categories. Why, for example, does it not cover banking, finance and associated services, or education?

The hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley mentioned getting more women entrepreneurs involved in small businesses. Many women want to become involved in small businesses on the education support services front, yet they cannot qualify for the small firms loan guarantee scheme if their business is in any way connected with education. That is a ridiculous anomaly. The same is true of businesses affiliated to medical, health and veterinary services; they cannot get a Government-backed loan. Motor vehicle repair and servicing are very important in some of our constituencies, where there are many young people who want to go into that kind of business, but retail and transport are also excluded.

We could make the scheme a little more flexible overall. I shall give the example of a company that did not get a loan. It was a business that needed funding to cope with increased orders. It was excluded from securing a £250,000 loan because, despite having been in existence for two years, its parent had gone into receivership, and the management team had bought the company from the receiver and traded with the same staff, premises, customers and order book. The Small Business Service interpreted the change in ownership as a cessation of business.

I hope that the Minister will take from this debate the strong points made by many hon. Members. Obviously, there are some things that the Government cannot do, but there are others that they can, and some of them do not cost any more money. I would have thought that extending and reinforcing the success of the small firms loan guarantee scheme would be a good way of telling the small business sector that the Government want to do all they can to help them.

The Liberal Democrat spokesman mentioned the burdens of red tape. Does the Minister agree with David Frost, the Director General of the British Chambers of Commerce, who said the other day that the community burden of red tape has now reached over £20 billion, excluding the £10.2 billion cost of the minimum wage, which my party firmly supports? Mr. Frost went on to say:

> "Red tape is strangling British productivity and it is threatening to combine with other blocks on business to create critical mass that will destroy jobs through a dramatic loss of competitiveness."

[Mr. Henry Bellingham]

That has become a great worry. I hope that the Minister will comment on what David Frost said, because some of those burdens are home-grown and are being gold-plated. Some have come out of Europe, and the Government have no control over them. However, 60 per cent. of the burdens came from the UK.

The Liberal Democrat spokesman mentioned the report commissioned by the British Chambers of Commerce by Tim Ambler of the London business school and Francis Chittenden of Manchester business school. They considered 200 regulatory impact assessments. According to their report, only 11 per cent. of impact assessments even considered the possibility that there might be an alternative to legislation. Some 60 per cent. of the 200 assessments examined said that the consultation with the stakeholders was very poor indeed. An example that they gave—and this might be something that the hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley supports—was the Government's policy on the right to demand flexible contracts. The cost of that to business is some £296 million a year. The benefit to businesses will also be substantial, but no alternative was proposed and there was no proper consultation on it. Does the Minister agree with David Frost's conclusion from the study?

The Minister will know that storm clouds are brewing on the horizon. The CBI's last report was very gloomy, and today's figures show that manufacturing and investment are at their lowest level since records began. That is not good news. I know that the Minister recognises that, because he has great energy and enthusiasm and a great weight falls on his shoulders. The new jobs that must replicate those lost to manufacturing must come from the small firms sector, and we look to the Minister to respond to those important points.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman rightly drew attention to his interests in the Register of Members' Interests, which is as it should be. However, that is not much help to hon. Members who are participating in the debate if they cannot refer to the register. I shall make representations to arrange for copies of the register and "Dod's Parliamentary Companion" to be made available on each side of the rostrum, so that hon. Members in the Chamber will have full information available.

3.20 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Nigel Griffiths): I am proud to be the Minister with responsibility for small businesses. I am proud to have a great team at the Department of Trade and Industry, and I am proud of the Small Business Service and many business links.

I am proud of the role that small businesses play in ensuring that we have the fastest growing economy in the G7 and the fourth largest economy in the world. I am proud of the quality of the contributions of my hon. Friends, and of their commitment to small businesses in not only their towns and communities, but throughout the United Kingdom. None of my colleagues are more committed than my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, East (Mr. Luke), who articulately voiced many of the issues that affect and interest small businesses. I congratulate him on his contribution.

Small businesses play a major part in our economy. The Federation of Small Businesses, the British Chambers of Commerce, the Institute of Directors, the Forum of Private Business and the Confederation of British Industry's small and medium-sized enterprises council play an invaluable role in advising me and, I am sure, the Opposition and colleagues about what is good for small businesses. Perhaps the fact that we have taken their advice is one of the reasons why 1.7 million small businesses have started in the past five years, and why their survival rates are the highest for a decade.

There are issues in Scotland—nowhere more than in Dundee—that my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, East rightly highlighted. I am delighted by recent developments in Dundee that have made it one of the top biocentres in the UK and, therefore, in Europe. The University of Dundee has done tremendous work on spin-out companies, and several will be world showcase companies. I talked today to Iain Gray, the Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning in the Scottish Executive, about the valuable role played by Dundee, and he told me about recent examples, including two today, that will take the expenditure on spin-out companies from the university to £30 million. One such company, Calico Jack, received a £40,000 smart award, which is a Government grant to help it to take its technology at the micro-project level toward commercialisation. Another company is CXR Biosciences, which has attracted £4 million from the private and public sector and is the university's newest spin-out company. I will want to follow the company's progress through my hon. Friend.

None of that would have happened without the commitment of my hon. Friend and others in the Dundee area to putting Dundee on the map and sending the clear message that Dundee is one of the best places in Britain to set up and grow a small business. The small business gateway in Dundee spends £23 million, and receives a contribution from Dundee city council of £115,000. That spending ensures that there is a one-stop shop in Dundee not only for people who are growing a business, which was a vital point made by my hon. Friend, but for people who are starting businesses. That £23 million contribution is very valuable. It complements the work done by business link organisations in England through the Small Business Service, which provided 250,000 businesses with advice and support last year, including 18,000 start-ups. I agree that the focus should not only be on start-ups, but on businesses that are willing and able to grow.

I now turn directly to the key issues that have been raised. Procurement is vitally important. One of the first questions that I asked when I became a Minister at the Department of Trade and Industry was how a small business got the contract to clean the carpet or the windows. The bundling of contracts has been detrimental to small companies. I am pleased that the representations that I made in my first few months as Minister resulted in the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, who has responsibility for these matters, abolishing the requirement to supply three years of accounts. That is a welcome move, although it is only a beginning.

I recently had a meeting with my right hon. Friend to progress that agenda, and I am confident that the Treasury will work with us on behalf of small businesses to ensure that anachronistic procurement rules are changed so that the public get value for money while, at the same time, small businesses get a fair crack of the whip.

Every hon. Member will know about the problems caused by insurance. I have had several meetings, not only with the stakeholder groups that I mentioned earlier, but with the Association of British Insurers and the British Insurance Brokers' Association. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Work, my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to the Treasury and I sit in a tripartite committee. I do not apply a blame culture to insurance companies. There are commercial pressures and wrong decisions can be taken. We must work together to do what we can to alleviate the burden. Small businesses must have affordable cover, and we are working hard with the industry to come up with practical solutions.

It is vital to do what we can on regulatory impact assessments. I was in Brussels last Wednesday and I was interested to hear what Nick Clegg, the Liberal Democrat MEP, said about the need to have regulatory impact assessments in Brussels, especially when regulations are amended by the European Parliament that do not appear to have had a proper impact assessment. We have an established RIA procedure, and although there are always grounds for improvement, I gain satisfaction from the fact that our European colleagues and their civil servants come to see what we are doing. We are always open to suggestions for improvement.

The small firms loan guarantee scheme is especially vital. I know that every hon. Member will have constituents who have benefited from it. There was a barrier in 1993 to certain sectors, some of which have been mentioned. I asked for the criteria to be examined and questioned whether what applied a decade ago should still apply. I am pleased that we were able to persuade my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer to make a change that comes into effect on 1 April. The number of sectors eligible will be extended to include retailing, catering, coal, hairdressing, house and estate agents, libraries, museums, cultural activities, motor vehicle repair and servicing, steel and travel agents.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Ms Munn) eloquently raised a key issue. I have visited several companies in her constituency. She mentioned the role of women entrepreneurs. Only about 33 per cent. of companies in Britain are set up by women entrepreneurs. My hon. Friend highlighted the fact that there would be 100,000 more new businesses if women set them up at the same rate as men. Our extension of the small firms loan guarantee scheme as from 1 April to industries such as catering will bring benefits to women and women entrepreneurs.

I am pleased that we are the fourth biggest economy in the world. I want us to maintain that position. To do that, we must ensure that we embrace the talents of everyone in our society, regardless of race or gender, so that the benefits are enjoyed by everyone in our society and are passed on to our children and grandchildren. I congratulate my hon. Friend on raising this important topic.

Public Accountability (Wales)

3.30 pm

Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent): At the time of the last referendum we were promised that just about everything that was bad in Welsh politics would be confined to the dustbin of history if only we had the good sense to vote for an Assembly. A new Jerusalem was going to be produced in Wales's green and pleasant land. The days in which unelected and unaccountable individuals in quangos made decisions on behalf of communities were to come to an end—so were the days when individual Ministers in the Welsh Office made decisions that were not subject to a vote. Those Ministers, by the way, had been democratically elected, were accountable and could, indeed, be removed.

The quangos were to be the first victim of that new Jerusalem. Indeed, all of the political parties that campaigned for a yes vote in the referendum were committed to the abolition of the quango state in Wales—not just one, two or three quangos, but the lot. In the words that were used at the time, we were going to make a bonfire of the quangos. Sadly, that has not happened. There has been no bonfire. In fact, it has been a damp squib. If anyone has researched the matter, they will find that there are as many quangos in Wales now—and probably more—than there were when Ron Davies first made the commitment in 1995, or by the time that the referendum was held, or since the Assembly was first set up.

It seems that those people and all the political parties in the Assembly have learned to love rule by quangos. At the same time, they knew that the commitment was a cheap publicity stunt. Anyone who had bothered to read the Bill, which became an Act, would know that it contained no powers to allow the Assembly to abolish the most important—the executive—quangos in Wales. However, it is not just a matter of having the executive powers to deal with the quangos. The Assembly has the powers to deal with the non-executive quangos, but its lack of commitment is shown by the fact that it has failed to abolish them. We still have a quango state in Wales. If the bonfire had happened, we could have been subject, for want of a better word, to a more democratic and accountable Wales.

Adam Price (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): The hon. Gentleman's railing against the dangers of government by unelected appointees would carry considerably more weight if he had supported the proposal for an elected second Chamber in Parliament. He voted against both the 100 per cent. and the 80 per cent. elected options. If patronage is wrong in the case of the Welsh Assembly, why is it right in Westminster?

Llew Smith: I was not defending patronage in this place.

Adam Price: Why did the hon. Gentleman not vote for 80 per cent.?

Llew Smith: The hon. Gentleman posed the question and I assume that he wants to hear the answer that I am attempting to give. I did not vote for patronage in the House. I am totally opposed to a second Chamber that

[Llew Smith]

is made up of appointed members. If we had such a second Chamber, it would be a quango like those that we are subject to in Wales. A quango is a quango, regardless of whether it is in Westminster or Wales. That is why I voted against that type of second Chamber and in favour of refusing to set up any second Chamber in this community. My position is simple: if the Scottish Parliament does not need a second Chamber, why does Westminster need one?

Adam Price: Why did the hon. Gentleman not vote for 80 per cent.?

Llew Smith: You are not only posing questions, but answering them too—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Frank Cook): Order. The Chair is not posing any questions. A 30-minute Adjournment debate is essentially an opportunity for an hon. or right hon. Member to raise an issue with the Government and get responses from the relevant Ministers. Interventions are allowed, but continuous harassment and barracking are not.

Llew Smith: I welcome interventions. I deliberately made my contribution relatively short to encourage them because several weeks ago I tried to intervene on a debate on the single currency but was refused.

I do not believe that the people and the political parties that made up the yes campaign were serious in their commitment to make a bonfire of the quangos. The Assembly did not get powers to deal with the most important of them—the executive quangos—but it has powers to deal with non-executive quangos. However, there are still more non-executive quangos today than there were when the Assembly was set up. That suggests that the people and political parties that made that commitment were not serious and that it was a public relations stunt.

Several weeks ago, I was at a lobby where that point became relevant. Trade unions in Wales, including Unison, were in Westminster to lobby Members of Parliament because of the transfer of housing stock. They did not come here to complain that powers were being transferred from the Assembly to local authorities: their objection was that pressure was being applied to transfer the power over housing stock from local authorities to the Welsh Assembly. I found that unacceptable, as did just about everyone else who attended that lobby. The Assembly had made a commitment not only to abolish the quangos, but to transfer many of their powers to local authorities, but it was doing the opposite with the housing stock in Wales. It was helping to put pressure on devolved, elected and accountable local authorities to transfer powers over housing stock to new-style quangos that the Welsh Assembly was setting up.

I would have thought that the hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price) would have opposed that. However, many politicians who used to be committed to making a bonfire of the quangos—to ending the quango state in Wales—are now rushing to distance themselves from that campaign, which was supported by all the political parties that were a part of the yes campaign. They are rushing to divorce or distance themselves from the commitment to make Wales more accountable by making a bonfire of the quangos.

Ron Davies, a previous Secretary of State for Wales who made the original commitment in 1995 to make a bonfire of the quangos, recently stated that it was "just a colourful phrase". Edwina Hart declared:

> "I have never favoured bonfires."

Janet Davies, a nationalist Assembly Member, proclaimed:

> "We should not have a reflex action to get rid of all Assembly-sponsored public bodies",

by which she obviously means quangos. When the current Secretary of State for Wales responded to a question from my right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Denzil Davies) and I, he merely stated that the Assembly provides for all its agencies to be more accountable. That is somewhat less than the bonfire of the quangos that he and the yes campaign committed themselves to only a few years ago. Not only were we going to get rid of the quango state in Wales, even more ridiculously, the moneys that would be raised from the abolition of the quangos were,

> "to pay for a democratically elected and accountable Welsh Assembly".

Only a few hon. Members are here today, but most of them would accept that that was a silly commitment to make. They will also accept that, once again, the commitment has not been delivered.

Some while back, I wrote to the Prime Minister and the Leader of the House, asking whether they had received any correspondence from Rhodri Morgan asking for legislative time for the Government to make a bonfire of the executive quangos—the most important quangos. The answer was no. It seems that just about all the parties have learned to love rule by quangos.

Adam Price: I have sympathy with the drift of the hon. Gentleman's argument about democratic accountability. Can he give some examples of the Assembly-sponsored public bodies that he would like to be abolished? Will he take the Arts Council of Wales within the Assembly, into the Ministry of Culture, Sport and Welsh Language? Does he see that there is some value in some instances in having arms-length bodies with sector-specific objectives?

Llew Smith: I was not the person who made the commitment to make the bonfire of the quangos. I am sure that the hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr would accept that. As for the Arts Council of Wales, I would be in favour of abolition. The Minister and I experienced its decision-making a few years ago, when, in total opposition to the feelings of local communities, it tried to close Gwent Theatre in Education, which most people will accept is one of the finest theatres and education companies in the United Kingdom. I am a member of its board—a non-paid member—but most people would accept that that is so. The Arts Council of Wales was taking decisions, supposedly on behalf of the community—a community that it was not a part of, that it did not understand, and that it treated with total contempt. Much to the credit of the local community, it made its voice heard and, as a result, the decision was changed. Not much later, the chief executive resigned.

As for other quangos, Education and Learning Wales is nonsense—consider the decision and announcement some days ago on the IT contract, whose costs have gone through the roof. Once again, decisions have been taken by bodies that are not accountable, not elected and cannot be removed. Surely that is wrong. I am not saying that all quangos should be subject to the bonfire. I thought that the original commitment was daft because many scientific committees, which are quangos, but are there to advise Government, would be abolished. Does the hon. Gentleman want that? I suggest not. I certainly do not.

The other aspect of public accountability that had to change was that Ministers in the Welsh Office were making decisions that were not subject to a vote. That system had to go and be replaced by a democratic assembly where democratic decision making would be accountable to the vote. I think that most hon. Members would accept that that has not happened either. I should have thought that having reneged on those promises and made a complete mess of running the Assembly—for which I think all the political parties must share responsibility—they would be more humble.

No. Rhodri Morgan has now set up the Richards committee, which is stuffed with his own appointees, who, as we all know, will arrive at the conclusion that the Assembly must have powers similar to those of the Scottish Parliament and that there must be 80 members instead of six. That will happen because we know Rhodri's position on the matter. Then they wonder why people are not taking any interest in the committee and why people who are opposed to the Assembly and to giving it more powers are not turning up to give evidence.

To be fair to the Welsh National party, it is committed to a separatist Wales although it used coded language to say otherwise; yet most codes are indeed broken. Ieuan Wyn Jones, the leader of the Welsh National party, once proclaimed:

> "Labour are clearly unable to win a general election and self government for Wales is the only answer."

Yet Cynog Dafis said:

> "Plaid's aspirations remain full self-government . . . The status that used to be called independence."

The most recent thought of Ieuan Wyn Jones is,

> "I think self-government now needs to be redefined. I much prefer to use full national status."

Whatever difference the party may have over words, its commitment is still to be separate from the rest of the United Kingdom: a Wales where the people in England are no longer a part of the decision-making process.

I find it ironic that while the nationalists are unable, and totally opposed, to share decision making with the English, they are quite willing to share it with, and indeed to be ruled by, the European Central Bank, which is not elected or accountable and cannot be removed. It seems as if the nationalists have some sort of love affair with the European central bankers, as long as they are not English.

In terms of accountability, it is wrong to split up the United Kingdom. We can learn from one of my predecessors, Nye Bevan, who always used to say that there is no difference between an unemployed worker in south Wales and an unemployed worker in London: there is no difference between a rural worker or a coal miner in north Wales and a rural worker or a coal miner in the north of England. That is why he decided to set up a national health service, not just for Wales, but for the whole of the United Kingdom. We can learn from people like Nye.

In conclusion, public accountability in Wales, not quangos, is increasingly subject to the bonfire. We were not promised that, and it has been a sad day for Wales that this has not happened.

3.47 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Don Touhig): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Llew Smith) on securing this debate. All of us who serve Wales have at heart the best interests of the people whom we represent. I am in politics because I am determined to do something about my constituents' quality of life, and I am sure that the same is true of my hon. Friend and his constituents. To do that, we must have first-class and effective public services.

I am delighted to be taking part in this debate, which bears directly on the key issues of how we can best deliver quality services to the people of Wales. I know that my hon. Friend shares my aspirations for the people whom we represent. I strongly hold the view that we can best serve our people and deliver services by pushing decision making out from the centre wherever appropriate. We have come a long way since the election of the Government in 1997.

I contrast the journey that we have made since then with the situation that existed before. Decisions were taken at the centre, often in Whitehall, when they could have been taken in the nations and regions of the United Kingdom. I remember the debate about whether my children's secondary school, which took pupils aged 11 to 16, should have a sixth form. The final decision on that proposal was taken not by the school governors, the parents or the LEA but by the then Secretary of State for Wales. I have often mused on such matters. Let us imagine the Cabinet of that time being called together at No. 10, with the Prime Minister calling it to order and saying that the first item on the agenda was that the Secretary of State for Wales was to report on whether West Mon school at Pontypool should have a sixth form.

Things have changed dramatically since 1997. We have a democratically elected Assembly to take decisions about the delivery of public services in Wales; we have a Scottish Parliament; we have an Assembly in Northern Ireland, albeit temporarily suspended at the moment; and we hope to have regional assemblies in England. Prior to the creation of those Assemblies, there existed an unsatisfactory way of running public services in Wales. Only three Welsh Ministers were available to take responsibility for, and decisions on, everything from health to transport and from education to planning. The only way in which the system was made to work was by Ministers delegating their responsibilities and powers to quangos—the theme of my hon. Friend's contribution.

I remember how difficult it was to work with many of those quangos. I have often thought that people seem to have no difficulty in finding Members of Parliament or

[Mr. Don Touhig]

their local councillor when they have a problem; however, let them just try to find out who runs the local general hospital or college of further education. My hon. Friend and I have been comrades in arms in many a battle. One in particular was to uncover considerable mismanagement in our local college of further education, which was run by a quango. My hon. Friend referred to the battle in which we were both engaged concerning the appalling decisions about the Gwynedd theatre made by people in senior positions at the Arts Council of Wales. I well remember the difficulties and our campaign.

To come to the core of my hon. Friend's argument, it is, in the devolved context, for the National Assembly to determine how it will deliver services in Wales, and whether that should be done by the Assembly itself, by local authorities or by Assembly-sponsored public bodies—or quangos. However, we have a role in this place. It is for Parliament to set the primary legislative framework within which the Assembly must operate. It is the job of Members of Parliament at Westminster to debate that and to vote the necessary funding to enable the Assembly to provide the relevant services. Within the broad parameters that we set it is for the Assembly to set priorities, to allocate funding, to ensure that services are working effectively and economically and, to a significant degree, to decide on the mechanisms by which the services can be delivered.

We should be careful to avoid generalisations about Assembly-sponsored public bodies, because some of them may provide the best answer in some contexts—such as science and research, which my hon. Friend mentioned. However, in other cases they may not be the best answer. Something that does not work well in one case may be exactly what is needed in another. What one Assembly-sponsored public body has done well may not be done superbly well by another. I should certainly want the greatest openness and accountability from any organisation that was providing public services. We should not be overly rigid in prejudging the structures that we want in Wales—a point that was, I think, conceded by my hon. Friend.

Llew Smith: I accept the Minister's point about the Assembly now having responsibility for many public services. However, a commitment was given by all the parties that were committed to a yes vote for the Welsh Assembly that when it was established, with its powers over non-executive quangos, it would abolish not one, two, three or four, but the whole lot; it was going to make a bonfire of the quangos. That was not my work. I thought that it was a bit daft at the time. Still, I should like the Minister to respond on the subject of the commitment that was given, and the fact that the Assembly, and all the political parties in the Assembly, reneged on it.

Mr. Touhig: I shall develop that point in a moment. I am aware of the statement that was made at the time. I do not think that we had so much a bonfire of the quangos as a small coal fire. Perhaps I shall demonstrate how that came about as I continue my remarks. For my part, I want the best services for my constituents. I recognise that some services can be delivered effectively by Assembly-sponsored public bodies, or quangos.

We should not forget, I think, that there have been significant improvements in the behaviour of quangos since 1997. In that period the Government, in partnership with the Assembly, have done three things. We have reformed the structure of many of the Assembly-sponsored public bodies; we have maintained the rigorous scrutiny of their effectiveness; and we have reformed the system of appointing members.

To deal first with the structural changes, there were 19 executive quangos in 1997; there are now 15. The map has changed with the merger of the Welsh Development Agency, the Development Board for Rural Wales and the Land Authority for Wales. Tai Cymru, the Welsh Health Common Services Authority and Health Promotions in Wales were abolished, and their functions were transferred to the Assembly. The Cardiff Bay development corporation was dissolved, and my hon. Friend will remember that he and I made common cause in campaigning for greater public investment in our valleys when we saw public investment going to Cardiff bay.

Llew Smith: The fact that the Cardiff Bay development corporation has gone has nothing to do with the Welsh Assembly; the development corporation had a set life. Tai Cymru was abolished before the Assembly was established. Does the Minister accept that there has been no reduction at all in the number of quangos in Wales?

Mr. Touhig: No, I do not accept that. As I have pointed out, there has been a reduction. Some of the quangos were abolished before the Assembly was set up, which is why I prefaced my remarks by saying that we, the Government, and the Assembly had taken the steps.

There has been the abolition of the training and enterprise councils and of the Further Education Funding Council for Wales, with the transfer of those functions to the National Council for Education and Training in Wales and the WDA. We now have continuing rigorous scrutiny of quangos, and the Labour-led Assembly is committed to accelerating a review of major sponsored bodies to ensure that they are necessary, effective and efficient, and to the reviews being completed by 2003–04. The objective of those reviews is for Assembly-sponsored public bodies to be retained only where they are the most appropriate, cost-effective means of carrying out functions.

To date, reviews of the WDA, the Countryside Council for Wales, the National Museum and Galleries of Wales, the Welsh Language Board, the National Library of Wales and the Wales Tourist Board have already been completed and discussed in plenary sessions of the Assembly. Plenary debates on completed reviews have resulted in unanimous Assembly support for the retention of those bodies so far reviewed.

Strategic reviews of the royal commission on the ancient and historical monuments of Wales and the executive agency Cadw have been completed, and the findings are being fed into the historic environment review of Wales that the Minister with responsibility for the environment has commissioned. A review of the

Sports Council for Wales is well under way and a review of Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales is planned to start in the spring. That shows that we are continuing to apply rigorous standards to our Welsh quangos.

Another strand of improvement since 1997 has been in the way that members are appointed. All appointments to Assembly-sponsored public bodies in Wales are made in accordance with the Commissioner for Public Appointment's code of practice on ministerial appointments to public bodies. The code is based on the principles of the recommendations of the Committee on Standards in Public Life and the Nolan report. We can contrast that with what existed when the Tories were in government and there were jobs for the boys. We saw that throughout the quango structure in Wales.

Adam Price: Of course, there is another level of public accountability, which is UK-wide public bodies that have a responsibility to Wales, such as the Strategic Rail Authority or the new regulator, the Office of Communication. Does the Minister believe that the National Assembly should have the right to appoint a member for every major public institution that covers Wales?

Mr. Touhig: No, I certainly do not, but for any appointment, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales will be in consultation with colleagues in the Assembly when any aspect of Wales's interest is affected, and we shall judge what is appropriate. However, I do not believe that there should be any automatic appointment.

Last year, the then Secretary of State for Wales succinctly summarised the improvements that we have made when he told my hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent:

> "What has happened is that those bodies"—

he was referring to Assembly-sponsored public bodies—

> "are now much more locally accountable in Wales than they ever were, and appointments to them are much more open and transparent than they ever were under the previous Administration."—[*Official Report*, 19 June 2002; Vol. 387, c. 263.]

I fully understand my hon. Friend's dislike and mistrust of Assembly-sponsored public bodies—quangos—and he has good grounds for that. I have had similar experiences. He and I have shared problems in trying to solve such difficulties in the past. However, the Government have done a huge amount to improve, to scrutinise and to reform the Assembly-sponsored public bodies throughout Wales. We have done that to the point at which I am confident that they provide a useful solution—but not the only solution—for delivering services in appropriate circumstances.

We must constantly keep under review that system of delivering public services. It is the intention of the Secretary of State and myself to take part in those reviews and to make appropriate changes where necessary. My colleagues in the Assembly who are responsible for the reviews that are carried out there intend to do exactly the same. I recognise my hon. Friend's strong feelings, but I hope that he will recognise that we have made some progress in trying to make improvements.

Llew Smith: Does the Minister accept that there has still been no bonfire of the quangos, a commitment that was given by all the political parties that campaigned for a yes vote?

Mr. Touhig: I made the point that there has been no bonfire of the quangos but, as I said earlier, we have a small coal fire that is still burning. We must keep the issue under review, but we have made some progress. I intend, with the Secretary of State, to play my part in keeping under review the delivery of public services by quangos.

Health Fit Process (Isle of Wight)

4 pm

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to raise this issue. I am glad to see the Minister in her place.

There are three key questions that I hope that the Minister will be able to answer. First, health fit, which I will explain in more detail later, mentions drivers for change, some of which are practical and some of which are artificial. Do the Government accept that they have responsibility for creating some of those drivers for change and therefore that they have responsibility for the consequences? Secondly, when the Government set so many targets, why are there no targets for access to accident and emergency services? Thirdly, will the Government guarantee the future of emergency surgery facilities to support a consultant-led accident and emergency service together with maternity and paediatric services in my constituency?

The Isle of Wight is situated some two to five miles off the south coast of England, depending on where one crosses. It is difficult to describe the impact of living on a small offshore island to someone who does not share that experience. I will explain it for the Minister's benefit. If, every time she wanted to move from the city of Salford to the city of Manchester, she were only allowed to travel every half an hour, she spent half an hour doing so and there was no transport after 11 o'clock at night or before six o'clock in the morning, she could understand the practicalities faced by my constituents. There are only six ferry connections between the island and the mainland, very few of which run all the time.

The population of the island is 125,000 but it rises to 300,000 during the peak holiday season. It is one of poorest areas in the UK not to receive objective 1 or objective 2 status.

The hospital, which is run by the Isle of Wight Healthcare NHS Trust, is a splendid, albeit small, district general hospital. It was constructed in the late 1980s. A total of £26 million is now being spent on reconstruction because it has been agreed that 125,000 inhabitants in the winter and 300,000 in the summer

> "must have an accident and emergency service, and therefore must have the 24-hour cover that supports that accident and emergency service, which has been described by the joint consultants committee of the BMA as acute medicine, acute surgery, trauma and orthopaedics, obstetrics and gynaecology, paediatrics, a full anaesthetic service, ITU, CCU and HDU, pathology and radiology, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 52 weeks a year. That is a basic minimum without which A and E cannot function effectively or, indeed, safely."—[*Official Report*, 14 January 2003; Vol. 378, c. 655.]

We fear the loss of those services and, of course, the ambulance service must use coastguard helicopters to transfer patients to the mainland from time to time.

I will give more background. There is an enduring concern in my constituency about the loss of island services to the mainland. We have got used to having a joint police service with Hampshire, although we still hanker to have the island mentioned in the service's name. Since 1997, we have seen the creation of a cross-Solent learning and skills council, and a health authority that was first amalgamated with that in Portsmouth and then re-amalgamated with that covering the rest of Hampshire.

Those may only provide backroom services, but more recently we have seen the loss of the police control room to Netley and the loss of Customs cover based on the island. There is a natural suspicion among my constituents that such losses will continue. Sadly, the health fit process was launched against that background of suspicion.

The health fit project is run by the Hampshire and Isle of Wight strategic health authority and is part of a national process to reconfigure hospitals in what is called "a rapidly changing environment". The local health community is expected to agree a strategic framework for reconfiguring those services to achieve what the health authority calls

> "sustainable, affordable and efficient health services that meet the health care needs of the population."

The principles adduced include the recognition of drivers for change, the involvement of the public, meeting the needs of the human population rather than bricks and mortar and making services effective and safe while sometimes taking calculated and agreed risks. I shall shortly ask whether the risk of not having an accident and emergency department on the island is worth taking.

Three elements are profoundly important. The first is public involvement. I welcome the fact that consultation is not taking place behind closed doors, but the language must be more accessible. Using phrases such as

> "based on a series of patient pathway conferences"

is unhelpful. It means precious little to me, though perhaps more to the Minister.

The second element is drivers for change. Some are technological and medical advances, National Institute for Clinical Excellence clinical statements and the demands of the royal colleges. Another identified in the health fit document is to

> "manage the pressures on the medical workforce as a result of the European Working Time Directive".

Some drivers are inevitable, some artificial. The Government imposed some—so the Government can take them away. Where they damage services or impose a financial cost that the Government are not prepared to meet, they should be interpreted flexibly.

The first that most islanders knew about the health fit process was on 10 January when the story hit the *Isle of Wight County Press*. I pay tribute to Suzanne Pert, its health correspondent and a mature and sensible journalist who does not scaremonger. She wrote:

> "An explosive report on future health services suggests Islanders would have to go to the mainland for all emergency surgery and trauma services, for some planned operations and even to have babies for a caesarian or forceps delivery."

A document had been produced—ambiguous and full of health jargon—for the community health council meeting on 13 January. I shall summarise its key points. First, it states:

> "For in-patient paediatrics at Levels 2 and 3, the working assumption might be that these services should align with the 'comprehensive' acute hospital sites in Southampton, Portsmouth and Basingstoke."

There are presently five, but that is only three. Secondly, it states:

> "Whilst the role of the acute hospital will change, there is still a need to define sites where acute trauma (accidents) and acute surgical emergencies will be treated. The likely strategic sites for these services, in terms of population distribution and access, are Southampton, Portsmouth and Basingstoke."

A third extract states:

> "However, the emerging view of the HealthFit event"—

typical of the language used—

> "was that greater thought needs to be given to emergency access to the mainland, rather than treating the Solent as a barrier which completely defines the nature of services on the Island."

I understand what the document was getting at and I see the Minister nodding in her place, but it was open to profound misinterpretation—that if emergency services are wanted, one may have to cross the Solent to get them. That was a serious error on the part of those who wrote the document.

Fortuitously, on 14 January I held an Adjournment debate on public services, to which the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr. Lammy), replied. I shall not quote all the relevant columns, but I had read the health fit document by then and pointed out that, if implemented, it would undermine the argument for minimum must-have provision for the population. I told the Under-Secretary that the proposals in the health fit document to remove accident and emergency to the mainland were unacceptable. I hoped that they were to him, too.

I provided the Under-Secretary with an opportunity to deal with that concern, by then widespread on the island. Sadly, he failed to do so. He merely read out a prepared script in columns 660 and 661, which described a process that would continue for a year or more, offering no comfort to residents on the future of accident and emergency, or, indeed, any other services on the island.

It was not surprising that the primary care trust and the health trust under the leadership of David Crawley and Graham Elderfield respectively should meet with their staff to put together the technical, financial and medical case for and against moving the services as described in the document. It is not surprising that the public became increasingly worried, that Councillor Roger Mazillius, the portfolio holder for health, social services and housing on the Isle of Wight council, called a public meeting, or that people wrote to me and telephoned me to ask what they could do. My assiduous local paper and other media including Isle of Wight Radio and the Southampton *Daily Echo* took a close interest.

On 22 January, the leaders of the three political groups on the Isle of Wight council, the Island First Group, the Conservatives, and Debbie Gardiner for Labour, launched a petition against what health fit called the proposals, but what I was careful subsequently to call the suggestions and ideas. I pay tribute to them, to the townswomen's guild for helping to launch the petition, and to people all over the island who helped to collect signatures for the petition in bars, pubs, shops, cafés, garages and fire stations. To date, I am pleased to say that 53,209 people have signed the petition: more than half the total adult population of my constituency. I have also received a huge number of letters, some of which I have with me.

Before the public meeting on 3 February, Peter Bingham, the chairman of the Hampshire and Isle of Wight strategic health authority, wrote:

> "I cannot envisage the closure of accident and emergency services at St. Mary's. The bulk of accident and emergency services will always need to be provided from local facilities."

It is no reflection on Peter Bingham that islanders subjected that letter to the same kind of textual analysis with which they might examine a snip offered by a used car salesman. They were becoming suspicious because they had already lost their services. Some may have recalled, as I did when I read it, the words of my noble Friend Lord Heseltine, who notoriously "could not envisage" doing something rather damaging to my party. However, that is the kind of analysis to which the letter was subjected.

The statement was examined in detail at the public meeting. Richard Samuel, for the strategic health authority, gave three key assurances: a mini health fit for the island would be held in April; no decisions had been taken; and he repeated the "cannot envisage" statement.

Graham Elderfield, of the health trust, said that we needed to have accident and emergency services on the island, and pointed out that the clinicians had decided two years ago that it was too high a risk to move maternity services from the island. David Crawley, of the primary care trust, said that

> "the document doesn't say close A&E, it will be provided on the island."

He also said that

> "accident and emergency is an integral part of delivering services on an island."

However, later the same evening he said that

> "accident and emergency will remain as it is; the question is the emergency services around it."

Paul Barber, the secretary of the community health council, said that the consensus was entirely the opposite of that indicated in the health fit document, which suggested that there was consensus on the ideas put forward in the document.

Given the promise that I have just quoted from Peter Bingham—a promise that people took seriously—people then began to focus on what was meant by accident and emergency services. Did it mean the accident and emergency service as presently provided, or did it mean an accident and emergency service at St. Mary's, but perhaps without emergency surgery and trauma support—in other words, a minor injuries unit?

My noble Friend the Earl Howe asked that question in another place last Wednesday, but even before he did so people were beginning to suspect that it meant a minor injuries unit. Lord Hunt of Kings Heath declined to give my noble Friend the confirmation that he sought—that emergency surgery would remain on the island.

Not surprisingly, my constituents have smelt a rat. What would be the consequences of the loss of accident and emergency services? It would mean the loss of other services. Without consultant-led accident and emergency services, as the British Medical Association has shown, there is no need for other acute hospital services. It would be impossible to provide maternity services in case an emergency caesarean was needed, as happened in the case of Elaine and Keith Ashdown of Cowes. Mrs. Ashdown had a textbook pregnancy, but needed an emergency caesarean when Daniel was born on 1 July 2002. Minutes later, he was whisked off to the neonatal intensive care unit. Mrs. Ashdown said:

> "The one thing that helped my husband and I through what should have been the best day of our lives was the fact that we had family there with us."

[Mr. Andrew Turner]

Without consultant-led accident and emergency services, as accident and emergency consultant Peter Beal said, we would turn into a minor injuries unit. We must have complete accident and emergency coverage, and to have that we need all the necessary back-up. Mr. Jules Gwynn, who is a nurse in the unit, said:

> "If people are trapped and need assessment, a whole specialised team would go out including a consultant and an anaesthetist. We are all on stand-by 365 days a year . . . It's part of the job, we don't get paid for that. We do it for the Island, we don't do it for ourselves."

The time and cost of travelling to the mainland is a problem. It costs the parents of a sick child £49.70 to visit him in Basingstoke. It is a return journey of more than five hours from Newport. A lady in East Cowes said she had just time to go to Southampton general hospital between leaving her children at school in the morning and picking them up in the afternoon.

There is pressure on mainland hospitals, with which they are ill equipped to cope. Caroline Dinenage of Portsmouth wrote to me to say:

> "I am extremely worried about the impact that changes to the Isle of Wight hospital will have upon Portsmouth hospitals which are already under enormous pressure.
>
> My personal experience was in September of last year when I was under St Mary's hospital Portsmouth for maternity care. I was booked to go in on the morning of Sept. 5th to be induced . . . The nurses on my ward told me that they were so overwhelmed with women in labour that some midwives were having to attend to two women simultaneously . . . Unfortunately the maternity/labour wards were so busy all of that day and the next that I had to wait until 9 pm on the following evening before I could be induced (36 hours later) . . . one of the midwives on my ward took pity on me and stayed late at work to carry out the procedure.
>
> I have to say that the care I received from the staff during my stay was absolutely marvellous—they were all just so kind and good natured despite the pressure they work under. I really can't see how they will be able to cope without some substantial investment and dramatic increase in staff numbers."

That is what will happen if these changes go through.

I wrote to the Minister to say that islanders' concerns and, in some cases, fears will increase unless we get some assurances. Health staff morale will be sharply reduced and recruitment and retention, always difficult, would be imperilled. People would choose not to relocate to the island, and our holiday trade, on which a substantial proportion of our wealth depends, would be hit. Most important of all, however, lives would be put at risk, as was the case with a Dorset mother-to-be who was brought from Weymouth a fortnight ago today because no hospital in the south of England other than St. Mary's had the intensive care cot that her baby needed. Fortunately for her, the ferries were running, but 1,500 times a year ferry services are cancelled and often helicopters cannot fly. Mainlanders, as I am sure the Minister appreciates, can go elsewhere; islanders cannot. That is why a fully equipped hospital is a matter of life and death to the people of the Isle of Wight.

4.17 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): Once again, I find myself in the fortunate position of being able to begin by congratulating the hon. Member for the Isle of Wight on securing today's debate. I am sure that he will often raise issues of concern to his constituents in Westminster Hall. He is concerned to ensure that there is a high standard of health care on the island, and rightly so. For the record, I reassure him that the Government are absolutely committed to providing high-quality services for people in this country, wherever they may live, and that includes the hon. Gentleman's constituents on the Isle of Wight.

I do not intend to repeat the lengthy catalogue of improvements that my fellow Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr. Lammy) mentioned in the previous debate about changes that have taken place on the Isle of Wight. As the hon. Gentleman is aware, there has been a great deal of extra investment in and improvement to the infrastructure of the NHS and to direct service delivery in his area. However, it is worth repeating a statement that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary made in the previous debate, as it sets the context for the health fit proposals. He said:

> "Health services are never stagnant: they adapt to new opportunities and challenges as they appear. That applied especially when the Government introduced the NHS plan and the "Shifting the Balance of Power" initiative. In accordance with those policies, it is up to strategic health authorities and primary care trusts, with their specific local knowledge and expertise, to plan and develop health services in line with the needs of their local communities."—[*Official Report*, 14 January 2003; Vol. 397, c. 659.]

It is important that the hon. Member for Isle of Wight, his constituents, the health professionals and all those in his area look at any proposal in the context of that policy. The Government are determined that local people will be involved from the outset in shaping, designing and developing services to meet their needs and those of their families. I urge the hon. Gentleman to have a little faith and courage, and to have confidence in the ability of local people to come up with robust proposals that will meet the health care needs of his constituents.

Let me contrast the health fit process with what happened previously. The hon. Gentleman will know that I was chair of a community health council during the deep, dark Tory years, when consultation seemed to consist of the expiry of a period of time. A 12-week consultation process consisted of the NHS presenting its preferred option as a fait accompli to local people, the 12 weeks passing, and the initial option being adopted. That was entirely unsatisfactory and unworthy of the name public consultation.

The Government have tried to introduce an entirely new system, involving the public and patients from the outset in considering with health professionals the services in their communities—involving questions such as which services should be in the acute sector, how many should be in primary care and how many in intermediate care, and where specialties should be sited—as well as in debating difficult issues in a mature, realistic and reasonable way. If we have confidence in local people, we shall end up with robust, rigorous and sustainable solutions that will work in the longer term.

We are not merely preparing health policies that will suit us today, but trying to look into the future and to ask how the health service in the 21st century might provide high-quality services for people in the Isle of Wight. I urge the hon. Gentleman, the local press and the local community to involve themselves in the process. I have had a chance to look at the health fit document. It is excellent. The strategic health authority has grappled with a new way of designing proposals.

The hon. Gentleman should look at the back of that document and see the list of people who have already been involved at stage one of the process in trying to draw up some of the options that might be available. They include a range of people from local authorities, the primary care sector, the ambulance service, primary care trusts and the acute services who in the past would never have been engaged in the process. They would not have brought the views of community representatives, their knowledge of the local area, or their information about transport and about the way in which the community works into the health service planning process.

In the bad old days, the NHS would simply have decided in a closed environment what the local people should have. We are turning the system on its head and saying that it is for the local community to determine its priorities and for the health service to try to respond—within the bounds of quality and affordability.

The hon. Gentleman has raised serious questions about the drivers for change that are set out in the document. We must all address work force issues. We need more doctors, nurses, therapists, cleaners and porters—every kind of person working in the health service. This Government, with their massive investment, are enabling that to happen. We must also look at the skills mix. People will have to do different jobs from those that they have done in the past: nurses will have to do many of the things that only doctors have done, and doctors will do things that only consultants have done. Radiotherapy practitioners will have to do things that in the past only radiologists will have done. Getting the skills mix into the system is a key issue and a big driver.

There are pressures to centralise some services, some of which relate to quality, and there is recognition that in areas such as cancer, where surgeons have an opportunity to do a goodly number of operations, outcomes are better. It is now accepted in a number of specialist areas that bringing services together can result in better outcomes. Set against the pressure to centralise is an equal pressure to have services located in local communities wherever possible. If communities are engaged in that discussion, they can accept some of those contradictions and work through which services are better brought together and which are better done at local level. The traditional way of organising those services is not always the best way of meeting the needs.

We have to be imaginative. We have to use new technology. The introduction of telemedicine, teleconferencing and new IT means that we can work in different ways. Primary care services can often be connected through IT to the acute trust. A patient does not always have to go to the hospital to have an appointment: consultants can come out to primary care centres and run their out-patient clinics in the community. The health service is changing almost as we speak and faster than we have ever known before because of these drivers in the system.

Another driver is that we have to provide services within the money that is available. The hon. Gentleman must recognise that the investment in the past few years has been pretty significant. There was an increase in investment of 3.5 per cent in 1997–98, nearly 6 per cent. in 1999–00, and 8 per cent. in 2001–2002. There was a further cash increase last year of 9.6 per cent. and another increase of 9.7 per cent is coming.

Those are big numbers. This is the biggest investment that the NHS has ever known. The hon. Gentleman's constituents are seeing the benefits of having a Labour Government who have the courage to increase taxes and are prepared to invest in the NHS. The hon. Gentleman should be aware that this kind of change and transformation cannot take place unless there is an environment of increased investment that enables us to make those changes.

The hon. Gentleman asked about accident and emergency services. The chairman of the strategic health authority said very clearly on the record:

> "I cannot envisage the closure of accident and emergency services at St Mary's. The bulk of accident and emergency services will always need to be provided from local facilities, because of the need for urgent access."

I challenge the hon. Gentleman to be more imaginative about what emergency services can look like in the future. They do not have to be designed as they have been for the past 30 or 40 years. With technology, new techniques and many more nurse practitioners, more people can be seen even closer to home than the original A and E services might have provided.

We are at an early stage. There are currently no proposals on the table and there is a long way to go in drawing up the health fit process. To rule out any possibilities at this stage would be undemocratic, not the best form of consultation and unnecessarily restrictive. It would not be fair to the local community. Whatever the hon. Gentleman says about the press not scaremongering, it is not fair to tell the community that they face the prospect of losing all their A and E services in their local hospital. That sort of statement will not encourage them to engage properly in the process or to play their full part in making their contribution to shaping the future health service for the Isle of Wight.

The hon. Gentleman talked about targets for access to A and E. He knows that we have targets about waiting times in A and E. Ninety per cent. of people are seen in A and E at his local hospital within four hours. That service is meeting the target. There is an excellent service on the Isle of Wight. He also talked about providing a consultant-led A and E and maternity service. Clearly those are important matters to local people and ought to be considered as part of that process. I am absolutely sure that they will be.

This strategic health authority has really tried. It has gone out of its way to do things in a different way and to actively engage with local people. It is determined to make that work. It recognises that the old style of operating—simply coming up with the option preferred

[Ms Hazel Blears]

by the professionals—is not the way to have a sustainable, responsive and accessible NHS in the future. The strategic health authority is doing its absolute best to ensure that it involves people.

Some important messages are already emerging from the initial health fit events. People say that there needs to be greater diversity of access, that primary care services should be extended and that more acute care should be taking place in the community. The role of the acute general hospital needs to change. Health services are changing for the future.

The hon. Gentleman should have some courage. He should have some ambition for his community. Things do not have to be as they are. In the future, they can be much better because of the investment that the Government are putting in and our determination to reform health services so that they operate in the best interests of the people. The hon. Gentleman should have some faith. He should get involved, play his part, and encourage his constituents to do the same.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes past Four o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 27 February 2003

[SIR NICHOLAS WINTERTON *in the Chair*]

New Towns

[*Relevant documents: Nineteenth Report from the Transport, Local Government and the Regions Committee, Session 2001–02, HC 603-I, and the Government's response Cm 5685.*]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Mr. Sutcliffe.]*

2.30 pm

Andrew Bennett (Denton and Reddish): I am grateful for the opportunity to debate the Select Committee's report. I want to put on record my gratitude to all those people who submitted evidence to the inquiry. Select Committees are very dependent on the quality of the evidence that they receive if they are to produce valuable reports. The report contains excellent evidence. As well as collecting evidence, we asked a series of questions about the new towns. There is a great deal of valuable information in volumes II and III of the report.

I also appreciate the hospitality of those people who arranged our visits to Telford, Corby and Hemel Hempstead. No, it was not Hemel Hempstead but Harlow—my memory is slipping. I should have made a note not to make that mistake. I thank them for the information that I gathered during my visit.

Finally, I want to record my appreciation of Brendan Nevin, the adviser to the Select Committee, and to David Harrison, the Clerk of the Select Committee for this Parliament and the previous one. David Harrison has now moved on, but the Select Committee appreciated his hard work.

The new towns were created after Lord Reith's inquiry into housing problems following the second world war and out of the need to replace a huge amount of slum housing and bomb-damaged housing, especially in areas such as London. The three key proposals that the inquiry made were that the new towns should be created in open countryside, that they should have a maximum population of about 60,000 and that the housing should be low density. We must remember that there was great concern in that era about diseases such as tuberculosis, which were associated with high-density housing.

New towns and the way in which they were created were an important part of the nation's history. In some ways, we need to keep a record of that. The attempts of Robert Owen, the Levers and Cadburys to create new housing remain: we have New Lanark, Port Sunlight and Bournville. It would be nice to think that some of the new towns will exist in the future, so that people can view them as a record. Most of the early new towns were the creation of a set of town planners who were very important in the middle half of the last century. They created something that was relevant for the time, rather than something that would develop easily into housing that suits modern life. It is important to achieve a balance between keeping the historic record and having somewhere attractive for people to live.

We must also note that the new towns were served badly by successive Governments. The Treasury can tell us that a lot of money was put into the new towns at the beginning, but rather than allowing the money to stay with them to help them evolve and develop, the Treasury quickly started to demand that the new towns pay the money back. In many cases, the towns paid it back time after time, which is how the new towns got a rotten deal. When the Commission for New Towns was wound up, it handed over its assets to English Partnerships, which was continually under pressure from the Treasury to get the money back. Many hon. Members in the Chamber represent new towns, and they would all agree that if the money had stayed in their communities rather than going back to the Treasury, their communities could have evolved.

Some communities had a certain amount of money set aside for future activities. For example, in Milton Keynes, we were told firmly that the money to look after the parkways was still available, but such endowment is the exception rather than the rule for the new towns.

Ms Julia Drown (South Swindon): Towns such as Swindon were not classified as new towns but went through similar experiences without the extensive powers or direct grant that came from the Government. Does my hon. Friend feel that in considering the issues of extra and continuing support for towns, the grant that was invested initially should be considered, to ensure that infrastructures keep up with the needs of communities?

Andrew Bennett: It is important that money is available to keep the infrastructure developing and to take into account the special problems that were created, which I will comment on later. Some of the transport systems and lower-density housing schemes brought problems, which have got worse, and the Government have a duty to come up with the money to solve the specific problems created for the new towns by the concept of the development.

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead): Further to my hon. Friend's observations about Governments' attitude to new towns, was he surprised to receive a memorandum from the ex-chief executive of the Commission for the New Towns, John Walker. He said that from the 1980s to the mid-1990s, the

> "Government took it as an opportunity to turn its back on new towns, and regard them primarily as a source of income from asset sales."

Does my hon. Friend think that the current Government have brought about a big change in that policy?

Andrew Bennett: I hope that the change has been made, but I shall come to that later.

I was starting to talk about how English Partnerships had taken a lot of the money away from new towns. Sadly, until 12 months ago, it could have been said that English Partnerships deserved to be wound up. I understand the argument that English Partnerships is a useful vehicle for the Government. I hope that, instead of being a moribund institution that should have been wiped away, it will be much more successful in its second coming. I have heard all the public relations material. Its

[Andrew Bennett]

representatives appeared before the Transport, Local Government and the Regions Committee, and everything looked promising. However, we want to see delivery on the ground before we are convinced that English Partnerships can do the job that the Government are planning for it.

Rosemary McKenna (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth): Is my hon. Friend aware that the situation is different in Scotland? New town developments have already been wound up, and there is no residual body or Scottish Partnerships, but all the problems noted by the Select Committee are identifiable in the Scottish new towns. Has he been in touch with any of his counterparts in the Scottish Parliament, in view of the fact that the new towns are now an issue for the Scottish Parliament, and does he think that there are lessons to be learned jointly in examining the issue?

Andrew Bennett: I certainly think that there are joint issues to be examined. My hon. Friend the Member for Cunninghame, South (Mr. Donohoe) was on the Committee, and he pushed urban issues very strongly. It seemed to me that there was a common theme, and that what needed to be done for the English and Welsh new towns also needed to be done for the Scottish ones. I do not know enough about the Scottish situation to know the mechanisms, but I fully accept that something needs to be done to solve the problems of the new towns there.

I shall now enumerate some of the problems. The original promise was that the housing would be low density. In the 1950s and early 1960s low-density housing might have been what people wanted. On occasions, imaginative ways of dealing with low-density housing might have been devised, but they are no longer relevant. In Runcorn, for example, an imaginative bus way was put in, which, at that particular time, served the low-density communities well. However, that bus way is now a nightmare, because, particularly in the evening, people are left standing at bus stops with no cars or other traffic going past, and do not have the feeling of security that they need in low-density housing areas. We must recognise that low-density housing, as created in most of the new towns, is not suitable.

There is also the question of critical mass, and what size the new towns should be. The aim for the original towns was 60,000 people. It may be true that, when they were built, 60,000 gave the critical mass to provide—I will not say the butcher, the baker and the candlestickmaker—the things needed to make a complete community. It is increasingly evident that the new towns that stuck at 60,000 or smaller are too small to maintain all the critical facilities that they need. That raises the question whether extra housing can be spread out into some of the green spaces in those new towns, to give them greater capacity without losing the original vision.

There are, therefore, some important issues to be addressed with regard to increasing housing density, developing viable communities, and establishing facilities such as good transport links.

Mr. Philip Hammond (Runnymede and Weybridge): I am interested in the fact that the hon. Gentleman makes the case for increased density not out of necessity—we all understand the need for high-density housing—but on the basis that people prefer to live in a higher-density environment. That is not my experience, from the comments that I receive in my constituency whenever intensification of development is proposed. Does he have any evidence to suggest that people want greater density, rather than recognising that they will have to have it?

Andrew Bennett: There is quite a bit of evidence that people like to be in bigger communities. They may not want the field at the bottom of their garden to be built on, but they would like another field nearby to be built on. All sorts of things, such as shops and other facilities, are not viable unless there are enough people. I believe that people recognise that a critical mass is needed to make things work. I have talked to people in some of the new towns—not specifically the ones that the Committee visited—and they say that there are not enough people with the same sort of interests to make a particular society or group of activities work.

David Wright (Telford): Does my hon. Friend agree that the critical issue is quality design? In many new towns there needs to be clearance of unpopular housing and quality redesign that will resolve some of the issues related, for example, to the Radburn lay-out, which many consider to have been a disaster in the new towns.

Andrew Bennett: I do not want to go through everything that is in the report, but I was about to address the Radburn lay-out. First, however, I want to deal with town centres.

Every member of the Committee who went to Corby was shocked and appalled by the state of the town centre. There was a feeling that we were in a third world country rather than the United Kingdom. I have every sympathy with the people of Corby. They have a town centre in which they can take no pride. A large number of them go out of Corby to do their shopping and they would like to make the town centre an effective shopping area again. That is true of most of the new towns; the way in which the shopping centres were designed is not effective today. They need redesigning, but that will not be possible without a greater number of people to make those shopping centres viable.

Barbara Follett (Stevenage): There is a particular problem with crime in these town centres because they are deserted after 6 pm. There is no residential/work mix. We have to get that right if we want to bring crime down.

Andrew Bennett: Yes. It is worth remembering that the concept of the new towns was a planning one. People were supposed to live in one place, work in another and shop in another. Everything was separated. There were good reasons for that in 1950; most industry was not pleasant and people did not want to live close to it. Industry has changed and the Government have been working hard on the idea that town centres should become places where people can live, work, shop and participate in leisure activities.

Putting all that back together is one of the key tasks in the new towns. We want the new town centres to be redesigned so that they are places where people can live, shop and go for entertainment. That is a significant task that will involve Government, the new towns and the private sector. To do it, we need the critical mass.

Mr. Colin Pickthall (West Lancashire): Will my hon. Friend clarify a point? He seems to be talking about the population of the town. Skelmersdale's population is 42,000. He may be saying that if it were 80,000 the town centre might be more feasible. That is not the same as low-density housing. In Skelmersdale and other new towns the housing on the estates is high density and people are on top of one another. Those are two different issues.

Andrew Bennett: I am happy to take interventions, but if all hon. Members are to have a turn there needs to be a little restraint.

I accept that there are two different issues. All new towns are not the same. There are places where the housing was spaced out with large areas of parkland in between. In some cases, there are not now the resources to maintain that parkland to a standard that would make it an asset rather than a disadvantage to local people. From my brief visit to Skelmersdale, I do not think there is the same problem there as in some of the southern new towns.

Some of the housing is brilliant and has stood the test of time. The difficulty with most of the new towns is that they started off with a high standard of housing and then, with all the pressure to build extra housing—especially in the 1960s—some cheap designs were brought in. Some were system-built. There was also the Radburn design, which was revolutionary at the time. It had walkways to the front door but the garages were located at the rear and all other services were supposed to come to the back door. In some places the design still works effectively, but in most places it does not work. The front accesses have become places where crime almost flourishes and the backs look unsatisfactory.

A great deal of money needs to be spent to remove some of those dwellings and put new dwellings in their place. Certainly, some of the housing that we saw in Telford should have been knocked down a long time ago, but of course that costs money. There is the question of money to replace much of the worn-out housing, and the question of jobs. Some new towns were very successful at attracting jobs and a balance of jobs. Places such as Skelmersdale, however, were far too dependent on one employer, so when that employer got into difficulties, so did the whole town. Again, that is a lesson for the new towns. A multitude of employers are needed, rather than just particular ones.

Neighbourhood renewal money has gone into an awful lot of urban communities, but most of the new towns do not qualify for it. The people who represent new towns have a justified whinge that they cannot gain access to some of the money that other communities have been able to get. There is a question about planning permission and whether it has been transferred. English Partnerships still has quite a lot of outstanding planning permissions to deal with, and the local community should have a say in that. The problem of clawback also needs to be dealt with.

I think that we produced a fairly balanced report. My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister has said nice things to me about the report on several occasions, but the polite way of describing the official response is that it simply says, "Get lost." In one way, that can be disheartening. A Select Committee can do its work, take evidence and produce a report, but then the Government do not show much enthusiasm. I have to admit, however, that some of the Government responses that are least encouraging on the surface produce the best results over time. I shall therefore listen with considerable hope to the reply from my hon. Friend the Minister. I hope that he will address many of the problems that we have identified and that, in a couple of years, it will be the action taken, rather than the Government response, that is remembered.

I say firmly to the Minister that I hope that, today and in the actions taken by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, he will talk about a rebirth of the new towns, so that they can build on their successes and remedy many of their problems. I hope that he will ensure that the new developments in the Thames Gateway and Ashford, whether they are called new towns or not, avoid the pitfalls that the new towns have encountered and learn from the many considerable successes that people in the new towns have experienced. I commend the report to the House.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Nicholas Winterton): Order. I inform those hon. Members who wish to speak that the Chairman of the Committee, who has just spoken, indicated that if he had given way much more often, perhaps not all of them would be able to speak. A majority of those seeking to catch my eye represent new towns, and I hope that all hon. Members who want to will be able to speak, to enable the Front Benchers to wind up the debate at the normal time.

2.53 pm

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Chairman of the Committee and those who worked on the report. When it was published, there was an extraordinary sense of elation in the community that I represent, because after decades of neglect, it was not simply people who represented new towns who were responding to what those of us who represent such communities see as a crisis. There was a sense that someone out there really understood the problem, and I am immensely grateful to my hon. Friend, first, for having initiated the inquiry and, secondly, for having made a series of recommendations, each of which hit the button. I say that as someone who has been disappointed by many people who are supposed to have been doing something to address the problems of these communities. Finally, it looked as if there was some understanding of what they faced.

It was therefore with something approaching horror that I received the Government's response to this extremely intelligent and thoughtful report. In almost every particular, the recommendations are rebuffed and there is a failure to understand. Those who advised Ministers in the 1980s and 1990s were the kind of people who led even the ex-chief executive of the Commission for the New Towns to say that the Government had turned their back on new towns and that their attitude was that of a detached landlord with no apparent policy interest in the long-term success of these communities.

[Mr. Tony McWalter]

Those civil servants or advisers still seem to be ruling the roost, to judge by the Government's response. Time after time it shows a lack of understanding of the recommendations being proposed. For instance, there are repeated references to substantial amounts of money being made available for housing under this year's allocations from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. However, very little of it is coming to my constituency; indeed, there is a haemorrhaging of resources away from the community, because the Government have decided that negative subsidy and the asset base of the community that I represent are such that substantial resources should be removed. The Government regard themselves as having given substantial resources not just to my constituency but to new towns in general.

Yet the ex-chief executive of the Commission for the New Towns said on page 79 of the evidence:

> "The New Towns Programme was the only urban programme (to the best of my knowledge) which relied almost entirely on loan (rather than grant) finance from government. Moreover, it has repaid the loans to government, with interest, nearly 40 years before they were due, leaving residual assets in government ownership worth well over £1 billion."

He goes on to talk about the difficulties of maintaining the assets that had been put forward:

> "There is . . . a common sense and a moral argument that says the local communities ought to benefit more directly from value released by the further development and sale of the remaining assets, which vary tremendously in scale and value between the various new towns."

Government policy under Nicholas Ridley was not what we were expecting when we were elected to represent new towns in 1997. I welcome some of the substantial changes made by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, especially in the remit governing English Partnerships. The recent change of attitude since the report was published has been manifest in some of its work to see itself as an agency for regeneration and co-operation rather than an agency for Treasury deprivation of assets of local communities.

I welcome much of that. However, that thinking is not reflected in the Government's document, which takes the attitude, "You think you've got problems, but other communities have as well". There is something in that, but we have a series of problems that are coming to a head at the same time. The Government talk about design and infrastructure and say that that is not a problem that is specific to the new towns. No it is not, but we have it in spades and other communities have it sporadically.

I represent a new town that has a library at its centre. The library is the usual small, leaking, crumbling structure that one would associate with a new town with 70,000 inhabitants. It was built on the assumption that those people would not need books. The college in the centre of Hemel Hempstead is falling apart. It has a flat roof and is of a dreadful design. Its principal would like to see it razed to the ground. The only venue for any form of public entertainment such as concerts and pantomimes in Hemel Hempstead was recently levelled by the local authority, leaving a large pile of rubble. Everything is falling apart at the same time. As with Corby, people who want to go shopping find department stores in other towns, not in Hemel Hempstead.

When, in response to a series of important recommendations about the inadequacy of standard spending assessments as a way of remedying the difficulties of new towns, the Government say that that is a problem that others have too, we need them to get real. Standard spending assessments are not helping us and the most recent effects of the local government finance settlement have exacerbated these problems.

I do not want to take up more time than I should, but the fact is that whenever the Government are offered something in this document that would really help, they say no. For instance, paragraph 52 of their response states:

> "The Government is not prepared to give up clawback or sales receipts in the New Towns as a general principle."

We want the Government to understand that new towns were financed in a way that involved them in repaying their debt to the wider community. They have repaid it and repaid it and repaid it. Now they are crumbling and they need something back. In his submission, John Walker, the chief executive of the Commission for the New Towns, said:

> "Examination of government accounts show that a large portion of their expenditure on 'inner city' programmes has been funded from new town receipts."

That milch cow ought now to be seen as itself in need of a little tender loving care.

If the Government rip up their initial response to this report and follow some of the things that have been flowing from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in advice to English Partnerships and on prospects for regeneration of our communities, we can begin to address the problems with which the system has left us. I am asking for another handout, for more money, for regeneration and investment, but I am also saying that new towns have the capacity to solve some of the problems that are firmly on the Government's agenda.

Affordable housing in Hertfordshire is at a premium. The site owned by English Partnerships in Hemel Hempstead—the so-called Lucas Aerospace site—will be ideal for such a development initiative, and will solve the problem of vacancies in the local health service, which are at a higher level than in any other community in the United Kingdom. Some 8.6 per cent. of nurses' jobs are unfilled. An active housing programme, affordable housing and new towns can help to solve such difficulties.

We must bring solutions to the table. We need an active process of urban regeneration that involves English Partnerships and its current asset base. Where it does not have an asset base, it should use its expertise to develop one. I welcome any approach, but we have real problems. We need major investment, which may address many other issues on the Government's agenda.

3.6 pm

David Wright (Telford): It is a great pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Hemel Hempstead (Mr. McWalter), and I agree with so much of what he had to say. I do not intend to delay the Chamber for too long, and I begin by welcoming the Select Committee report and praising the commitment of the Chairman of the Committee during its construction.

The Committee visited Telford, and councillors and local authority officers found that visit extremely useful. The report allowed people to believe that new towns are back on the agenda, having been off it for so long—some 20 years, in fact. It also leads us to believe that someone is starting to listen on some of the issues and problems that new towns encounter, although I am disappointed by the Government's response. I will return to that.

My first point relates to the unique nature of new towns, which the Government's response does not accept. New towns are largely a construct of the post-war era, but there are many examples of new communities that were created by the philanthropists of the 19th and early 20th centuries, when people came together to try to improve the housing and social conditions of their communities. The post-war new towns policy was an echo of that. It was incredibly positive, and a message, which was pushed largely by left-of-centre Governments in the post-war era, that lives and communities could be better and that we could do more for our people. The new towns stand as a unique testament of how Government intervention can be positive for ordinary people.

As Members know, Telford was called Dawley new town in 1963 and renamed in 1968. It is one of the larger and, I would argue, more successful new towns. It is also my home town, and it is a great privilege to represent it, but Telford is not new any more, as it is over 30 years old. In some ways, the title "new town" is a problem for us. When new towns were constructed, there was a massive investment in the infrastructure all at the same time, but infrastructure wears out. New towns were developed in a fairly short time, and that infrastructure looks tired and worn. We have had substantial new investment and good partnerships with the private sector that have brought resources into new towns, but we need a major injection of public and private sector resources to deal with some of those infrastructure problems. I will turn to one of them in relation to a point that I wish to make about the Select Committee report and the Government's response.

Much of the housing stock in new towns is past its useful life. We have already heard about issues involving the Radburn layout of estates. A number of estates in my town in south Telford, such as Woodside, Brookside, Sutton Hill and Malinslee, were developed using the Radburn layout, which was well described by the Chair of the Select Committee. Access to the front of a property is gained from a pedestrian area, and parking and vehicular access are to the rear.

In many of those estates there are areas of overgrown former environmental improvement patches and large swathes of poorly defined land with no indication of where people's property starts or ends. That causes great problems with antisocial behaviour and nuisance. We need to redesign and restructure those estates radically and turn some of those properties around. We need to consider street design and renewal.

Many shopping centres on those estates can be described only as bunkers. We must clear them and consider better quality design that would open them out and make them more attractive. The people of Telford deserve the best—I am sure that all Members believe the same about their constituents. They measure their perception of what Government and local government think of them from the facilities we provide for them. To be honest, we have let them down over the past 20 years and it is time for change.

I am pleased to say that English Partnerships is assisting us locally on Woodside. It is doing a tremendous job, and I refer in particular to people such as Peter Murray, who heads the team and to whom I pay tribute. We are seeing greater partnership between the agencies, particularly English Partnerships, which needs to go on the record. A potential multi-million pound scheme is emerging for the regeneration of Woodside, and I thank the Minister for his interest over recent months. Some positive things are coming out of the change in attitude and process.

The difficulty is, however, that that scheme will tackle only one of a number of estates that I mentioned, although those problems exist on many others. Once we have dealt with Woodside, we must try to deal with some of the other estates too, which will be resource intensive. It would be helpful if the Minister commented on how we can draw together a rolling programme of housing stock improvement and investment in new town areas. I shall touch further on that point in my conclusion.

The role of English Partnerships has been extremely important over the years. The attitude employed by its predecessor, the Commission for the New Towns, during the 1980s and 1990s was appalling. It pursued a policy of what are known as "fire sales" of accommodation on new town estates, which created enormous problems with mixed ownership and tenure. In terms of redevelopment, mixed tenure can be good, but the way in which the disposal strategy was handled during the 1980s and 1990s and the fact that people have been unclear about who owns which assets and strips of land that are left seemingly in no one's ownership have caused great management problems in many new town estates. We need to re-examine that issue and get it right.

I repeat that the role of English Partnerships is central to what we are trying to achieve in new towns, and I appreciate the changes at the top level in the management of its role. If it can emerge as the new regeneration agency that can help us to deal with some of the issues in new towns, I will welcome that. When I make my concluding proposals, I shall return to some issues that I would like English Partnerships to pick up.

One of the major issues in Telford is transport. The town was designed around the car in the late 1960s. There is a fantastic road network—the large estates are surrounded by roads and have fantastic vehicular access—but our public transport infrastructure is weak. We have excellent new bus programmes, but we need more resources to assist us in our transport plan. Indeed, I do not believe that the existing transport budget can cope with the infrastructure and investment that Telford needs. If the town were built now, high-quality rapid transit systems—running north-south and east-west—would be put in. We could see that development in future years. We certainly need significant investment in our bus transport strategy and I want that to be a key theme in the regeneration of the new town.

Matthew Green (Ludlow): The hon. Gentleman is aware that his constituency has a portion of railway line that is not used for public passenger transport. Roughly speaking, it runs south from the centre of Telford down

[Matthew Green]

to the Ironbridge power station. It has often struck me that it could be developed into a useful commuter route, which would shuttle people from largely residential areas in the south towards the centre of Telford. Does he agree that that should be considered?

David Wright: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for promoting that idea. I recently received a proposal from the Telford steam railway trust relating to opening that line up again. However, delivering the project would involve an investment of about £4 million. The scale of the necessary infrastructure and investment means that the project cannot be achieved by a small organisation. We would need to put together a public-private partnership. I welcome his interest, however. Perhaps we could have a discussion and consider how the investment could work. He represents a neighbouring constituency, and the project could have a positive impact on his communities as well.

High-quality cultural investment is one of the key issues on which we need to focus. My hon. Friend the Member for Hemel Hempstead has already mentioned the fact that he struggles in terms of the scope and scale of the cultural investment in his town centre and community. Telford has an excellent town centre and a superb shopping centre, but, as I said in evidence to the Select Committee, it is an out-of-town centre right in the middle of the town. It makes very little connection with many of the communities around it.

We need to develop public-private partnerships to secure investment in a cultural quarter in Telford. I am pleased to say that English Partnerships has acknowledged that and has supported the local authority in developing a master plan. We need support and pump-priming investment to ensure that we can deliver that. We also need to bring in the private sector, but we may well need further assistance and support through public sector pump-priming to bring forward sites under the cultural investment strategy. That will help us to ensure that our town centre is the life of the town, and that it does not close down at 5.30 or 6 o'clock at night and become a desert environment.

I finish with a plea on promoting better quality design, which is integral to the future of our new towns. When our new towns were first put together, many of the architects who worked on them were committed to trying to achieve the best communities. Unfortunately, a lot of the work done then has not stood the test of time. I hope that we do not repeat those mistakes when redesigning many of our residential areas and town centres over the coming years.

We need to lift the quality of the design and infrastructure that we offer to local people, who judge their town by the environment around them. They deserve the very best, and we need to invest heavily in design competitions and processes that will bring the best architects into the new towns. Why should the best architects look only at the large cities in our country and across Europe? Why do the best architects look only at Manchester, London and Leeds? We need to translate their activity down and attract them to redesign our new towns. They could bring their skills and talents to give us some of the best quality buildings for the future.

Andrew Bennett: One of the interesting things about the new towns is that when they were initially constructed they attracted some of the best people in their field as chief planners. They got their prestige out of working for a new town. Getting such people back is important.

David Wright: My hon. Friend is quite right and I broadly agree with him. I want to recreate that environment, so that people see new towns as being at the cutting edge of design and quality and the best designers are brought back to regenerate our new towns.

Mr. Hammond: There seems to be great enthusiasm for master planning among Members who have spoken. Is not one lesson to be learned from some of the problems with our new towns that the monolithic approach to planning, rather than a more organic approach to the development of communities, can be a root cause of future problems?

David Wright: As one who represents a new town, I think that one of our biggest problems is the laissez-faire planning approach of the 1980s, when many of the structure plans for new towns were torn up, small retail parks sprang up all over the place and the shopping hierarchy was destroyed. We need to integrate our planning framework more effectively. I am a supporter of master planning, and if that makes me an old-fashioned Stalinist, I am sorry, because I do not intend to be. I want public sector agencies to examine the overall approach to new towns, bring in the best designers in the private sector and encourage flexibility around a master plan. Both angles can be achieved.

I am conscious that other Members wish to speak, so I shall sum up. I want to raise four issues, which I hope the Minister addresses, and to explain what we need for future new town development. First, we need access to neighbourhood renewal fund resources because of our new town status. There is a problem in many new towns because we do not qualify for those resources. We have significant pockets of deprivation, but they are often outweighed by areas of relative prosperity. That means that local authorities such as mine do not receive regeneration resources. They are often unable to plan what goes into those pockets of deprivation or to use such resources to match investment from English Partnerships, the Housing Corporation, other agencies and the private sector. We need a greater commitment to neighbourhood renewal in new towns because they are new towns.

Secondly, I want the Minister to consider new towns as a priority for any future housing market renewal investment round. It would be helpful if new towns could be considered as special cases in that context. Local authorities in my area are doing significant work with the black country boroughs to examine how the housing market in the west midlands operates. Many wards in my constituency would be investment priorities if they were in the black country, so if there is to be a second round of the housing market renewal fund and housing market renewal investment, I hope that the Government consider new towns.

Thirdly, I would like more waiving of clawback arrangements. English Partnerships has done a lot in response to queries from a number of Members, including me, who have been fairly annoying and persistent questioners on the strategy that it employs.

Fourthly, I want to ensure that we do not return to the situation of the 1980s and 1990s when, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hemel Hempstead said, places such as Telford were seen as a cash cow for the Treasury. That must stop. New towns have paid their dues and it is time that they were regenerated effectively in a partnership between communities and those who represent them.

3.23 pm

Mr. Brian H. Donohoe (Cunninghame, South): I welcome this opportunity to speak in the debate, and I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Bennett) for giving me the opportunity to serve on the Committee that considered the new towns. I thank all who were involved in putting together a very good report, which I commend to the Minister, but I am rather disappointed at the Government's response.

Hon. Members will know that I do not represent an English constituency, and I feel almost divorced in making this statement, but it is important to demonstrate my experience of new towns. I have lived, almost from birth, in an area where a new town was created, and I saw the birth of that town in the 1960s and its demise in the 1990s. I want to share with the House some experiences of that period. There were five new towns in Scotland, which were all wound up at the same time. The town that I represent, in which I have lived for most of my life, is the Irvine new town, which is unique in that it is the only new town created by the sea. There are those who say that it should have been shoved into the sea after the planners walked out. I represent it, however, and I am proud to do so. Its people are the best that there are, and I call it God's country.

I have seen some of the effects of new towns and have heard about those from other hon. Members this afternoon. The Committee was able to expose some of those effects, especially in Corby. Having been to Corby with the Committee, I have to say that I came away thinking that I had been to hell and back. I have relatives there, and after my visit I telephoned them to say that I had been. They said, "You didn't come and look at Corby did you? It's the pits". It really is. Having then gone back to the Irvine new town and taken a wander around, I can say that it is like a palace compared with Corby. However, we also went to Harlow, which is a completely different experience. There has been good investment there, and much creative thinking.

Irvine was wound up in the mid-90s and has suffered since because it no longer receives the £11.5 million per annum that was injected by the development corporation. One plus of being a new town was that those funds brought industry into the area—lots of industry—which created lots of jobs. Those were at the leading edge, and they were of high value to the area. They injected enormous resources into it which would not otherwise have existed. The leisure facilities, such as the Magnum leisure centre in the main part of the town, were magnificent, and there was nothing better than seeing those made available to people for the first time. The creation of golf courses, football fields and all sorts of recreational facilities has transformed the area and is to be commended.

My hon. Friend the Member for Telford (David Wright) mentioned transport. I have a theory that when the planners—who I think are worse than lawyers, which is saying something—came to design the new town, they opened up an old Ordnance Survey map of the area and then decided to have a tea break. Where the tea cups left stains, they became the roundabouts. They decided to join them up, and that became the roads. Irvine, and every other new town, is a wee bit like that. Having represented a trade union covering the five new towns in Scotland, I appealed to my employer for a special allowance for tyres because I wore out so many going round all the roundabouts. I understand that the taxi drivers in East Kilbride get 2p extra a mile on their rate because they wear out so many tyres going round all the roundabouts.

Transport more broadly is a disaster. The planners did not look outside the new towns. They spent all the money on the new towns, but the roads go nowhere. There are roundabouts with blocked-up exits all over my town. Roads do not go anywhere other than the new town itself. Many years ago, I saw the Grand Prix in France where it is held in the streets and thought about making an application to have the Grand Prix up in Irvine, where there would be a fantastic network of roads to choose from, instead of in Silverstone.

I return to the subject of planners. Having been in a town of 19,000 people, where there was great heritage and culture, I would argue that the planners from the development corporation destroyed the centres of those communities; they ripped them down. They took away the bridge, which I regret to this day, and they created a shopping centre that I call the biggest WC in Europe because it is white-sided and white-tiled, and it looks absolutely appalling. I do not know if they were planners with a great future ahead of them. My God, I would not have given them much of a future if what they created then was an example of how they went about their business. It was a demonstration of what was wrong with the new towns.

Having always been involved with the politics of the town, I can say that there was a democratic deficit in the boards of the new towns. That had plusses but a lot of minuses. The planners would never have got away with what they did to the town if they had been subject to the democratic ticket. They would not have been re-elected if they had been democratically elected in the first place.

The other element of the problems is the loss of industry. At the start of my remarks, I made a point of the plusses and mentioned the good industry in the area. Today, most of that industry has gone away; none of the companies that were brought to us in the 1960s are still there. Not one company created at the same time as the development corporation is in the town now. That has a major impact: my constituency has the highest unemployment in Scotland. The rate is 3 per cent. above the national average because the jobs that were brought in are no longer there.

There are no public sector jobs either. Because the new town was not completed—it was wound up early—it does not have the infrastructure to support itself for

[Mr. Brian H. Donohoe]

any length of time. I remember talking, in the days leading up to its demise, to the chief executive, who bemoaned the fact that he was going to be out of a job, but he also saw his baby being thrown out with the bathwater. A house was being created, but the early wind-up in the mid-1990s meant that the house was never given a roof. That affected the whole infrastructure, and it is still badly affected.

The worst example is the town centre. My hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish mentioned town centres and the experience in Corby. The town centre in Irvine was destroyed by the planners. It is now ageing, and there are no resources to improve its position. We see that as the legacy of the new towns process.

If I were to summarise, having lived through the whole period of the new town, I would say that it has been a bad experience overall. However, I have come out the other side of that process; I have spent a tremendous amount of time encouraging people; and I have seen the small communities coming alive. There are two main towns, and the smaller of the two, Kilwinning, is coming alive. It is starting to see its own identity return, and the whole area is being lifted up. It is obvious that it will never be able to do that on its own because it requires more attention than can be given by any Government agency. I would suggest that any new town in the United Kingdom is in exactly the same situation.

The momentum of what was being developed—latterly the developments were good—has been completely lost. We are not seeing what I wanted: a town of some 70,000 people, which would have been big enough to allow Marks & Spencer, for instance, to come to it. Nothing like that could happen in Irvine. That problem must be looked at seriously in every new town.

The Chairman of the Committee mentioned the need for rebirth. There is no doubt that the position of new towns needs to be rethought. They are unique; they have been unique throughout their existence; and their legacy must be addressed. They need more resources and more investment. I look forward to hearing the Minister say that the Government will proceed on the basis that the new towns are unique.

3.35 pm

Mr. Colin Pickthall (West Lancashire): I am fascinated by my hon. Friend's account of the way in which his roundabouts came into being. Skelmersdale in my constituency is similarly covered with roundabouts, which came about in a slightly more enterprising way. The new town was built on an old mining area, so the roundabouts were put on the top of the old pit shafts. The whole of Westminster could fit into some of the roundabouts. They have wonderful flooded pits in the middle of them, which kids fish in. They are the closest thing to leisure centres that any of them have seen. When kids moan, "There's nothing to do in Skem," I say, "Go and fish in the roundabout," and they do.

Mr. McWalter: Is my hon. Friend saying that there is nothing else to do in Skelmersdale?

Mr. Pickthall: Not after dark.

Mr. Donohoe: I forgot to say that one of our roundabouts is so big that the local sheep farmer has the grazing rights.

Mr. Pickthall: It is one way of keeping green spaces.

I am a fully paid-up member of the new town whingers group. If one has something to whinge about, one whinges. As well as having some positive things to say about our new towns, we have a lot to complain about as well. Therefore, I was delighted when the Select Committee decided to do a study on the new towns, and even more pleased when I read its report, because it hit all the right notes. I shall come back to that in a moment.

The gap between the Select Committee's recommendations in its report in July last year and the Government's response in November is unusually great. The Government's response is largely dismissive and does not even bother to be polite or to explain some of its conclusions in detail. That may be the result of changes in the structure of Departments and ministerial changes. Attitudes are bound to change. However, before the report was printed, Lord Falconer and my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Ms Keeble), who were the Ministers responsible for these issues before the changes were made, openly and clearly supported most of the main recommendations that the Committee eventually made. Several of us had meetings with them on the subject. Indeed, in a debate in this Chamber we put forward our views and received a positive response from my hon. Friend.

Therefore, the brusque rejections in the Government's reply came as a shock—literally. I was astonished when I read it. The recommendations included, for example, the removal of the clawback rights. One can smell in that the controlling hand of the Treasury, because it would have had to forgo some projected income if clawback and asset sales were forgone.

I congratulate the Select Committee on its report, which was generous in spirit. That needs to be said, because most of the hon. Members involved in its construction—perhaps all of them bar one—did not represent new towns. Therefore, they were looking at the problem from outside and objectively. They were asking the right questions and then making the right recommendations. What they recommended would have made a significant difference to Skelmersdale in my constituency of West Lancashire.

I do not deny that the Government are injecting regeneration funds into Skelmersdale through the methods briefly outlined in the response document, but two points need to be made on that. First, at the same time as the Government, through the regional development agency facilitators in the Government office for the north-west, are putting regeneration funds into Skelmersdale, they are removing assets and potential assets through sell-off and clawback. It seems absurd that one arm of government should recognise a problem—in my town as well as many others—and say, "Right, we'll put a pile of money in," while another arm takes out a tranche of money that the town has generated for itself.

Secondly, the Select Committee made it clear that new towns had special problems—lots of towns have problems—consequent on their being new towns. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Telford (David Wright) that "new towns" is now the wrong title. The report said that Skelmersdale traditionally did not get the regeneration support received by other new towns because of its proximity to larger areas of deprivation, and it said the same about Telford. That is self-evident. However, it is also true that the attention of successive Governments seeking to tackle socio-economic deprivation has, over decades, concentrated on the larger areas that are perhaps easier to identify and have inner-city problems, such as Liverpool in my part of the world and, to a lesser extent but still a problem, Manchester.

To some extent that identified disadvantage for Skelmersdale has been addressed in recent months. It would be churlish of me not to welcome that, because the money that has come from the Government through the RDA will do a great deal of good. Skelmersdale has 42,000 people and, like other towns that have been mentioned, its growth was stopped in the 1970s. I believe that it was stopped deliberately so that Skelmersdale did not qualify for further help to build its town centre or its hospital. Land is still set aside for a hospital. The town will never get it, but the entire population of Skelmersdale believes that I will deliver the hospital at some point in the future. They will probably get rid of me if I do not. I certainly have no chance of doing it.

In smaller urban areas such as Skelmersdale deprivation is not as extensive. The numbers are not as large, but the situation is as serious as in Liverpool, Manchester or any of our cities with problems. Skelmersdale is a second-generation new town, built in the 1960s to accommodate mainly overspill population from Liverpool. Those who moved to Skelmersdale in its first years and are still around—there are quite a lot—say that it was fabulous: it was a great place and they thought that they had come to paradise. They could look out of the windows and see green fields, and some of them had nice little gardens. It is about 15 miles from Liverpool and 30 miles from Manchester, but it is immediately surrounded by a large and relatively well-to-do rural area.

Skelmersdale has no rail link, although railway lines pass close to it. It has lousy bus services, especially into the big estates around the town. It has the sort of town centre that my hon. Friend the Member for Telford described in the report, a description that he has repeated this afternoon: it is rather like an out-of-town mall dumped into the middle of the town, with no civic centre characteristics at all. There is no cinema. There was a small theatre, under county council provision, but it is about to be shut. There are sports centres but there is no community life in Skelmersdale centre after 6 o'clock in the evening. Several of my hon. Friends have made the same point about their towns. That makes towns of such size very difficult places to live in.

The changes to the planning regulations that the Select Committee proposed would have considerably helped West Lancashire district council to develop a proper town centre for Skelmersdale, something that it is seeking to do. Plans for that are being put together. The Government's response to the proposed changes to the planning arrangements, on page 14, is in my view pretty woolly. It says:

> "We would, therefore, expect planning arrangements under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 to increasingly become the norm."

Does that mean that that will happen in 100 years' time, or that it will happen once this year and twice in ten years' time? It is, frankly, not very helpful.

I shall mention the jobs situation briefly, because it is very similar to what my hon. Friends have already described, and I do not want to bore the Minister by repeating the same points. In the late 1970s, four huge factories in Skelmersdale, including Courtaulds and Dunlop, closed down within weeks of one another when the grants and the rate relief ran out. Some 4,000 jobs were lost overnight. That was a crippling blow in a town of that size. I am delighted to say that unemployment in Skelmersdale is now much lower, which is very positive, but over the years those factories have been replaced with firms with no roots in the area. They come in and are there for a few years. If they flourish, they stay a little longer, but if they flourish a great deal, they are taken over by another firm, which tends these days to be an American parent firm, and moved to Romania. That has happened to several firms recently. The jobs available in Skelmersdale are always very shaky. There is always uncertainty among the people over whether their jobs will still be there the next year.

The Government have brushed aside underlying arguments clearly put forward by the Select Committee. There is a serious democratic deficit in the new towns, where substantial resources continue to rest in the hands of English Partnerships, a quango with which the elected local council may or may not have a close working relationship. I am pleased, and want to put on record, that my council tells me that in the past few months those relationships have become much better and more positive. It is happy about that. The Government say that English Partnerships will be a "key player". They state:

> "We are not now proposing to divest English Partnerships of its non-strategic assets to local authorities, but rather for EP to ensure that their value in achieving the Government's objective is realised to the full."

That sounds pretty fine, but I am not sure what it amounts to in reality. It is safe to say that a good, sympathetic, positive and forward-looking quango is better than one that is not. Such a change has taken place, and I welcome it.

I recognise that the Government are enjoined to work with each new town's local authority, which is now happening. I also understand—the Minister will correct me if I am wrong—that English Partnerships can now acquire land and be involved in developments outside the new town. If so, the Government have not only rejected the proposal to transfer controlled assets from a quango to democratic local authorities—as my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Bennett) told us his Committee recommended—but are presiding over an expansion of quango powers beyond the remit of the Commission for the New Towns into and around my local authority areas.

Finally, I want to express my dismay at the general tenor of the Government response. It seeks to refute the argument of new town MPs and the Select Committee that new towns are special and require particular attention. One obvious example is that new town estates were often built rapidly over a limited period and are therefore decaying at the same time.

It may not be true of other new towns, but mine has a parallel problem with the population. Large families moved in and bred rapidly, but the size of families is now much smaller and the number of young people in the town has collapsed over the past few years. Projections

[Mr. Pickthall]

suggest that that will continue for some time. All of a sudden, we have a problem with schools that we no longer need. This year we shall have to decide which schools to close. Such problems are peculiar to new towns, because of their manufactured, non-organic history.

In Skelmersdale, we have tried every experimental building method known to man—and even some that are not. Some proved catastrophic. It is not so bad now because the worst houses have been pulled down. If I had wanted to, I could have shown members of the Select Committee houses in which they could have put their hands through the corner of a room into the garden and picked a flower. Those houses were built on metal frames with concrete slabs, but many of the frames rusted and twisted. We still face the legacy of such experiments. In the 1960s, such houses might have seemed all right, but they left a dramatic legacy.

Mr. McWalter: Does my hon. Friend agree that part of that legacy was the vast use of asbestos, as a result of which even pulling buildings down is extremely hazardous and difficult?

Mr. Pickthall: Indeed, it posed many complications. On one fairly large estate, the council has removed asbestos over the past couple of years, but only from those houses that are still rented. People who bought their houses unaware of the asbestos in them have to sort it all out themselves, at a cost of several thousand pounds, and many are elderly people who do not have the resources to do so. That is certainly a damaging legacy. No one living now is to blame for it, but the problem is still with us.

The introduction to the Government response refers to the desire of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for new towns to be "normalised". I am glad that they put the word in inverted commas. It sounds rather sinister. It sounds like the sort of thing that the Americans did in Vietnam: "We'll normalise this piece of territory." The Government go on to talk about ensuring

"parity of treatment with other local authorities".

That is fair enough and it is encouraging, but a major part of that normalisation must be to seek to ameliorate the problems created by the Radburn design. I shall not go into that, because my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish has described it more than adequately. Paragraph 3 of the introduction describes it as militating against sustainable living communities. That is one point in the Government response with which I absolutely agree. The rest of the paragraph, which addresses what we shall do about the Radburn principle and the design flaws, is well-meaning waffle. It does not mean anything.

The enormous effort and cost involved in correcting the problems that the Radburn design has created must be acknowledged. I maintain that the assets in the control of the CNT and English Partnerships should be used—perhaps they are being used now, as things are being handled more sensibly—by the local authority in that work. The local authority is the best body to organise that, and I speak as someone who for the last 12 months has had a Conservative-controlled local authority. However, it is democratically elected, concerned about the future of the new town and anxious to do its best for it.

Skelmersdale is helping, whether consciously or not, the Government's programme for affordable housing and better housing, because all round the edge of it huge new private estates are being built. The houses are very nice. If they were in the south-east of England, they would be worth £250,000 apiece, but in that area they are relatively low-cost houses. They are improving the town and avoid the mistakes that were made in the building of the existing new town. There are many thousands of them. However, we could end up with quite a nice dormitory area all round the edge of Skem, like a big doughnut, with a rotting core of the old new town, without a town centre. That prospect does not cheer me up at all.

Mr. McWalter: Does my hon. Friend draw any comfort from the claims made repeatedly in the Government response that the standard spending assessment system is being abolished and replaced with a new local government settlement, and that that is the way in which these matters will be dealt with?

Mr. Pickthall: As my efforts over many years to understand the standard spending assessment have absolutely failed, the answer is no, that does not give me any comfort, although it does remind me to place on the record the fact that my area has also had its support for housing chopped back in the last year. That is causing us considerable problems.

It must be remembered that new towns such as Skelmersdale represent work still in progress. They are not a finished job; they have never been capped off. Debts are paid off, but cash from assets is still being taken out by the Treasury. I still maintain, despite the reports and the nice things that I have said about English Partnerships, that those assets should be used to help to finish off the new towns—in the nicest possible way. They should be used to make them the living communities that the Government say that they are anxious to construct. That enormous task will be very difficult, but many people out there are willing to take it on, and most of them are elected.

3.59 pm

Matthew Green (Ludlow): I welcome the debate, and in particular the Select Committee report, which examines the problems of the so-called new towns in some detail. The report, and the Government's unsatisfactory response to it, revolve around whether one accepts that the new towns have a unique case compared with other areas. In summary, the Government's response is that the problems of new towns can be dealt with in the same way as those of other areas. One could have some sympathy with that view, if it were not for one major difference between the new towns and other areas: a substantial amount of land in new towns is owned by a Government quango, English Partnerships, and the controlling interest that that quango has over the planning and development of the new towns does not exist anywhere else.

The Government may have strong arguments for saying that, with the new formula spending share, which has replaced the standard spending assessment, unique cases could be made for towns throughout the country. I, for one, would argue that the Government have not taken enough account of rural areas, and that new towns adjoining rural areas, such as Telford, get a better settlement than the rural districts. However, the important issue with new towns is that the land and the assets are in the hands of a quango, and cannot be used to the full extent in helping their regeneration—or in some cases their required rebirth.

We should also bear it in mind that the new towns are not all the same. We have just heard about Skelmersdale, where the polite word that might be used about the core of the town is stagnation. However, other new towns, such as Telford, are expanding and thriving. Moreover, Milton Keynes, where the Government are planning to build a lot more housing, will continue to be a "new" town because of the rapid development that is planned for it.

I shall add a little historical perspective to the debate. Hon. Members will probably not know that my degree is in mediaeval studies. I know that new towns are nothing new. Ludlow is a formally laid out mediaeval new town. I would not have described the Mortimers, who planned the town in the 12th century, as Stalinist. Formal planning does not have to be viewed as a centralised approach. Ludlow is a very successful new town from the 12th century. Our biggest problem is that in the 12th century they did not realise that the motor car would be invented, so there are no parking spaces. Many of Ludlow's problems are a result of its success.

There are also new towns that were built in the 12th and 13th centuries that no longer exist. There is a place in Shropshire called Caus, which is now a field, but was once a planned, formally laid out town. In the past, towns have been successful or not, and we must take a historical view of that. There will be nothing really new. There may soon be new "new towns", although they might not be called that, at Ashford and Thames gateway.

To return to the report, as I am sure that hon. Members would prefer me to do, there are several areas that should be examined, the first of which is planning. There is a particular problem where a large amount of land is owned by a quango and that quango has rights with no equivalent elsewhere. That prevents local authorities from developing proactive local planning strategies. The capacity to use section 106 agreements to get planning gain is also limited compared with other areas. As a by-product, the local authority also has a reduced fee income from the administration of the planning system, because so much of the land is owned by English Partnerships. The Government cannot ignore that, and pretend that new towns are like the rest of the country, because that ownership does not exist in other areas.

There is also the financial aspect. With both the 2 per cent. clawback and the fact that only 20 per cent. of the asset is put back into the area, there are some situations in which the areas are still seen as milch cows that keep the Treasury happy. We have heard about the crazy case of Skelmersdale, which is attracting regeneration money into one hand and seeing money disappearing off to Government from the other. If we tried to explain that to local taxpayers, they would be more than baffled.

The financial aspects need to be reviewed. More importantly, we need to learn some lessons, because in the future we will need to develop the equivalent of new towns, and to develop and redevelop the existing new towns. There was an exchange about low or high density, but the real problem with new town development was the separation of the new towns into different zones in which people live, work and shop. Successful towns throughout the centuries have merged those activities in one site. People live above shops and are in thriving centres at all times of the day, because they either live there or are visiting for entertainment. That is lost with the modular approach, which is also designed around the motor car.

Mr. Hammond: Is not the essence of traditional towns that different parts of them get redeveloped at different stages, so no single fad or design concept of the moment is imposed across them all? That is what gives them their vibrancy and character, which are so often lacking in some of our new towns.

Matthew Green: The hon. Gentleman has a point, but it goes only so far. Historic towns that have been developed piecemeal have been in existence for much longer, and the 30-year-old new towns will develop piecemeal from now on. He has a point, as the infrastructure problems stem from the fact that they were all built at the same time, but I would not stretch it too far.

David Wright: The point is that there are pockets of problems, deprivation and poor design surrounded by other areas and communities that are successful. We do not want to affect the successful communities; we want to tackle the problems. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that we could use a different design approach in each area while retaining the character of the successful elements of new town communities?

Matthew Green: The hon. Gentleman is spot on with that approach. That does not involve ignoring strategic planning, as good strategic planning would ensure different designs, feels and characteristics for different parts. I know Telford well, as I was born and bred in Shropshire, which Telford is still formally part of. Many people in Telford will still say that they come from Wellington or Ironbridge, referring to the old communities. Some of those are successful, but we have also heard about the problem estates, especially those built on the Radburn design. It is not an easy decision for local authorities or the Government to consider, but I suspect that we may reach the stage of having to demolish the Radburn estates, rather than trying to fiddle with them.

Andrew Bennett: Some Radburn estates many need to be pulled down, but we must remember how the tenure has developed on them. There is owner-occupation, because people have bought their homes, and a significant amount of rented accommodation, because private landlords have moved in, particularly in places such as Telford. Sadly, they are some of the worst private landlords, and I hope that the Housing (Overcrowding) Bill will start to deal with that problem.

[Andrew Bennett]

Putting the different interests together in one package is complicated, and the process is further complicated by the fact that ownership of some of the land is unknown.

Matthew Green: The hon. Gentleman has hit the point. The problem is not always that land ownership is unknown. Some strips of land have, in effect, become ransom strips for any future development. There are many problems. Central Government legislation may be needed to provide more radical ways of dealing with the problem of the complexity of ownership of sites.

Mr. Hammond: It may be inconvenient to anyone who wants to take a redevelopment approach that the new towns are not necessarily under single ownership. However, surely that simply repeats the pattern that exists in every other community and town in every other part of the country? There are various tenures, and various owners, good and bad, co-operative and unco-operative.

Matthew Green: Yes, in a sense, but I invite the hon. Gentleman to walk around some of the estates in Telford, although the hon. Member for Telford (David Wright) might not be too keen. He will see that the problem is much more systematic than would arise from a more organic process of the past.

Mr. McWalter: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that many of those ransom strips are now being actively conveyed to the local authority following some of the recent changes to English Partnerships? That is certainly happening in my area. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will welcome that, and ask the Minister to consolidate that move.

Matthew Green: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. I do not disagree that some of the recent changes to English Partnerships have been for the better. Frankly, the worst days for new towns were in the 1980s and 1990s when there was a laissez-faire approach, as it was described, and distant landlords. I welcome some of the changes, but problems remain that the Government have yet to accept. That emerges from their response; they do not accept that the problems exist. Members of the Select Committee and most other people accept that the problems are very real.

Another major point to make about the new towns is that they were built around the car. In the 1950s, 60s and 70s, the car was not seen as the environmental problem that it is now. That had several effects. We heard about the roundabouts, which create great problems. Telford, which is on my doorstep, and Redditch, which is not that far away, share the characteristic of hundreds of roundabouts.

Moats were another effect that the very effective road system created. They prevent people from travelling on foot from one part of the town to another. Telford town centre, which I know well, is like a large shopping mall that could be anywhere. It could be Merry Hill, which is an out-of-town shopping mall, but it is not: it is in the centre of Telford. Hardly anyone would ever walk there or take public transport. Everyone drives there. Office blocks and successful businesses surround it, but each one of them is a small island surrounded by car parking spaces. At 6 o'clock, they are dead and distant. It is a long way for anyone to walk into the town centre from any of the housing areas.

Mr. McWalter: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for allowing us to add to points that we made in the main debate. Is he aware that the cars were also separated from the houses? A row of houses was built, followed by a garage block, the assumption being that all these proud car owners would put their cars into the garages at night. That does not happen now. Hardly any of the garages are used to house cars, but are the centres for drug trafficking and a variety of other antisocial uses such that one of our needs is for many of those garage blocks to be entirely demolished.

Matthew Green: That is a fair point. One of the long-term routes out of this is that when areas of new towns are redeveloped, as they will have to be, rather than a residential area just being redeveloped as a residential area we should look more closely at live-work schemes. We should perhaps try to make the communities work on that site, rather than have this continual divorcing of different parts in different places. I would like to see a bit more support from the Government for live-work schemes. The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill is currently going through Parliament. There is quite a bit of concern about developers' mixed use schemes. The reduction in planning consents down to three years may be welcome in straight housing sites but could be a serious problem in mixed use developments. Perhaps the Minister could give us an assurance that he will look into that.

We have a well thought out and cogent Select Committee report and a Government response that at best imitates the action of an ostrich with its head firmly in the sand. They are pretending that the problem is not there. These problems will not go away. There is the decline in the infrastructure, the problems of all the buildings becoming old at the same time and the fact that the Government are taking the lion's share of the finance sitting in the land. That finance could be used to redevelop those areas. That has to be addressed at some point. If it is not, it will keep coming back year after year, until finally this or another Government concede the point and allow the money to go back.

The Minister may not be able to persuade the Chancellor. It may be a difficult task, but he needs to start trying. At some point in the next few years some of that money must be invested back into these towns. It is only fair that it should be. Future sites such as Thames gateway, Ashford and Milton Keynes are coming on. We owe it to them to learn the lessons of what has worked and what has failed in the new towns. We must work to solve the problems that have been created and ensure that those problems are not created for the new generation of settlements.

4.17 pm

Mr. Philip Hammond (Runnymede and Weybridge): I congratulate the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Bennett) on his presentation of the Select Committee report. As a former member of that Committee, albeit for a rather brief period, I find it a particular pleasure to take part in this debate. It has been characterised by a great deal of expertise. That is hardly surprising, as almost all the hon. Members who have spoken represent new towns. I cannot claim to represent one myself, but I grew up in Essex and anyone who grows up there has a passing acquaintance with new towns.

The debate is timely because the Government are proposing new settlements. It is an appropriate moment to look at some of the inherited problems from the last wave of new settlement buildings before plunging into the new wave. It is also interesting that a number of hon. Members referred to the problems that have arisen from what were regarded at the time as novel, modern and innovative building techniques. Houses were built quickly using the kind of techniques that the Deputy Prime Minister advocates to address the affordable housing crisis in the south-east.

I hope that the Government will think carefully about the lesson of the new towns in relation to unconventional building techniques. I am sure that when Skelmersdale was built, experts advised that those techniques were perfectly sound and well researched and would not present problems in the future. I hope that the Minister can reassure us that the construction techniques that the Deputy Prime Minister advocates for this new wave are less susceptible to such dangers.

The report is good and worthwhile, although I do not agree with all its recommendations. I do not share the rose-tinted affection of the Chairman of the Committee for the designers of the new towns. Hon. Members had mixed views about whether brickbats or bouquets should be awarded to the architects and town planners of the 1950s and 1960s.

There is some Labour party grief to be worked through; every Labour Member who spoke expressed disappointment and dismay and emphasised the gap between the Select Committee's recommendations and the Government's response, to which the Minister will reply in due course.

I identify two conflicts between the report and the Government's response. The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish suggested that the Government's response was basically, "Get lost". More specifically, the Select Committee has emphasised the need for special treatment of the new towns, and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has emphasised the desire of the new towns for normalcy, and to be treated as part of the general community.

In rather extraordinary language for a Government response, it is suggested in paragraph 34 that the best way to benefit areas in greatest need is "bending mainstream programmes". I am not sure what that means, but it is not what one expects civil servants writing a response to suggest. There seem to be some unresolved differences between the Committee's recommendations and the Government's response.

The second clear area of conflict is that the Select Committee's overall thrust is to recommend giving local authorities greater autonomy and allowing them to retain capital receipts in order to deal with problems at local level, using local people and democratically elected local forums. It recommends specifically the transfer of the assets of English Partnerships to the relevant local authorities.

The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish was gentle on the Government over their response to the Select Committee recommendation, which the Government comprehensively rejected. They prefer to control the agenda from the centre through English Partnerships and the Regional Development Agencies. The Government intend to retain clawback and prefer to have the money available for disposal from the centre so that they can determine where regeneration will take place, rather than allowing locally generated receipts to fuel local redevelopment. That is the antithesis of local government.

The pooling of capital receipts, which the Government propose in clause 11 of the Local Government Bill, which is currently going through Parliament, is a further step in the wrong direction. It is a step away from local autonomy and towards enabling the Government to direct investment according to their agenda and in a way that is not subject to scrutiny and control by democratically elected local authorities.

David Wright: I am interested in what the hon. Gentleman has to say, but I want to know why, in 18 years in government, the Conservative Administration did not make any of the changes or work with new towns on the basis that the hon. Gentleman suggests.

Mr. Hammond: During the past 20 years, the situation has been evolving. I am not here to make a party political point; the Select Committee report made various recommendations and suggested certain actions, some of which the Government have rejected. The debate this afternoon is between those hon. Members who support the Select Committee's recommendations and the Minister defending the Government's response.

Matthew Green: The hon. Gentleman says that he is not here to score party political points, but is he saying that a Conservative Government would allow clawback and give control of the funds back to the councils? Is that now Conservative party policy?

Mr. Hammond: I shall not make policy on the hoof. The hon. Gentleman will be aware of recent debates on the Local Government Bill, so he should know that we greatly resisted the Government's proposal for the pooling of capital receipts, which is a parallel example. He should be able to deduce that it would be inconsistent to reject the pooling of local authority capital receipts and at the same time advocate continuation of the clawback of receipts to English Partnerships. I shall return to the point in a few moments.

The Select Committee and the Government agree that not all new towns have the same characteristics and needs. Some are in areas where low demand aggravates the physical problems. Others, particularly in the south-east and around London, are areas of high demand, facing the problem of the lack of affordable housing, though there might be potential for brownfield redevelopment of higher densities than currently apply.

David Wright: I am interested in the hon. Gentleman's comments, and I am not attacking him, but does he acknowledge that the high and low demand equation

[David Wright]

often occurs within the towns? Some estates in Telford are pockets of deprivation where demand for property is low, but in others two miles down the road the demand for housing is high. It is not simply a north-south divide; the market dynamics are far more complex.

Mr. Hammond: The hon. Gentleman is right. It is certainly not just a north-south issue, as hotspots exist all around the country. It is incontrovertible, however, that in the south-east, where the pressure for more affordable housing is greatest, the new towns—perhaps including some of their more depressed parts—provide more potential for redevelopment as higher density communities. That could prove a solution to the affordable housing crisis from which London and the south-east suffer.

All the new towns are affected by problems such as poor sustainability, car dependence, and inadequate infrastructure and housing stock—often as a result of building methods. Another problem that new towns often share is coming into obsolescence at the same time. It is the coincidence of obsolescence that underpins many of the issues raised by new town Members here today.

I should like to focus on the report and the Government's response, and put some specific points to the Minister. Recommendation (a) deals with the licensing of landlords, which the Select Committee clearly linked to the receipt of housing benefit. It is unclear from their response, however, whether the Government make that link. They refer to making it a criminal offence for a private landlord who is not licensed to let a property, yet in the next sentence talk about no housing benefit being payable.

It is wholly appropriate and legitimate for the Government to consider introducing a system of licensing landlords who are to be beneficiaries of housing benefit. However, it is equally clear that requiring landlords to have a licence to let—with the corollary that if they do not have a licence they will be committing a criminal offence by letting, not necessarily to someone in receipt of housing benefit but to anyone—represents a significant erosion of the rights of private property, with potentially significant implications for human rights. I shall be grateful if the Minister will clarify the Government's intentions on that point.

Andrew Bennett: We are looking forward to the draft housing Bill that will deal with that matter. Does the hon. Gentleman accept that there are two separate problems? In many parts of the country private landlords do not cause any problems. However, particularly in some areas of low demand in the north and the new towns, some landlords appear to put tenants into a property with a view to making the property next door almost unsellable. In that case, it is a question not just of whether those people receive benefit or not but of the behaviour of the landlord.

I hope that the Government will consider enabling local authorities to take action against all landlords whether they are in receipt of benefit or not. In other places, it will be necessary only when they are in receipt of benefit.

Mr. Hammond: I look forward to having that discussion with the hon. Gentleman when the draft housing Bill is published, but the issue of compensation will arise. Local authorities can compulsorily purchase properties, but the compulsory letting of properties suggested in the communities plan is not compulsory purchase but the state's requiring a landlord to take an action that he might not otherwise take. That is a significant step.

There will be issues relating to compensation. I do not know whether the Government intend to allow landlords who are not licensed and cannot let their property to require the local authority to purchase it. It would be interesting to learn that, but it might be more appropriate to discuss it when the draft housing Bill is published.

Recommendation (b) draws attention to the problems of low density, and the Government's response cites the Greenwich millennium village, which on the face of it looks like an interesting example of a new high-density sustainable development of 80 dwellings per hectare. Hon. Members will know that the proposed developers of the millennium dome site held an exhibition in the House a couple of weeks ago. I had the opportunity to talk to them about the Greenwich millennium village and discovered that very few of the occupants of those dwellings were families. They were mainly single people and young couples.

Of course, the population is increasingly composed of single-person households. We must recognise that, but I maintain that an essential part of the glue of our social fabric is the family. Families have an ownership of communities that single people do not. We all had the experience when we were younger of living in areas mainly composed of single person households, in which people arrive in their cars and leave in their cars. There is not the same sense of community that there is when families are present. I am concerned that no one has yet come up with a model for high-density urban living that will be attractive to families with children as opposed to professional couples and single households.

Andrew Bennett: The attractive feature of the Greenwich millennium village is that it already has a functioning school—I assume that there must be children for the school to function—and a family health centre. It is not as balanced a community as the hon. Gentleman would like, but it is fairly balanced, and the key thing is that the facilities are put in place at the same time as the new housing is developed.

Mr. Hammond: I take the hon. Gentleman's point and it is an interesting experiment. However, it seems to me that the jury is out, and 10 or 20 years down the line, the absence of a mix of population in that development may be an issue. Perhaps we should all watch it with great interest.

Mr. McWalter: Does the hon. Gentleman recognise that his Government left a report to the effect that some

4.4 million homes were needed in the south-east of England, and we were left to deal with it? That report identified the huge growth in single-person households as the main driver of that housing need. Clearly, a programme that dealt with that need and gave single people a reasonable chance of getting accommodation in the near future would be extremely welcome.

Mr. Hammond: The hon. Gentleman is obviously right. There is going to be great interest in the need for accommodation for single people. It would not be beneficial for our cities and urban areas to be redeveloped as high-rise, high-density, single-person accommodation, while the suburbs became the places where people moved when they wanted to have families. That would be a bad model, and I am sure that the Government would not want that kind of social apartheid. I am simply pointing out an area of concern. The jury is out and we all need to watch with interest—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have been listening to the debate extremely carefully and it appears to be wandering into other areas. We are debating the Select Committee's report and recommendations and the Government's response to them. I suggest that I have shown discretion and that we should deal with the report and the Government's response.

Mr. Hammond: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for that valuable guidance.

Recommendation (e) of the Select Committee's report deals with neighbourhood management problems. The Select Committee thinks that part of the blame lies with the fragmented ownership that has arisen out of the right to buy. One or two hon. Members have clarified some of the issues. I hope that the Minister will be able to confirm that it is still the Government's view that mixed tenure communities are likely to be successful and that mixed tenure is a positive thing. I am sure that neither I nor the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish want the Select Committee's report to be interpreted as suggesting that the introduction of different forms of tenure into an area is a negative thing.

I want to ask the Minister about business improvement districts, which we have been discussing in the context of the Local Government Bill. There is much reference to local authority-led initiatives in relation to town centres in new towns, but the Government's response contains absolutely no reference to BIDs. Will the Government confirm that they regard BIDs as an appropriate potential solution and a tool for use in new town centres?

As I have already said, new towns in the London area need more affordable housing. Instead of addressing that need for more affordable housing in the new towns, the Government refer in paragraph 32 of their response to the announced new focus points in the south-east—the Thames gateway, Ashford and the Cambridge-Stansted corridor. However, in paragraph 13 they suggest that the intensification of development within the existing new towns can be an important route to the delivery of affordable housing. Will the Minister confirm that the Government see the new towns in the south-east as a significant source of land for affordable housing? Will he confirm that paragraph 57, which refers to English Partnerships' land being a source of affordable housing, means that English Partnerships will cease to dispose of land for market housing? If that is so, what are the implications for mixed communities and mixed tenure development?

Recommendations (j), (k), (o) and (p) deal specifically with the role of English Partnerships, and the Government's response is the exact opposite of what the Select Committee recommended. The Select Committee suggested that English Partnerships should become a consultancy, having divested itself of its assets to local authorities. Local authorities would call English Partnerships in as a consultant where appropriate and the RDAs would get involved only in genuinely strategic sites. The Government have decided that English Partnerships is to drive the whole process. Paragraph 40 of the Government's response states:

> "English Partnerships will work closely with the Housing Corporation, and with other key agencies including the RDAs".

The paragraph makes no mention of local authorities.

We also have to consider something that hon. Members have not mentioned. I hope that they are aware of the Government's proposal to sequester 75 per cent. of all capital receipts, rather than capital receipts only in the new towns. A pattern is emerging of local authorities being emasculated by a Government who have decided that the regeneration and redevelopment of urban areas, including the new towns, will not be led by elected community representatives and will effectively be in the hands of their agencies.

All hon. Members who have spoken have touched on the need for investment in redevelopment or refurbishment of obsolete or nearly obsolete stock. What is the Government's assessment of the scale of that problem? There will clearly be a time after which the housing stock and infrastructure of the new towns will come to the end of their useful lives. The Government response tells us that £4.7 billion, which includes money spent on the planning system, will be available by 2005–06. Can the Minister say how much of that money will go to the new towns? Can he put that in the context of the Government's assessment of the need for the renewal of obsolete infrastructure and stock in the new towns?

Recommendation (m) is that clawback from right-to-buy sales should be abolished. That was the major theme of the Select Committee report, but the Government have rejected the recommendation outright, while referring to their protection of public investment in the new towns, although, as several Members have commented, the debts have been paid off. The Select Committee's concern was to put the new towns on a similar basis to that of other local authorities. I must say to the Chairman of the Select Committee that the Government have done that by a rather different route. They have sequestered 75 per cent. of the capital receipts of all local authorities, in effect extending clawback to all local authorities and all right-to-buy sales, which is a huge centralising measure that will give the Government, not local authorities and local people, control over the regeneration and redevelopment agenda.

Paragraph 48 of the Government response says that English Partnerships has the power to waive clawback or to transfer it to a local authority. Local authorities are being subjected to the sequestration of 75 per cent.

[Mr. Hammond]

of capital receipts. Can the Minister explain how the power to waive or transfer clawback will operate? Is that still a valid statement in view of clause 11 of the Local Government Bill? A local authority has raised that specific question with me.

Recommendation (v) relates to the evaluation of the experiment at a time when the Government propose to move forward with more new settlements. The recommendation seems sensible, and, although the Government have not rejected it, their response, which discusses thematic studies, is unclear. Will the Minister clarify what the Government are doing to learn the lessons of the new town experiment in a formalised way, particularly in terms of innovative building methods? How do the Government intend to learn from those experiences in developing the new communities of the future?

The Government have rejected the Select Committee's central proposals and have chosen to take a Treasury-led centralising approach with the central allocation of funding for redevelopment and renewal. They have chosen to reject any explicit recognition of the special problems arising from the coincidence over a short time of many routine renewal requirements in the new towns. That approach is repeated in the Local Government Bill and the new local government funding formula, which the hon. Member for Hemel Hempstead mentioned. It seems that the Government have rejected the opportunity provided by the Select Committee report to address the liabilities that will accrue from the housing stock and infrastructure of the new towns if they are not tackled immediately.

4.44 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Tony McNulty): This has been a good debate and I am pleased to have so much time to respond. We need to understand the context. The Select Committee report was published in July, at almost the same time as the Deputy Prime Minister's first statement of intent, following the comprehensive spending review, on 18 July and almost at the same time as the quinquennial review of English Partnerships and all that that entailed. It was responded to in November 2002 and, as someone said earlier, it is clearly a work in progress if ever there was one.

We have almost completed the jigsaw with the announcement of the sustainable communities document in February 2003. If the Select Committee's report was timely, much has happened since, and Members need to understand the wider context and all that has prevailed since its publication. Their characterisation of the report has done a disservice to the new towns that they represent and to the response to that report. It is not a dismissive document. With all that has happened since, I would have thought it unnecessary to make such remarks, some of which I shall return to.

The hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) was right about one matter in his entirely non-partisan conclusion—not. It is no accident that barely one new town is represented by a Conservative—most of the rest fell away in 1997—but he is right that the response is not, "Get lost." We are not well served by selective quotations that anyone could make from the report. There are elements unique to some new towns, but not to others. There are elements of social fabric unique to some of our new towns, but not to them all.

If I were being flippant, which I am not, because this is a serious subject, I would say that Harrow could be characterised as a new town, certainly as much as Ludlow, given that about three-quarters of its housing stock was built in the 1930s. Happily for Harrow—I do not know about Ludlow—it was slightly better built with a greater concern for high quality and design than much of the housing stock in the new towns, although I will not make special pleadings for 1930s Nash-built pairs of semis that might reach the end of their natural life in 30 or 40 years. Happily, the houses were built to last and were worthy of 100 years or more.

That is not to belittle the perhaps five types of difficulty in our new towns, but to say that either the Government's response or all that the Government have outlined since the report's publication fails to respond to them is not useful. Many of the points made about employment and reliance on single employers are a feature of the flawed aspects of the social engineering that went into some new towns. Sadly, when travelling the country, I see similar factors in communities that have sprung up since, and indeed long before, the new towns were built, as well as communities that have sought to reinvent themselves and been clobbered by what might be called reliance on a mono-industry culture.

I think in particular of Torbay, whose 1920s elegance is faded to say the least. It relies wholly on tourism and has a wonderful Edwardian façade that makes it look very posh and rich, but it is 89th in our list of most deprived areas and has significant pockets of poverty. The area has sought to reverse the decline in tourism by relying more and more on mobile phones and telecommunications. That was fine when there was a taker for them—it led to a little boom in Torbay's economy for some time—but then there was a shut down, with all the commensurate difficulties that Corby has encountered with steel and that many other new towns and other areas have encountered. To say that many difficulties of the new towns are not unique is not to dismiss or belittle them—it is to be realistic. Very serious points have been made, however, and I want to deal with them.

No one has said that the Government response somehow implies that the new towns are not relevant. Some 10 sit squarely in the huge tri-regional growth area of London, the south-east and the east, where we are following the communities plan and putting in significant amounts of money. The notion that those 10 new towns will not be part of the growth areas and housing growth in those regions is complete nonsense. We must learn from mistakes in the new town movement when we move on with those growth areas, which is why the debate and the report have been useful. However, I am certain that those 10 new towns will be part of the solution, not part of the problem.

It is right and proper that the sustainable communities plan dwelt on the four growth areas in London, the south-east and the east, but people will know if they look at the housing numbers that, even if we achieve every single housing aspiration in those growth areas, that represents but 50 per cent. of the commonly agreed growth targets that we need to meet for those regions. To say that other new towns will not have a role is not appropriate.

I can understand that expectations were raised by the Select Committee report, which I fully accept is extremely good. I can also understand the elation after decades of neglect, not least by the Conservative party, which had a judgment meted out to it in 1997 and subsequently. However, I do not understand the horror that has been referred to at the Government response and at what the Government have done since. In the context of the response, I do not accept that every recommendation was entirely rebuffed. Let me say this in the gentlest terms: the notion that there is no long-term interest in the viability of those communities at the core of the Government response is not accurate.

To say that some civil servants still rule the roost is an unnecessary attack on officials. If hon. Friends do not like the Government response or what I say as a Minister, they should attack me, not the officials who stand behind me. They have no recourse to a response. If people have a problem with the policies of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, what I have said or what the Government response says, they should attack the Department or the relevant Minister. They should not characterise things as indifference by officials who are with us now or who were with us previously. It is not appropriate to do that in any way, shape or form.

Mr. McWalter: As my hon. Friend gave evidence to the Select Committee when he had been in post for only four weeks, it was inevitable that a significant contribution to his response would be made by those who briefed him.

Mr. McNulty: That is as may be—I am sure that it is as factual as the sun coming up tomorrow—but that does not alter the fact that it is inappropriate for elected politicians to hide behind their position to attack officials in any way, shape or form. If people do not like what the Government do, they should attack the Government. If they do not like what I say, they should attack me. They should not tell me that there is a horrible number of civil servants behind me who were indifferent to what new towns were about in the 1970s and 1980s and who are indifferent now. People should not say that those civil servants put words in my mouth and that that is why I am indifferent. Frankly, that does not serve anyone's purpose, nor does the notion that since 1977 in respect of new towns we have had government by diktat à la Nicholas Ridley. Equally, that is not true. It is not why people got elected in 1997.

I have been up and down the country, and I have seen examples of crumbling libraries, colleges with flat roofs and so on in new towns and outside them, which my hon. Friend the Member for Hemel Hempstead (Mr. McWalter) described. That is not to belittle the experience of new towns, but we do not serve them by suggesting that their problems with crumbling public infrastructure, whether libraries or colleges, are unique. I have crumbling libraries in my constituency. All significant urban areas have crumbling libraries and badly built and designed public buildings of poor quality—of course they do.

Mr. Donohoe: Surely my hon. Friend the Minister accepts that the quick build that occurred during the period that we are talking about, which is mainly the 1960s, resulted in poor architecture. That is why, some 30 years later, we are experiencing problems and the new towns are taking a big hit. No other towns have comparable problems. I challenge him to give an example from any part of the country of a town built in the 1960s that is not a new town.

Mr. McNulty: That is not the point. The comments about the quantity and obsolescence of an array of housing stock are well made—I am not trying to belittle the difficulties—but I can say the same about the mill towns of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. There is seriously low demand in pockets of the north, which is not to do with the fabric, but with social engineering.

Sadly for us all, much that was built in urban areas, especially in the 1960s, has crumbled. The school that I went to was very good, but I spent half my time in mobile units in the playground—the building was condemned because not enough concrete was used to build it. Yes, there are problems in urban areas and in some parts of, perhaps, every new town, but they are not crumbling, decaying wrecks from top to bottom in quite the way that some people would have it.

Mr. McWalter: Most Members accept that every community has major difficulties with renovation of infrastructure, but in any given decade most communities need perhaps 20 per cent. of their infrastructure to receive such renovation. It is unusual for a community to have to deal with a percentage much greater than that. Does my hon. Friend the Minister accept that the extraction of money from local authorities—£10 million from mine—through negative subsidy alone creates special problems and deprives areas of the resources to effect very necessary renovations?

Mr. McNulty: I recognise that there are special problems, not least in terms of volume and the fact that much decaying stock is coming on stream at the same time, but it is indicative that most new towns do not have the significant problems of low demand and abandonment that exist in some areas. I shall return to that when I deal with the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Telford (David Wright).

I do not mean to over-egg the pudding. It is not appropriate to undermine very real problems, but when we talk about new towns moving to normality, there is nothing sinister in it—that is exactly what they must do. When we talk about the democratic deficit and moving towards the framework of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, people ask, "What does that mean?" Precisely, it means overcoming the democratic deficit that people accept exists in other dimensions. I shall return to that issue.

Of course infrastructure is wearing out. The Radburn layout scheme was a complete travesty, and it was certainly not designed for its durability or on any notion of sustainability. This has been pointed out, and I shall return to it in a moment:

[Mr. McNulty]

> "The Government is not prepared to give up clawback or sales receipts in the New Towns as a general principle."

Fine. Members can refer to that if they want, but please will they quote it in the context of the next two sentences? They are:

> "We need to be sure that the investment the Government has made in the new towns is protected. As we explained . . . in some circumstances, and with the agreement of the Treasury, English Partnerships might waive clawback or transfer the right to receive clawback to the relevant local authority."

If the whole piece is quoted, it makes sense as a response, whether one agrees with it or not. If one simply quotes the first part, one cannot sustain an argument that it is dismissive.

Mr. Hammond: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. McNulty: No, because I shall deal with what the hon. Gentleman was going to ask me in a moment. He will understand that when we get to it.

I am not downplaying some of the new towns' problems, nor the variety between and within new towns, but we could have a similar debate about seaside towns, market towns or the 88 inner-city ward areas. Those places have different problems of different magnitudes, but they are specialised and unique problems none the less.

The point has been made, which is fair in part, that, overwhelmingly, new towns do not receive neighbourhood renewal funding. One response to that is that if they are not in the 88 top wards, why should they receive such funding? The mechanism for distributing those funds uses the condition that an area has to have one of the 88 most deprived wards in the country, and if it does not, it does not get anything. I have significant pockets of deprivation in my constituency, but we do not get neighbourhood renewal money for the same reason—there is a quantum when compared with the overall borough authority.

However, a serious matter underlies that point, as my hon. Friend the Member for Telford said. Although the mechanisms and data did not necessarily exist for smaller-area remuneration districts the last time the index of multiple deprivation was looked at, the neighbourhood renewal unit has now engaged academics and researchers from Oxford university to review that situation. We are about halfway through that review, in which we are trying to capture an area beyond the ward—sub-ward and small-area level. That is problematic, and we are committed to addressing it. That could increase the availability of neighbourhood renewal funding for some new towns and other areas where there are distinct, but very deep, pockets of poverty which are not captured by the wider mechanism.

On setting up market renewal areas in the new towns, I suspect that I have no substantial good news. The pathfinders are quite deliberately focused on the most acute areas of widespread market failure, and, with the best will in the world, we cannot say that that is a significant feature of new towns. I know that Telford has the worst examples and manifestations of the problems affecting the new towns but, as my hon. Friend the Member for West Lancashire (Mr. Pickthall) said, it is nothing like the east Lancashire pathfinder area, where housing problems, in all their forms, are writ large. The new towns do not have the emerging problems of Oldham and Rochdale, where I was on Tuesday, or some parts of Merseyside and South Yorkshire, where there are problems of low demand, abandonment and other complexities.

We will, however, be able to translate to the new towns, and other areas, the significant lessons that we learn from tackling the issues of low demand and abandonment in the nine pathfinder areas. That process happens in a range of our other programmes. We need to learn the lessons of new build in the 1960s in general, and of the new towns in particular, not least in terms of quality, design and density, and the problems with transport that have been mentioned. We should not repeat the mistakes in the growth areas.

Andrew Bennett: Does my hon. Friend accept that in some pathfinder areas where problems are pretty desperate, it may be necessary to put in nine stitches to turn the area round, but in places such as Telford, where market weakness is just starting, we may need to put in only one stitch to achieve that? We should make some effort now in places that are starting to suffer market weakness, rather than waiting until they are in the worst state.

Mr. McNulty: That is exactly what English Partnerships is doing in Woodside and the four other strategic sites that it will retain in Telford. We have made it clear that what is needed is good quality and design, not tinkering and the built-in obsolescence that resulted from a decade of bad design. EP has a positive and productive relationship with its colleagues in the three sites in Hemel Hempstead which will stay on the list of 34 strategic sites. Those good principles will also be followed in Skelmersdale town centre. I spent three years in Liverpool and had the pleasure of going to Skelmersdale once. I will say no more.

I say to my hon. Friend the Member for West Lancashire that English Partnerships has not, in its new role, acquired the power to buy land outside the new town areas. It has always had that power but it is now incorporated in its plans for new towns. My hon. Friend said that new towns needed to be finished off in the nicest way, but every community and town is a work in progress; it is never finished. The Mortimers did not foresee 12th-century Ludlow as a finished project; 21st-century Ludlow is ever so slightly different but it is still a work in progress. An end game was never intended for these communities. They may have come to the end of their useful life as representatives of the glorious new town movement, but they have moved on and are now substantial communities in their own right. They have moved to different phases and have to address their own problems.

As part of the process of restoring the democratic deficit, we have given the new town authorities and others significant funding to revitalise their planning functions. The planning delivery grant gave authorities such as Telford and Stevenage at least £75,000 for the coming year to improve their planning departments; Milton Keynes got £340,000, Hemel Hempstead

£229,000, Harlow £181,000 and Basildon £208,000. We want to get the planning process up to speed, and we are putting our money where our mouth is.

We expect planning arrangements under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 to become the norm, and we expect to move away from the anti-democratic elements in English Partnerships and the Commission for the New Towns. There is nothing sinister about that; we want to restore the democratic planning process in those areas, and rightly so.

Having responded to hon. Members, I will start my speech. I suspect that there will be no monument to me in a new town. Lewis Silkin, the post-war Minister for Town and Country Planning, shares one side of a monument in Stevenage because people were so happy about what was done.

David Wright: Telford has a Silkin way.

Mr. McNulty: I am pleased to hear it. When Lewis Silkin visited Stevenage before it was expanded, people repainted a sign at the railway station to read "Silkingrad". That was not a 13th-century Stalinist, but there was an allusion to Stalin, none the less.

Andrew Bennett: Does my hon. Friend accept that there is a chance that 17 new town shopping centres will be named after him if he comes up with the money?

Mr. McNulty: I am not sure that I want that to be my epitaph—not yet, anyway.

Fifty years after the start of the process, the challenge is for new towns to move into the next phase of the work in progress. The report is useful, and I urge hon. Members to take our response and all that has happened since its publication as a comprehensive reply. We need to heal the parts of some new towns that are showing their age and, when appropriate, find ways of ensuring that new towns play their part in meeting today's housing needs through sustainable growth.

As we tackle both issues, we must keep at the forefront of our minds the fact that sustainable communities are about more than just rebuilding the fabric of housing. As hon. Members have commented, communities need strong economies full of opportunities, jobs with a long-term future, and good schools, hospitals and public transport. I accept the point made about transport in some communities, and many authorities have submitted their transport plans and are already starting to redesign local transport schemes with an eye on the 21st century rather than the 1960s. Communities also need a safe and healthy local environment, well-designed neighbourhoods, more sustainable construction and much more.

There are specific difficulties with our new towns, but many themes are common to all our communities. Our policies for new towns must be seen in the context of our overall action plan for sustainable communities, which is flexible according to the needs of local areas and regions but comprehensive enough to deal with the big issues that confront us today. Although we are alive to the needs and opportunities facing the new towns, we need to deal with those challenges within the approach outlined in our sustainable communities plan.

Putting new towns in a policy isolation tent will not help them. It is much better to integrate them into mainstream housing regeneration and planning, so that they can benefit from our comprehensive approach and other communities can more readily learn the lessons of new towns. As some hon. Members have said, we may be talking about newer new towns for the Thames gateway, but serious thought needs to be given to how that growth area and others will expand to meet the needs of the south-east.

I want to mention the key aspect of the Government's approach which was not fully developed when we made our response to the report; I refer to the role of English Partnerships. Other hon. Members have mentioned that, for which I am grateful. EP is a key player in delivering the Deputy Prime Minister's new agenda, and it has a significant and pro-active role to play in co-ordinating the delivery of plans for key-worker and affordable housing.

English Partnerships is not only about housing; it is at the core of our work to create balanced communities. We can point to the Telford and Milton Keynes millennium communities, the Telford sustainable extension at Lawley and the Northampton south-west district. I have no time to go into them, but they represent progress made by EP and many new towns since the quinquennial review of 24 July. I am grateful to every hon. Member who has said that the relationship with EP before and since the review has been productive and positive, because that is what has been fed back to me.

We have an excellent new dynamic team at English Partnerships which, under Margaret Ford's chairmanship, works with new town authorities on an individual basis to ensure proper dialogue. People can still throw rocks and call it a quango, but it is working effectively with the democratic leadership in each area. I make no excuse for telling EP to focus on 42 strategic sites and projects as the key to its role. As hon. Members will know, 34 of those are in new towns, and a variety of schemes are included to enhance the vitality and sustainability of the new towns. They include work on Skelmersdale town centre, a range of schemes in Milton Keynes, Spencers park, Paradise fields, Brakespear in Hemel Hempstead, and the town centre, Woodside, Lightmoor, East Ketley millennium community and Lawley in Telford.

Equally important is EP's role in improving the quality of ageing housing estates, such as Woodside in Telford, Five Links in Basildon and Castlefields in Runcorn. Those are all under the auspices and tutelage of EP and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

Mr. Mike Hall (Weaver Vale): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. McNulty: I shall give way briefly, although the request is cheeky, as my hon. Friend has only just arrived.

Mr. Hall: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way. He just mentioned Castlefields, in my constituency, and that is why I got to my feet. We are delighted with the co-operation that we have with English Partnerships in redeveloping the Castlefields site, and we look

[Mr. Hall]

forward to wonderful things taking place there. However, to ensure that the site is properly regenerated, we might need to discuss clawback with the Department so that we can reinvest the money in the Castlefields area.

Mr. McNulty: I look forward to those discussions, and to visiting Weaver Vale, as I have been promising to do for the past three months. I shall still visit, despite my hon. Friend's contribution to the debate.

English Partnerships has held very constructive discussions with the new town local authorities. It knows from that experience that each new town is different, and that the package of non-strategic assets and liabilities varies from town to town. Consequently, today I am pleased to announce that English Partnerships has been given discretion by the Deputy Prime Minister to transfer balanced packages of non-strategic landholdings and assets to the local authorities.

We shall, in some cases, have to take some of the financial issues to the Treasury, and we will also need to ensure that such transfers will cause no detriment to the delivery of our plans for sustainable communities. However, I am assured by English Partnerships that we will get more than merely words, and it will actively seek to waive clawback and transfer the right to receive clawback to the relevant local authority. Those matters are being examined in some detail.

Mr. Hammond *rose—*

Mr. McNulty: Now the hon. Gentleman will ask me about clause 11 of the Local Government Bill, which is why I would not give way to him earlier.

Mr. Hammond: I shall let the Minister answer the question about the interaction of transfer of clawback rights to local authorities or waiver of clawback and clause 11 of the Local Government Bill.

Mr. McNulty: The simple answer to that, which is not intended to be facetious, is that I will not comment on legislation that is currently under consideration, albeit from my Department. I do not want to pre-empt the democratic process and what Parliament will have done with the Bill by the time it emerges from that process.

I am assured that the discussions with the Treasury are taking place in the context of clause 11, and that the ability to waive clawback remains. Unlike the hon. Gentleman, I do not live or die by the daily events and proceedings on the Local Government Bill, so if that proves not to be the case, I will write to him to let him know. However, I am fairly sure that the ability to waive clawback and to pass on the receipts to a local authority rather than to English Partnerships remains outwith clause 11. If that is not the case, I will get back to him.

Mr. Hammond: I am sure that the Minister is right that that is outwith the provisions of clause 11, which deal with local authority sales and the Secretary of State's right to take 75 per cent. of those right-to-buy receipts. However, it seems odd that, on the one hand, the Government say that all local authorities must pass to the Secretary of State 75 per cent. of what they receive, and on the other hand, the Minister is saying that English Partnerships may be empowered to waive that right with respect to certain new town authorities. However, I am grateful to him for offering to write to me.

Mr. McNulty: On that point, as the hon. Gentleman has suggested, there was the unique position of a significant public sector quango—the Commission on the New Towns as was, and English Partnerships as is—having significant landholdings. The quinquennial review said that there are 42 strategic sites—town centres and others—that are crucial to what the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister wants to achieve in its policy framework and the detail of the sustainable communities plan. There is a range of other non-strategic balanced packages of sites that we will—now that the Deputy Prime Minister has signed that off—co-operate with the new town authorities to put back where they should be, with those authorities. I am not, of course, saying that the Deputy Prime Minister has signed a bit of paper and overnight all those assets will revert to the new town authorities, because there must be significant negotiations to unpick all the complexities of ownership that colleagues talked about earlier.

It is a Welsh example, but in Cwmbran, where work to identify all non-strategic assets and liabilities is virtually complete, English Partnerships has no interests suitable for development. The clawback and covenants in relation to community buildings, highway subsoil and miscellaneous open space come to 120 hectares in 20 different sets of legal documents. The local authority sees clawback as an impediment to local regeneration and for 10 years next to nothing has happened. Our proposals would transfer responsibility for all that to the local authority, enabling it to get on with regenerating key areas of the town. The distinction is between receipts for local authorities that are cash windfalls, where 75 per cent. may go back to central Government, and new town clawback, where the receipts will be for reinvestment in new town regeneration. That is part of the answer, but I will still write to the hon. Gentleman with the full answer.

New towns will sit in the vision and strategy that is outlined in the document "Sustainable Communities: Building for the Future". They have a strong role to play in achieving those numbers for growth in London, the south-east and the east. As the Government response says, and as my hon. Friends have mentioned, despite the poor quality of design in some areas and the degradation of some of the public infrastructure and the transport difficulties—issues that are recognised and are being resolved in one form or other—there is still scope to add to many of the new towns in London, the south-east and the east. There is serious need in those communities and beyond for affordable housing and key worker housing.

We are currently a year or so into the starter home initiative, which partly addresses the issues of key workers. Our target is 10,000 starter homes, which we will achieve, and we have reached 2,000 so far. Some 400 of those are in the southern new towns: 400 key workers are now housed because of the starter home initiative. As I said about pathfinder areas, there must be lessons that we can learn from the low demand in those key areas at their worst. People may describe Corby town centre as third world. I have just come back from Delhi, and if it was anything like Delhi I would go there. I loved Delhi. I thought that it was wonderful. The urban regeneration company just launched in Corby has shown wisdom and has an enormously creative and imaginative vision for Corby's future. It has elaborate plans to double the size of the community over the next 30 years. I know that that is what all the new towns will want for their future.

Andrew Bennett: Does my hon. Friend acknowledge that the Select Committee had an impressive presentation from people in Corby about what they would like to do? All they want is a bit of railway from Corby to the mainline so that they can attract people from the rest of the south-east to increase the critical mass of Corby. If he could say yes to that he would be a hero in Corby—

Mr. Donohoe: And he would get a statue.

Mr. McNulty: Perhaps unsurprisingly, I will resist that temptation. As my hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Phil Hope) is the Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister, I know Corby. I know that those concerns are there. It is also part of one of our growth areas in that key south midlands corridor. The urban development corporation's vision and how that fits in with the overall growth area is quite lively and creative stuff. Whether Corby gets its railway line is a matter for others with far more power than I have.

There are strong examples across the piece of the new towns coming to terms with the next phase of their existence. Yes, with help and support, but with help and support through our main programmes. Their problems are recognised—some are shared or similar and some are unique. What we have done with English Partnerships and the way in which it has come up to speed so soon after the outcome of the review is a tribute to Margaret Ford and her leadership. All the reports stress a professional commitment to creativity and imagination by the new town authorities and by English Partnerships to get to grips with the serious issues that hon. Members have outlined. I repeat that the new towns have been well served by the Committee and its report. I was very pleased, not least because I was only four weeks into my new job, to appear before the Committee. It was enormous fun. I do not know whether enjoying an hour before a Select Committee makes me a sick person, but it was an education.

As I said to hon. Members in my opening statement, one cannot be a Harrow boy without knowing in some detail all the new towns, and especially those in Hertfordshire, dotted around Watford. Those northern towns, as I used to think of them, are part and parcel of the fun and creativity of growing up in north-west London. I accept now that Welwyn, Stevenage and Hemel Hempstead are not northern towns in the generally accepted sense. New towns are at the heart of our approach. Everything that we do in the sustainable communities document will benefit the new towns.

If I let hon. Members go at 5.28 they will not be saying, "That rotten person kept us here until 5.30."

I am also, among other things, the design champion for the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. I am responsible for parks and green spaces and other aspects of the public realm that are crucial to the sustainability of our communities. Whether in growth areas, low-demand areas or in reconfiguring and revitalising our new towns, we must learn that the spaces between buildings are important. The public realm in the widest sense is important. These are lessons that the designers of new towns did not take into account. When designing a new town, we must plan out crime not plan it in. We must appreciate that people must live in these towns and walk around them.

Grass verges and public parks are not fripperies: they are central to the vitality of our communities. That is why it is such a pleasure to know that the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment is working closely with Telford on Woodside. We can revitalise all our communities, not least our new towns, by learning the lessons of the past and by insisting that, whether it is dealing with greater numbers in the south or reconfiguring some of our low-demand communities in the north, high quality and good design are not add-ons. We should not adopt an attitude of "Build 'em cheap and build 'em high," so that buildings collapse in 10 or 20 years' time. They must be rooted at the core of everything that we do—public sector, social sector and private sector.

Design and high quality permeate the sustainable communities document, and rightly so, as does the notion that the public realm is vital in those areas.

Mr. McWalter: Will my hon. Friend accept the point made earlier by my hon. Friend the Member for Telford (David Wright) that the top design teams simply do not make themselves available to towns as they do to cities?

Mr. McNulty: I accept my hon. Friend's point. That is why I am so pleased that CABE is working with Telford in Woodside, and I encourage that elsewhere. I want to see good, high-quality designers helping us to reconfigure and refocus our low-demand areas. It is quite wrong to characterise our approach to low-demand areas as one of bulldozing empty houses. If that were all that low-demand areas offered, their plans would not be accepted. Plans must accept fully that good design and good quality in the public realm and in public open spaces are crucial. We must ensure that designers are attracted to low-demand areas as well as to growth areas and to new towns. That is fundamental.

We should celebrate the new towns. We are not finishing them off, but they have perhaps come to the end of one phase. We must ensure that, with all other urban communities, they march into the next phase in the context of the sustainable communities document. They must have their needs served as readily and as comprehensively as all other communities.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes past Five o' clock.

HOUSE OF COMMONS PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES (HANSARD) ● 2002-03

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Westminster Hall

Tuesday 4 March 2003

[MR. EDWARD O'HARA *in the Chair*]

Civil Defence

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Charlotte Atkins.]*

9.30 am

Sir John Stanley (Tonbridge and Malling): Since the end of the second world war, except during the early years of the cold war, civil defence has been regarded by successive governments as a Cinderella policy issue, perhaps more so since the Berlin wall came down. Emphatically, that must change, and it must change with dramatic speed and intensity and with resources to match.

Throughout the whole of the cold war, even when a nuclear threat hung over the people of this country, I do not recall a single senior politician or security person saying that they considered that an attack with mass fatalities was inevitable. It is a very different situation today. Last year, the Director of Europol said that it was no longer a question of whether there would be a terrorist attack in Europe but, simply, a question of when. In a recent interview on the BBC's "Breakfast with Frost" programme, Sir John Stevens, the Metropolitan Police Commissioner, was asked whether he thought that a terrorist attack on the UK was inevitable. He replied:

> "I am afraid I think it probably is, but that doesn't mean we aren't doing all we can to prevent it."

In a meeting of the Liaison Committee on 21 January, the Prime Minister was asked by the right hon. Member for Swansea, East (Donald Anderson) whether he believed

> "that an al-Qaeda attack on the United Kingdom is inevitable?"

The Prime Minister replied:

> "I believe it is inevitable that they will try in some form or other."

In the immediate aftermath of the 11 September attack, the Prime Minister gave the starkest warning as to the forms that an al-Qaeda attack might take. He said in the House on 14 September 2001:

> "We know that these groups are fanatics, capable of killing without discrimination. The limits on the numbers that they kill and their methods of killing are not governed by any sense of morality. The limits are only practical and technical. We know that they would, if they could, go further and use chemical, biological, or even nuclear weapons of mass destruction."—[*Official Report*, 14 September 2001; Vol. 372, c. 606.]

I do not for a moment suggest that the Government have been inactive on civil defence, but I seriously question whether their priorities are right and whether they have acted with sufficient intensity. Undoubtedly, they have been preparing for the worst case, which is their responsibility. We read in the newspapers that body bags are being stockpiled. *The Sunday Times* of 17 November stated:

> "Officials involved have revealed that planners are considering the extreme case of hundreds of thousands of deaths being caused by a biological attack involving plague or smallpox."

The same article reported the establishment of a United Kingdom mass fatalities working group and the creation of a strategic disaster mortuaries working group for London, with consideration being given to mobile and modular mortuaries and with the possibility of RAF Northolt being designated to provide, in the delicate phrase of *The Sunday Times*, an "overflow capacity".

I do not criticise the Government for preparing for mass deaths; that is their unmistakable responsibility and duty. However, I am interested to know what the Government are doing to engage in mass life-saving, if the worst should happen and, in particular, if there is a terrorist attack on the UK involving weapons of mass destruction. I spent four years at the Ministry of Defence and in my experience the military have a particularly accurate way of coining terms of remarkable brutality. I read in another press article that, as a result of their planning and the exercises carried out to prepare for a biological attack on the UK, the armed forces will divide the luckless civilians caught in the vicinity of an attack into three categories: walkers, floppers and goners. Little prospect of survival is held out for the floppers and goners.

I, like any number of Members of Parliament with constituencies in London or its vicinity, have countless thousands of constituents who travel into the city each day in the confident expectation that they will return safely at night to their families. I, for one, want to be satisfied—in detail and by the Government—that should my constituents should be so unfortunate as to find themselves in the wrong place at the wrong time when the worst happens, they will not be consigned to the ranks of the floppers and goners and doomed to die.

There are four issues relating to life-saving that I want to raise with the Minister. First, there is the issue of resources and money. The most successful civil defence is a civil defence plan that never has to be employed for real, and that means prevention. Preventing terrorism is linked to a very simple, even primitive, equation: either we get the terrorists first, or they get us. From my time in Northern Ireland, I remember the resources that are required to put just one person under 24-hour, seven-day-a-week surveillance. How many suspects or potential suspects are there in the UK who may represent al-Qaeda secreted cells? Is it hundreds, thousands or tens of thousands? Are there perhaps over 100,000 people who need to be found and eliminated as potential suspects?

Yesterday in the House, we debated an Intelligence and Security Committee special report on Bali. I very much welcome the fact that the Committee produced the report in quick time. I hope that, right now, the Committee is examining other matters equally quickly and will also be making a special report to the House, as fast as possible, on whether the resources being made available to the intelligence services, the anti-terrorist branch and special branches up and down the country are adequate to the task of finding the terrorist cells that are undoubtedly still secreted in this country.

I have said in the House that, in dealing with terrorism, intelligence is the first, and probably the last, line of defence. In the judgment of those in a position to know, such as the Prime Minister and the head of the Metropolitan police, an attack on the United Kingdom is inevitable. That could result in loss of life far greater

[Sir John Stanley]

than that on 11 September, and I say to the Government that resources must be provided to the intelligence services, the police and the anti-terrorist branch to enable them to do the job that they have to do, while there is still time.

My second life-saving issue is the Government structure for effective counter-terrorism and civil defence. The Home Secretary is the Cabinet Minister in the lead, but does he have sufficient authority to deal with all the other Departments whose co-operation and involvement in civil defence is essential? Is he in a position to take an effective lead in, and charge of, the whole of civil defence planning, preparation and organisation in this country? I doubt it. At least six separate Departments and Cabinet Ministers are involved, including the Cabinet Office and the Prime Minister. It might be of passing interest to the Chamber to know that when this debate was announced, the first Government Department to get on to my office to ask what I was going to say was not the Home Office but the Cabinet Office. The Ministry of Defence and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office are involved, as is the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, which has responsibilities for the regions and local authorities. The Department of Health and the Department for Transport are involved, as are the devolved Administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

I may be wrong, but it appears to me that the structure that we have leaves a great deal to be desired if we are to have truly effective and authoritative civil defence planning and organisation in this country. I am not necessarily advocating that we go down the same route as the United States and create a separate Government Department to deal with the issue, although I have been briefed in the United States on its new Department of Homeland Security and I believe that it will prove a very effective answer to that country's civil defence needs. I ask the Government, and the Prime Minister in particular, to consider one fundamental question. If the worst should happen and there were a terrorist attack on this country involving mass civilian casualties, would the civil defence governmental structure in place today continue unchanged? If the answer is emphatically no, and it would be changed radically, then I put it to the Government and the Prime Minister that that change should be made now, before that loss of life occurs.

My third life-saving issue is the need to ensure that emergency personnel are put in the very best position to provide their life-saving services if the worst should happen. I welcome the Home Secretary's announcement yesterday that there will be a major civil defence exercise on the ground in London. It is high time—18 months after 11 September. That exercise should surely have taken place already, and there should be such exercises in other cities and local authorities up and down the country.

I am aware from what I have read in the press that there have been many exercises in COBRA. I spent many happy hours in COBRA as Minister for the Armed Forces, and as the security Minister of State in Northern Ireland. I do not suggest that COBRA exercises are without value, but that value is limited. They are command and control and communications exercises. The only way to get real value is through undertaking exercises on the ground.

The basic principle of exercises is, and has always been, that the closer that one can approximate the exercise to reality, the greater the value of the exercise. In that case, as elsewhere, the United States is well ahead of us. A few months ago, in my hotel room in the United States, I turned on the television and saw a full-scale exercise taking place in the local county based on a simulated anthrax attack. It was played out on the ground, in the streets and throughout the county. At the end, the emergency chiefs were interviewed on television about the lessons learned. One wonders whether any such thing could happen on television in the UK. Mercifully, the United States is a more open society.

One lesson learned, for example, was that the anthrax antibiotic was available only in bulk and that vital life-saving time would be lost in breaking it down into small amounts that could be quickly and easily made available to victims of the attack. I put it to the Minister that one learns such lessons only by means of exercises on the ground.

There is plenty of evidence for thinking that the level of exercises is seriously inadequate in the UK. Last November, the National Audit Office produced a report that examined the preparedness of health authorities. The report demonstrated that one third of health authorities had not tested their plans under the category:

> "Testing of plans—chemical, biological and mass casualty incidents".

When it came to the testing of plans for radiological or nuclear incidents, four fifths of the health authorities had not tested their plans. Only last night, on the BBC television news, Professor Michael Clarke of King's college, London said that at the local health authority level the lack of preparedness was as shambolic as it was two years ago.

I hope that hon. Members will make inquiries in their constituencies about the exercises that have been carried out by emergency services and accident and emergency departments in their areas. They should make the results of their inquiries known to the Minister. There needs to be a dramatic improvement in the level of exercising and training of the emergency personnel on whom the lives of those who may be caught up in a terrorist attack will ultimately depend.

The final issue in my saving of life agenda is the adequacy of the medical treatment policy that the Government are adopting, with reference to an attack with weapons of mass destruction on the United Kingdom. I warmly welcome the decision of the Science and Technology Committee under the chairmanship of the hon. Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) to conduct an inquiry into the scientific response to the terrorist threat. As I have said personally to the hon. Gentleman, the inquiry being carried out by his Committee is the single most important Select Committee inquiry being carried out in this House, and

I say that as a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee. I hope that that Committee will make all possible speed with its inquiry and will make the earliest possible report, or series of reports, to the House. I hope that it will cover in its report the medical and scientific response to nuclear and radiological attack, toxic chemical attack and biological attack.

The most urgent medical policy issue is protection of the public against a smallpox attack. It is of the utmost urgency for evident reasons. It is the area where there is the greatest potential to save life because a vaccine is available. In the United States recently, I received a confidential briefing on its worst-case scenario of a smallpox attack in the United States. The results were horrific. I am not able to disclose the details, but I shall refer to one assumption that is common and accepted medical knowledge. In the event of a smallpox attack, every person infected with smallpox is likely to infect a further 10. Smallpox will spread like wildfire, and, as we know, its consequences are normally fatal unless vaccination can be provided.

I, like other hon. Members, was interested to hear the person who was described as a senior Government adviser being interviewed on the "Today" programme yesterday. Sadly, owing to the culture of fear that seems to exist in the public sector, he had to remain anonymous because he expressed views that were critical of the Government's policy. He had grave doubts about the adequacy of the Government's policy for dealing with a smallpox attack; indeed, he said that the Departments involved were displaying a lethargic approach to this vital issue.

There is no doubt that the position that the British Government are taking is different from that of others. In the United States and in France, the Governments have already announced that they will procure sufficient smallpox vaccine to vaccinate the entire population. In the UK, the Government treat as confidential how much vaccine is being procured for reasons that I wholly fail to understand or conceive to be justified. The Government have indicated that the amount of vaccine being procured is less than one per head of population in the UK, which is an extraordinary decision given that in the event of a smallpox attack people are likely to disperse and carry the infection with them. They could disperse to any part of the United Kingdom, even to some of the remote islands in Scotland.

Dr. Andrew Murrison (Westbury): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the culture of secrecy owes a lot to the cold war, and that the Government ought to grow up? As he rightly implied, the United States has a far more open approach to this kind of thing. Although it is important for security reasons to keep things under wraps when facing down an aggressor such as the Soviet Union, that does not apply, in particular in reference to our preparations for biological attack, to terrorist organisations.

Sir John Stanley: I agree with my hon. Friend. I see no security reason why information should not be disclosed. It is information that the public, whose lives are at risk, are entitled to have.

The all-important computer programme—which is crucial for the emergency services—to simulate how smallpox would spread in the United States is available and up and running. The Government's anonymous senior adviser told us yesterday that that computer programme had still not been completed and was not available for exercises by the emergency planning authorities here.

Lastly—this is not inconsequential—the United States President has, rightly, gone public and said that he will have a smallpox vaccination. In this country, the Prime Minister considers the information about whether he will take that precaution to be highly classified, and No. 10 yesterday made the ludicrous suggestion that it is a personal matter for the Prime Minister. It is a matter of utmost public importance and interest to know whether the Prime Minister is taking all necessary steps to ensure his survival in the event of a smallpox attack. He should have a smallpox jab, but the Government are inhibited because they think that if people know that the Prime Minister has been vaccinated, millions of them will ask why they cannot also be vaccinated. That is a reasonable question for people to ask and the Government should answer it.

Dr. Murrison: Does my right hon. Friend agree that after the MMR debacle, the Prime Minister might be forgiven for being queasy about getting involved with jabs?

Sir John Stanley: I take my hon. Friend's point, but this is a different issue. The Prime Minister should ensure that he is able to survive a smallpox attack.

I hope that the Government are prepared to take on a public debate—I welcome the fact that it has started in the media—on what their policy should be on preventive smallpox vaccination.

On the "Today" programme yesterday two different views were expressed. Professor Alastair Geddes of the Public Health Laboratory said that the advantages of preventive smallpox vaccination of the civilian population outweighed the disadvantages. We also heard the reported views of the chief medical officer that such vaccination is unnecessary and that the Government's policy of waiting until a smallpox attack has happened and then following a programme of ring vaccination would suffice. I question that view. Ring vaccination is uncomfortably redolent of the foot and mouth fiasco and I hope that the Government are not assuming that British civilians caught up in a smallpox attack would conduct themselves in the same way as cattle and meekly stand around waiting to see whether they are culled by smallpox.

There is no doubt in my mind that if such an attack took place, people would do everything possible to break out of the cordons, whatever the so-called quarantine cordons that the Government intend to erect, surrounded by police and armed servicemen apparently equipped with baton rounds. There will be infected people among those who escape, and the infection will spread to all parts of the United Kingdom. Against that background, it is incumbent on the Government to consider very seriously the possibility of enabling the people of this country to have smallpox vaccinations on a voluntary basis.

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire): On the question of the Prime Minister, but going beyond him as an individual, may I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to the Home Secretary's words in the House of Commons yesterday? He said:

> "Given that politicians are not held in high esteem and trust is not readily given, politicians, including me, will not seek vaccination against smallpox unless the vaccine is made generally available to the population."—[*Official Report*, 3 March 2003; Vol. 400, c. 591.]

Does my right hon. Friend agree that although that might explain Government policy, it clearly implies that the vaccine is not to be made available to the population?

Sir John Stanley: That was the policy view expressed on behalf of the Government by their chief medical officer on the "Today" programme yesterday. That policy should be subject to detailed scrutiny. I question it strongly, and I hope that it will be one of the issues immediately dealt with by the Science and Technology Committee, and the subject of a report to the House.

On all the evidence available, the UK civilian population is at more serious risk of large-scale fatalities than at any time since the end of the second world war, including the worst period of threat to this country from the IRA. Civil defence should be at the very top of the Government's agenda. It should be on the desk not only of the Home Secretary but of the Prime Minister, and it should be on his desk repeatedly. I fear, however, that civil defence in this country is still under-resourced, under-prepared and under-led. I urge the Government to ensure, with the utmost immediacy, that civil defence has the resources, the preparedness and the leadership required before for some—perhaps a horrendous number—it is simply too late.

10.2 am

Dr. Andrew Murrison (Westbury): I am surprised by the relatively poor attendance at this debate. I think that our constituents are most exercised by this issue, and I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley) on bringing it to the attention of the House.

The Library has put together an interesting collection of newspaper clippings which reflects the importance of the subject to the fourth estate and the people whom we represent. I shall touch on one or two important issues, and I draw the Chamber's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Interests. I am a reservist and could therefore be involved in the contingencies that the Government may put in place to deal with a terrorist attack on this country.

When I was serving, I came across some interesting characters called emergency planning officers. They are usually middle-grade ex-servicemen, tasked by local authorities with drawing up plans for emergencies in their localities. It is probably true to say that at that time, they were grossly under-resourced and usually a bolt-on added extra—put away by local authorities in a side room until they came out for their yearly exercise, if that. I remember thinking that the sector needed to be developed and properly resourced. In my area, the south coast of England, they were perhaps better resourced than they otherwise would have been because of the close proximity of the military and the problems that could arise from a nuclear accident. I suspect that, across the country, those resources were even thinner than those that I experienced in the south of England.

In recent weeks, we have seen the Government give a little more attention to emergency planning, which I welcome. However, I am left wondering whether it is too little too late and whether we need a culture change, similar to the one that the Americans have had, to protect our civil population.

I was recently in correspondence with a hospital in the south of England, which wishes to remain anonymous, in which we discussed the preparations that it had made for the possibility of a terrorist attack. It is probably true to say that any preparations were centrally driven, and I shall be interested to hear the Minister's comments on what direction has been given to health authorities to protect their people and to assist the civil population for which trusts are responsible in the event of an attack.

From what I was told, it seems that provision is fairly inadequate and, in particular, the protective suits with which personnel in the casualty department have been provided are second rate and liable to fall apart with minimal usage. Inadequate thought has been given centrally to what NHS trusts may need in the event of an attack. I fully appreciate that the Minister is not directly responsible for that, and I shall go on to explain why we may need an overarching method of pulling together the various strands to which my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling referred. I would appreciate some comment from the Minister on the preparedness of the NHS to deal with the issues that we have been discussing.

A chemical attack on the population of this country would be tragically and devastatingly obvious. An attack with biological agents would not be so obvious because there is an incubation period and it would take considerable time for the ill effects to become apparent. There are ways of detecting agents before they become clinically apparent, so it would be interesting to hear from the Minister what preparation he has made for early warning of the presence in the atmosphere of novel biological agents.

We shall rely in general on a pick-up by general practitioners and epidemiologists, so the problem will be one for public health. It would be useful to know and to be assured that everything is being done to pick up cases early. If we could do that, it would, as the chief medical officer said, be possible to vaccinate exposed populations and provide prophylactic antibiotics, which would reduce the toll.

It would be wrong of me to pre-empt the forthcoming report from the Select Committee on Science and Technology on the scientific response to terrorism, but it is probably true that the creation of a department for homeland defence is one of the topics that will be discussed. The United States, in its inimitable fashion, has pre-empted us and created such a department. It clearly feels that the threat to its population justifies that. It will be interesting to hear whether we shall proceed down that route. The problem is multi-departmental, and I have every sympathy for the Minister having to come here to discuss the issue, when he is probably ill placed to speak on behalf of the multifarious Departments that touch on civil defence.

There is a danger that Departments will pull in different directions without co-ordination, and in this situation, that is precisely what is not required.

We are told that our reserve forces have embarked on something called a civil contingencies reaction force that will augment civil powers in the event of an attack on this country by a terrorist organisation. We know little about that, so it would be useful if the Minister gave us a few words of wisdom on the subject. How will the force be constituted? What will be its size and its functions, and, crucially, what training will it receive? It would be useful to know, for example, whether it will take part in the exercise planned for London in a few days.

That exercise will be a worthwhile use of our reserve forces. We hear that members of the reserve forces are having difficulties with the concept of an attack on Iraq. Such an attack is not homeland defence, nor is it territorial in the usual sense of the word, and a homeland task would be more in tune with the usual tasks of the Territorial Army. It would be useful if the Minister explained the function that he anticipates for the civil contingencies reaction force. Will he reassure us that no one in the reserve forces will be asked to carry out tasks for which they are not adequately trained?

10.10 am

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): I thank the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley) for introducing the debate, and speaking authoritatively and clearly on what he sees as the priorities.

I was reflecting on how much the issue had become the subject of public discussion in a way that we could not have anticipated two years ago. The right hon. Gentleman made that point very well. Five or 10 years ago, civil defence and emergency planning was seen mainly as a response to unusual meteorological events, such as floods, hurricanes and drought. The people involved in civil defence were regarded as minor players. They were regarded as Cinderellas, and not taken seriously. They were perceived as a dad's army adjunct that existed in shadowy form giving a few drugs to a few people that one did not need to know much about.

As the right hon. Gentleman rightly said, things have changed fundamentally. It is important that Parliament ensures that the country puts a structure in place as quickly as possible to respond to the sorts of attack that are possible today that were not possible 50 years ago.

This is the third recent debate on the subject of which I am aware. A debate on emergency planning was initiated in the House of Lords by my noble friend Lord Roper on 4 December. Lord Filkin provided a response on behalf of the Home Office. On 12 February, a debate was initiated in this House by my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake), who had a particular interest and concern about transport security. That debate was answered by the Minister of State, Cabinet Office. During today's debate, a Home Office Minister is present. I am happy that he is here, but it reflects the fact that the Government are still undergoing a journey of development on accountability. Of course, the issue cuts across a range of departmental responsibilities. I accept that the Home Secretary has principal Government responsibility on the matter and the Government have made that clear, but there is still some uncertainty about who fits in where.

I do not want to repeat things said by the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling; I want to add two or three matters of concern. I speak as a London Member of Parliament, and one in a team of people in my party who shadow the Home Office. I declare a third interest. My hat is in the ring for our party's selection for mayoral candidate. Later this week, I may have that additional responsibility. In that capacity, I will be ready and willing to participate in the debate about such issues.

Yesterday's written statement by the Home Secretary was welcome, but I was surprised that it was not an oral statement. The statement is significant, and because it was so important there were references to it, and the Home Secretary commented on it, in the debate about the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 (Continuance in force of sections 21 to 23) Order 2003, which is a linked but separate issue. There would have been considerable interest in an oral statement. I know that there will be other opportunities, but I ask the Minister of State to take back to the Home Secretary a request that such a statement be the basis of an early opportunity to question the Home Secretary and Ministers, and to have on the Government Front Bench other available Ministers as well.

Sir John Stanley: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it was particularly regrettable that there was no oral statement, not merely in view of the importance of the issue and the large number of right hon. and hon. Members who might have wished to put questions to the Home Secretary on it, but as the business of the House finished early last night and there was, therefore, no shortage of time yesterday for an oral statement?

Simon Hughes: That is certainly true. As somebody who participated in the first of the debates, I reflected that it would have been sensible and logical to take the three issues together. We had the anti-terrorism renewal order debate and the debate on the Intelligence and Security Committee's report on the Bali bombings. The logic would have been to take this debate with those. I regret that that was not done. It means that we have not had an opportunity to probe important issues, some of which have been raised today.

In addition to the points made by the right hon. Gentleman, I want first to mention the question of resources. I have not done the arithmetic, but I am reliably informed by colleagues who have, including my hon. Friends the Members for Bath (Mr. Foster) and for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey), that local authorities' budgets for the coming year do not show an increase in real terms for civil defence and emergency planning. If that is the case, it is extraordinary, given the extra demand for those matters and interest in them and the extra expectations that will be placed on them. We must be clear, and the public must be clear, how much money in the national budget is allocated to those matters, how much is in the regional budgets—London is an obvious example, because the Greater London authority has responsibility for these matters, among others—and what the local budget is? Our constituents would be reassured to know that money was allocated for these matters and would be properly deployed and spent. There would not be any criticism if money were raised and spent on that area of public protection.

[Simon Hughes]

In that context, I ask the Minister formally to give me an answer today to the proposal that I put to the Minister of State in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister who has responsibility for London planning and chairs the Cabinet Sub-Committee. I asked whether, not just in London but throughout the country, people could receive with the mailing that is about to go through their letterboxes, containing their local government precept, charges and information, the maximum information about what they should do if there is an emergency and a civil response is needed.

On one key issue I reflect the point made by the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling about the fact that ours is a secretive society compared with, say, the United States. The public are asked to go to all sorts of different places to find different pieces of information. The more central the location of the information and the more clearly the public can be pointed towards it, the better. To his credit, the Minister of State said that he would reflect on that idea, which he thought was a good one. I had the impression that public dissemination of that kind might be made through the letterboxes in the next few weeks.

Dr. Murrison: I agree with much of what the hon. Gentleman says, particularly about the simplicity of including that information in mailshots that are going out anyway. However, does he not agree that it is important to do a risk assessment first, particularly as people may be alarmed by the material? We should perhaps target the advice on conurbations, where the risk is larger, and spare people in parts of the country where the risk is low from receiving what might be quite disturbing information.

Simon Hughes: I understand that. It is a difficult judgment. I think that the best advice can be given by those elected to represent people in the local authorities and areas in question—the leaders of the local authorities and Members of Parliament. Different types of information may be given. I am not arguing that the only place where people can look for information is in a brown envelope that comes with their council tax bill, but that seems a way of giving them authoritative, up-to-date information. There are other ways, of course. The Government have made it clear that they expect the media to be the prime source of information, and that is understandable.

However, taking as an example the smallpox case, there still seems to be an expectation that GPs will inform themselves by going up the line to the local health authority, local trust or public health laboratory service, rather than that such information will come down the line to them in advance. It is confusing for people to have to go to various website addresses for information about health issues, protective clothing or the person to whom they should turn for instructions. Such information should be in one place, regardless of whether the police, health service or reserve forces are responsible.

A national police service, which is led by the special branch of the Metropolitan police, deals with such matters. The Minister has heard me say before that it would be reassuring, rather than the opposite, to the public to know that even though, technically, the Metropolitan police special branch is leading—I understand that the police are the lead authority among the emergency services—an umbrella of cover is provided nationally in order to achieve maximum integration and minimum waste and duplication of resources. It would be useful if the specialism of the police were seen as available throughout the country. The Minister might be kind enough to discuss the arrangement between the different forces and the Met, which has taken the lead.

My hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington asked about maximising the improvement of security at our ports and airports. The matter was discussed by Lord Carlile in his report. He pointed out that small airports and ports are much less well protected than the public would wish. It would be helpful if the Minister would tell us whether a response has been made to Lord Carlile's recommendations and whether there is a plan to recruit more people for the border force, thereby making controls at our major airports more effective. I have previously mentioned that desks are unstaffed other than at core hours, and that checks are not made, for example, on behalf of the Customs and Excise because no one is available.

It is still possible for a temporary member of staff who has not had proper security vetting to go air side, even at Heathrow. We must resolve that issue, because everyone who works in a vulnerable location—ports and airports must count as such, as well as places such as the London underground—should be subject to security vetting.

In an earlier debate, my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan) discussed the need to ensure that our information systems had the capacity to deal with the demand that will be placed on them in the case of a terrorist threat. In old-style military attacks, one would seek to take over the airport, control tower and radio station. It is no secret that someone who wanted to disable society now would try to interfere with radio and computer communications. We all know what happens periodically with mobile phones and similar technologies. Can the Minister reassure the public that arrangements are in hand, if not yet in place, to ensure that such systems are better protected so that, if suddenly there is mass use, the systems will not go down just when everyone most needs to use them?

Lastly, I wish to pick up on the topical issue of vaccinations and link with it that of the provision of protective clothing. I do not pretend to be an expert and I understand the concerns, but it seems to me that there should be a policy of having enough vaccine for everybody. I am not advocating that we should vaccinate everybody now. I know that contingency planning has taken place and that supplies have been pushed out through the national health service. However, the public would be reassured if they knew two things: first, there is, or soon will be, vaccine available for everybody, should it be needed, and secondly, there is, or soon will be, protective clothing available. To pick up on a point made by the hon. Member for Westbury (Dr. Murrison), perhaps such clothing should be available in conurbations first, rather than generally. Those things would mean that there would be personal protection in the event of a terrible chemical, biological or nuclear attack.

There is a huge set of issues. The debate is welcome, because it will take those issues further. The knowledge that there will be a civil contingencies and civil defence Bill in the summer, which was firmed up by the statement yesterday, is also welcome. I hope that, using that as a backdrop, there will be an opportunity in the near future for the Home Secretary to come to the House to answer questions; that there can be other, informal occasions when parliamentarians can have a discussion and be briefed, and, most important, that the public can have clear and simple routes of access to the maximum amount of information, as soon as possible.

10.26 am

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir John Stanley) on securing the debate. He brought to his very considerable speech his immense experience and stature within the area of defence and security. He made some of the issues that beset us starkly real. He started by reminding us of the public statements made by the Prime Minister and others about the very real possibility of this country being subject to some form of terrorist attack. He did not say so, but the possibility of that happening is considerably higher than the possibility of the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) becoming Mayor of London.

My right hon. Friend also reminded us of the importance of ensuring that all local authorities and health authorities have sufficient resources to fulfil not only their obligations under the present legislation, but the greater responsibilities that they will have as a result of the Bill that we will have later in the year. I venture to suggest, bearing in mind the risks to which my right hon. Friend referred, that regardless of whether authorities have the responsibilities, the resources should be there already. That would enable authorities to take discretionary action, even if they are not obliged to so.

My hon. Friend the Member for Westbury (Dr. Murrison) spoke wisely on health issues. He referred to his sadness about the attendance, but, as the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey said, this is the second debate on the subject in a month. However, I share the view that more hon. Members should perhaps have taken an interest. It is interesting that in the three weeks since the previous debate a number of new issues have arisen, on which I want to touch.

As the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey pointed out, a different Minister is replying to today's debate. I am delighted about that, but it raises the issue of overall responsibility. My right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling quite rightly and properly said that he was not sure that we needed a whole Department, akin to the Department of Homeland Security in the United States. However, I am concerned that we do not have a single Minister who is ultimately responsible for the issues. The Minister of State, Cabinet Office, who replied to the previous debate, rightly said:

> "The Home Secretary has overall responsibility for the safety and security of the citizens of the United Kingdom. He is in charge of security and also supervises all current counter-terrorist and resilience work by Departments".—[*Official Report, Westminster Hall*, 12 February 2003; Vol. 399, c. 305WH.]

That is an important job, but the Home Secretary is also responsible for the asylum chaos, our passport system and our police and law enforcement mechanisms. The amount of time that he can devote to this important matter must be extremely limited, which is why we retain the view that a Cabinet Minister should be responsible only for considering and co-ordinating home and security.

Yesterday, the Minister appeared as the Minister for chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear co-ordination, as he was described in a document published by the Home Secretary on civil contingency planning to deal with a terrorist attack. He said that he had been in the job since the turn of the year, which is fine. Having worked with him for around 18 months, I have huge respect for him and I am not criticising him, but it demonstrates yet again that another Minister with an important responsibility—

The Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community Safety (Mr. John Denham): I hope that the hon. Gentleman will accept that yesterday was not the first time that it was stated on the parliamentary record that I hold those responsibilities. I held them when, among other occasions, I gave evidence to the Select Committee on Defence last year. The hon. Gentleman and his right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) may have overlooked that, but other parliamentarians may not have done.

Mr. Paice: That is interesting and I am happy to accept the Minister's word, but the statement yesterday was certainly the first time that a number of us had heard of that.

The issue concerns co-ordination and whether it is possible for a disparate group of Ministers, each with different responsibilities, to co-ordinate. At least two of us in the Room have been in the same sort of position as the Minister. He will say that there are committees to do that, but those of us who have sat on Cabinet Committees and Sub-Committees know that it is easy to convince oneself that one is doing a grand job when hindsight often shows that matters of urgency and priority are never top of the agenda.

I shall not repeat all the issues that the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey reminded us about, but I hope that the Minister will address airport security in his reply.

Much of this morning's debate has concerned public information. My hon. Friend the Member for Westbury suggested that we should worry only about areas of dense population, which is a reasonable and valid proposition. My view is that the biggest cause of fear is lack of knowledge of the issues. We should be less patronising in the way in which we treat the public concerning threats and the actions that can be taken against those threats.

There has been much jocularity about the old "Protect and Survive" leaflet of the 1970s and 1980s, which, with hindsight, we might say was absurd, but at that time it provided an element of information to the public and we should not throw out the principle because, with hindsight 20 or 30 years later, we can rubbish that document. Perhaps nowhere is that more important than with vaccination, although that will arise in other matters that I want to raise.

[Mr. Paice]

As my right hon. Friend said during his opening speech, vaccination, particularly smallpox vaccination, is important. The statement published by the Home Secretary yesterday referred to the establishment of a United Kingdom reserve of a national stock of vaccines and antibiotics. Last night, the BBC news said that 20 million doses were available, but I am not aware of any public statement on that, so perhaps the Minister will confirm it. The Home Secretary said in the debate in the Chamber that Ministers will not seek vaccination against smallpox unless that is made generally available to the population. When he was then challenged at the Dispatch Box by my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin), the Home Secretary said:

> "I do not believe that there is a problem with people approaching their general practitioner for the smallpox vaccination."—[*Official Report*, 3 March 2003; Vol. 400, c. 596.]

Those two different statements, made by the Home Secretary in the space of a few minutes, are misleading and could give rise to considerable confusion. Of course, anyone is entitled to go and ask their GP for a vaccination, but whether the facilities are available for them to have it is another matter. I hope that the Minister can clarify that point. I argue strongly that anyone should be able to have a smallpox vaccination if they feel that that is necessary for their and their families' safety. We definitely do not want the sort of confusion that, I suggest, has now arisen.

Sir John Stanley: My hon. Friend referred to the lack of public information leaflets put out by the Government to help people to deal with civil defence and emergency issues. Is he aware that the Australian Government have already put out an interesting and comprehensive leaflet entitled "Preparing for the Unexpected"? If the Australian Government have concluded that it is necessary to put out such information in their very large country, surely we should be doing likewise, with great speed, in this tightly packed country where the risk of mass fatalities is that much greater.

Mr. Paice: My right hon. Friend introduces the next page of my speech perfectly, and saves me from making some of my points.

I turn to the websites referred to by the Home Secretary in yesterday's published statement. He mentioned ukresilience.info and the forthcoming Home Office site on terrorism. I do not think that anyone would describe the UK resilience site, which I spent some time studying yesterday evening, as user-friendly. It is very much a technocrats' website and does not provide large quantities of helpful public information from UK sources. For example, I searched for the word "smallpox", which I should have thought was reasonable on such a site, and four items came up. Three were simply extracts from newspapers and the fourth was on the medical effects of smallpox. None gave information about the terrorist implications, or about measures that people can take to minimise their personal risk from smallpox.

Yesterday, the Home Secretary said in the House that he would not produce guidelines along the lines of the "Protect and Survive" leaflet, but that the Home Office was developing a terrorist website to provide information. If one goes into the UK resilience site, as my right hon. Friend has, one finds links. Like him, I found the link to the Australian Government document "Preparing for the Unexpected". With the slight proviso that that is designed for an entirely different type of country, it is an extremely helpful, clearly written, explanatory document. It is not written in technical language, nor is it scaremongering. It provides the general public with a straightforward series of fairly simple advice.

There is some confusion here. On the one hand, the Government have said that they will not publish a leaflet in the form that has been seen before, but on the other, their own websites provide access to other countries' similar leaflets, which are helpful, but not designed for British circumstances. That seems highly contradictory. It is also worth making the point that one can access similar sites in the United States, Canada, France and New Zealand, all of which are far more helpful than the UK site.

Nowhere is that point more starkly illustrated than in an article that appeared in *The Sunday Times*. I am not a great one for quoting the press because we all know that accuracy cannot be vouched for, but that article raised particular issues so I shall end by quoting from it and challenging the Minister to say exactly what is going on. The article, which was published on 23 February, stated:

> "HOUSEHOLDERS are to be given guidance on how to survive in the face of a catastrophic terrorist attack. The guidance, which Ministers intend to reach all 24m homes in Britain, will include a shopping list of items that should be bought before a possible biological, chemical or nuclear strike".

The Cabinet Office said:

> "It is not clear yet how advice will be issued nationally. In the meantime, local authorities are entitled to adapt the Australian guidance."

It goes on to describe the Australian guidance entitled "Preparing for the Unexpected", to which we have referred.

There is confusion. Westminster Hall is, by convention, a less antagonistic Chamber than the House, but I want to draw to the Minister's attention the widespread confusion about what the Government are planning to do about informing the public. I say with sincerity that the public are entitled to have information similar to that being provided in other countries that face similar threats. It is patronising to suggest that the public will be panicked into an absurd reaction. That may be true of certain individuals, but that should not affect the wider issue. At the end of the day, the British people are a sober and realistic people who will take the information at face value, and they should be trusted.

I hope that the Minister will answer some of our questions—we have given him a lot of time so he has no excuse for not answering all of them. We should like him to answer those questions that his colleague did not answer at the end of the previous debate, and those that have arisen today. The debate has been useful and constructive, and I congratulate my right hon. Friend once more on securing it.

10.42 am

The Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community Safety (Mr. John Denham): I start by congratulating the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir John Stanley) on securing this Adjournment debate. It has been a useful debate, and the right hon. Gentleman was able to bring to it his considerable experience, not only as a former Minister, but as a Minister who dealt with a relevant Department. I am grateful to him and to the other Members who spoke.

A wide range of issues has been raised. I shall attempt to deal with them as fully as I can, but in 17 minutes I may overlook some, in which case I shall endeavour to write to hon. Members and follow up issues outside this debate.

Civil defence is an important topic; the Government take it seriously and have recognised it. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary made a written statement on civil contingency planning to address terrorist attack. The hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes), among others, asked whether an oral statement would not have been better. I shall certainly draw his remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary. However, difficult judgments have to be made on a lot of issues. In the current climate, there tends to be the belief that there must be a reason for choosing the particular date on which an oral statement is given, and the event may be given a significance that is out of proportion to the event itself. The intention of the written statement was to update the House. I ask the Chamber to accept that it is difficult to judge whether an oral statement will be interpreted by some sections of the media as meaning that the Government know something. Those are the judgments that we are wrestling with all the time in trying to get our communications right.

Simon Hughes: I completely understand. As we now know that there will be legislation later in the parliamentary year, it might be helpful if there were a periodic opportunity to speak on the matter so that it would not look like a panic response. We could all prepare for that, and the public would expect it, as a matter of regular updating.

Mr. Denham: I note what the hon. Gentleman says, and I note that we are discussing the matter for the second time in three weeks. Perhaps we are getting used to the idea of such debates.

I shall deal first with the question of structures and accountability, and then go on to some of the more specific issues. It is worth mentioning that the Government moved to strengthen the arrangements for emergency planning and civil protection immediately after the 2001 general election before the events of 11 September. In August 2001, the Government published a comprehensive discussion document on the future of emergency planning arrangements. At that time we concluded that the Civil Defence Act 1948 no longer provided an adequate framework for modern emergency planning. Its provisions relate to the organisation and protection of the civil population at a local level in response to a hostile attack by a foreign power.

The immediate concern was that since the 1980s, emergency planning had effectively concerned itself with preparations for responding to a wide variety of peacetime hazards in accordance with the policy of integrated emergency management. Since the mid-1980s, assumptions about the nature of potential threats to this country have changed dramatically, and the attacks of 11 September 2001 certainly brought that home to us. Planning began before 11 September and we have sought a clear structure for civil contingency planning overall, as well as the specific responses that have to be made to the threat of terrorist attacks, including the possibility of CBRN attacks.

The Home Secretary has overall responsibility for the safety and security of the citizens of the UK. He is in charge of security with direct responsibility for the main elements of the work to counter the current threat from terrorism: the intelligence work of the security service, counter-terrorist policy and building resilience against the terrorist threat. He supervises all current counter-terrorist and resilience work by Departments in his capacity as a member of three relevant Cabinet Committees. One oversees the work to strengthen our defences against terrorism, the second works to build the UK's resilience and ability to manage the consequences of major emergencies and the third meets to oversee lead Department management of major emergencies once they have taken place.

I was appointed Minister for CBRN co-ordination, reporting to the Home Secretary, at the end of 2001. We are supported in this work by Sir David Omand, who was appointed the Government's security and intelligence co-ordinator and permanent secretary to the Cabinet Office last summer. That new post was created to enhance the capacity at the centre of government to co-ordinate security, intelligence and consequence management matters and to deal with risks and major emergencies, should they arise. He is supported, as is the Home Secretary, by the civil contingencies secretariat in the Cabinet Office.

In reply to the argument that one person should be in charge of the whole response, I would argue that it is essential that, in their usual work, the major Departments of State have ownership of, and responsibility for, those aspects of our response and resilience to terrorism that come under their responsibilities. It is tempting to feel that, for example, airport security should be taken away from the Department for Transport and given to someone else, but in practice it is essential that those who are responsible for our airlines, airports, railways and the underground actually build into their day-to-day responsibilities an understanding of what is needed in the running of those major services so that we can respond to emergencies. We expect them to be able to do so should there be, for example, as unfortunately there have been, major, catastrophic train crashes. We cannot separate events that might be the consequences of terrorist action from those that happen by simple accident or act of God.

We have sought to create a structure supported by a strong central secretariat, in which individual Departments and Ministers are fully aware of their responsibilities in the overall picture, but in which the Home Secretary and the senior ministerial committee that he chairs ensure that there is an overall strategy and that people are held to account for their contribution to it. That is the essence of the structure that we have evolved.

[Mr. Denham]

One sometimes has to anticipate debates of this kind, so, depending on the issue that is likely to be the subject of such debates, there is no contradiction in the fact that the Minister who appears may be different. If the debate were to concentrate on, say, airport security, a Minister with responsibility for transport might respond. If the debate were considering our general structure for contingency planning against a variety of civil and terrorist emergencies, the Minister of State, Cabinet Office might respond. In anticipation of the likely thrust of today's debate and given my responsibilities for CBRN, I am answering on behalf of the Government. It is an illustration of strength rather than weakness that a number of different Ministers can respond to hon. Members on this matter.

Mr. Paice: I want to make it absolutely clear to the Minister, and to put it on the record, that he is countering an argument that no one has put. No one—certainly not me or my party—is suggesting that all those responsibilities should be extracted from individual Departments. The point that I have made repeatedly is that co-ordination is such a major issue that it should be the responsibility of a single Minister.

Mr. Denham: Co-ordination lies within the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, supported in CBRN, the current issue of concern, by me. We are supported in that both by the specialist teams in the Home Office and, in terms of co-ordination across the Government, by the civil contingencies secretariat. However, I am glad that the hon. Gentleman accepts—at least I think he does—that it is not as odd for different Ministers sometimes to answer different debates as he suggested earlier.

I had hoped to touch on developments that are taking place in those structures, and particularly to make two points. I shall do so only briefly now. First, we recognise that, to support activities locally, we need a strengthened regional tier for emergency planning and resilience building. The development of that is under way as we speak. Secondly, I confirm that we intend to publish the proposals for a civil contingencies Bill in the summer during this parliamentary Session, so that it can be subjected to further scrutiny. It is important to stress that the development of that Bill has not delayed essential work on emergency planning structures at local and regional level, but a new legal framework is necessary.

Resources were mentioned a couple of times. Last year there was a 30 per cent. increase in the dedicated central Government resource for emergency planning, a rather narrow and limited area. That is an increase that we wish to maintain. However, that £19 million represents only a small part of the resources devoted to emergency planning. Overall, the spending review of 2002 has resulted in additional spending on prevention, including a 6.4 per cent. increase in real terms on national security and intelligence agencies. We are expanding our investment in health, police and other major agencies. The statement issued by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary yesterday indicated some but not all of the areas of additional procurement of equipment and training carried out since 11 September.

For obvious reasons, the question of smallpox was raised a number of times during the debate. While we are always criticised for not giving information to the public, when we do give out information, no one reads it or acts as if we had made it available. It is worth stressing that we published our interim plan for smallpox in December 2002. It had input from the national health service, the Public Health Laboratory Service and other specialist agencies. We set out the three components in the Department of Health's preparation for a response to a possible smallpox emergency—improved vaccine stocks, a plan of action and a cohort of immunised staff who can deal safely with any potential smallpox cases. All those components are being developed as part of the Government's preparedness to respond to a deliberate release of a biological agent.

It is worth stressing that we are the only nation other than the United States and Canada to have published a smallpox plan. We are also, however, working with the European global health security action group on preparedness for smallpox and we hosted an international modelling workshop in November that examined the models underpinning the action group's planning requirements. It is always interesting and entertaining to listen to people on the "Today" programme who will not speak in their own voice and who say they are senior Government advisers. I stand to be corrected, but I am not aware of anybody who could be described as a senior Government adviser having made representations to Ministers that were reflected on "Today" yesterday morning. If I am wrong about that, I shall inform the hon. Gentleman and the House.

It is important to stress that the strategy of containment and ring vaccination first, which is at the heart of the Government's smallpox strategy, is consistent with World Health Organisation advice. If there were more time, I would read out some supporting quotes, but I hope that the hon. Gentleman will accept that the strategy has been drawn up in line with WHO advice.

Sir John Stanley: Time is running out. Does the Minister really believe that, given the length of time that it will take to vaccinate people inside the ring and for the vaccine to be effective, ring vaccination is a medically viable answer to a significant smallpox attack on the United Kingdom?

Mr. Denham: When I and my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Department of Health are advised by the chief medical officer and the World Health Organisation that our approach is the correct one, unless we have detailed scientific knowledge ourselves, I would rather not second-guess that.

The hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice) raised some related questions. In the debate yesterday my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary mentioned the figure of 20 million full vaccine doses. We are not—this needs to be stressed and it is also on the chief medical officer's advice—encouraging mass vaccination. Of course people should go to general practitioners if they want advice, but because of the risks associated with the vaccine, which can produce a severe reaction in one in 600 people, the CMO is not advising a mass vaccination campaign, nor are we proposing to launch such a campaign. However, the overall strategy has been set out in the interim plan for smallpox, which has been published.

I have two minutes in which to try to respond to a number of other issues, which I shall struggle to do.

The hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey asked about the policing arrangements. Clearly the role played by the police in responding to an emergency situation through the gold, silver and bronze command is different from that of, say, the special branch or the specialist terrorism services led by the Metropolitan police, but the overarching body is a sub-committee of the Association of Chief Police Officers, which looks at all policing activities in relation to counter-terrorism.

I apologise to the hon. Gentleman for Westbury (Dr. Murrison), who raised some important points. Towards the end of the year the Territorial Army reserve forces should be in place and able to offer military assistance and civil power under the normal rule. I shall write to him about the other points that he raised.

Property Law (Mr. Tony Martin)

11 am

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): I shall refer initially to some of the background to the Tony Martin case. As the Minister will be aware, it is a sad and tragic case. It is tragic that someone died in the break-in to Tony Martin's farmhouse, Bleak house. It is sad that a Norfolk farmer who is a man of honour, integrity and decency ended up going to prison, having had absolutely no previous convictions or examples of bad character in the past.

I want to consider the laws of burglary, in particular those governing self- defence. Before doing so, however, I want to refer to Tony Martin's application for parole. I note that the original Minister who was to deal with the matter cannot be here today because he is ill, but I am glad that the Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community Safety can respond to the debate. I spoke to his office about an hour and a half ago and informed his staff of the broad outline of what I am about to say, so I hope that he has been briefed on that. I am grateful to him for stepping in at the last moment.

The Minister will be aware that Tony Martin was convicted originally of murdering Fred Barras and was sentenced to life imprisonment. However, the conviction for murder was quashed on appeal and a conviction for manslaughter was substituted. The sentence was commuted to five years in prison. The first available date for parole was about five weeks ago. Everyone was led to believe that Tony Martin would be given parole and that that would not be a problem. As we know, parole was refused. That was a staggering decision. Tony Martin will challenge the Parole Board's decision through to judicial review, so obviously the matter is sub judice.

Will the Minister comment on the award of parole? I am talking in general terms; I note that the Clerk is looking a little apprehensive. I will not say anything that is sub judice. It is most important for the Minister to consider the matter from a general perspective. The two key criteria that matter most are the behaviour of the prisoner and the likelihood of his reoffending. I have a meeting lined up with the chairman of the Norfolk probation service in about two weeks. It would seem from press reports—they have not been denied—that the probation officer in question took a subjective view. For example, he is quoted as saying that Tony Martin showed no remorse. He is also quoted as having said that Tony Martin lived in the 19th century and believed that an Englishman's home was his castle. There is nothing dramatic in that. As for remorse—there has been much discussion about that in the local media—surely that is a private matter. I should not have thought that it was for a probation officer to take a subjective view. It is up to him to be dispassionate and professional and to make a judgment on the facts.

I draw attention to the contrasting case of Brendan Fearon, which is in the public domain. He was one of the burglars who broke into Tony Martin's home. He had a string of convictions as long as my arm and was a serial offender. He was convicted of burglary and was sentenced to three years' imprisonment. After 18 months, he was granted parole. Many people took the view, and said, that it was wrong for him to be granted

[Mr. Henry Bellingham]

parole in such circumstances, because if anyone was likely to reoffend it would almost certainly be Brendan Fearon. A few weeks ago he did reoffend and he is now back in prison serving a sentence for supplying heroin, yet he is an example of a person whom the probation service said should be granted parole. It is staggering that Brendan Fearon was granted parole but my constituent, Tony Martin, was not.

Will the Minister examine the role of the Prison Service? It submits reports to the Home Secretary but it also puts together a package of papers for the Minister to examine.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am listening extremely carefully to the hon. Gentleman. The subject of the debate is the operation of the law relating to property and how the case of Mr. Tony Martin affects that. The hon. Gentleman seems to be talking about the case of Mr. Tony Martin rather than the law relating to property. I do not think that he has yet stepped out of order, but he is not strictly addressing the terms of the debate, as I understand it.

Mr. Bellingham: I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for that slight rap over the knuckles. I shall come on to the law relating to burglary in a moment, but I am sure that you will agre[illegible] if one is making a strong case for reforming th[illegible]w and trying to put something in context, it is important to use individual cases because they bring home to people how deficient the law might be.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard (South-West Norfolk): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate. As he knows, Mr. Martin's home community of Emneth is in my constituency although Mr. Martin is my hon. Friend's constituent. As hon. Members will know, my hon. Friend was sadly absent from the House between 1997 and 2001, which was when the incident occurred, and during that period I took on responsibility for Mr. Martin and his community.

One of the most distressing aspects of the whole affair is a general aspect that affects not only Emneth, judging from my postbag, and no doubt that of my hon. Friend, and that is the loss of people's confidence in the criminal justice system, especially in relation to the invasion of privacy by burglars. That is enormously important, and if the law regarding people's security and safety in their homes is brought into disrepute by what people felt four years ago to be unfair treatment of an individual, it is right for the law to be examined. That is the background of my hon. Friend's case.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That was rather a long, but very helpful, intervention. It certainly described the scope of the debate, as I understand it.

Mr. Bellingham: I am extremely grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard) who summed up succinctly the feelings of many of our constituents. She was right to point out that Tony Martin, whose house is the last house in my constituency, is a constituent of North-West Norfolk, but the community of which he is part, Emneth, is in my right hon. Friend's constituency.

My right hon. Friend's point brings me neatly to the law of burglary. I shall address a point about the Parole Board in a moment, but you are right, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because we are nine minutes into the debate and it is time that we examined burglary and the law relating to it in more detail. I see that the Clerk is cheering up a bit, which is obviously good.

Rural police forces up and down the country are overstretched. Burglars know that because they are targeting, more and more, homes in the more rural and sparsely populated parts of my constituency and the constituencies of my right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Norfolk and my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Simpson).

People in rural areas feel particularly vulnerable, which is not helped by the recent confusing comments of Lord Chief Justice Woolf and the Lord Chancellor. They appear to be completely out of touch. Burglary is not a victimless crime. It often involves the threat or the fact of physical attack, and many of its victims are permanently traumatised. When Lord Chief Justice Woolf and the Lord Chancellor suggest that first-time burglars should not be given custodial sentences they send out quite the wrong signal.

People in rural areas feel especially vulnerable, and many of them think that they should be able to use reasonable force to protect themselves. However, recent cases have resulted in total confusion. The Tony Martin case is well documented and everyone knows the facts. He shot a burglar who broke into his house, was charged and convicted. Another man was recently convicted for repeatedly stabbing a burglar who had broken into the flat where he believed that his children were sleeping. However, when another householder stabbed to death one intruder and seriously wounded another, the Crown Prosecution Service found that the force used was reasonable and did not prosecute. Clearly the CPS cannot decide where the boundary between reasonable and unreasonable force lies and what the law is. How can it be right to prosecute people when the law is confused and contradictory?

If lawyers, safe in their offices, cannot work out what is right, how can a householder be expected to weigh up the pros and cons in the middle of a violent struggle in the dark? Is it reasonable to expect a householder, during a few fearful seconds at the top of the stairs, when he is being menaced and perhaps threatened with a broken bottle or a knife, to guess what the law would say when lawyers do not know?

I do not want new over-prescriptive laws, and I certainly do not want a firearms free-for-all. We do not want here the situation found in parts of the United States where if one so much as enters someone's garden one is likely to be shot at. In a case in Florida, a Japanese tourist knocked on someone's door and was shot through the letterbox. That is the gun culture gone mad and we do not want that. However, I think—the Minister might comment on this—that we need a much more sympathetic approach by the police and the CPS towards householders who defend themselves. All too often, those householders, who have perhaps had to react in a split second, are made to feel the No. 1 criminal. There should be a presumption in favour of their innocence, rather than the other way round, which appears to be the case at present.

I am not suggesting that the Government should immediately change the law, but we should have a report from the Law Commission, which should be tasked with examining whether we need a new law where the relevant test is not the reasonable man test but a new, subjective test of what the householder believes to be appropriate at the time. At the moment, under the reasonable man test, many months after an incident, the CPS and lawyers will be sitting in their comfy chairs deciding what the reasonable man would do in those circumstances. How can they put themselves into the shoes of the householder who had to take a decision in a split second? If we bring in a new, subjective test, that would allow for the fact that every case is different and every set of circumstances quite unique. Householders would not then be prosecuted unless they were launching what I would describe as revenge attacks on burglars. They would not be prosecuted for any action that they took in the heat of the circumstances, on the spur of the moment. They might be prosecuted if, for example, they apprehended the burglar, held them at bay, and then launched a revenge attack on them. That would obviously be very different.

I urge the Minister to consider my suggestion. I do not say that the law should be changed immediately, but there is a strong tide of opinion in Norfolk and in many other rural areas that the law is completely confused. The Government should accept that and try to do something about it. My suggestion that the Law Commission should examine the issue and produce a report makes the most sense.

I also want to make a point about burglars and other intruders who break into properties and end up getting injured or, in this case, shot. I strongly believe that those burglars—those criminals—who have often committed wicked crimes should not have any civil rights with regard to any incident that takes place in that property. There is a great deal of support in my constituency and that of my right hon. Friend for the suggestion that when burglars break into a property, and it is manifestly obvious to them that they are committing a crime, they should leave their civil rights outside that building or home. I am thinking especially of the case of Brendon Fearon who is trying to sue Tony Martin for, we are told, £150,000, on the basis that he suffered injury and other problems when he broke into Tony Martin's house.

It would make much more sense if a rule were introduced whereby all civil rights are extinguished the moment that a crime is committed. It offends many people when it becomes apparent that burglars and other criminals can profit from a crime. The Minister must respond to the tide of public opinion and revulsion at some of the incidents that have taken place throughout the country. The Government must focus on these two points. I do not advocate American-style laws under which people can shoot whom they want. However, it is high time that householders know exactly where they stand. The Government must seize my point about people who commit crimes being able to profit from them.

The Parole Board apparently ignored its own guidelines when it made its decision in the Tony Martin case. Those guidelines demand that it considers any psychiatric reports in any review. I understand that it did not study the report by forensic psychiatrist Dr Philip Joseph, who made it clear that he had examined Tony Martin and concluded that he was not prone to losing his self-control and was no more volatile than the average person. He recommended that Tony Martin should receive parole, but it appears that that crucial psychiatrist's report was not included in the key papers that the Prison Service presented to the Parole Board. The Minister must consider that.

I am unclear whether the Parole Board is an independent body over which Ministers have no control. Will the Minister say whether that is the case, and will he examine any possible discrepancies in the Parole Board's decision-making process? Will he ask questions and discover why a key report was not presented? Will he ask the Prison Service for an explanation, and will he speak to the relevant prison governor? Will the Minister obtain a copy of the probation officer's report? If I write to him and ask for a copy of the probation officer's report that went to the Parole Board, will he supply it? Could I write to the chairman of the Norfolk probation service and ask for a copy, or will those reports always be confidential? In a case where there has been substantial publicity about what was in that probation officer's report—information that has not been denied—would it make sense for such a report to be published? Will the Minister explain to the House what he can and cannot do in such a case?

I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for giving me that leeway. I hope that the Minister will be able to answer my questions on the way that Tony Martin's application for parole was handled. Would he also consider setting up a Law Commission inquiry into how the burglary law works and what householders can and cannot do? If he could do that, many of us would be extremely grateful.

11.20 am

The Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community Safety (Mr. John Denham): I congratulate the hon. Member for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham) on securing the debate. As he appreciates, I have stepped in at the last moment to respond to it and I hope to address several of the issues that he raised. He introduced the debate in a measured way. I am sure that he would join me in regretting the fact that some of the coverage of the case has focused on individual people with some role in the decision-making process, drawing attention to where they live and their identity in a way that is not fair to people working in the service of the public.

With regard to the Parole Board's decision, we cannot comment on the circumstances of a particular case. I shall, however, set out the process for considering whether a prisoner serving a sentence of four years and over should be granted early release on parole licence. It is important to say that that is the approach that we expect the Parole Board, as an independent body, to follow.

Prisoners serving a sentence of four years or more are entitled to be considered for early release on parole at the halfway point of their sentence. It is for the Parole Board to determine whether to award early release on parole. When considering whether or not to release, the board is obliged to take into account the directions set down by the Secretary of State, pursuant to Section 32(6) of the Criminal Justice Act 1991.

[Mr. John Denham]

Those directions clearly state that the Parole Board shall consider primarily the risk to the public of a further offence being committed at a time when the prisoner would otherwise be in prison and whether any such risk is acceptable. This risk is then balanced against the benefit, both to the public and to the offender, of early release back into the community under a degree of supervision. However, I must stress that when carrying out that balancing exercise, the board's overriding concern must be the protection of the public. That is all the more so when the offender concerned has committed either a violent or sexual offence.

The Parole Board will also want to satisfy itself that the prisoner concerned is likely to comply with the conditions of their licence. It will want to be satisfied that there is a sound release plan, which will assist the offender's rehabilitation and which has adequate safeguards that will enable the probation service safely to manage risk while the prisoner is in the community. In short, a significant part of the consideration that the Parole Board is required to undertake when considering an application for release on parole focuses on the risk to the public of further offending during the parole period. In general, if someone presented no risk of reoffending, it would follow that the Parole Board would be bound to recommend that person's release.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the availability of reports to the Parole Board. I shall look into that matter and write to him about it. From the briefing that I have, I have no reason to believe that all available reports and material were not considered by the Parole Board. The current position is that Mr. Martin will be released automatically at the two-thirds point of his sentence, and supervised on licence until the three-quarter point.

On the question of the law on self-defence, it is well-established in law—I am not talking about an individual case—that a person may use "reasonable force" in self-defence or in the defence of his or her family or property. The key elements of what amounts to reasonable force in self-defence may be summarised as necessity and proportionality. The force that it is reasonable to use in any given situation will depend on the nature of the threat that a person is facing—for example, the level of force that he can use to defend his life is greater than that to defend his property.

What constitutes reasonable force will depend upon the circumstances of each case and is a matter solely for the courts to decide. That does not mean that if a person inflicts injury on a criminal in the course of defending himself or his property he will necessarily face criminal charges. However, if a complaint is made that excessive force has been used, the police are duty bound to investigate. If charges are brought, the court takes account of what was reasonable in the circumstances for someone in the defendant's shoes. For example, some allowances are made for panic in the heat of the moment or the fact that the defendant is small and frail and the criminal is large and threatening.

Some sort of codification of what level of force is permissible is likely to be of only academic interest to people who suddenly find themselves under attack. Such a code is not likely to be the sort of thing one carries round in one's mind in case it is needed. I am not sure whether it would help to resolve the situation. When a case is brought to court, it is best left to the jury to decide, in the light of the circumstances, whether the action taken in self-defence was necessary and proportionate. The law allows a jury to take into account the fact that people defending themselves may not be able to judge to a nicety what level of force to use. Generally, juries are able to come to sensible conclusions that are on the side of the law-abiding public and the victim.

Although it is quite reasonable to ask for a proper approach by the police and the prosecuting authorities, many of the judgments in cases that are brought to court must be put in the hands of juries, which must play the role that they have traditionally played. We need to keep a careful balance between upholding an individual's right to self-defence and maintaining the general rule that people should not take the law into their own hands. It follows that changes to the existing law should not be made on the hoof as a response to a particular case. At this stage, we are not convinced that a change to the law on self-defence is required.

Mrs. Shephard: I congratulate the Minister on his grasp of the matter. When a case has the kind of reception that this case had, it brings the law and people's respect for it into some doubt. The reaction to a case is something that Ministers should take into account when they are reviewing possible changes in the law.

Mr. Denham: Both the points that the right hon. Lady makes are correct. High-profile cases raise public concerns about the way in which the system operates and Ministers are duty bound to reflect on the issues that are raised, but they are also duty bound not to commit themselves to rewriting an entire piece of legislation on the back of an individual case, if, on reflection, the principles seem to be sound.

Mr. Keith Simpson (Mid-Norfolk): This is not in the same category, but it relates to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham) and my right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard). The impression among the public is that the balance has shifted towards the criminal, rather than the victim. I was told recently by the head of the Norfolk Archaeological Trust that a person had broken into an archaeological site, climbed over a fence, fallen into a ditch and injured themselves and was now seeking legal advice about suing the trust because it had not put up a notice saying that there was a ditch. We can smile about that kind of thing, but it contributes to many people's perception of the balance. I know that the Minister cannot necessarily take the place of a judge, but he must have a view on the matter.

Mr. Denham: There is a slight difference between the issue of the law on the reasonable use of self-defence, which has been in place for some time, and the interpretation of the Occupiers' Liability Act 1984, which involves considering what was in the mind of the Government who introduced it. I suspect that the 1984 Act was much more to do with children going into their neighbour's garden to retrieve a ball and falling into a dangerous pond, than it was to do with climbing over fences belonging to the Norfolk Archaeological Trust.

I can add little further today, other than to say that there was an interesting exchange—not in the House, but on "Any Questions" last Friday night—between my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin), which appeared to point to a consensus that some revision of the 1984 Act might be in order. I understand that that was due to be discussed in the Committee that is considering the Criminal Justice Bill this morning. I cannot commit the Government on this matter, but there does seem to be something in the ether surrounding the issue, so perhaps we should watch this space.

11.29 am

Sitting suspended until Two o'clock.

EU Enlargement

2 pm

Mr. Wayne David (Caerphilly): Just over a year ago, I was able to initiate a similar debate on European Union enlargement in Westminster Hall. A year later, it is remarkable how much things have changed. Most important is the fact that we had the Copenhagen summit last December. The summit was historic in many ways, not least because it was agreed at the summit that 10 applicant countries should be able to join the European Union in 2004. Those countries—as all hon. Members know—are the three Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Hungary, Malta and Cyprus. The summit also agreed that Romania and Bulgaria should be able to join the EU in 2007; and, significantly, the European hand of friendship was extended to Turkey's possible future membership.

It is amazing how much things have changed in so many of the countries involved in the enlargement process, not only in the past 12 months but in the past decade. If we pause for thought, we will remember that 10 years ago six of those 10 countries did not exist as nation states. Now, they are in the process of transforming their societies and economies, developing new political structures and once again engaging with the international community. The progress in all those states is epitomised by the example of Poland.

In 1989, the situation in Poland was dire in the extreme. Inflation was 600 per cent., consumer goods were virtually non-existent, travel was almost unheard of and the private sector was minuscule. Today, twice as many Poles go to university than went in 1989. Poles travel extensively and, although unemployment is still unacceptably high, 3 million businesses now create new jobs for Polish people every day, and inflation is only 1 per cent. There is an optimism and upbeat character throughout the country that shows how far it has progressed and is likely to progress in future.

The enlargement process is not over simply because we had a successful summit in December. Copenhagen was only the end of the beginning. Referendums have yet to be held in all the accession countries—the first will be in Malta on 8 March and the last in Latvia on 20 September. Those referendums are critical, and the debate in those countries will be intense.

We should also remember that the process of change must continue in the countries of central Europe. Political democracy must be strengthened and reinforced, market economies must progress and administrative capacity must be developed. For example, when the states receive structural funds from the EU, they will have to ensure that those funds are spent in the best possible way and that programmes have been introduced to maximise their value. That task should not be underestimated.

One issue relating to the accession treaty is still outstanding—it must be ratified by the European Parliament and by each of the current member states of the EU. In that respect, I must express my grave concern about the recent comments of President Chirac. He said that the many countries of central Europe that support the position of the United States on Iraq are childish, badly brought up and irresponsible. Such comments are

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totally unacceptable and absolutely outrageous. France, like every other member state, must ratify the treaty, and it may decide to hold a referendum. To issue veiled threats against the applicant states—the accession countries—is the worst possible way for France to develop a relationship with them. I believe that President Chirac's comments will prove to be counter-productive.

Cyprus was debated at length at Copenhagen. There is no doubt that the Greek-speaking southern part of Cyprus will join the European Union, but I am sure that we all want the whole island to join. I was very pleased to learn in the past few days that a third revised version of the plan for unification is under consideration. Extra time has been given to President Papadopoulos, who is the new President of Cyprus. It is said that he is more opposed to unification of the island than his predecessor, but I did not find that to be the case in my discussions with him when the European Scrutiny Committee was in Cyprus. He might surprise many people by being more in favour of unity than they think.

The new deadline for reaching agreement is 10 March, and a draft agreement is to be put to a referendum on 30 March. I hope that the process will be successful. If it is, we must pay tribute to the British involvement in it, not least that of Sir David Hannay, who has done an excellent job in ensuring that progress has taken place.

It was also agreed at Copenhagen that Romania and Bulgaria should not be forgotten, and 2007 was mentioned as the date for their accession, but I question whether those two countries should automatically be linked together, as the two are very different, as is their progress towards EU membership. For example, as of December, Bulgaria had closed in negotiations 23 of the 30 chapters, but Romania had closed only 13 of 30.

Recently, Commissioner Verheugen was in Romania. He made it absolutely clear that a lot of work had to be done, and done speedily, in that country. He was very blunt, as he often is, in saying that corruption had to be tackled and genuine attempts had to be made to create an independent judiciary. However, there is much work to be done in Bulgaria, too. I was in Bulgaria just a couple of weeks ago, and I heard from business people as well as politicians that there was still a great deal of corruption in the police force and that the judiciary was anything but impartial and independent.

Croatia has recently submitted an application to the EU—there is a debate to be had on that—and I understand that Macedonia has just submitted one as well. Personally, I feel that it would be helpful if the Government of Croatia were more co-operative in relation to the war crimes tribunal in The Hague. That would certainly enhance the country's application. I would be interested to know the Minister's position on the enlargement process as far as those countries and other Balkan states are concerned.

Finally, I shall refer to Turkey—I say "finally", but although I refer to it last, it is by no means least. An agreement at Copenhagen was of tremendous importance to Turkey. For the first time in some 40 years of sometimes heated debate, the European Council proposed a potential start date for accession talks in December 2004. That is of enormous significance, but there is a debate about Turkey's membership in principle and whether it should ever be admitted to the European Union.

Turkey is a Muslim country of 70 million people. It is situated predominantly in Asia Minor but it is also in NATO. Some people have said that Turkey should not be admitted to the European Union, most notably Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, although he accepts that progress has been made and that progress is planned for the future. His argument comes down to the fact that, in his view, Turkey is not a European country.

I fundamentally disagree with that point of view. For me Europe is an idea. It is about values, not about dotted lines on maps, religious beliefs, tribal loyalties or ethnic pedigrees. Countries that sign up to core values such as democracy and freedom of speech and of association should be eligible to join the EU whether their populations are Slavs or Muslims. That to me is irrelevant.

Obviously, the laws of economics mean that no economic association, whether the EU or any other body, can keep on growing without limits, but that limit has not been reached in respect of Turkey. Since 1999, Turkey has responded positively to the challenges that face it. Its Parliament has passed measures to abolish the death penalty. Turkey has extended key rights to the Kurdish people and it has begun to reform its judiciary. Importantly, we have recently seen the election of a new democratic Government who have Islamic beliefs firmly rooted in the Islamic community, but who are also committed to progressive socio-economic reforms.

That is not to say that not much more needs to be done in Turkey—a heck of a lot more needs to be done. The Turkish economy still needs to be liberalised. Dissidents, ethnic minorities and ordinary prisoners need to be treated far better than they are at present. There needs to be genuine freedom of worship and far more rights should be accorded to the Kurdish people. Above all else, let us not forget that the military must have far less influence than it currently exercises in the Turkish state, albeit behind the scenes.

None the less, I stress my belief that things are changing significantly. By giving Turkey a provisional start date for negotiations, the Copenhagen summit has given us an historic chance to bring together two traditions and two civilisations. We should welcome that fact and understand its true implications.

The case for EU enlargement rests on two basic facts. The first is that the best interests of the United Kingdom and the European Union as a whole are served well by the process of enlargement. Let us not forget that some 14,000 British firms currently trade with the countries of central and eastern Europe, and their number is increasing all the time. Let us not forget that accession is relatively more important to countries such as Germany, which are much closer to the accession states.

However, let us not minimise the advantages of joining the European Union to those countries that we hope will enter in 2004 and beyond. For them, Europe offers hope, freedom and a chance of real prosperity. It offers them hope because the European Union with its liberal democracies is something to which they aspired for many years during the dark days of the communists. It offers them a real chance of developing a market economy in a socially responsible way. The European Union, alongside NATO, reinforces their prospects of genuine peace and stability well into the future. That is why enlargement is a win-win process that offers benefits to everyone. I hope that the House will achieve real consensus on the importance of enlargement and that there will be cross-party support for the treaty of accession when it comes before Parliament.

My final point is this: it is all very well politicians and Governments talking about the importance of enlargement—the case for it is overwhelming—but the important challenge is to convince the people of Europe that enlargement is critical. The other day, I was reading an article in *E!Sharp* magazine dated October 2002. It gave a comprehensive analysis of various European barometer polls. It stated the following chilling words:

> "Not only do the vast majority of EU citizens have no idea which countries are candidates to join the Union, but many of them do not even want to know".

All of us in the House and beyond who believe in Europe and the values of the European Union and see enlargement as intrinsically worth while have a moral responsibility to take the message out beyond the House and to convince people of the worth of the European enlargement project. I hope that in some small way, at least, this debate will reinforce our determination to make enlargement work. It gives a chance to demonstrate that we must take all the people with us in this great project.

2.17 pm

Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): I am delighted to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly (Mr. David) and congratulate him on obtaining this debate. He says that it has become an annual feature of the House of Commons and I look forward to his applying for a debate next year, when we shall be only a couple of months from the completed enlargement process.

There will be no dissent in the Chamber this afternoon. All hon. Members, on both sides of the House, support enlargement for the reasons made clear by my hon. Friend. There was a time when the Opposition were against enlargement—they wanted a referendum on the Nice treaty and to block the enlargement process.

Mr. Richard Spring (West Suffolk): I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman has adverted immediately from his statement that we are all in favour of enlargement to the idea that the Conservatives were against it. We have never been against it, but we believed that the way in which Nice was handled ultimately had precious little to do with enlargement. However, Nice has happened, and we want to get on with things as they are.

Keith Vaz: I am delighted by the Conservatives' retrospective change of policy that has been announced in this debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly can take comfort from that. I am glad that we all now speak with one voice.

It is right that Britain should take pride in its role in the process, particularly because the speeches and initiatives of our Prime Minister during the past few years gave the enlargement process in Europe impetus and enthusiasm. My hon. Friend the Minister for Europe should be congratulated. From the moment that he became the Minister for Europe, he made it a feature to visit as many applicant countries as possible to keep those positive links going. He came here today from chairing a major Foreign Office seminar on enlargement.

That is why Britain has a right to be proud of what we have achieved in the enlargement process, and it is why, when we talk about creating a new Europe, we do not mean dividing up the countries between the so-called old Europe and the so-called new Europe. A new Europe will be created when the enlargement process is completed. That new Europe will consist of a group of countries that are determined to achieve the reunification of Europe and to create the largest single market anywhere in the world, covering 500 million people and bringing peace and prosperity to the continent. That process has taken place only because of the enormous amount of work done by so many.

I pay tribute to Günter Verheugen, the Commissioner on enlargement, who I know has worked extremely hard. It is not easy to go through the acquis communautaire, but we should commend the speed with which the countries and their chief negotiators have tackled the subject. I am glad that only two of the original applicants are not joining in the first wave. I know that there was discussion about how big the wave should be, but the European Council was right to decide that as many countries as possible should join.

I will raise only three or four points in the short time available, because I know that a number of my colleagues want to take part in the debate. I see at least two former members of the European Parliament to whom Westminster has granted asylum. I know that they will want to speak, so I shall be brief.

First, I wish to flag up the issue of reform. Of course we welcome the new countries that are joining the European Union, but it is essential that the reform process that the Prime Minister and Chancellor Schröder began with their now famous letter of 25 February 2002 be completed. Once all the new countries are in Europe, unless the way in which the European Council operates is fundamentally reformed, there will be gridlock—the decision-making process will come to a halt. One of the practical suggestions in the practical letter sent by the two leaders to the Prime Minister of Spain was that, for example, the round-table discussions that take place when each country sets out its stated position, and the entire day is taken up in deliberations, must end.

We must ensure that the paperwork does not bury the bright officials from the United Kingdom who speak on our behalf and on behalf of other countries, but is put to one side, so that we can get on with making practical decisions. Therefore, we must look at the reform agenda for the way in which the European Council operates. I should be interested to hear from the Minister how many of the points in the letter of 25 February 2002 can be ticked off. I know that he is as keen as all Members of Parliament to make sure that the reform process is continued.

My second point is that, once the enlargement process is completed, we must not stop doing the good things that we are doing. Let the Minister continue his bilateral visits, and let there be more visits between

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parliamentarians at Westminster and those in the new European Union countries. The taxpayer pays for us to make three visits to European Union institutions, and that has recently been expanded to include the enlargement countries. Every Member of Parliament should decide to visit one of the member-designate countries to build up the relationship so solidly built at ministerial level by the Minister for Europe, the Foreign Secretary and others.

We must also enhance business opportunities in the eastern European member-designate countries. We have a lot of companies out there. Let it not be only Tesco that has a supermarket in downtown Bratislava. Let us make sure that other British companies go to those countries and, by investing in them, contribute to the development of their economies.

My third point relates to the euro. A number of EU enlargement countries will watch with interest to see what happens by June. Some of those countries might be in a position to join the euro before us. While I do not wish to turn this into a debate on the euro, I hope that the Minister will try to persuade the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister to release a timetable so that new members-designate will have an understanding of what we intend to do once the assessments are completed by 7 June. If we are not going to have a referendum, we should know about that, and we should know if we are to have one. I am sure that Warsaw, Riga, Bratislava and Prague are all watching with interest to see what we do. It would be tragic if we were to join the euro after all those countries had joined.

My fourth point relates to a practical move that we could support in order to show that the members-designate are really part of the EU. I propose that we should support the moving of an EU institution or agency headquarters to one of the member-designate states after 1 May. I do not mind which it is, as long as one is moved. I am not suggesting that the European Parliament should move, but something should. We should show practical support for the new member-designate countries to ensure that they feel that they are part of Europe.

After 1 May, the centre of Europe will not be Brussels. It will probably be Prague, although I will not get out my measuring tape to find out how big the countries are. Perhaps the Minister and the bright young things from the Europe team will tell me if I am wrong. The fact is that the centre of Europe will shift, and if we accept the cogent arguments on Turkey advanced by my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly, it will move even further away from Brussels. It is important that we consider my proposal, because through it we would be able to demonstrate our support.

My hon. Friend ended with Turkey and I, too, shall end with a brief note on that country. It is right that we continue to give Turkey hope, but we should not raise its expectations to such an extent that we cannot deliver on the promises that we make to it. To be frank, it is not for George Bush to champion Turkey's membership of the EU; it is a matter for our country—we have done it in the past—and for other EU countries. We must step up our bilateral links with Turkey to ensure that when we talk genuinely about getting it into the EU, along with Romania and Bulgaria, we can back that up with examples of work that we have done.

The debate is important. I hope that it will become an annual debate. That will provide us with an opportunity next year to be on the doorstep of history preparing for that huge enlargement that will transform Europe for ever.

2.28 pm

Mr. Mark Hendrick (Preston): The Copenhagen summit was an historic achievement. Apart from allowing the accession of 10 applicant states into the EU, it put forward an excellent financial package for those countries. Some £25 billion will be given over the period 2004 to 2006 but, while that will help those applicant countries, that sum is only 0.1 per cent. of Europe's GDP. As my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly (Mr. David) said earlier, more than a decade ago six of the 10 applicant states did not exist. Since breaking away from communist rule, those countries have integrated themselves into world and European markets, something that many of us could not have imagined 15 years ago when they were still part of the Soviet empire.

The previous century witnessed wars across Europe; not only the two world wars, but 50 years of cold war and conflict over Cyprus. It seems that the prospect of Cyprus entering the European Union has united the country; it is a fantastic opportunity. If we can secure agreement on the Kofi Annan plan before the accession takes place, a united Cyprus will exist within the EU and the path will be clearer for Turkey to join later.

For European countries, the first 50 years of the last century were about survival. Governments had to deal with unemployment, ill health, poor housing and insecurity. The second 50 years, for western Europe at least, were about consumerism, from the sale of music records in the 1950s to the CDs and computers that we enjoy today.

For about 40 of those years, applicant countries experienced direct communist rule from Moscow. The changes in those countries over the past 10 to 15 years have been amazing. NATO will guarantee those countries security and peace for the foreseeable future and the European Union will provide them with economic prosperity and security. Relationships with neighbouring countries that were hostile in the past should now be secure.

Membership of the European Union will bring many advantages. As my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly said, we are now in a win-win position. The GDP of new members will increase by approximately 19 per cent. in the medium term. As I said earlier, six of the member states did not even exist in the past and none of the countries sharing a border with communist Poland now exists in the same form. The change has been entirely peaceful with no borders affected and no populations expelled in the process.

In the past year, the European Union spent €40 million helping Slovenia to prepare for membership, and €440 million on reconstructing Kosovo. Those figures cannot begin to convey the tragedy of what Mr. Milosevic did to Yugoslavia. If the enlargement of the European Union can prevent such a tragedy from ever happening again, it will be a testament to the European future. Co-operation on trafficking in people and drugs will take place on a scale never before seen, which is welcomed by all member states.

Some people in this country are worried about migration into the UK from these applicant countries, but let us examine the examples of Spain and Portugal. When Spain joined the EU in 1986, 109,000 Spanish workers were based in France. By 1994, the figure had fallen to 35,000. The sort of economic migration that happens through desperation will be inhibited by the development of these applicant countries, which will feel more secure and provide their people with more opportunities.

If we can bring Europe together under the EU, we shall be able to work much more closely with the United States and present a common force for good to the world. We do not want an inward-looking EU of just 25 members, or even an EU that is aligned to the United States of America and just looks after its own economic problems. There are pressing problems in today's world. We need to develop Africa, a continent that is going backwards and has suffered from famine and underdevelopment for hundreds of years. We can begin to deal seriously with the HIV epidemic in southern Africa that will bring death and destruction in many communities. We can begin to look at stabilising the middle east, as the United States and Europe together have the political will and economic might to ensure that that is done in a way that we have never seen before. Most importantly, especially given the problems that we face in Iraq, we can strengthen the United Nations.

The Convention on the Future of Europe will determine the architecture for a Europe of 25. If that Europe can get an architecture of government and method of multinational decision and law making that is far superior to anything that any continent in the world has seen, we can look towards reforming the United Nations. We can work out how it can adopt EU best practice in order to work with organisations such as the World Trade Organisation, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank to create world order that provides stability for places such as Africa and Asia and make the world a much better place.

An EU of 25 will give the United Kingdom far more influence. Many applicant countries are Anglo-centric and look to the UK, and the USA, for support and co-operation; militarily in the past and economically, I believe, in the future. The Franco-German axis will decline, and some of Mr. Chirac's recent comments seem like the scream of a dying baby. There will be new dynamics in the decision-making processes as a result of the change in the composition of the Council of Ministers and in the European Parliament. The family of Europe will be reunited.

We look forward to a Europe of peace, prosperity and influence. I welcome the changes that are taking place.

2.37 pm

Mr. John MacDougall (Central Fife): I, too, offer my congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly (Mr. David) on securing the debate. I will not take too much time, but I am grateful to make a contribution to an important debate.

I recognise the importance of the decisions that were taken in Copenhagen on 12 and 13 December and the significant challenges, and benefits, that they bring. My hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly identified each country by name, including Poland, and I want to make some comments on my interests in Poland. They go far beyond the fact that my wife comes from a Polish family or that I heard many stories from my late father-in-law about the challenges that Poland faced over the years and the benefits seen in a much-rejuvenated Poland, which my hon. Friend also noted.

In recent informal discussions with the Polish ambassador Stanislaw Komorowski, who has now become a good friend, he told me that he did not see the process of Poland joining the EU as one in which only Poland and the Polish people received the benefits. He saw it as an opportunity for Poland to give something back to the EU, which is an important message. It made me think about the other countries that will join the EU, which, with their individual styles and opportunities, will make their contributions to a much stronger and more stable Europe.

I can mention one obvious opportunity that will arise from Poland's membership. We are all aware of the fact that Poland has large agricultural potential. The development of that potential would release great benefits to the European Union. Everyone accepts, and has commented at one stage or another, that it is hardly acceptable that just over 50 per cent. of the total European budget is spent inefficiently through the common agricultural policy. With Poland becoming a member of the EU, the contribution of its agricultural capability should be seen as an opportunity, not a threat. That is one example of a benefit of membership.

I should like to refer to stability, which other Members have mentioned, and to history. The European challenge of recent times is vastly different from that posed by the Europe that we knew; everyone recognises that. Not too long ago, the shape of the European Union was entirely different. My hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly referred to the number of countries that emerged at the end of the cold war. The break up of the USSR and the situation that arose after Germany became a unified country again all presented different challenges and threats to Europe's shape. The 10 countries in the process of accession will give a strong and good message to other countries in Europe.

When East and West Germany were merged, the hopes of the East Germans were raised considerably during the merger, but were difficult to meet. There is a danger that if a merger is not made quickly, aspiration will quickly turn to disillusionment and to the feeling of being unsettled, which can cause further problems to a Europe that is already experiencing instability. The opportunity for stability offered by enlargement should not be understated.

The fact that we have a larger Europe today gives us greater opportunity to see the benefits of working together; rather than the alternative, which is a referral to the power base of military control. I agree that enlargement gives us the opportunity to tackle challenges differently.

I welcome today's discussion. Much has been said, and the problems facing Africa have been referred to. Opportunities will arise from a strong message being

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sent from the 10 accession countries, including Bulgaria, Romania, Cyprus and Turkey, the challenges of which have yet to be addressed. With a good success rate for those 10 countries, other challenges can be taken on board.

A dear friend, Bruce Millan, who was a well-respected Commissioner in Europe, once said to me, "If the only reason that you are in Europe, John, is to put £5 in and take £5 out, you are wasting your time. It is much more sophisticated than that." I hope that we get that message out to the public, and debates such as this one and publicity from them are essential. During a surgery that I held last Friday in my constituency, I met 34 constituents in an hour and a half. Not one of them mentioned Turkey, or the fact that Cyprus and Poland were about to become members of the EU. That is significant. The subject is not high on the public agenda, so we must promote the importance of a stable Europe to each and every one of us; not just in the UK, but throughout the world.

I look forward to the annual event that my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly has inaugurated in the hope that, next year, the situation will be much more progressive than it is at present and that we can meet many of the challenges that lie ahead. I also look forward very much to my hon. Friend the Minister's response at the end of the debate.

2.45 pm

Mr. Michael Moore (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Central Fife (Mr. MacDougall). He highlighted the fact that the applicant countries see the process as being not simply about taking something from Europe or getting their share of Europe, but about how they can contribute to the process as well. Before I go any further, I congratulate the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. David), who has made something of a specialty out of EU enlargement. He has raised it in this Chamber before, and I commend him for doing so again, particularly at this important time.

As has been mentioned, the debate follows on from the seminar that the Minister hosted at the Foreign Office this morning. That welcome initiative reinforces his credentials as one who is keen for the enlargement debate not simply to be dealt with by Ministers and officials, but to be engaged in by Parliament and, indeed, the whole country. As the hon. Member for Central Fife remarked, people do not come to surgeries to complain about EU enlargement. I fear that people in this country know very little about it, so we all have a duty to ensure that that is corrected and that people face some of the big changes that will occur as a result of enlargement in just over a year's time.

The Liberal Democrats, like the other parties represented here, have supported enlargement throughout the process. We believe that the principles that have applied to successive enlargements over the past 50 years also apply to this one. In the past, we have debated quite regularly the underpinning that the EU gives to the security of Europe. For those countries that are about to join and which have, like us, clear and long memories of what war in Europe was all about and the dangers associated with the cold war settlement afterwards, this is a huge breakthrough—a major development for them and us. Often, we run the risk of forgetting just how important keeping the peace in Europe is and the role that the EU as a collection of nation states plays in that endeavour.

For many of the countries about to join the EU, the importance of joining is what it says about the state of their democracy and the opportunity that they have further to enhance their democracies and to instil the values that go with it in the modern form of their countries. Perhaps the most often cited and important aspect of enlargement in most people's eyes, however, is the economic benefits that will flow from it. There are many different estimates of the impact that enlargement will have, but recent ones raise the possibility of 300,000 additional jobs throughout the EU and a substantial boost of some £2 billion to overall GDP. At the seminar that the Minister hosted this morning, the director-general of the CBI, Digby Jones, talked about the enlargement giving Europe more clout. That is always welcome in the world, particularly in the era of the WTO and developments in trade that are so important to all our communities.

Since we had a chance to debate this topic here last year, much has changed. As the hon. Member for Caerphilly pointed out, huge progress was made at the Copenhagen summit just before the end of the year. The European Parliament will soon consider the accession treaties, which each member state will then consider. Referendums in each of the applicant countries are due to be held by September. There was considerable concern about what had to be achieved when we debated the issue 12 months ago, and we must not underestimate what has been covered since then. However, it would be equally remiss of us to ignore some of the key issues that remain to be resolved in the next year or so.

Internally, enlargement presents a great challenge to existing member states. Some 10 days ago, I was in Brussels holding discussions with various officials and Commission departments and directorates. It is clear that the issue is focusing minds like nothing else. There are huge issues to be resolved in key areas such as the CAP and regional policy before 2004—the 10 new states should come on board in May, the European Parliament elections are due in June, and the new Commission will be announced later that year.

The officials whom I met in Brussels talked a very confident game about sorting out the details of the reform of the CAP in time for the June Agriculture Council. I would be interested to know the Minister's opinion, because if those details are sorted out, we will have to make substantial progress in a very short space of time on key issues such as decoupling, modulation and degressivity, all of which remain unresolved issues of concern in the United Kingdom.

The same is true of regional policy. The third cohesion report is due later in the year, as are the recommendations on the development of the policy. I understand that recommendations and contributions to that process are due by the summer break, and I hope that the Minister and his colleagues in other Departments will ensure that they and each interested body throughout the UK participate fully in that debate. The emphasis will shift with enlargement in a year's time, but it is clear that regional policy has an important relevance to this country, especially to peripheral areas. Will the Minister state the Government's policy stance as the negotiations head towards their conclusion?

The focus may be inward for existing members, but there is plenty for the applicant countries to be getting on with. Commissioner Verheugen recently pointed out that there is still a great deal of work to be done to build administrative capacity and to ensure that all the key parts of the Government machinery are in place to deal with issues such as corruption and the integration of minorities in some applicant countries. Much progress has been made on those issues in the course of the enlargement process. All that work must now come together.

Several contributors to today's debate highlighted issues relating to particular applicant countries. It is right that we spend time considering Cyprus, where affairs are very delicately balanced. We should pay tribute to the work of Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations, who has invested a considerable amount of his own time and prestige to the creation and development of the proposals currently before the two communities in Cyprus. His initiative is important and we now await the response from the two parts of the island. As has been mentioned, 10 March is an important new deadline for those developments. We must hope that the prize of enlargement is strong enough, and is on sufficiently good terms, to resolve many difficulties that beset that beautiful place.

However, we cannot ignore the fact that there are issues in countries other than Cyprus that, although less fraught, could also cause problems. The Minister has a great fondness for Poland, which I know is shared by many in the Chamber. We cannot ignore the difficulties facing the Polish Government with the departure of the Polish Peasant party from government. Poland's Prime Minister remains confident that that will not cause any problems for the accession process. I hope that he is right. We wish that country every success.

In other key players, such as the Czech Republic and, in particular, Hungary, there is some nervousness and evidence in opinion polls that support for enlargement is not quite what it once was. I do not believe that the outcome in those countries is seriously in doubt but we, as well as their Governments, must send strong signals from outside to say that we look forward to welcoming them into a larger family of nations in Europe and that we hope that that can be achieved on time.

My final point on individual countries has already been mentioned this afternoon. It is not on applicant countries, but on France. This is not a debate on Iraq, but just as I would deplore efforts by the United States to twist arms and bully people into supporting a particular line, I find it reprehensible that France should attempt to skew the debate and blackmail particular countries on their prospects of joining the EU on account of their position on developments in Iraq. Each of those countries has earned its position in Europe: each has met the tests and criteria and is making strenuous efforts to come to terms with the new Europe of which they will be part. Bullying by one of the oldest members is surely inappropriate, and we must resist attempts to do that.

The enlargement process has often travelled a bumpy road, but we should reflect on the fact that in the past few years—and the past 12 months in particular—the European Union has made fantastic process. We still need to get our own house in order and we must support the applicants. Then, together, we can look forward to seeing a revolutionised European Union in just over a year's time.

2.58 pm

Mr. Richard Spring (West Suffolk): I, too, warmly congratulate the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. David) on securing and introducing this debate. He is a passionate advocate of enlargement and enjoys the respect of all hon. Members for that commitment and for his profound knowledge of the subject. Of course, his concerns are shared not only by the House but by the 70 million citizens of the accession countries.

We have had a good debate and I congratulate the hon. Members for Preston (Mr. Hendrick) and for Central Fife (Mr. MacDougall) and the Liberal Democrat Front-Bench spokesman, the hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Moore), on their thoughtful contributions. It was a particular joy to hear from the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Keith Vaz). I remember seeing him selling the attractions of the EU by travelling the country in a bus, which greatly added to the country's political scene, even though, if I remember correctly, his attempts to sell the euro to the British people during that campaign resulted in the greatest quantum leap in lack of support for the euro among the British people seen in the past five years. Nevertheless, it is always a great pleasure to hear from him.

Enlargement is of huge importance, as everyone has said. We hope that it will extend stability and prosperity to many millions of our fellow Europeans. We welcome the outcome at Copenhagen and congratulate the Danish presidency on orchestrating that summit. The process of enlargement has been too long and complicated, and Turkey's membership, which we support, has not been universally encouraged, but Copenhagen was an historic achievement We hope that next year we shall see the division of Europe that has lasted since Yalta healed. Speaking personally, I believe not only that that is politically and economically desirable, but that it is a moral imperative.

The accession countries have made great strides on their own since the fall of the Berlin wall, but enlargement opens further prospects. Participation will offer the countries full access to a single market and structural funds. Although I am not always an admirer of regional funding from the EU, my discussions with many eastern European politicians, civil servants and business men leave me in no doubt that structural funding offers hope for progress in developing eastern Europe's infrastructure, which needs to be updated in some respects. For example, the hon. Member for Caerphilly will know that Poland's roads are notoriously poor. How much more productive and efficient would Poland's economy be if businesses had access to improved roads?

Enlargement does not only hold out the promise of great economic prosperity for the accession countries; it must be admitted that one of the EU's great successes

[Mr. Richard Spring]

has been its ability to stabilise young democracies and root them in the ways of a free society. We only need consider the way in which, over time, Greece, Spain and Portugal have succeeded in that respect, and I hope that that will happen for the accession countries as well. Success after enlargement is not assured. All European countries must be in a position to generate wealth, and that will not happen while the EU remains a zone strangled with mounting red tape, afraid of the economic flexibility that creates jobs.

The atypical workers directive is typical of the sort of EU legislation that can only hurt employment creation in the long-term. The EU's high-cost employment practices are the last thing that prospective EU members need. Those countries need to use their currently lower-cost labour forces to build prosperity, and we must let them do so. Regrettably, it is universally recognised throughout the EU that the process that the Prime Minister set in train in Lisbon is stuttering. We must ensure that the EU is fit to meet the challenges posed by enlargement. Otherwise, the accession countries may find that EU membership is more of an economic prison than a liberating market, and heaven forbid that they should ever think that.

The CAP must be fundamentally reformed—something that the Government have lamentably been unable to drive forward. Nothing has made the negotiations on enlargement more bitter than the need to shoehorn the accession states into the failing CAP. Likewise, it has been said to me abroad that the former communist countries do not want to see control from Moscow replaced by control from Brussels. Countries that have only recently regained their independence do not want to use it to enter some sort of supranational state. However, as we saw in the draft constitution, the supranational structures that are being prepared in the Convention on the Future of Europe clearly point to that. I am aware that the final version might look rather different at the intergovernmental conference, but the overall tendency is fundamentally integrationist. That is not the sort of EU in which the new states will feel comfortable.

Indeed, one may question the wisdom of transforming the EU just as the new states arrive. No one should question the need for fundamental reform in the EU—that is widely recognised—but the new states should be full participants in the process. I entirely agree with the hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale. I, too, found France's bullying, implied threats that it might veto the accession countries' EU membership unless they toed the French line absolutely disgraceful. Does the Minister agree with Chris Patten that the EU

> "is not the Warsaw pact. It is a club for equals and everyone has to be listened to"?

President Chirac's remarks make it harder for the accession states to participate in the debate on Europe's future as equals. That is an important point.

The president of the Convention on the Future of Europe has said that he wants the Convention treaty to provide the EU's framework for the next 50 years. If the new countries are to live in the house that Giscard and the Convention have built, they have as much right to determine its design as anyone else. For that reason, it is urgent that the IGC agrees that the new treaty should not be decided on until accession countries are full members of the EU. It would certainly be totally unacceptable if the IGC were to take place this December, when full accession was still some months off; that would be inequitable. I hope that the Minister will reflect on that point and respond to it in his winding-up speech.

We have extraordinarily close links with Cyprus. I salute President Clerides and his efforts over many years, and I welcome Tassos Papadopoulos's presidency. I have had the pleasure of meeting him and discussing the reunification of the island with him. That much hoped-for reunification is in danger, even though one of the great hopes of accession was that it would prove a vehicle and stimulus for the island's reunification. We all want the united island to enter the EU.

I hope that the Minister will tell us more about what the Government are doing to assist reunification, particularly at this crucial time. At the very least, the Government have not kept Parliament properly informed about their offer to hand over almost half of the sovereign base areas' territory to a reunited Cyprus. Whatever the Government's motives, the handover of British sovereign territory is serious, and the Government have failed to tell the House all that they should.

Why did the announcement of the offer of British territory come through the UN, when it could have been made in Parliament the next day? Why, in the written answer that the Minister gave me on 27 January, was no hint given that the offer might be made, even though the open nature of the question gave ample opportunity to do so? Was the offer under consideration when the answer was given? Why, when my noble Friend Lord Howell asked on 14 January whether the UN peace plan would affect arrangements for the bases, did the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Baroness Symons, deny that it would? Was she aware of the offer, and if not, how much time was given to considering the offer before it was made?

What assessment has been made by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Ministry of Defence of the effect that the offer will have on their operational capability, particularly at this crucial time, knowing the strategic importance of Cyprus in the eastern Mediterranean? It was apparent that there was inadequate consultation between the two Departments about Gibraltar, and the Minister for Europe must tell us what consultation the Foreign Office has had with the Ministry of Defence on this matter. Parliament deserves answers, and I hope that the Minister can provide some enlightenment.

My party wants enlargement to succeed. We want an EU that is fit for enlargement and the challenges of the 21st century. It must be flexible enough to accommodate its diversities and must be a union for its peoples, and not its leaders. People must feel a sense of ownership of the EU and its institutions and architecture. The Convention was meant to bring the EU closer to its peoples, but it seems to be doing the contrary, and the Government now seem to be taken aback about their position. All countries should have a referendum on the constitution, and that includes the accession states. That would help to ensure that those states can participate in the debate as equals.

If we can successfully reform Europe's economies, transform the common agricultural policy into something enduring, and—this is crucial—build Europe from the bottom up, not the top down, enlargement will do great things for our continent. I want an enlarged European Union to be a success. To achieve that, we must deal with the problems of today, not the challenges of yesterday.

3.9 pm

The Minister for Europe (Mr. Denis MacShane): This has been a very good debate. It is appropriate that it follows an excellent seminar and conference on enlargement at the Foreign Office this morning. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly (Mr. David) on securing the debate and hon. Members on the quality of their speeches.

I shall start with the last speech, by the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring), who I believe was in favour of enlargement but did not seem to be terribly much in favour of the European Union. Therein lies the eternal contradiction in Conservative thinking on this great issue.

The remark of President Chirac, whose position is held by many in France, including some of his Ministers, that has most upset people in east Europe is that there should be a referendum on the next stage of European construction. Countries in east Europe are rightly concerned that if the existing nations of the European Union were to hold referendums on the matter—referendums which are not called for under their constitutions—all the anti-Europeans could combine to produce a no vote and enlargement would not take place. I merely caution the hon. Gentleman before he starts running with the referendum line that is put forward by people in this country who are not normally associated with a pro-European position, that he might do a serious disservice to the process of enlargement and the successful working of an enlarged European Union, which are the tasks of the Convention and the intergovernmental conference.

The hon. Gentleman seems to be unaware that a commitment was given at the Copenhagen Council that the incoming member states will be full participants in the intergovernmental conference. They are not voting members of the Convention, but they have observer status there and we look forward to working with them as voting members in the intergovernmental conference.

To return to the main subject of the debate, we had a very powerful speech from my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly, who made the case for enlargement and stressed that it is a win-win process. We really must break free of the mentality that it is in some way a zero sum game, in which Britain and other member countries will lose.

That point was also very powerfully made by my hon. Friend the Member for Central Fife (Mr. MacDougall), who, like me, has a Polish family connection. It has been remarkable to see the Polish community in Great Britain turn with enthusiasm to the leadership offered by the Prime Minister. They realise that the enlargement of the European Union for which he has fought so valiantly is good for their native country. Last Friday, the Polish ambassador, who is one of the most dynamic and effective ambassadors in London, and I had the pleasure of opening Sheffield's Europe week at the Dom Kombatanta ex-servicemen's club for Polish veterans. It was a very lively and positive occasion.

We had a contribution from my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Keith Vaz), whom I had the honour to serve as a Parliamentary Private Secretary in two of the more interesting, ebullient and, at times, turbulent years in the office of the Minister for Europe during this or any previous Administration. Yes, he boldly went into the countryside with buses, certificates, flare and fun and challenged the British people to think seriously about Europe. With his inside knowledge, he was able to describe the immense complexities of day-to-day business. I long for the time when speeches are not read out by rote and when our very bright officials who work for the Foreign Office and, though British nationals, as European civil servants for the European Commission and Council are not buried under paper.

Keith Vaz: The hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) mentioned the campaign bus. Of course, the bus went to Rotherham. Was he upset that it did not go to Bury St. Edmunds?

Mr. Spring: That is not in my constituency.

Mr. MacShane: The first roadshow took place in my constituency, Rotherham, and I think that I can safely say that it was downhill all the way after that.

Some important points were made about the need for parliamentarians to build networks and links. I have been holding talks with the British Council and have asked about arranging seminars that involve parliamentarians of all parties—this is not a party-political issue—building links with their opposite numbers in the incoming countries. It was also suggested that an EU agency or institution might be moved to east Europe or one of the incoming member states. I am sure that they will be the first in the queue when the new agencies are allocated.

If, as we hope, Malta and Cyprus come into the EU after their referendums—and how much we long for a united Cyprus to do that—two Commonwealth countries will be added to the membership. Their accession will re-orient some of the focus of the EU towards the Mediterranean. In recent years, there has—rightly—been an obsession with east and central Europe, but the EU also has a great role to play in the Mediterranean.

As I have plenty of time in which to speak, I would like to commend a book that I have just received called "Orient Express", Published by Oxford Brookes university. It was edited by Fiona Sampson, who writes:

> "as Europe shifts on her axis again, the critical mass of the E.U. Enlargement Countries is what engenders this shift. And resists the forces of globalisation by its insistence on the particular, on the coloured-in detail of what is characteristic."

The book is a collection of novels, short stories, poems and essays and shows the immense cultural contribution that will be made by the enlargement countries and to which we can look forward. The advantage for us is that, on the whole, if people from those countries have a

[Mr. MacShane]

second language, it is likely to be English, which will provide a further set of bridges between our great European country and the new, but at the same time very old, European countries and cultures that are about to join us.

As always, my hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Mr. Hendrick) made a very positive speech. I hope that the Foreign Office will shortly announce further work to promote the value of enlargement and the need for Britain not only to be the champion of enlargement, but to build enduring economic and political links—we are also talking about local government—with the incoming countries. I hope that hon. Members from all parties will want to play a part in that policy.

The hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Moore) had some rather harsh words to say about the President of the French Republic. I invite him to come to the annual general meeting of the Franco-British Council, which will take place in two hours at the Foreign Office. Some four or five months ago, I accepted an invitation to give the keynote speech under the heading "France and Britain: towards a new era of co-operation in international and foreign policy", which just goes to show that my speech this afternoon is merely a curtain-raiser to what is, in some ways, a more interesting challenge lying ahead.

Judging from the position adopted by the Liberal Democrats and certainly their leader, I rather thought that the hon. Gentleman was lining up with President Chirac in not supporting the view of Her Majesty's Government that firm action must be taken against the dictator, terrorist and tyrant of Baghdad.

Mr. Spring: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Moore: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. MacShane: I will take the intervention from the representative of the biggest Opposition party.

Mr. Spring: I want to take up a point that I thought was legitimately made by the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Keith Vaz), who talked about moving some of the European Union's institutions to a base further from its western side. Could the Minister suggest to our French partners this afternoon that European taxpayers could save themselves a vast amount of money by closing down Strasbourg and moving it further east?

Mr. MacShane: The notion that I have the power to close down any city is flattering but, alas, it is beyond my capability to do so. The plain answer is no. Strasbourg is the seat of European reconciliation. It was agreed in the treaty signed by the hon. Gentleman's former boss, the former right hon. Member for Huntingdon, when he was Prime Minister that 12 plenary sessions would take place in Strasbourg. Therefore, once again, the Government are stuck with treaties signed by the Conservative party in a fit of pro-Strasbourg passion.

The hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale is right: both centres need to be reformed, and both will be under huge pressure to reform. I warn him only that it cannot be assumed that all the incoming members will automatically be on the side of reform, especially of the CAP. When the cheques arrive from Brussels, that immediately becomes a seductive inducement to favour the CAP. That is why I have always said that it is no use this country and this House endlessly condemning the CAP—we are all in agreement on that. Instead, we must find ways of building alliances with our sister parties, our national farmers' unions must find ways of discussing the matter with other countries' farmers' organisations, and the Churches, Oxfam and other non-governmental organisations must find ways of talking in French and Spanish with their opposite numbers to build a coalition for effective reform.

The same is true of regional funds. Clearly, the incoming members will reduce average GDP per capita of the EU as a whole. Many of the regions of the UK that have become eligible for forms of regional funds will lose that eligibility. We must now have a serious discussion about funding and support for the regional development that we as a country want, and how we factor those ideas into the wider European question.

We should welcome enlargement. I was impressed by the speech of Digby Jones, the director-general of the Confederation of British Industry, at this morning's seminar when he talked movingly about his visit to east and central Europe. He said that, although those with whom he spoke were pro-trade and pro-business, they also saw the European Union in terms of peace and democracy. We should not lose sight of that idealism and those values. The EU is founded on the principle of establishing peace in our continent. At a time when there is much talk of war, it is no bad thing to remind ourselves of the dictatorship and terror that Europe has seen in our lifetime, and the wars that it saw in our parents' lifetime.

Mr. Hendrick: Was my hon. Friend, like me, impressed by what Digby Jones said about the harmonisation of technical standards and regulations across Europe and the way in which that, together with the work that has gone on at the European institutions, had made the European single market successful?

Mr. MacShane: Indeed, and reference was made this morning to an article in, I think, today's *Financial Times* by two American Republican spokespersons, who said that the argument is not for or against regulation—the primitive caricature that we heard in one closing speech today—but about the type of regulation that is introduced. There are times when regulation is necessary. For example, to guarantee safety in aviation is the only way to liberalise air markets.

We do not want to go back to each country in Europe erecting its own norms and standards and refusing to admit commerce and trade in goods, services and economic exchange unless they correspond to purely nationally defined norms. It costs Europe far less financially, politically and socially to support its neighbours' transitions to stable democracies and open economies than to rebuild them after conflict. Compare how much money we had to spend after the Milosevic savagery in the former Yugoslavia with the relatively painless and much less costly entry of Slovenia into the European Union.

I was asked about Croatia. Both Croatia and Macedonia have recently made applications to be considered as applicant countries. They will be treated in the same way as other applicant countries, but I believe that in the case of Croatia, the road to Europe lies through The Hague. In my judgment, strong compliance with the demand that those in Croatia who are alleged to have committed war crimes be sent to The Hague would undoubtedly speed up Croatia's being taken seriously as an applicant for formal EU accession.

Membership of the EU will bring immediate economic benefits to the new member states. It will create a single market of 450 million people and there will be new markets for UK business. UK exports to central Europe increased by 19 per cent. between 1999 and 2000, and by 25 per cent. with the Czech Republic and Hungary in the same period. There are 15,000 British companies exporting to or investing in the region.

However, the preparations for enlargement are already obliging all those in the existing and the incoming member states to raise our standards so that we can tackle jointly the problems that cross borders, including pollution, drug smuggling and people trafficking. Candidates are making major improvements to air and water quality to meet EU standards. Beaches around Cyprus, where nearly 1.5 million UK tourists go each year, are being brought up to EU standards. Thanks to co-operation between UK and Czech officials, a major drugs-related money-laundering operation was closed down a couple of years ago. We need to keep working to maintain those levels of co-operation

I conclude by turning to the important matter of Cyprus. I will seek to address the points raised by the hon. Member for West Suffolk, who sneaked the issue of sovereign base areas into the debate. I am happy to write to him in detail. I would have been happy to make a statement in the House had I been asked to. I am content that the decisions taken late in the day—when I replied to the question to which he referred, I knew nothing of the proposal—were made in good faith to show British willingness to contribute to arriving at an agreement that will be supported by both the Turkish and the Greek-Cypriot communities on the island.

Our policy is that we want a united Cyprus to join the European Union. We think that the Annan proposals, for which the jargon term is "Annan 3", deserve support. We hope that Mr. Denktash and President Papadopoulos will support them and that their colleagues and friends in Athens and Ankara will also make it clear that Cyprus is going to enter the European Union under any conditions—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. O'Hara): Order. I was thinking that the reference made by the Minister to British policy towards Cyprus is only relevant to the debate in that it contributes to a solution to the Cyprus problem, which means that a united Cyprus can enter the enlarged Europe. Will the Minister bear that in mind?

Mr. MacShane: You are quite right, Mr. Deputy Speaker. No one has greater knowledge of the Hellenic aspects of the Cypriot question than you. It is important to stress—as Commissioner Verheugen did this morning—that we want a united Cyprus to enter the European Union, but if for any reason Mr. Denktash or others fail to agree to the Annan proposals, Cyprus will still enter the European Union. That is an important point that is worth putting clearly on the record. It is one aspect of European Union enlargement that I hope is contributing to a more secure east Mediterranean.

The Government will work to support enlargement. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly on securing this important debate.

Asylum seekers (Leeds)

3.30 pm

Mr. Fabian Hamilton (Leeds, North-East): I am grateful for the chance to debate this issue of great humanitarian importance and current controversy. The debate centres on section 55 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002, which reads:

"(1) The Secretary of State may not provide or arrange for the provision of support to a person under a provision mentioned in subsection (2) if-

(a) the person makes a claim for asylum which is recorded by the Secretary of State, and

(b) the Secretary of State is not satisfied that the claim was made as soon as reasonably practicable after the person's arrival in the United Kingdom."

I want to concentrate on the phrase

"as soon as reasonably practicable"

this afternoon. Before going any further I want to stress that the debate is not intended to be a swipe at or indeed a criticism of the Government. My aim is to be helpful by pointing out that that phrase has had unintended consequences on genuine refuges fleeing persecution in their native countries.

I represent a highly multicultural constituency, as my hon. Friend the Minister will know. In the eight advice surgeries that I hold each month around north-east Leeds, I see many asylum and immigration cases. From time to time I come across cases where the asylum system has been abused by those who fail to have visas extended or, as the Home Secretary has said, have tried to use the asylum system to gain financial support when they have run out of other options. I support the principle that Parliament should discourage those who seek to exploit this country's hitherto generous support for asylum seekers for their own dishonest purposes. I know that that was the intention of the Act.

However, the reality has been somewhat different. I believe that that is because the phrase

"as soon as reasonably practicable"

has sometimes been unreasonably interpreted by officials in immigration centres throughout the country, and especially in Leeds where my sample cases are based and where I am a parliamentary representative.

The immigration centre to which I refer is in Waterside, Kirkstall road, west Leeds, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle). In that centre, as in many others throughout the country, the interpretation of section 55 of the 2002 Act, since it came into force on 8 January this year, has forced destitute new asylum seekers on to the streets of Leeds. Were it not for the generosity and humanity of church members who are involved in the refugee education, training and advice service in Leeds, many more people fleeing persecution in their own countries would be homeless and freezing on the streets of Leeds. As of yesterday, 73 such persons were destitute without support from the National Asylum Support Service.

I understand that there has been a temporary relaxation since Mr. Justice Collins gave his judgment on 19 February and that many of those who were destitute are now in official centres. However, there is deep concern about what would happen if the Home Secretary won his appeal and those people had to be ejected from their accommodation. The judgment was on the cases of six asylum seekers who had been refused support under the 2002 Act and who made a claim under the European convention on human rights. The judgment angered the Home Secretary who, not unreasonably, felt that it was the job of Parliament to make the laws of the land and to debate those laws and that it was not the job of the courts to undermine that legislation. The Home Secretary appealed and we await the outcome of that appeal, which was heard yesterday.

Section 55 was introduced as a Government amendment to the Bill in the House of Lords and was not mentioned in the preceding White Paper. Introducing the Government amendment, Lord Filkin said:

"The new clause ends the presumption of support for those who apply for asylum in country unless they can give a truthful and credible account of their circumstances and how they arrived here and can therefore demonstrate that they are claiming asylum at the earliest possible opportunity."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 17 October 2002; Vol. 639, c. 978.]

On 5 November, the Home Secretary said:

"The question is how reasonable we are regarding the people who come here but do not claim asylum at the port of entry. We need to be reasonable and to take into account the trauma that people experience. We need therefore to allow a reasonable period before we presume that people have come into the country for another reason and have been sustaining themselves and that when they could no longer do so they decided that the asylum system would sustain them, being far more generous than the equivalent something-for-something, welfare-to-work system."—[*Official Report*, 5 November 2002; Vol. 392, c. 199.]

Following Royal Assent on 7 November 2002, my hon. Friend the Minister made a written statement to the High Court about section 55, in which she said that it would come into force on 8 January 2003. She said:

"It will not be acceptable for an asylum seeker wanting NASS support to postpone making an asylum claim unless there is a very good reason for doing so. Even if there is a good reason for not claiming asylum immediately on arrival at the port, the person must then claim asylum as soon as possible thereafter."

She went on to say that the Secretary of State must be satisfied

"that the person claiming support has made the asylum claim as soon as reasonably practicable after arrival in the United Kingdom."

I now want to demonstrate that a number of individuals who, for one reason or another arrived in the city of Leeds, made their asylum claim as soon as was reasonably practical after their arrival in the UK and yet were denied any support under the 2002 Act.

As my hon. Friend the Minister knows, often the only way for someone suffering extreme persecution to flee their country is to use what we would call people traffickers; men and women who make a living out of supplying forged documents and enabling those desperate to leave their countries to go to places where they will be safe and can find refuge. Historically, Britain has offered refuge to so many people who have suffered persecution, yet the problem is reaching an unmanageable proportion and the Prime Minister has pledged that the numbers of applicants will be halved by the end of the year.

I will not give the real names of the individuals whose cases I recount. Marie is a 33-year-old French-speaking woman from Cameroon, which is officially listed as a safe country. She was held in prison for 12 years as an opposition activist, along with her husband, who has now disappeared. While in prison she was tortured; she was finally released in autumn 2002. She believes that her husband is probably now dead but has no way of finding out what happened to him.

Shortly after her release, she received a police summons ordering her to appear at the local police station. Not unnaturally, she was very frightened and her mother advised her to leave the country as soon as she could. She sold her family home and paid the money to a trafficker—often called an agent by refugees—to get her to French-speaking Quebec in Canada. Although she is not Muslim, she was told by the Libyan agent to dress as a Muslim woman and wear a burqa, and she was brought to London via Algeria. She was told that she had arrived in Montreal and was not allowed to keep her false passport. She was virtually imprisoned in London for two weeks by the agent's wife, after which she was brought to Leeds on a train.

While they were walking through the station concourse in Leeds, the agent told her that he had left his wallet on the train and ran back to fetch it. He said he would be a few minutes but, surprise, surprise, he never returned, leaving the woman stranded in Leeds city station without even knowing what country she was in. Marie cannot read or write; she speaks no English. After two hours she found some French-speaking people who told her she was in the north of England. She was taken to the refugee council in Leeds and then to Waterside, where she registered her application for asylum. Support was refused; either because officials did not believe her story or because she had not registered "as soon as was reasonably practicable". Currently, church members in Leeds are looking her after.

I would argue that Marie could not have been expected to claim asylum any earlier. She had genuinely believed she was in Canada until her arrival in Leeds. She had been told that she would not reach Quebec if she left the house in London, which she thought was in Montreal. I do not believe that her delay was unreasonable.

Rezgar is an Iraqi Kurd who has a serious speech impediment and is illiterate. He finds it hard to communicate, even in his own language, because many Kurds think that he is mentally ill when they hear him speak. He was deposited in Leeds from the lorry that brought him illegally to the United Kingdom, without being told where he was.

Rezgar spent three days sleeping rough on the streets of the city before finding a road sweeper who was a Kurdish speaker and took him to the police station, from where he was able to report to Waterside. It took him more than three hours to give the most basic information, after which he was told that he was applying too late to receive NASS support. I am glad to say that that decision was reversed three weeks later and Rezgar now receives that support but, in the meantime, he had to rely on the charity of local people. Was his delay really unreasonable?

My third case is that of Camille, who came to Leeds from the Democratic Republic of Congo—formerly Zaire—to find her mother, who had last been heard of in Leeds. Again, she came illegally on forged documents, because she was being persecuted for her political opposition to the regime in the Democratic Republic of Congo. That regime is known for its cruelty and persecution of the opposition. She was accompanied through immigration at Heathrow by her so-called agent, and then taken on the underground to central London, where she was put on a coach to Leeds.

Camille is educated, articulate and intelligent. I met her three weeks ago and heard her story at first hand. I speak French; she speaks no English. On arrival in Leeds, she asked for directions to Waterside. It took two hours for her to walk there, and once she had registered for asylum she was told that she had registered too late to be given any support. She was told how to find St. George's crypt, a church project for the homeless and destitute in central Leeds. She walked there, only to find that there were no beds available that night. She was given some food and a sleeping bag, and told to sleep on a park bench. It was a Friday night.

After three nights outdoors and being fed by the St. George's crypt project during the day, Camille managed to contact the refugee education, training and advice service, whose volunteers took her in and looked after her. The story has a happy ending, because her new friends managed to locate her mother in Coventry, where she now lives, having been given refugee status herself. However, I would argue that Camille's delay in registering was not unreasonable.

The response of the church network of volunteers to the growing number of asylum seekers on the streets of Leeds is, "We will do better than our Government." If people with genuine stories such as those are made destitute by section 55 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002, it is frustrating that a measure designed, quite reasonably in my view, to deter those who attempt to exploit our system, is forcing refugees with the most harrowing histories to become beggars on our streets, whether in Leeds or any other major city in the United Kingdom.

My reason for this debate is to ask the Minister to re-examine the guidance given to NASS officials. The guidance already says that each case must be considered on its merits, although none of the cases of which I have spoken appears to have been so considered. It also says that a person's circumstances must be taken into account.

Christopher Mace, the deputy director general of the immigration and nationality directorate of the Home Office, said in his statement, submitted by the Home Secretary to the High Court last month:

> "If those arriving at ports know that they must apply for asylum at the port then it will deter facilitators [so-called 'agents'] from bringing asylum seekers to the UK and thereby significantly reduce the incidence of this serious offence."

He said that the most frequent reason for failing to claim asylum at a port is obedience to the facilitator's instructions. However, as we have seen from the three cases that I mentioned, such a measure has made no difference to the people traffickers. As for the refugees themselves, how can they know what the rules are, if many cannot read, write or speak English?

[Mr. Fabian Hamilton]

My contention is that the Act, designed, rightly, to deter dishonest asylum seekers, is being unreasonably interpreted so that it ensures the complete destitution of many genuine asylum seekers. Even if a case subsequently fails, surely the UK can be more humane in the way in which it treats such people? The most important issue is to ensure the speedy processing of claims, rather than starving successful and failed asylum seekers alike or aiming to prevent them from coming here in the first place.

Finally, I hope that the Minister will be able to issue new guidance to officials, requesting that an interpretation of the phrase

"as soon as reasonably practicable"

is not made unreasonably.

3.44 pm

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-East (Mr. Hamilton) for introducing this sensitive subject and inviting me to say a few words in support. I also thank the Minister for her close attention to this complex and difficult issue. I hope that my remarks and those of my hon. Friend will help her to move forward rather than be obstructive.

Waterside is in my constituency, as are Leeds' main reception centre and a significant number of NASS agency houses for asylum seekers. I deal with individual cases every weekend, but the circumstances are much more difficult to manage if those who arrive by any means—many do not enter via our ports—are cut off from the customary systems with no options, no income, no home, no resources and no real friends, and forced out on the streets in the city centre at precisely the time that the Government and Leeds city council have done so well in tackling and reducing street homelessness.

During the Christmas recess, my hon. Friend and I spent a night out with the police, examining rough sleepers in the city centre. We found young people with homes to go to—many, tragically, drug addicts—out on the streets to acquire drugs or just for company. However, one city centre church voluntary project, which has provided a crypt facility with night hospitality for nearly 70 years, was recently refurbished and relaunched to tackle the problem of those remaining on the streets. The aim is to connect people back to the support systems to enable them to restart their lives.

The services of the St. George's crypt voluntary project are now overwhelmed by homeless asylum seekers who are sleeping rough and completely locked out from access to other support systems. Such people, if they are deemed not to have applied immediately, cannot be referred to social services or receive the income assistance of social security. The project now feels undermined in its objectives. It needs to be able to tell these people where they can go and who will be expected to support them, but it cannot.

Good-willed individuals, desperate to help the excluded asylum seekers, are put into an incredibly difficult position, receiving no assistance in the task of deciding whom to help by taking them into their homes, or, subsequently, how to help people on to the support systems. Adhering hard and fast to the rules causes problems; there seems to be no way out for anyone in this position.

I appreciate that we need a fair and firmly applied rule system with rules that are clearly understood by all parties, but I wholly support my hon. Friend and gently ask the Minister whether we can re-examine the unintended consequences that are so clearly undermining other social objectives and social inclusion in our cities.

3.48 pm

The Minister for Citizenship and Immigration (Beverley Hughes): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-East (Mr. Hamilton) on securing the debate and on the way in which he expressed his concerns this afternoon. Before I respond, I pay tribute to his diverse constituency work, and I want to assure him that I understand his problems; I am a constituency Member, too. My hon. Friend raised legitimate concerns that he is wholly free to express.

I should also like to thank the Yorkshire and Humberside consortium, which works in a strong partnership with us in trying to provide services and co-ordinate the work that we do together with the immigration and nationality directorate. This strong consortium does a great deal of good work.

As my hon. Friend said, the interpretation of section 55 is currently under consideration by the Court of Appeal, so it would not be appropriate for me to comment in detail on the way that we have operated the policy since it came into force on 8 January. Notwithstanding that, I hope that I can respond to some of the important points that he raised today.

I remind the Chamber that when Mr. Justice Collins handed down his judgment in the High Court on 19 February, he did not find that section 55 was unlawful or incompatible with the Human Rights Act 1998 or with any of our obligations under international law. His findings were that the circumstances of each case should be investigated in greater depth than he understood had been the case so far and that there should be more detailed questioning to give the claimant the opportunity to explain himself convincingly if he could. On the challenges to section 55 under the ECHR, he found that inquiries should be made to try to establish whether any support was likely to exist. Otherwise, there will normally be the risk that to leave someone destitute would violate articles 3 and 8.1 of the convention. Of course, all findings are subject to the judgment of the Court of Appeal.

I should like to explain briefly some of the background to the Government's decision to introduce section 55 during the passage of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002. It is one of several measures in that Act designed to overhaul fundamentally the immigration and asylum system. The aim was to tighten the process by getting claims considered and decisions made at a much earlier stage, and to ensure that support goes to those who need it. The real point of section 55 is to try to change people's behaviour so that asylum seekers make a claim immediately on arrival in the UK and, partly through that, to try to crack the power and control that some of the traffickers—to whom my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-East referred—have over people.

There is a clear difference between economic migrants and those fleeing persecution, and I am grateful that my hon. Friend acknowledged that it is not acceptable for people to claim asylum after being in the United Kingdom for some weeks or months simply as a way of staying here at the taxpayers' expense or of delaying removal. It is reasonable for us to expect people who flee persecution to claim asylum as soon as they get to the UK as a safe country, so section 55 prevents the Home Secretary from providing support to asylum seekers who have not made their claim when they arrive at a port in the UK or, if that is not possible for any good reason, as soon as possible afterwards. The provision is not retrospective, so those who applied for asylum before 8 January are not affected, but it applies to those who arrived in the United Kingdom before 8 January but did not make a claim by then.

My hon. Friend referred to my written statement of 28 November, which attempted to clarify the way in which section 55 would be implemented. I will not say that it is not a tough policy; it is a tough policy, and is meant to be. However, it has been applied fairly and there are important safeguards. Families with children are exempt, as are those who can show that they suffered treatment contrary to the European convention on human rights. Those with special needs continue to be supported by local authorities under the National Assistance Act 1948.

Before I turn to the specific points raised by my hon. Friend, it might help to explain briefly the way in which section 55 decisions on the timeliness of asylum claims have been made by caseworkers since 8 January. That is at the crux of his concern. Each case has been considered on its own merits, and decisions have been based on a thorough assessment of the individual circumstances and the credibility of the case as presented by the applicant during the screening interview. I accept that that involves caseworkers making a judgment on credibility, but there is no way around that. As my hon. Friend acknowledged, some people make up stories while others tell the truth, but we have to make a judgment about that credibility to take a decision. However, all section 55 decisions to refuse support are referred to the central NASS team in Croydon to ensure fairness and consistency in the decision-taking process. All decisions taken by caseworkers are reviewed at a senior level before they are confirmed. I stress that it is open to individuals to ask for their case to be reconsidered if there is further evidence, a change of circumstances or information that they believe has not been taken into account.

I do not know the identity of the people involved in the cases to which my hon. Friend referred, so I have not been able to review the immigration and nationality directorate's records to examine the caseworker's reasoning. I cannot comment easily on the individual decisions taken, even if it were appropriate to do so in this forum.

My hon. Friend made a compelling case for the French-speaking woman from Cameroon, but it is not easy to accept at face value how someone capable of finding an agent to get her to French-speaking Quebec in Canada, who then got to the United Kingdom, spent a fortnight in a house in London, and travelled by train to Leeds can end up having no idea that she was in Leeds, not in Montreal. I am not making a judgment, but it is unsurprising that, in the circumstances that my hon. Friend described and in the absence of any corroboration, the conclusion was that her story did not add up. That is why support was refused.

Mr. Hamilton: Does my hon. Friend accept that one of the main ways in which traffickers do their business is to take the identity documents away from the person who has paid them to bring them to the country in the first place? The individual is unable to produce the evidence that he might have to present to an immigration officer.

Beverley Hughes: I accept that that is the norm, but identity is not crucial to the case. The caseworker would have tried to obtain information about the details of the journey—its course and what had happened—to corroborate the story. I am saying simply that it does not surprise me that the caseworker found that the story did not add up in the absence of any corroborative information to try to verify that journey and the point at which the person entered the country.

I entirely understand my hon. Friend's point about the second case of the Iraqi Kurd. Although the process seems to have taken three weeks, a positive point to make is that the decision was reversed once additional evidence had been presented. I am comforted by the fact that the system that we put in place, which would be amenable to a change of decision, has operated successfully. However, I take his point.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) made a very important point about the impact of failed asylum seekers and others in our communities, and how that cuts across some of our other important objectives for community relations and cohesions. It is difficult to resolve. Section 4 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 provides for accommodation-only support, especially for people whose application failed but who cannot return because there is no route through to, say, northern Iraq. People are often offered accommodation, but they do not take it because it is not exactly where they want it. However, I am happy to reconsider his point if there is anything that we can do to help the voluntary organisations dealing with this problem.

Finally, my hon. Friend asked me to re-examine the guidance given to NASS. We must wait for the judgment in order to do that but, subject to that judgment, we may well have to do it.

Education Funding (Leicestershire)

4 pm

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): This is an extremely timely debate, given the beginning of the financial year and the education funding settlement that will kick in within some three and a half weeks for Leicestershire and elsewhere. I welcome in particular my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) and my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick), because they, too, can testify to the enormous groundswell of opinion against the Government's funding for Leicestershire.

"Education, education, education"; that was the old mantra. On 13 February, the Minister for School Standards, who is here today, said:

> "I remind the House that the Government have put their money where their mouth is with the most sustained increases in funding for a century . . . There will be £1,000 extra for the average school pupil by 2005–06".—[*Official Report*, 13 February 2003; Vol. 399, c. 1074–5.]

I do not know who the average school pupil is, but he or she is not in Leicestershire.

The voters—parents, teachers and governors—believed the Government's mantras. Naive as I may be, I, too, at least believed up to a point that more money was going into education. After all, we have paid an enormous amount of tax, so we would at least expect that education funding would increase and that our children in Leicestershire would receive a better education. However, the Government obviously believe that if they say something often enough, people will believe it.

A report on the BBC website on 28 February stated:

> "A spokesman for the Department for Education and Skills said local education authorities had been guaranteed a minimum increase of 3.2 per cent. per pupil."

I have also heard it said that no schools will be worse off. However, that is not true in Leicestershire. People may have believed what was said, but in fact they are worse off. They are getting less than 3.2 per cent. per pupil and they are very cross.

Leicestershire has the lowest funding settlement in the country. It is not 3.2 per cent., as we were promised, but 2.5 per cent. I have gone into this in some detail, because the Minister should know about it. This has to do with the way in which the base was calculated. It was calculated on the extra money for post-16 education, which the area is not getting in the coming financial year. That will end up, throughout the county, in a 1 per cent. cut in real terms to education funding in schools.

The background is worth considering briefly. Leicestershire used to be the second worst funded education authority for primary education and the fourth worst funded for secondary education. The saga of the standard spending assessment and the F40 group, of which I and, I think, my hon. Friends were members, is also worth remembering. I went to various meetings with Ministers, mostly before the present Minister got into the House. We finally heard that the SSA for education was to be changed, and a good job, too. We were to have instead the education formula spending share; the FSS. Leicestershire has 80,000 pupils, and the number in education is growing, because it is a vibrant and prosperous area. It also gets good results. I believe that we are right at the top for key stage 3.

There has been a long campaign in Leicestershire in this respect, both before the SSA was scrapped and since the formula started to be introduced. I have had innumerable letters from parents, governors and teachers throughout the county. In January, there was a meeting, which I did not attend, with the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, the hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. McNulty). The meeting was attended by two head teachers, including the head teacher of Lutterworth grammar school in my constituency, the leader of the county council, Mr. Harry Barber, and, I think, Mr. Ivan Ould, who is responsible for education at the county council. I am told that they had a "courteous hearing". The concern is not new. There has been a long campaign and still, after some 10 years, one gets a courteous hearing.

I have been raising this subject since 1992, when there was a Conservative Government. The situation was bad enough then, but it has got markedly worse since 1997.

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): I congratulate my hon. Friend on pressing for this debate. Is he aware that, since 1997, when Labour came to power, schools in Leicestershire have lost 9 per cent. of their funding? Does he not think that that is disgraceful?

Mr. Robathan: Indeed. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point. The average funding per pupil throughout the county has fallen by 9 per cent. against the average.

Since the announcement of the recent settlement, I have received letters from all over my constituency. I shall not list all the schools and places from which people have come—that is a Liberal Democrat trick—but I shall refer to some of them later. I want to give the Minister and the Chamber a flavour of the settlement. The figures for the education FSS are derived by taking a basic amount per pupil with top-ups for deprivation, area costs and sparsity. That seems relatively sensible, but in Leicestershire, the increase is the lowest in the country. The proposed settlement gives an increase in total education FSS of 6.6 per cent. compared with the national average of 6.5 per cent. That sounds jolly good, but that is because we had a large increase in pupil numbers, mainly three-year-olds. In terms of the FSS per pupil, we have the minimum increase. The floor is supposed to be 3.2 per cent., but it becomes 2.5 per cent. in Leicestershire. The Education Authority is passporting the whole of the 2.5 per cent. increase. That does not meet spending pressures or represent real-terms protection as promised.

The response to the F40 parent and teacher campaign has been ignored. The disparity between the best and worst standard authorities is widening, not narrowing, and we believe, as does the education authority, that the basic entitlement per pupil should be higher to maintain and improve attainment across the board.

In Leicestershire, we educate 4,100 city children who—day in, day out—cross the border into Leicestershire because they receive a better education there but do not bring the money with them. If they did, there would be an extra £500-plus per pupil as they cross the border. The figure for Leicestershire is £2,932 per pupil; the figure for Leicester city, which is just across the Braunstone lane from my constituency, is £3,476 per pupil, a difference of £543. If every pupil in Leicestershire were funded as pupils in the city are funded, there would be almost £52 million extra for education in Leicestershire.

What possible justification can there be for that? I understand that area cost adjustments take account of the cost of housing. The cost of housing is certainly not lower in Leicestershire than across the border in Northamptonshire or Warwickshire. The cost of employing a teacher is exactly the same, the cost of buying a computer is exactly the same and the cost of maintaining a school is exactly the same, so how does the disparity arise?

I want to turn to Winstanley high school where I am going to a meeting on Friday that has been called by the governors. The governors from 30-odd schools in Blaby district have been asked to attend, which is a daunting prospect for me. In Winstanley high school, 20 per cent. of the pupils come from the city and the head teacher told me—I want to be fair to the Government where fairness is due—that they have received targeting funding and capital funding. That is great, but they do not receive core funding; the proper budget. What does that mean for schools such as Winstanley high school?

In every school, teacher pay is rising by 2.9 per cent. under a national agreement. The Minister and I both welcome that, because teachers are not overpaid, even with the 2.9 per cent. increase. Pensions are rising and I also welcome that. However, national insurance is rising from 1 April, as every school knows because schools, as well as teachers, must pay the increase. That tax, with superannuation and increased pay, means that there will be on-costs related to pay. Swinford primary school, which is in the south of my constituency, calculated that after the increase in pay, the on-costs, which used to be 14 per cent. of teachers' pay, will rise to 23 per cent. That is a hell of a lot of money for a small primary school to find, and it is concerned that it may have reduce the number of classes from four to three. However, there cannot be more than 30 pupils in a class, as that would be against the law.

At the same time, there are plans for out-of-class assistance so that teachers can spend more time out of class. Again, that is laudable. It should allow teachers to spend more time on preparation, but where is the money coming from? I am afraid that schools in Leicestershire will not be able to employ the much-heralded support staff. From Braunstone town, Swinford, Lutterworth Sherrier primary school, Brockington high school and Countesthorpe Greenfield primary school, governors and parents are writing to me, and there is real bewilderment. I assure the Minister that many of them will have voted Labour, but they are upset and are becoming angry.

This is the worst settlement for the whole country. It is bad enough this year with school funding on the floor; they would have received even less if there had not been a floor. What will happen next year? That is cause for concern. Are there any grounds for hope?

During the summer there was the fiasco over the Criminal Records Bureau. Leicestershire county council asked at the beginning of the autumn term for £25,000 to meet costs. It has yet to receive a response from the Minister's Department. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick) said, since May 1997—I say this just in case the Conservatives are accused, as we usually are, of doing everything wrong—Leicestershire schools have become 9 per cent. worse off than the national average for funding. The Minister looks dismissive of that figure; perhaps he can tell me how it is wrong.

We want the Government to listen, and I am glad to see the Minister here. We want them to listen to the reality of Leicestershire schools, which need money this coming financial year. They say that the situation has become impossible. We need assurances that things will not get worse next year and in future. I assure the Minister that Leicestershire MPs are angry, be they Labour or Conservative. Parents, teachers and governors are angry. I was told about one governor this morning who thought that there would be no more problems or financial wranglings. He had had enough of trying to balance the budget and he knew that lots of money was coming, so all would be well. When he heard about the funding settlement, he said that it was the one thing that made him want walk away from the job, a job that he does, as do all governors, voluntarily.

Finally, I shall quote from a letter from the headmaster of South Wigston high school. The school is in the constituency of my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough, but is on the border and acts as a polling station for my constituency. The school takes a large number of children from Glen Parva and Blaby. This man, who is an excellent headmaster—I have met him several times—says in a letter to the Secretary of State for Education and Skills:

> "My school is oversubscribed, taking 30% of our pupils from out of catchment . . . The school roll . . . shows us as being one of the most deprived Leicestershire schools . . . I am not looking forward to planning a 2003–04 budget. Classes are already full to bursting, so cutting staffing is out of the question. The most likely situation will be to stop all of the proactive developmental work we do here in teaching and learning linked to social inclusion and use such funds to prop up the budget.
>
> This is no way to run a school. As a Headteacher I need to know that I can plan into the future, and not have the rug pulled from beneath my feet. I had thought that this government had really grasped the need to invest in our children's future and provide schools with the finance to develop properly. It seems completely unfair, both as a parent and a Headteacher, to look only a few miles up the road and see schools where"

pupils are doing a great deal better from the settlement.

4.14 pm

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): I begin by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) on securing the debate. I thank him and the Minister for allowing me to make a brief contribution to this Adjournment debate. I am glad to see the Minister for School Standards here because I believe him to be a bright and intelligent man who is capable of dealing with complicated ideas. However, he is as much a prisoner of the Treasury as he is a free spirit in his Department. I forgive him, up to a point, with regard to the difficulties that he faces in dealing with a debate such as this. Every Member of Parliament has no doubt been knocking on his door and on that of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, asking for his share of the pork barrel for his constituency. That is a given in debates such as this.

[Mr. Edward Garnier]

When the Minister for Local Government and the Regions, the right hon. Member for Greenwich and Woolwich (Mr. Raynsford), announced the figures for our respective local education authorities in a statement some two or three weeks ago, I was shocked to find that Leicestershire LEA was at the bottom of the pile. I thought that there must have been something wrong with the printing of the tables when I found Leicestershire so far down the list.

My hon. Friend the Member for Blaby cited the example of Mr. Gary Toward, the headmaster of South Wigston high school, which is on the boundary of my constituency and his. The point that my hon. Friend made is exemplified by the fact that that school has to accept a proportion of its pupils from the city of Leicester. Because the city of Leicester is a unitary authority, it has its own education spending budget from central Government. The problems facing South Wigston high school are the same as those facing schools in the borough of Oadby and Wigston in my constituency, right next door to the city of Leicester, and schools in the rural part of my constituency, which stretches right down to the boundary of Northamptonshire. Central Government require them to do more and more and to follow more and more instructions but they are given less and less money to do that with. If the Minister is going to ignore the F40 campaign—of which my hon. Friend, several Labour Members and I were active members—and the pork-barrel pleas from Members of Parliament, I urge him to come and see for himself the effect of his Government's policies on the schools in our constituencies.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Blaby, I have had letters from primary school heads, high school heads, senior school heads, governors, teachers and parents. They are, in effect, holding up their hands in shock and concern at the way in which their schools have to go on. It is now impossible for a chairman of governors or a head to plan ahead for the future development of a school because of the financial regime that has got hold of the system in our constituencies. We need more and better-funded schools in Leicestershire. We must be able to assure our constituents that our schools can plan a bright future for our bright children. I look to the Minister not to wave a magic wand, but to show that he has some kind of intellectual understanding of the terrible problems that his Government have dumped on Leicestershire's people.

4.17 pm

The Minister for School Standards (Mr. David Miliband): I am pleased to have the chance to discuss these important issues with the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) and the hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier). I congratulate the hon. Member for Blaby on securing the debate, and I congratulate them both on the passion with which they argued for higher funding levels in Leicestershire. I share their passion to see greater funding across the country, and I look forward to the day when all political parties have in their manifestos a commitment to raise the share of national income devoted to education. That would benefit from a cross-party approach.

In a debate on funding, it is important to start by congratulating the teachers and pupils in Leicestershire on the outstanding work that is going on in their schools. I am pleased that there are more than 200 more teachers in Leicestershire schools than there were five years ago. Some of the primary school statistics are striking. The percentage of young people reading, writing and counting well has risen from 66 per cent. to 78 per cent. during the past five years. I think that hon. Members on both sides are pleased at that. There is significant improvement in maths and science at key stage 3 and the percentage of pupils getting five good GCSEs has risen from 45 per cent. to 52 per cent. during the past four years. That is a real testimony to the professionalism and dedication of the teachers and pupils.

4.19 pm

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

4.34 pm

On resuming—

Mr. Miliband: It is also important to point out the increases in funding that have taken place in Leicestershire in the last five or six years, before I address the points raised by the hon. Member for Blaby.

The hon. Gentleman referred to core funding. He will be pleased to know that the education standard spending assessment for Leicester has increased by over 36 per cent. over the past five years. He also raised the matter of non-core funding, which is an important part of the picture. The standards fund has increased from £3.5 million in 1997 to more than £21 million this year. The school standards direct grant was £3.7 million in 2001, and is £8.2 million this year. Because that grant is not delivered through the formula spending system, it gives extra benefit to Leicester compared with that system. A typical 250-pupil primary school can expect £10,000 more next year, and a typical 1,000-pupil secondary school can expect £50,000 more. Obviously, there have also been major increases in capital spending, which are not under debate today but are important in relation to the schooling infrastructure.

I want to address the points made by the hon. Member for Blaby. I do not know if I shall justify the praise of the hon. and learned Member for Harborough; he may change his mind after listening to me for 10 minutes. The development of a new funding system for local government is a complex enterprise and depends on close working with those in local government. We are very grateful for the work of the education funding group, which was brought together with representatives from the F40 authorities. There was a serious discussion of a whole range of issues.

Having come to the process as a new Minister half way through, I do not think that it is fair to say that anyone was ignored. Everyone really did have their say. When it came to the final reckoning, some F40 authorities did well, others less so; some unitary authorities did well, and others did not. There was a serious amount of discussion.

We tried to base our development of the new system on simple principles. First, there should be a basic entitlement for all pupils; £2,000 in a primary school, £2,600 in a secondary. Secondly, there had to be recognition of additional educational needs. Thirdly, there had to be recognition of additional costs. I shall run through those briefly and address the points that the hon. Member for Blaby made. Our aim is to ensure that similar pupils in different parts of the country have a similar amount of money attached to them. In the end, the reason that Leicestershire is 150th out of 150 local educational authorities for its funding derives from the statistics on pupil need and area cost.

I am pleased that we have been able to raise the amount of money that has gone into Leicestershire schools during the past five years. I am confident that with more money Leicestershire schools could do more. That is why the overall increases in spending are important.

Let me run through the important points raised by the hon. Gentleman. He talked about the area cost adjustment and housing. Although two of the options in the consultation did use housing as a basis for the final settlement of area costs, that was not the final basis used. The final basis of the area cost adjustment was the level of wages to recognise the different costs of recruitment and retention in different parts of the country. We have a national pay scale, but in different parts of the country the costs of recruitment and retention can be higher, and are driven by turnover, above all. About 50 out of 150 local education authorities benefited from the old area cost adjustment system. That meant that there were a significant number of cliff edges in the system, and a degree of rough justice. I am pleased that under the new system we have a much more focused and carefully calibrated approach to the area cost adjustment, so that 99 authorities benefit from it.

Sad to say, that is of little comfort to MPs from Leicestershire of all parties, because Leicestershire LEA is not one of them. In refining the area cost adjustment, we had to target the allowance at those authorities with the highest wage rates. Those do not include Leicestershire. The hon. Member for Blaby also raised the question of additional educational needs. We want to ensure that similar pupils in different parts of the country have a similar amount of money attached to them. The national average percentage of pupils from deprived backgrounds is about 20 per cent. That is the primary driver of the additional educational needs funding. In Leicestershire, that figure stands at about 13 per cent., which is why the recognition of additional educational needs in Leicestershire is lower than elsewhere.

Mr. Garnier: On the question of additional education needs and deprived backgrounds, border schools on the boundary of the city of Leicester are drawing in children from deprived areas—we are delighted to have them—who are sucking away educational resources from the children of our constituencies. The picture is much more complicated than the Minister paints, on a national scale.

Mr. Miliband: I accept that the picture is far from straightforward. Deprivation accounts for about 80 per cent. of additional educational needs, and about 20 per cent. is reserved for the additional costs associated with speaking English as a second language and related issues. There are cross-border questions. We considered carefully whether we should account for mobility in the final formula. We decided not to do so, because the evidence was that it would not change the final distribution of resources much. We have 150 LEAs, which means that there are cross-border issues. I hope that pupils from Leicester are not seen simply as a burden. As the hon. Gentleman says, they are part of the school community in Leicestershire.

I want to say a little more about how the additional educational needs component was developed, because part of it is important and benefits Leicestershire. Under the old system the definition of poverty was based on income support. Two of the options in the consultation paper last autumn repeated that basis, but two others included families in low-wage work and families who were not unemployed but benefited from the working families tax credit. That helps Leicestershire, because the number of families in receipt of working families tax credit is just below the national average, although the number of families receiving income support is far below. Leicestershire will benefit not only from a sounder system but from our recognition of families who are not unemployed but in low-wage work.

In relation to ethnicity, Leicestershire benefits less than many other authorities, because it has between 4 and 5 per cent. of pupils with English as an additional language. That compares to a national average of about 9 per cent.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned sparsity in passing. It would be a pity not to recognise that the Government have taken an important step forward with the proposal that a sparsity element be inserted in the new formula to reflect the cost of home-to-school transport in rural areas and to help rural primary schools. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman welcomes that part of the new formula. We considered in detail whether to introduce a sparsity element for secondary schools, but we found no evidence of a connection between secondary school size and sparsity. Small schools are as likely to be found in densely populated metropolitan areas—perhaps unexpectedly—as in shires such as Leicestershire.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the gap between the highest and the lowest-funded authority. I can understand that. He also quoted some figures about the relationship between the lowest-funded authority and the average, which I did not recognise. The figure that I have is that the gap between the lowest-funded authority and the median has hardly changed. There has been a difference of about 10 per cent. in the two periods. If the hon. Gentleman wants to write to me about the figure that he quoted, I can certainly look into it. He or the hon. and learned Member for Harborough also referred to a letter that they had written to the Department that had not been answered. I shall follow that up.

Mr. Robathan: The letter concerned the Criminal Records Bureau.

Mr. Miliband: I certainly undertake to find out what has happened to the reply to that letter.

[Mr. Miliband]

The hon. Gentleman did not say much about the floors and ceilings in the new system, but it is important to recognise the 3.2 per cent. floor this time and, significantly, the impact of that in future years. Because Leicestershire is quite close to the floor, it will do better in years two and three of the spending review. We want to make sure that there is as much certainty as possible in the medium term, so that schools and local authorities can plan. We have not yet been able to announce the floors for future years—we want to see how the system works—but because Leicestershire is quite close to the floor this year, the transition will be relatively short. I think that it can look forward to significantly improved funding by years two and three of the spending review—financial years 2004–05 and 2005–06.

Finally, no one should deny—certainly no Government Member does—that difficult decisions remain about how to spend money in our education system. Those difficult decisions are made by governors and heads. I reassure the hon. Gentleman that we are committed to continuing to increase the quantum of funding that goes into education. That will benefit Leicestershire to the extent of its needs. I want to see funds growing across the country, and the best route to that is to continue to raise the overall spend on education and to distribute it as fairly as possible. That is what we have sought to do in the new funding system.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at sixteen minutes to Five o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 5 March 2003

[MR. FRANK COOK *in the Chair*]

AIDS

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Mr. Kemp.]*

9.30 am

Mr. Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh, North and Leith): I take this opportunity to raise one of the most important issues facing the world community—the crisis caused by the spread of HIV/AIDS, which is wreaking destruction in much of the world and which threatens to do so in much more of it. This is not the first time that the crisis has been raised in the House of Commons and I am sure that it will not be the last.

I pay tribute to the many hon. Members present, whose interest in the issue goes back over many years. It is particularly appropriate to raise it again now given the greater public awareness and concern that I have noticed in the past few weeks. That development was no doubt stimulated by some of the excellent media coverage. Hon. Members may have read the reports in *The Guardian*, and *The Sun* has also run an excellent campaign on the issue. Furthermore, there has been considerable coverage on the BBC and I am sure that other media sources have recently covered the issue.

It is also appropriate to raise the subject again now because the world's attention is understandably focused on events in the middle east. We must ensure that the same attention continues to be paid to crises such as that caused by the spread of HIV/AIDS. The AIDS crisis could have even more wide-ranging consequences for the world community, not least because of the insecurity that could threaten the entire world. Only a few weeks ago, Colin Powell rightly described the AIDS crisis as being as serious a threat to global security as international terrorism.

The basic facts about the crisis are well known and I do not intend to repeat them at length. However, I want to highlight some of the latest figures on the extent of the crisis. The most recent figures from UNAIDS—the joint United Nations programme on HIV/AIDS—appeared a few months ago. In 2002, the epidemic was estimated to have claimed more than 3 million lives and an estimated 5 million people became infected with HIV, 800,000 of whom were children under the age of 15. That is estimated to bring the total number of people in the world living with the virus to 42 million. Life expectancy in some countries has now fallen by 20 years and UN estimates for world population growth have been revised downwards because 300 million people are expected to die from AIDS in the next half century.

The situation is much worse in some countries and the estimates in southern Africa are particularly severe. About 29 million people now live with HIV/AIDS and infection rates in some countries run at more than 30 per cent. of the adult population. Botswana, for example, is expected to lose one fifth of its population by 2050. Those are staggering figures.

The crisis is not only developing in southern Africa and the epidemic is undergoing fast rates of growth in Russia and the Caribbean. In Asia, in countries such as India and China, the figures are already high and estimates suggest that there are 6 million HIV/AIDS sufferers. The figures suggest that the sub-Saharan rate of infection could be replicated in Asia in the next few decades. The International Development Committee recently reported to that effect.

As hon. Members know, the consequences of the spread of HIV and AIDS are found not only in health programmes, health policies and the health of the individuals affected; the crisis has major implications for development programmes in general because of its impact on economies and social systems. It is estimated that by the end of the decade the per capita gross domestic product in the countries hardest hit by the disease may drop by as much as 8 per cent. AIDS has the knock-on effect of increasing the number of people living in poverty. For example, if a family's main breadwinner becomes infected, that clearly affects the entire family.

There is a real fear—or rather an expectation—that the objectives of halving extreme poverty as part of the millennium development goals may be jeopardised. Key Government workers in developing countries are being lost to the disease and AIDS is reducing the ratio of healthy workers to dependants. In agriculture, AIDS is severely affecting the ability of countries to invest in, or sustain, capital-intensive methods of production. That is exacerbating the food shortages that are being experienced in many southern African states. Farming skills are being lost. Craft skills are no longer being passed from parents to children. A new generation must struggle to find a livelihood. Irrigation schemes are not being maintained. Farms are being abandoned and families are returning to subsistence farming. All that is contributing to the present famine in southern Africa.

The effects go beyond agriculture into the social sphere. The spread of HIV/AIDS, as well as overburdening the health and social security systems, is having a serious impact on education services. Teachers and students die and older children must leave school to look after siblings. The millennium development goal of ensuring universal primary education is also at risk in the worst affected countries.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): Has the hon. Gentleman reflected on the number of AIDS orphans in the world? That will cause a huge social problem in developing countries.

Mr. Lazarowicz: Indeed it will. Another of the awful statistics is that in Africa alone there are more AIDS orphans than there are children in the United Kingdom.

What action is needed from the world community—and from this country—to tackle the crisis? They know what needs to be done. The question is whether the world community will exercise the common will to tackle the crisis. There are three priority areas. First, education is vital. A greater awareness of how to prevent the transmission of the virus is crucial to the successful combating of the disease in the developing world. I welcome the emphasis that the Department for International Development has placed on support for

[Mr. Lazarowicz]

education programmes in the worst affected countries. It is commendable that it directs its efforts in particular at the 15-to-24 age group.

Money is also a vital question. Above all, there is a need for commitment to a major programme of multilateral funding. All hon. Members in the Chamber must welcome the setting up of the global fund to fight HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria. That is the most important initiative in this context since the crisis developed. The global fund has certainly enabled greater attention to be focused on fighting those diseases. The Government's support of the fund, which comes in addition to their significant spending on bilateral HIV/AIDS programmes, is very much to be welcomed. Although the UK's commitment is welcome, however, and the £138 million that the Government have committed to the fund for the next five years is a positive step, it still needs more money. A severe funding gap is opening up and serious questions are being raised about its future. After all, although $10 billion was called for, only $2.2 billion has been pledged to the fund by countries and only part of that has been delivered and allocated to programmes aimed at tackling HIV/AIDS. More money is needed from the world community, but also from this country as part of that community.

The third problem is access to necessary drugs. Every hon. Member who has been following the issue will be aware of the continuing failure to reach agreement on measures to allow developing countries access to the cheap drugs that they need to tackle HIV/AIDS and a range of other diseases. I am sure that we would all agree with the Chancellor of the Exchequer about what needs to be done. He said:

> "It's time that all recognise the responsibilities to help avoid unnecessary deaths and that means we've got to get an agreement for the trade round."

He said that the problem

> "is a terrible indictment on a world that has the technology, the drugs and the resources to be able to solve these problems—and when you think of the hurt that any infant death causes you've got to understand that so much more could be done".

The Chancellor was absolutely right when he said that and I am sure that he speaks for most people in the country.

I mention in passing that even though we hear talk about the growing transatlantic divide, one matter on which there is a lot of agreement, especially where it concerns some of the big pharmaceutical companies in Europe and the USA, is the view that there is a reluctance to reach a fair settlement on the issue in question. I do not have time to go into the debate about the failure to reach an agreement on access to cheap drugs in detail. All I shall say is that only two weeks ago there was yet another failure to reach agreement in the World Trade Organisation. Every day that that agreement fails to be made is a day less in the lives of millions of people in developing countries who cannot afford the drugs that they need for their condition.

Once again, although I praise what the Government have done to take a lead on the issue and want to express my backing for what they have done so far, I should like them to do more. The Government certainly cannot take on the burden for the entire industrialised world. However, even allowing for that point and the welcome sums that they have pledged, the sums are relatively small. Without going into the rights and wrongs of events elsewhere in the world, I observe that the sums that we are pledging to the global fund are a drop in the ocean compared with those that we have put aside for contingencies for possible events elsewhere.

I am aware that other hon. Members wish to speak, so I shall end my contribution by posing a number of questions to the Minister about the Government's future policy on the international HIV/AIDS crisis. I hope that he can give some positive responses to those questions, so that we can underline today the country's continuing commitment to playing a leading role in the international community's efforts to tackle the crisis. First, there are fears that money is drying up and that the long-term future of the global fund is not secured. The international community should not wait for results from the fund before making contributions. I should therefore like to hear from the Minister what the Government's plans for financial commitments to the fund for the next five years are and, if possible, what their long-term attitude is.

Secondly, the World Health Organisation and UNAIDS have a target of treating 3 million people who have HIV/AIDS by 2005. Does the UK see itself as part of the partnership aiming for that target? How do the Government envisage achieving it?

The third question is on the way in which the health systems in developing countries can deliver the service and the drugs to those who are affected. Bearing in mind that drugs on their own are not enough—there has to be access to the relevant services as well—what are the UK Government's plans for supporting health systems in developing countries and, more importantly, will there be a trend in the financial support from the Government to encourage support for the health systems in the countries that are affected by HIV/AIDS? My fourth question relates to the third. How will the UK's bilateral programmes link to global fund programmes?

Fifthly, what monitoring mechanisms are in place to ensure that the DFID money goes to supporting the health systems? Do monitoring systems exist in all the countries to which we give financial support? My sixth question concerns another important matter. How can the global fund ensure that the country co-ordinating mechanism enables the civil societies in the countries affected to participate not just in making proposals regarding funding, but in their implementation over the years?

Finally, what long-term commitments can we give to the countries worst affected by the crisis? We all know that for a health ministry in a developing country to plan a proper anti-retrovirals programme, it must have commitment from international donors, not just for short periods of, say, three or five years, but for up to 10 years. What commitment are we going to make on long-term contributions to the global fund and to our own bilateral programme? Without long-term commitment, we will not be able to tackle the HIV/AIDS crisis and by failing to tackle it we shall allow it to become more serious throughout the world.

We need a long-term commitment and more funding, and we need them on a continuing basis over many years. I hope that the Minister can give some commitments today.

9.48 am

Tony Baldry (Banbury): The hon. Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz) has done us all a service in introducing this debate so well and so succinctly. It is good to see the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the hon. Member for Harlow (Mr. Rammell) here. I appreciate that the Secretary of State and the Under-Secretary from the Department for International Development are doubtless overseas on Government business, but I am glad to be able to thank the Minister, on behalf of the International Development Committee, for the incredible help that ambassadors and high commissioners give us in our work around the world. They are unfailing in their courtesy, support and good humour, notwithstanding the various demands that we place upon them. Foreign Office Ministers do not often take part in these debates.

I hope that I shall not repeat anything that has been said. The US Government have announced a $15 billion dollar programme over the next five years to combat HIV/AIDS. It is a go-it-alone fund, which will work on its own terms and only through US aid agencies. It will ignore existing structures, relationships and action plans already in place in those countries, especially Africa, already affected most by the HIV/AIDS pandemic. As the *Financial Times* recently observed,

> "As a recent convert to the war on Aids, the US administration has latched on to a simplistic vision of what to do, based on the example of a single country—Uganda. It knows little of the measures in place in different parts of the world and has not recognised that each country needs to shape the best local response. It is here that the Global Fund plays an important role."

I would go further. The issue is not just the global health fund, but the European countries' response to the United States' proposals. Although the US effort is a bold part, it is only a part of the total financing needs. Its limits are implicit in the fact that it is directed only at HIV/AIDS. It does not deal with malaria or tuberculosis and the American fund will be operational in only 14 countries.

The global fund will require new donor support of about $7 billion this year and next—roughly $3.5 billion a year—to meet the needs of the high-quality proposals that it is considering. A reasonable financing framework is thus clear and I believe that Europe collectively should match the US initiative with our own $3 billion a year contribution, while Japan and other donors should contribute at least $1 billion a year in addition. That would make a total of at least $7 billion a year during 2003 and 2004. Half of that should be devoted to the global fund and the other half should be spent on programmes that would indirectly bolster, rather than undermine, the fund.

As the same article in the *Financial Times* noted,

> "Silence from Europe at this moment would be deadly for the Global Fund. If the US is the only country to put up large new sums for the war against Aids, then it will be a US programme. On the other hand, with a bold European response to Mr. Bush's daring initiative, the transatlantic alliance—under great strain over Iraq—would prove to the world that it continues its historic commitments to freedom and human betterment. Impoverished and dying people around the world await a clarion call from the US and Europe together."

International partnership to combat an international problem is imperative, but what has been the UK Government's response? I appreciate that this is not the Minister's brief and I hope that he will prevail on the Under-Secretary of State for International Development to respond to any questions raised in the debate that he feels are worthy of a more detailed response.

I do not doubt the commitment of the Treasury and the Department for International Development to fight HIV/AIDS, but a recent interview given by the Chancellor is telling. He has, rightly, said that there needs to be far faster progress on trade-related aspects of intellectual property rights—TRIPS—at the current World Trade Organisation negotiations at Doha, which means Governments, such as the US Government, doing much more to make drug companies, such as GlaxoSmithKline, allow their drugs to be patented. Disappointment about the fact that a recent vaccine for AIDS has failed is well understood, but the Chancellor also alluded to the Government's new idea of an international financing facility.

Dr. Tonge: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would hate to give the impression that the vaccine initiative had totally failed. Only one vaccine was being developed for the western strain of the virus and many other trials are taking place in the world.

Tony Baldry: I was simply pointing out that there must be disappointment about the fact that the present vaccine trial has failed.

The problem with the international financing facility is that it does not have the support of the United States. It does not necessarily have the support of UK non-governmental organisations, because it does not make clear where the UK will stand on overseas development investment after 2015, nor what will happen to the UK's commitment to reaching a target of 0.7 per cent. of gross national income for overseas development investment.

In sub-Saharan Africa, 30 million people are victims of HIV/AIDS and as many as one in four people in countries like Zambia have AIDS, so Africa will not necessarily meet the United Nation's 2015 goals even with the international financing facility. Africa is the only continent going backwards as we speak and although the world is ravaged by the HIV/AIDS pandemic, Africa is at its epicentre. The World Food Programme estimates that 14 million people face serious food shortages in southern Africa this year, with the same number in Ethiopia and the horn of Africa, partly because hunger begets AIDS as AIDS begets hunger.

What is needed is not an international financing facility for HIV/AIDS but a straightforward commitment to the facilities and mechanisms that already exist. We do not need to invent or create new financing mechanisms; we need to support those mechanisms that already exist, such as the global health fund. I recognise that that fund has its problems. I suspect, however, that those problems are not caused by the structures that it offers, but are a result of the financial commitments that it receives from us and from our partners in the European Union.

[Tony Baldry]

I hope that I can prevail upon the patience of the House by sharing a letter that I recently wrote to *The Independent*, in which I stated:

> "Sir: Prior to the International Aids Conference . . . the devastating report from UNAids demonstrated the urgent need for renewed policies on HIV/Aids in both the developed and developing worlds to combat the pandemic in poorer countries.
>
> On the part of richer countries to prevent HIV/Aids, it is clear that the Global Health Fund simply isn't working. Whilst such trust funds act as a good mechanism to raise the profile of a specific issue it is less good when the issue's profile is high but only a lowly third of money pledged is actually reaching the Fund. Money surely would be better invested direct to African countries' administrations and local NGOs. On treatment also there is a need for further commitment from countries like the US, Canada and Japan at the forthcoming Doha trade round to ensure that poorer countries are given the capability to copy patented HIV/Aids drugs produced in other better equipped countries.
>
> Nonetheless, on the part of some poorer countries themselves, if more aid is to go to their governments, then still more needs to be done to recognise the extent of the pandemic. No doubt the recent South African court case was a massive move forward but ambiguities still exist in their approach and until these are removed treatment and prevention will stagnate.
>
> The reward would not only be preventing the HIV/Aids crisis escalating ever more; recent estimates also suggest that the economic boom for everyone would be US$186bn each year. I suspect this would benefit African countries more than the recent G8 summit."

I hope that the Government will give the global health fund every possible support. More importantly, however, I hope that they will encourage our European Union partners to match what the Americans are putting into the fund to ensure that it has the requisite funds necessary to do over the next two to three years what it was set up to achieve.

9.59 am

Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): As the hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) said, this is a timely debate, particularly as President Bush has announced a huge expansion in AIDS financing—£10 billion is a lot of money and in normal circumstances, it would be welcomed enthusiastically. Apart from anything else, as the hon. Gentleman said, it will put great pressure on other countries, including ourselves, to increase our contribution to work on AIDS, particularly the global health fund. However, the way in which Bush is doing it raises great doubts.

I want to raise two issues. First, as the hon. Gentleman said, why has the President virtually ignored the global health fund and allocated only $1 billion of the new money to that fund? That represents only $200 million a year from 2004; he has decided to disburse $9 billion unilaterally. I also want to talk about links between the treatment of AIDS and reproductive health services. By doing so, I shall demonstrate how Bush's decision to keep money out of the global health fund and his attitude to reproductive health are linked.

Initially, the United States embraced the global health fund and although it was criticised for not giving enough, its contribution was far in excess of any other donor. Why is it turning its back on the global health fund as a disburser, setting up its own administrative procedure and limiting its funding to 12 sub-Saharan countries and two Caribbean countries? That is happening when the global fund does not have money for a third disbursement of grants in October, which leaves most sub-Saharan countries, including several badly affected countries, such as Malawi, out in the cold. That also has major implications for the global health fund's choices about the distribution of its funding. It also implies disaffection with the fund. That is even odder when one knows that Tommy Thompson, who is Bush's Secretary of Health and Human Services, was elected to the chair of the global health fund only a couple of days after Bush's announcement on the $10 billion. Of course, Thompson would have known that he was to be elected before that date because his only opponent had withdrawn.

Part of Thompson's job is to be chief fundraiser for the global health fund. His task is surely more difficult if his Government do not put their major resources into the fund. It is even odder that Thompson did not travel to the board meeting in Geneva to take up his position as chair. I quote from the apology that he sent to the meeting:

> "I am sorry that I am unable to be with you in Geneva today but President Bush has asked me to be with him when he addresses his Advisory Council on HIV/AIDS in Washington".

That sends a clear message: America first, the world second.

It is extraordinary that Thompson was not allowed to organise his diary so that he could attend the board meeting when he was supposed to take over as chair of the global health fund. It is stranger still because Thompson's lengthy message to the board expressing his joy at taking over the chairmanship made no mention of Bush's huge increase in funding for international AIDS work , which was announced only a few days before in the state of the union message.

The situation is odder still because the chief executive of the global health fund, Dr. Feachem, made no reference to the $10 billion from Bush in his report to the board. He also came here to talk to the all-party group on AIDS but did not mention Bush's $10 billion until I asked him about it. It is surreal; there is an earthquake going on in AIDS funding yet the chair and the chief executive of the global health fund pretend that the ground under their feet is steady.

A further oddity about Bush's announcement is the fact that his figures for numbers of people to be treated with anti-retroviral drugs are achievable only if there is access to cheap generic drugs produced outside the United States. However, the US has been blocking such access in the Doha talks. Additionally, the new initiative is to be administered by USAID—the United States Agency for International Development—which, in its present statute, requires products supplied as foreign aid to be made in the United States. There are also doubts about the American bureaucracy because promises are made but it takes a long time for money to be channelled in a way that meets with the approval of Congress. I hope that the Minister will explain what is going on—I wish him good luck.

During International Development questions last week, the Secretary of State for International Development, who is on the board of the global health fund, expressed some disaffection with the fund's operation. I hope that the difficulties can be sorted out because the global health fund is a first-rate idea. The issue is far too important for those difficulties to be allowed to persist.

Mr. Lazarowicz: Does my hon. Friend agree that the proposal made a few minutes ago by the hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry), who chairs the Select Committee on International Development, that Europe should match the commitment of the United States to the global fund is one way of emphasising to the United States the world's commitment to the fund? Would he therefore agree to endorse the European Union making a similar contribution to the fund as the USA?

Tony Worthington: I hope that we and the EU make a much greater contribution to the global health fund than the USA: that is the point of what I am saying. The USA's contribution is $200 million per year for five years from 2004.

I also want to raise concerns about the relationship between AIDS work and reproductive health services. I am sure that Bush's decision to distribute funds bilaterally rather than through the global health fund is related to his appalling actions with regard to reproductive health. If he allocated money to the global health fund, it would be more difficult for him to keep the peace with the religious obsessives who back him.

Bush is in debt to, and under the control of, a small group of southern fundamentalist Christians who are obsessed with abortion and contraception. The way for a country to reduce the number of abortions—particularly unsafe ones—is to follow the example of Belgium and Holland. They have liberal abortion laws, thorough education about relationships and total access to family planning services. Belgium and Holland have the lowest abortion rates in the world, but Bush's followers support policies that push up the number of abortions—in particular, unsafe ones—and contribute to the appalling rates of maternal mortality in many countries.

The fundamentalists who programme Bush want to ban abortion and access to reproductive health services. Following their orders, Bush withdrew all funding from the United Nations Population Fund on the pretext that it was supporting the Chinese Government's one child per family project and coercive abortion. That was contradicted by his own investigating team and a group of hon. Members from this House. The UNFPA is working in 20 counties in China: it is weaning the Chinese away from compulsion and lowering abortion rates, but the zealots had their way with President Bush.

At meeting after meeting, the Bush Government are now trying to destroy the pace-setting Cairo conference, which found a worldwide consensus policy in this contentious area. It includes the explicit statement that abortion is never an acceptable method of family planning. The bedrock of the Cairo conference is that women throughout the world should have access to reproductive health services and that is under attack from the Bush Government.

The Americans are urging on the poorest people in the world policies that would create a riot if they were tried in the USA. Can anyone imagine the consequences in America and Britain if their Governments said that they were going to withdraw access to family planning? The American Government's policies go against the American constitution's statements on freedom of information. The consequence of their policy is that they have withdrawn their supply of condoms from many parts of the world. When the first President Bush was in power, America supplied 800 million condoms to the developing world: it now supplies only 300 million condoms per year, which means that the average Botswanan would have access to one condom supplied by the international community per year.

By cutting the number of condoms, they are condemning to death thousands of people who could be protected if that very cheap method of prevention were available. I do not usually quote the words of the Mozambique bishops, but this is their advice to their flock:

> "If you are HIV positive and you have unprotected sex and you infect someone you have in the eyes of God, committed murder. Or if you are HIV negative and you have unprotected sex with someone who is infected and they infect you, you have in the eyes of God, committed suicide. So my children, wearing a condom is not a sin . . . but not wearing one is."

That is the voice of sanity. In the words of the Mozambique bishops, Bush's policies stimulate murder and suicide. Now, during Bush's $10 billion AIDS initiative, his AIDS policy is running slap bang into a collision with his reproductive health policy. Will his AIDS policy allow condoms to be used as the only means of preventing that disease, but not for family planning? That would be absurd, but it is likely to happen.

American policy on AIDS would prohibit the sending of money to integrated health clinics offering AIDS treatment and family planning with information about abortion or abortion counselling. However, under the same policy money could be sent to a clinic treating only AIDS. In a country like Tanzania, which can spend only $3 or $4 a year per person on health care and where health clinics are sparse, American policy will require that the AIDS service is in a different place and run by a different agency from the health clinic. That is official.

This is not United States imperialism—it is worse than that. Under imperialism, an empire imposes its own way of life on another country. Bush would not dare impose such a policy in America because he would be ridiculed out of Washington. However, he is trying to impose just such a policy on the poorest people in the world and through it he is causing their deaths. That is one of the reasons why he has steered the money away from the global health fund and why he will distribute it bilaterally.

The tragedy of all this is that reproductive health services and AIDS policy should be much more closely linked than they are. That was said in the Cairo+5 document, as follows:

> "Governments should ensure that provision for STIs"—

sexually-transmitted infections—

> "and AIDS are an integral component of reproductive and sexual health programmes at the primary health care level."

[Tony Worthington]

That is also the policy of the International Planned Parenthood Federation and, in the words of its director general, Steven Sinding:

> "The same systems that enable people to space and limit births and protect themselves from STDs"—

sexually-transmitted diseases—

> "are essential to halting the spread of HIV."

The family planning association movements practically invented sexual and reproductive behaviour change and they went a long way towards establishing community-based services throughout the world. Both of those are essential in the fight against AIDS. However, the AIDS community and the family planning community behave as if they had nothing to do with each other. AIDS activists place emphasis on treatment and family planners often act as if they had no role in HIV/AIDS prevention. The donors have a major role to play in bringing the two groups together.

Bush's actions drive people in exactly the opposite direction. In the developed world, HIV transmission was regarded initially as being largely restricted to the gay and illicit drug-using communities, rather than through heterosexual transmission. Treatment was also captured by the large pharmaceutical companies, who saw that more money could be made from keeping wealthy people alive than from preventing people from dying. There was a lack of resources for vaccines or effective barrier methods controlled by women. There are still people who are obsessed with giving people in the poor world access to expensive retrovirals and they are failing to provide the resources for prevention through changing sexual behaviour or barrier methods, such as condoms.

It makes common sense to combine reproductive health services and HIV services, especially in terms of gaining access to young people. That is where the trained staff are and where the infrastructure often exists. Bush's emerging policy of providing condoms in HIV clinics but not to family planning services is counter-productive, both for family planning and for the treatment of the AIDS pandemic; we should wake up to what he is doing.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. This is a most compelling debate, but I remind hon. Members that it is common practice in 90-minute Adjournment debates to commence the first of the three winding-up speeches no later than 30 minutes before conclusion, which will be at 10.30 am. Hon. Members should take that into account when contributing and making or giving way to interventions.

10.15 am

Hywel Williams (Caernarfon): I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz) on securing this debate on an extremely important subject. The brevity of my remarks does not reflect the importance that my party colleagues and I place on the issue.

> "HIV AIDS is a modern apocalypse which dwarfs everything that has gone before."

Those are the words of Stephen Lewis, the UN special envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa. "Dwarfs everything" are the relevant words. As I am a relative newcomer to such debates, I shall briefly try your patience, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and that of the House by considering some of the figures, because they beggar belief. The number of people living with HIV/AIDS totals 42 million—5 million people were newly infected in 2002 and about 800,000 of those were children. Those figures are from the World Health Organisation. AIDS deaths in 2002 totalled 3.1 million and 610,000 of those were children. I find it difficult to comprehend those figures.

The vast majority—95 per cent.—of HIV/AIDS sufferers are in the poorest countries. In some African countries, 20 per cent. of adults are HIV-positive. In sub-Saharan Africa, where nearly 30 million people are HIV-positive, there were 3.5 million new infections in 2002. Those are astonishing and horrifying figures. The AIDS epidemic is increasingly entwined with wider humanitarian crises, such as the food crisis in southern Africa and the social disruption caused by the need to migrate to find work as people become more involved in the cash economy. Also, conflicts in Africa have caused an increase in HIV/AIDS. The ability of those countries to deal with HIV/AIDS is reduced by crises in the political and economic systems.

As the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Tony Worthington) noted, HIV/AIDS is open to attack through health education and the increased use of barrier methods. I was interested to see evidence of a decline in HIV/AIDS among inner-city women in Ethiopia as a direct result of such factors. There has also been a decline in HIV/AIDS in parts of Uganda among young pregnant women. Those are encouraging signs. I shall not refer to the availability of cheaper pharmaceuticals, which clearly is important. A decline in HIV/AIDS needs human intervention, which must be funded. That is my one and only point, and it is that on which I shall question the Minister.

The UK is making contributions to fighting HIV/AIDS. According to my figures, we furnished $215 million to the global fund to fight AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria from 2001 to 2003. The fund was set up by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, whose target is $10 billion per annum. I accept that we are also making other aid contributions, as well as making significant contributions to conflict resolution and development in countries suffering severely from HIV and AIDS. Politics is a matter of priorities, so I shall briefly refer to two of our priorities, without trying your patience, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Based on the Government's figures, we are prepared to spend £1.75 billion on the forthcoming war. That sum has already been committed and I understand that at commencement, the figure may be £2 billion. As far as I can see we are spending £2 billion on war and $250 million on HIV/AIDS.

I do not want to play down the Government's commitment to fighting HIV/AIDS, particularly when one compares their attitude to that taken by some other rich states. We are often told that the demands for health services are infinite, as near as damn it. I am not asking for a comment from the Minister on the potential global demand for services related to HIV/AIDS, but I ask him to consider whether we are spending enough.

Let us not allow people throughout the world, especially those in the poorest countries in Africa, to die because of our indifference, or because our priorities lie elsewhere.

10.21 am

David Cairns (Greenock and Inverclyde): I will try and follow the good example of other hon. Members and be brief so that we can give the Front-Bench spokesmen maximum time.

I cannot accept the slightly spurious comparison that the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Hywel Williams) made between the money set aside for possible international conflict and that set aside for HIV/AIDS. One can take any section of Government spending at any time and compare it to another section to make a particular point. The arguments stand or fall on their own merits.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz) on securing this important debate. As a relative newcomer to such debates, it has been a great pleasure to listen to the expertise of colleagues from the International Development Committee. I shall not rehearse the numbers and figures that we have heard over and over again today, numbing though they are.

It is a cliché to say that countries throughout Africa and Asia are simply being ravaged and paying a terrible price due to HIV/AIDS. It is not just individuals—hundreds of thousands, tens of millions of individuals—but entire families and communities that are devastated by the illness, including people who do not even have the infection. The hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) mentioned orphans; perhaps she might expand on that point in her speech. The challenge is not just to cure individuals of a disease, but to mend broken townships and cities and entire regions and countries.

Before I turn briefly to African and Asian issues, I want to talk about HIV/AIDS in the west. My hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Tony Worthington) touched on that subject. When the disease broke and awareness of it had its first impact, there was a sudden and welcome demise in unsafe practices, which had the predictable result of slowing the growth and spread of the disease. We have to remind ourselves that that happened about 20 years ago and an entire generation has grown up in the post-AIDS era. The doomsday adverts that we remember from the late 1980s increasingly have no bearing on the sexual practices of the current generation.

Complacency is the great threat in the west. Some sexual practices and venues are being reintroduced that closed down 20 years ago, which will increase the spread of the disease in the west at the very time that we are trying to do something about it in the southern world. We must not take our eye off the home front, as we concentrate—rightly in this debate—on the southern world. We all pay tribute to the health organisations, statutory bodies and others, but they need to refresh the message in this country that AIDS is still around, incurable and a killer. People suffering from HIV/AIDS will die as surely in Greenock as they will in Mozambique. Perhaps it will take longer in the west, because of access to palliative medicines, but it is still a killer and we should not take our eye off that ball.

On the global scale of the challenge, in Zambia, HIV prevalence is about 27 per cent. of 15 to 49-year-olds. In certain parts of Africa, one is always on the lookout for new ways in which the disease is spreading. I understand that one particularly virulent means is the interaction between long-distance lorry drivers and prostitutes. That is spreading the disease rapidly and non-governmental organisations are working on education programmes to try to do something about that.

The position is gloomy for much of the world and the messages that we are portraying today are dire. However, there are positive signs, including some evidence of increasing awareness of AIDS, which is the first step. We must pay tribute to the organisations spreading an educational message. The focus of today's debate is to emphasise that much more needs to be done. My hon. Friends and Opposition Members have highlighted means of doing that and I shall not go through those again. More money is the cornerstone. There must also be support for the global fund, greater access to drugs and a new approach to patenting important life-saving pharmaceuticals.

I shall briefly mention the international financing facility, although I shall not go into it in depth. The hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) mentioned it in what were, unfortunately, slightly disparaging tones. I have great hopes for that facility. It is not an international financing facility to combat HIV and AIDS—there is much more to it than that—but the scale of the figures mentioned in the document of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer is considerable. The figures go up to the £100 billion mark. That is a step change. My right hon. Friend is worried, and rightly, that we are nowhere near meeting the millennium targets. If we carry on at the same rate, we shall miss them. The hon. Gentleman implied that if something is not broken, we should not fix it, but I think that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor is right to be worried and to be considering other ways of achieving the step change needed.

I shall finish, if I may, on a personal point, which picks up on the second part of the well made speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie. Since my election to this House in 2001, I have deliberately steered clear of all issues relating to the Church. That is for personal reasons, relating to my previous career as a priest. I spend much time turning down offers of television interviews inviting me to give forth on issues varying from who should be the new Archbishop of Canterbury to war and peace matters. However, this issue is too important to allow such niceties to stand in the way. I yield to no one in my admiration for the work that the Catholic Church does throughout the world. Men and women from comfortable western families have given up a life of luxury to go to the most inhospitable, unfriendly, barren environments on the planet. They have given their lives and put themselves on the line to do work on which we stand here, in our comfortable Westminster surroundings, and opine. Their work in orphanages, schools, education and running programmes is magnificent. I know many such people personally and I make no criticism whatever of their commitment or that of the Church to helping the needy, the impoverished and those ravished by sickness and disease.

But—here is the "but" and my hon. Friend was absolutely right about it—it is incontrovertible that the use of condoms slows the spread of this killer disease. The whole argument about contraception has been

[David Cairns]

swept aside by the need to prevent a further genocide—genocide caused by an illness. We know how we can stop that and we have to stop it. The Catholic Church, quite simply, must change its view on the use of condoms. It must change its view on the explicit nature of sex education. Sex education such as that I had at school, which involved looking at sea urchins, is simply not fit for the purpose in the 21st century. The Catholic Church must have a complete, Copernican revolution in its attitude to sex education and its attitude towards gay men, in particular. This issue is too important. Lives are at risk. People are dying. The Church is a church of compassion. It must show that compassion and change its course.

10.29 am

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): I congratulate the hon. Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz) on introducing the debate. I do not think that we can debate this topic often enough. If ever there were a weapon of mass destruction, AIDS is it. It may well kill far more people over the next 20 years than the bubonic plague ever did. People all over the world face an absolutely horrific scenario. Perhaps that is not so much the case in the west—yet—but if we become too complacent, it may affect us just as badly. Mother nature has provided her own weapon of mass destruction.

We have had some excellent speeches. We have been told about figures: the number of victims and the billions of pounds that are being spent on the issue—it is figures, figures, figures all the time. The hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) talked about the USA's efforts to combat the disease, the hon. Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith talked of the problems of financing the global fund and the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Hywel Williams) stressed the importance of the figures.

I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (David Cairns). I assume that he is a Catholic and was a Catholic priest. I admire him for the way in which he spoke. We need more people to say what he said.

As always, the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Tony Worthington) gave a powerful speech. I spent 25 years in reproductive and sexual health in my professional life before I became a Member of Parliament, and I would have been proud to deliver that speech. I agreed with every word, dot and comma. I commend the speech to the House; it should be printed and put up on the wall of every hon. Member's office. I will not go on, because I do not want to embarrass the hon. Gentleman, but it was a seriously good speech.

Several points have not been emphasised quite enough. To start with, there is the availability of drugs. Developing countries need anti-retroviral drugs—particularly, to prevent mother to child transmission—but the problem is not an easy matter of simply providing drugs, however cheap they are. That will not conquer the epidemic or do the trick. The drugs are far too complicated to take and need to be backed by things that are simple for us in the west, such as good nutrition, if they are to work. How many people in developing countries can we honestly say are fed properly nowadays? I am sad that the global fund and the American contribution, about which the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie talked, are concentrated primarily on drugs.

I am sad that not enough emphasis is being placed on health systems. Some countries have not got the necessary roads and, even if there were a clinic, people would not be able to get to it. We have to deliver clinics and nurses. We do not need doctors, but we do need health workers who are educated in the delivery of AIDS drugs if those drugs are to be any good at all. If we do not have such workers, the drugs will be taken improperly, resistance to the disease will develop and we will have to start all over again. I feel passionately about that, and I am sick of hearing people castigate the drug companies when we are not placing enough emphasis on health systems.

Some recently published research is quite damaging in that it gives the wrong message. It is claimed that people in the third world use dirty needles and that health systems are inadequate and dirty and do not follow good practices. Those factors will certainly contribute a small amount to the spread of AIDS, but no one should make the mistake of thinking that they are the reason for its spread. It is not so, even if those things may be a small contributing factor.

We have not heard much about vaccines—although something was said by the hon. Member for Banbury. Vaccines are the ultimate weapon against any infectious disease, and the global fund, the Americans, the Gates Foundation, which has contributed a lot, and the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative have done sterling work. Trials of AIDS vaccines are going on all over the world, but there are not enough of them. We must ensure that funds enrich research into AIDS vaccines because that will lead to the end of the epidemic, as it did for smallpox and as it soon will do for polio.

The other thing that has not been mentioned is the effect of debt on developing countries. In passing, we should remember that African countries spend $14 billion a year on servicing their debt. The global fund has estimated that those countries need about $10 billion to do something that will have an impact on the AIDS epidemic. AIDS destroys economically active people in the population and will destroy the ability of any country to service its debt because fewer people will be working. As I mentioned during an intervention on the opening speech, AIDS orphans are becoming a huge problem, and developing countries will have to spend a lot of money on those children who have never known a family or a mother and a father. They live rough on the streets, not receiving an education and at risk from all sorts of factors. We expect countries in Africa to service their debt to the tune of $14 billion a year when less than that amount would greatly help the fight against AIDS. That is crazy. Giving with one hand and taking away with another is nonsense.

Finally, I shall compare the amounts of money that the world likes to spend on various things. I said that the AIDS virus is the most powerful weapon of mass destruction in the world. We have already heard from the hon. Member for Caernarfon that the USA is thinking of spending about $200 billion on war with Iraq, against which its contribution to the fight against AIDS pales into insignificance. Far less than 1 per cent.

of that amount goes into expenditure to tackle AIDS, and that includes the ear-marked $15 billion that the Americans are spending independently on the AIDS crisis. It is a disgrace that that is going on in our world.

I am pleased that a Foreign Office Minister is here to answer today's debate. If we truly have a wonderful special relationship with the United States, and if our Prime Minister is prepared to follow blindly whatever the President of the USA says, what return are we getting? Let us see some action on the other fronts that the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie mentioned, and let us see action on all those international treaties from which the USA is pulling out.

We learned from the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie that the USA's expenditure on AIDS is entirely cynical. It is making jolly sure that reproductive health and abortion services are not being funded. As a professional in that area, let me say that there is no way that an AIDS epidemic can be prevented unless reproductive health and abortion are also tackled. All those subjects are as one. Another reason why the USA is behaving in that way—this also explains its actions in the World Trade Organisation—is that it is funding the drugs industry.

I am getting black looks from Mr. Deputy Speaker so I shall finish by mentioning just one more thing. We were told that the distribution of condoms from the USA amounts in Botswana to one condom per annum per man. Who in the Chamber could cope with that?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I call the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key).

Dr. Tonge: The hon. Member for Salisbury?

10.39 am

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): I could cope quite simply; I had a vasectomy years ago.

Of all the debates that you and I have sat through over many years, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this must have been one of the most interesting. It will present the Minister with a challenge when he makes his wind-up speech.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz) for giving us another opportunity to debate this important issue, which has been debated with great success over many years. I was elected back in 1983—the dark ages of AIDS. The foundation of the all-party group on AIDS was a milestone at a time when ignorance was rife in a era of Government health programmes involving tombstones on television to impress on the public the consequences of an AIDS epidemic.

One of the first things that we had to learn was that it is no good being judgmental about AIDS and adopting a high moral tone. It is no good blaming everything on lifestyle choices, as some hon. Members did in the 1980s. One hon. Member said to me: "A plague on them; they made a choice; let them die." That was in line with wide public perceptions at the time, and it is fortunate that things have moved on.

It remains a mistake in 2003 to be judgmental about AIDS, particularly in developing countries. Being judgmental when considering such an important matter is a temptation that we should resist. We simply cannot apply European and American cultural stereotypes to entirely different social and cultural situations elsewhere in our world. I would like to sit some of President Bush's advisers under a mango tree in Gambia on a Saturday morning—I have done that—to talk to the village imam and elders about AIDS, contraception, family planning and so on. That usually results in uncontrollable mirth on the part of listeners and, I regret, very little comprehension.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith was right to discuss the consequences of the situation for the entire world, and Colin Powell was right when he said that it is as serious a threat as international terrorism. The Bush Administration's record on frustrating the work of the United Nations Population Fund is not good. I want to say to the President, as one Christian to another, that there is no evidence that the fund promoted coercive abortion in China or anywhere else. Does the President understand the consequences of his policy? The UN has estimated that cutting the USA's $34 million contribution to the fund will lead to 800,000 more unsafe abortions and the death of 4,700 mothers and 77,000 children under the age of 5. That is not a happy outcome from a change in presidential policy.

Another unfortunate consequence, particularly in countries in Africa, is that orphans are created, and there is terrible suffering and enormous medical need. Yet what do we do? We recruit their nurses for the national health service of the United Kingdom. Last year, 2,114 nurses were recruited from South Africa, 473 from Zimbabwe, 432 from Nigeria, 183 from Zambia, 195 from the Gambia, 155 from Kenya, 100 from Botswana and 75 from Malawi, in addition to the 994 recruited from India. That is not a good idea. It may be to the advantage of the nurses, and we cannot blame them for wanting to enhance their careers, but should that be the public policy of the United Kingdom Government?

My hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) referred to the UK's commitment after 2015. I wholly endorse what he said about giving the global health fund the support that it needs to persuade the European Union to match US funds. There is an EU problem in that there is increasing evidence that the American Administration seeks to influence European parliamentarians to oppose development work and, therefore, development money for southern Africa if it involves reproductive health care issues. We must take that on board very seriously.

My hon. Friend also mentioned vaccines, which are hugely important. I hope that Government agencies, such as the Centre for Applied Microbiology and Research, will encourage work on vaccines in partnership with our universities and their pharmaceutical partners.

The hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Tony Worthington) discussed the importance of Cairo and gave the Mozambiquan bishop's magnificent quote, which I shall use often. However, as a Christian who has a huge respect for the Roman Catholic Church, I would go further and say that the best thing that could happen to it would be that it accepted married priests and women bishops very soon. They might inject a little of the sense that the hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (David Cairns) introduced into our debate. The hon. Member for Caernarfon (Hywel Williams)

[Mr. Robert Key]

discussed the huge impact on children as something that particularly affected him, and I salute him for making his comments.

The hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde is a Member for whom we changed the law of this land. I spoke passionately in the debate on that occasion. It was a very good debate, which I suspect the hon. Gentleman read. If he did not, he can always check my website and find it there, because I am proud of what I said and proud that I voted to change the law so that he could come along this morning to tell us how the Catholic Church should be reformed and, furthermore, to do so while wearing a purple shirt. I congratulate him on that particular flourish.

The Minister must answer some serious questions. If he cannot do so now, he will in due course find someone who can. What total amount of money has our country given to the global fund? I am keen to know what our Government are doing to encourage other international donors to give more money, and our influence should be used to that effect. From where does the money for the global fund come? Is it from additional funds—perhaps from an unusually generous Chancellor of the Exchequer—or is it from the budget of the Department for International Development?

The Vice-President of Malawi, Justin Malewezi, who runs that country's campaign against AIDS, has raised a problem. He said that there is an upper ceiling for proposals and that any proposals

"over $300 million would be thrown in the bin".

Can the Minister confirm whether that is the case? Is there an upper limit on proposals for expenditure from the fund?

The commission on intellectual property rights, which is funded by DFID, is an initiative of the United Kingdom Government that I warmly welcome. Will the Minister confirm whether its report reflects official Government policy? It is important to know that, because it makes some very significant suggestions. I would be grateful if the Minister would address that issue.

In conclusion, we must not forget that we, too, are a part of the debate about the international impact of the crisis. I wish to draw the attention of the House to early-day motion 691, which is entitled "Contraceptive awareness week 2003". It points out that there is still great cause for concern in our country, in which 41,200 people are living with HIV, 31 per cent. of whom are undiagnosed. The number of people living with diagnosed HIV is rising each year. We should be careful before throwing stones in our own glass house.

10.48 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Bill Rammell): I should genuinely like to thank my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz) for securing this important debate. It is a long time since I have heard such well argued and passionate comments from so many Members. They demonstrated genuine understanding. It is also a first for me to hear in a debate about the personal contraceptive practices of Front-Bench Members, although I am sure that that practice will continue.

This is an important debate. Tragically, the scourge of AIDS is reversing the development gains of the past few decades, at a time when 46 per cent. of Africans live in extreme poverty. The Government are therefore committed to encouraging the entire international community to play a full part in tackling the HIV/AIDS epidemic, which is having a huge impact in many poor countries on health, social development, education, food security and, as my hon. Friend argued, economic growth. The epidemic hits agricultural activity extremely hard and contributes to the tragic famine that is unfolding in sub-Saharan Africa.

In the brief time available, I want to focus on the Government's important work on tackling the epidemic in developing countries. The Government's response to the epidemic covers many vital issues. It includes supporting state-of-the-art interventions in prevention, care, impact mitigation, access to treatment, which is crucial, research and—many hon. Members have referred to this—mobilising the additional finance required to tackle HIV/AIDS.

Last year, the Department for International Development invested more than £200 million in HIV/AIDS-related bilateral work, which is an increase from £40 million in 1997. In anybody's book, the increase is both substantial and welcome. That money is being used to fund several specific tasks. First, it will support national plans to reduce the epidemic's impact. Secondly, it will ensure that national responses are multisectoral and are sustainably embedded in national budgets. Thirdly, it will enable countries to build capacity to deliver high-quality preventive treatment and care for people living with HIV/AIDS and for orphans. Fourthly, it will address underlying causes of vulnerability, particularly human rights, stigma, discrimination and gender inequalities.

To support that programme, the value of DFID's overall programme in Africa is set to increase from £640 million to £1 billion by 2006, which is a genuine indication of the Government's commitment. We want a major element of that money to be used for preventive purposes. For example, we are supporting innovative multi-media work in South Africa, where the HIV message is relayed through television soap operas and on the radio, which is often the most effective way to get the message across.

In Russia and China, we are working to reduce the incidence of HIV infection in injecting drug users. In Mozambique, we are trying to improve users' lives through life skills programmes aimed at HIV prevention. In Kenya, we are working with community-based organisations to care for AIDS orphans. As well as that important bilateral support, we are providing important contributions to support HIV/AIDS programmes run by multilateral agencies, which include the United Nations. Our work on prevention is extremely important.

Although we face a huge task, we should be optimistic: there is initial evidence, particularly from Africa and Asia, that HIV can be beaten. Examples include Cambodia, Uganda and Thailand, where condom use has significantly increased, and Senegal, which has been a model of good practice in HIV/AIDS prevention for some time. Progress can be made, but there is an urgent need for other countries, in which political leadership is essential, to learn from those successful countries. This week, Nelson Mandela said that one of his regrets from his time as President of South Africa is that he did not give sufficient priority to the issue. Everybody needs to respond to that message from someone who is enormously respected, particularly throughout the developing world.

Many hon. Members have called on the Government to do more. We are not complacent, and we are making a significant contribution, particularly through our actions through the global fund to fight AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria. We have pledged $200 million over five years, and $80 million of that has already been disbursed.

I pay tribute to the work undertaken by the Chancellor in conjunction with the Department for International Development, especially in creating the new international finance facility. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith, that the comments made by the hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) were somewhat disparaging, and unjustified if one considers the case being advanced. We are not resiling from our commitment to increase our aid financing effectively and eventually to move towards contributing 0.7 per cent. of gross national product. However, that does not contradict the focus of the programme in trying to establish a partnership with businesses and civil society to increase those funds significantly, and that should be welcomed.

I agree with the comments made by the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge), who spoke for the Liberal Democrats, that we should not neglect or decry the work being done to find a vaccine for AIDS. In the longer run, that is the most effective contribution that we can make. Although the first candidate AIDS vaccine in widespread trials was unsuccessful, HIV is a complex virus; many other candidate vaccines are in the pipeline, and we must support them. DFID has already committed £14 million to international AIDS vaccine initiatives and £16 million to the Medical Research Council's initiative.

In the short time remaining, I shall respond to points made by hon. Members. First, on the status of the UK's contribution to the global fund raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith, we support the call for increased funding from the rest of Europe. We will take up the case and argue it strongly; the UK is one of the largest Government donors to that fund, and we want it to continue.

My hon. Friend also raised the World Health Organisation and UNAIDS' target of 3 million people in developing countries on anti-retroviral therapy by 2005, asking whether the UK was part of that partnership. We are not partners, but we support the goals of the international HIV treatment coalition in respect of increasing access to treatment of HIV/AIDS. We are funding work in support of the goals and will continue to look at the strengthening of health care systems within developing countries.

My hon. Friend asked about monitoring mechanisms to ensure that DFID money goes to support health systems. There are annual reviews in countries to assess the programmes and to ensure that they meet those goals. We are working closely with UNAIDS and other international agencies to monitor the efficacy of the countries' responses, and we will continue to do so.

My hon. Friend raised the issue of the contribution and role of civil society, with particular reference to implementation and monitoring. The full and genuine participation of civil society at country level in the preparation, implementation and monitoring of proposals is vital to the fund's success.

I wholeheartedly agree with many of the points made in the excellent contribution from my hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Tony Worthington). The financial initiative recently announced by President Bush should be welcomed, as it is a substantial financial contribution. However, there are some legitimate concerns that that money will be diverted from family planning services. We must look carefully at that and raise it with our American partners.

It is worth my underscoring the fact that the initiative is at a very early stage of development and has not yet been approved by Congress. There is a long way to go, and many of the points made today need to be considered in that context.

Finally, the hon. Member for Richmond Park professed passionate opposition to disarming Iraq. There will be no hope of tackling the AIDS crisis if we do not tackle proliferation and if weapons of mass destruction are used, the institutional order of our world will be in ruins. That should concern us all.

Coroners Courts

11 am

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): Again, it is a delight to serve under your chairmanship, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Over the past couple of days, several hon. Members have asked me why I called for a debate on such a recondite and obscure subject as the coroners' courts. I explained that there are many and good and strong reasons why we should have a full debate about the role of coroners in society, and how they operate, and I am delighted to see a former deputy coroner in the Chamber.

I wanted to raise the issue partly because of my experience as a curate in the Church of England. My first visit, which the vicar had asked me to make, was to an old lady who had been bedridden for several years. She died two minutes after I arrived. That regularly happened to me when I was a curate; people often died the moment that I visited them.

During the five years that I worked in the church, I saw how much extra and unnecessary grief the whole process of certification and dealing with inquests and post mortems can cause bereaved families. In cases of suicide, especially, when the family are already particularly distressed, a post mortem can cause even more grief when it is clear that the person has taken their own life and the family already face such complicated issues as how to explain it all to the children.

In the 20 months since I have been a Member of Parliament there have been 28 drugs-related deaths in my constituency alone. That is a very large number, by anyone's reckoning, but an accurate recording of the number of drugs-related deaths in the Rhondda. Each death was a tragedy for the person, their family and their community. In a valleys community in south Wales, unlike in a major city or conurbation, everyone in the street knows about the death of an individual, and a drugs-related death affects the whole community.

Under the current system, there is no room for the investigation of a series of deaths because there is no higher court, and the coroner stands alone and relatively unaccountable. An individual coroner might do a perfectly good job, but it is difficult to determine trends throughout the United Kingdom because there are no standard guidelines or rules on how a drugs-related death should be recorded.

In 2001, there were 532,500 deaths in England and Wales, 322,200 of which were certified by doctors without reference to the coroner, and 202,350 of which were reported to coroners. Of the cases reported to coroners, 121,100 led to post mortems but only 25,800 to inquests. In other words, 121,100 families went through the additional process of a post mortem. Almost one in four deaths in England and Wales led to a port mortem in 2001, which is a very high number in comparison with figures for other European countries. In Northern Ireland, where the coroner is allowed greater discretion as to whether to hold a post mortem, fewer than one in 10 deaths—9 per cent.—led to a post mortem.

I do not think that that is because there are more suspicious deaths in England and Wales or more deaths due to industrial disease that need greater investigation. I do not think that it is because people see their doctor less frequently or further from the moment of death. It is simply because the system in England and Wales has long been due for review. After all, most of the way in which coroners in England and Wales operate goes back to the Coroners Act 1887. The 138 coroners plus their deputies—roughly 375 individuals—operate in a miasma of fragmented legislation, which genuinely makes it difficult for people to have confidence in the system.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on raising this very important subject. He is right to say that far too many post mortems are ordered for no apparent reason. They should be confined to deaths in suspicious circumstances and genuinely sudden deaths for which there does not appear to be a medical cause.

On the hon. Gentleman's point about the need to bring the coroners' system up to speed, part of the reason for that, in my experience as an ex-deputy coroner, used to be that many coroners were part-time. However, that is not the case now. The situation has changed considerably, and now may be the time is right for better instruction from Government—for example, as to when post mortems should be ordered.

Mr. Bryant: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments. He is right about when post mortems should be held, and I shall come to that. However, a large number of coroners and deputy coroners are still part-time. I should like to see a far more professionalised service. Currently, a coroner has to have either legal or medical training. We should be able to guarantee both medical and legal training throughout the coroners' service. That is one of the issues that we need to consider.

I called for the debate because no society can truly value life unless it honours death properly. The traditional obsequies in different communities are important, and they vary enormously. Much of the 1887 law was written at a time when cremation was coming into use, but was still used by only a small minority of people in England and Wales. Now, however, 70 per cent. of funerals involve cremation. I shall deal with the three-tier certification process for cremation in a moment. In the multi-ethnic society in which we now live, and with the changing perceptions of death and how it should be honoured, it is important to review and renew the coroners' service.

Why on earth do we need a coroners' service in the first place? Obviously, we need it to detect and prevent foul play. I think that part of the reason why the Government initiated the review of the coroners' service that is being conducted at the moment—it should report finally at the end of the month—was the Harold Shipman case. It was clear that the certification process did not make it possible for us to detect and prevent further foul play in that case.

It is also important to determine trends in pathology and disease. One problem with a fragmented service is that it is difficult to provide the Office for National Statistics with clear and unambiguous reporting that is consistent throughout the United Kingdom.

An increasingly important aspect of the coroners' service is adjudication on cases of industrial disease. As a Member of Parliament for a former mining constituency, I know that for many widows what is on the death certificate is vital. A death certificate that refers to emphysema and chronic bronchitis results in a very different response from IRISC with regard to the miners' compensation process than does another certification, so it is vital that people have confidence in the process.

It is also important to adjudicate on whether a suicide has taken place, which may have significant legal and financial implications for the family concerned on mortgages, life insurance and so forth. Many implications stem from the determination that a suicide has taken place.

Finally, one important aspect of the coroner process and certification of death that is seldom mentioned is that it provides reassurance and support to families and next of kin. Knowing how and why someone died—especially after protracted illness in hospital when it has been disputed whether the treatment was right and proper, or in cases of mental illness—can be crucial for the family and the coroners' service carries out no more important role than providing secure and understandable reasons for cause of death.

At the moment the system is failing, partly because of fragmentation. To the vast majority of people, the system is incomprehensible. Until the moment when people have to go through the process of certification, they do not understand how the coroner relates to the registrar and the pathologist, or why a post mortem is carried out at some times, but not at others. Often there is no requirement to tell families that a post mortem is going to take place; sometimes they are not told about it.

Remarkably few rules and guidelines are in place to ensure consistency across the United Kingdom. One part of the country might have a meticulous and diligent coroner, but a coroner in another part of the country might work to a different set of assumptions and standards, and that must be wrong. Although a court of appeal exists in theory, in practice, few people have been able to go through the higher courts because the coroner service has no structure for appeal.

As I said earlier, too many post-mortems are carried out in England and Wales. The system is still under investigation, but the certification process seems to lead to many errors in adjudicating the cause of death. Some estimates suggest that more than 30 per cent. of deaths are incorrectly certified. The process for the certification of cremations was devised in 1887 and amended in the 1920s; it is open to abuse, not least because the second doctor is often nominated by the first doctor or by the funeral director, so is clearly not genuinely independent. Furthermore, the medical referee at the crematorium often receives the papers so late that he is deprived of the opportunity to say no and insist on reference to the coroner.

Most importantly, the current system has little sensitivity to the needs of the bereaved. A mechanistic approach is customarily adopted—a point reinforced yesterday when an hon. Member told me that families should get used to the fact of post mortems because they are important to society. However, for many people, the thought of their relatives and loved ones being dissected unnecessarily—particularly a double dissection of the bodily cavity and the skull—is profoundly upsetting. The system should be able to honour grief that naturally arises.

What would I like to see happen? Above all, I would like a single national coroner service for England and Wales, responsible to the Home Office rather than to the Lord Chancellor. Superior courts should be used for contentious cases or for the review of multiple cases—for example, a raft of drug-related deaths in a particular locality. I should also like clearer rules on how coroners operate—not just the legal procedures used for an inquest or in a coroners court, but a clear set of rules governing every aspect of when there should and should not be a post mortem. Of course, there should be a presumption that there will always be a full public inquest into deaths in custody or in prison and also perhaps in psychiatric hospitals or under psychiatric care. However, there should not be a presumption that there should be a full post mortem with double dissection in as many cases as there are now.

Thirdly, there should be clear national guidelines on the recording of deaths as drug related and in particular on when to require a toxicology report. Toxicology reporting across the UK is very patchy. I pay tribute to my own local coroner who does a good job in that respect, but it is uncertain whether that is equally true around the whole country. We should have an end to the three-tier certification process for cremation, which many doctors refer to as the ash-cash system. Instead we should have a robust system to support and monitor the certification of death to ensure that we have fewer errors in the attribution of the cause of death and clearer prevention of any foul play.

The coroners' review has already suggested that there might be a medical auditor. The Government should look at that. Undoubtedly we need to move towards roughly the same processes for burial as for cremation. We also need clarification of responsibility for the disposal of human tissue. It is not just the Alder Hey case that has provoked a great deal of concern in the UK about that. There is great uncertainty about whether it is the responsibility of the NHS trust, the pathologist or the coroner. That needs clarifying. We also need the active involvement of the family in the process of post mortem and inquest. As I said earlier, sometimes families do not even know that a post mortem is taking place.

Yesterday in the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport we were told the tale of a couple whose son had died in a contentious case that was widely and incorrectly publicised in the media. They were required to pay £300 for a copy of the transcript of their son's post mortem. That is wholly unnecessary. We should make the full coroner's report available to the families and the next of kin in such cases, and we should interpret the concept of families or next of kin in the broadest sense to mean not just married partners but unmarried partners.

Finally, I believe that there should be training for all coroners and all their officers. Dealing with bereaved families is complex and sometimes doctors or lawyers—with all respect to the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd)—have not had training that is necessarily relevant to that process. Many coroners also need training in dealing with the media. Often in contentious cases families will be gobbled up by the media and spat out at the other end. With just a simple element of sensitivity to the issues around the media and how to respond to them, coroners could make lives much easier for the bereaved.

11.18 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Hilary Benn): I congratulate my hon. Friend on having secured this debate and more importantly on his speech. It set out in an exemplary fashion the range of issues that society needs to address in relation to the coroners' service. It has made my job of responding that much easier. I also acknowledge the expertise of the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd), of which I was unaware until this morning. I do not know of any other hon. Members with that knowledge, and it is good that he has joined us for the debate.

First, I should like to address the question that my hon. Friend touched upon, which is the purpose of the coroners' service. It is an ancient office that has existed since the middle ages and which, particularly since the early 19th century, has evolved into the current mechanism for trying to ensure that violent and unnatural deaths are properly investigated on behalf of society.

Coroners' inquests serve four main purposes. First, as my hon. Friend said, they reassure the public that any untoward or uncertain death will be investigated impartially by an independent judicial officer, and secondly, they enable any rumour or suspicion surrounding that death to be dispelled. Thirdly—I shall return to the point—they assist in maintaining the integrity of data on causes of death in the interests of public knowledge and public health. Fourthly, they underpin arrangements for detecting and deterring crime.

The coroners' service also has to answer, and rightly so, the natural questions asked by society and relatives when someone dies about what happened and why. However, in recent years, the coroners' service has also been subjected to the pressure of determining how coroners courts fit in with the other mechanisms being developed to try to answer the questions of why, how, and whether someone was to blame for what happened. That is important with respect to the review that is being undertaken. Coroners courts are only part of that overall process. However, some of the pressures on them have been due to the fact that people have sought, when they have lost a loved one, to use the coroners' service to answer some of those broader questions. We should recognise that other mechanisms, such as public inquiries, have been developed to try to deal with those broader issues, particularly when a large number of deaths have occurred.

The second issue, which my hon. Friend touched on from his experience in his former profession, is society's approach and attitude towards death. In the 19th century there was a formal system, structure and rituals for dealing with death. In the 19th century, people were much more familiar with death—one only has to walk into any graveyard and look at the ages of those who died at the time to see that that was the case. The real truth—and I speak from personal experience—is that although we now seem to be able to talk openly about a wide range of things to do with people's personal lives, society still has some difficulty in grappling with death, although it is the most natural of occurrences. Some of the issues that I will discuss later arise from that attitude.

I feel strongly that we should be open about death and what it involves. For example, we need to provide open information for people on the arguments for carrying out post mortems, both in respect of the coroners' service and advances in medical knowledge. For the best of motives, people in the medical profession used to talk about taking tissue samples, but we have learned from a range of experiences since then, and that approach will not work in the modern age. People are entitled to receive information and to hear the arguments, so that they can then take decisions.

Coroners have always been local to the communities that they serve. They are still appointed and supported by their shire county councils, unitary authorities, or consortiums of metropolitan districts or London boroughs. The coroner's jurisdiction is quite different from that of the criminal or civil courts. The justice that they dispense is not one of arbitration between different parties. It is an investigation of those deaths which society rightly considers should be the subject of a judicial inquiry held in public.

Coroners are independent of the Government and are answerable in their judicial decisions only to the courts. That is an important feature of the system if they are to investigate deaths fully. Nevertheless, as a public service, coroners have to operate with many Departments and agencies that have an interest in their work, and the Home Office provides general support and direction, working closely with the Coroners' Society of England and Wales.

As my hon. Friend said, about 12 per cent. of deaths reported to coroners result in inquests. Although the inquests will report all the relevant details of how the deceased came by his or her death, much attention is of course focused on the verdict. Coroners and their juries are not restricted in the verdicts they may bring in, but for the sake of statistical consistency—a point to which my hon. Friend referred—a number of formulae have been recommended to coroners, including accident, unlawful killing, and suicide.

My hon. Friend raised the issue of drug-related deaths, in which I know he takes great interest. In 1984 new verdicts were suggested to coroners in respect of such deaths: death from dependence on drugs or non-dependent abuse of drugs. The truth is that these drug-related verdicts are not entirely satisfactory. Coroners believe that accident or other verdicts may more closely reflect the circumstances of the death. It is not always easy to separate the different contributory factors in trying to reach a verdict.

In view of the need to improve our information about the number of deaths due to drugs, work has been proceeding on finding the best way to use the information from coroners' inquests in conjunction with the Department of Health and the Coroners' Society of England and Wales. I pay tribute to their contribution to this work. We aim to issue guidance to coroners in the next couple of months, although it is in part linked to the coroners review. The suggested definition will be:

> "deaths where the underlying cause is poisoning, drug abuse or drug dependence and where any of the substances listed under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, as amended, were involved".

As an illustration I shall give statistics published on the total number of drug-related deaths in England and Wales. In 2000 it was 2,968. Within that total only 622 were recorded by coroners' verdicts as coming within the two 1984 definitions, of which 309 resulted from a dependence and 313 from non-dependent use. Yet the Office for National Statistics information on the total number of drug-related deaths draws heavily on the further information that coroners provide. Most coroners provide it in a form that the ONS has requested, but not all, which raises questions about the data's consistency to which my hon. Friend referred. This is part of the Government's national programme on substance abuse-related deaths.

My hon. Friend made the case for change in the coroner system with great skill. It has evolved over 800 years but the need for fundamental change has been highlighted by a number of recent events, of which the Shipman case is of course one. A separate inquiry into that is being led by Dame Janet Smith. One issue for the House after the inquiry will be balancing the arising recommendations, which will be important, with a recognition of the extraordinary nature of those crimes.

The Marchioness disaster highlighted the treatment of the bereaved. As Lord Justice Clarke's inquiry showed, it was easy for professionals who in good faith considered their practice as acceptable to fail to realise that it was not acceptable, particularly when it came to the concerns of the bereaved and the need to deal sensitively with families. I am particularly concerned, and I know my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is passionate about it, to ensure consistency of care and compassion across the board in the coroners' service. I have seen with my own eyes such care and compassion being exercised in the coroners court. I have also, as a Minister, received correspondence from families who felt that the opposite was the case. We must also take account of the issues arising from the Alder Hey affair.

The review of coroner services has been established to look at these issues. The Government are clear that we need to reform the system. In its consultation document, the inquiry said:

> "The prevailing impression we have is of people managing to give committed, professional, and compassionate service through obsolete and neglected structures".

That sums it up. We have committed and professional people but a structure that does not necessarily work. That is why the Government established the review, and we look forward greatly to its results, which are expected shortly, so that we can put the coroners' service on a new footing for the new century and meet the objectives that my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda so ably set out.

11.30 am

Sitting suspended until Two o'clock.

Rwanda and the Great Lakes

2 pm

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk): I am very pleased to have this opportunity to highlight what is happening in one part of the Great Lakes region, the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I want to focus on the report by the UN panel of experts on the illegal exploitation of natural resources and other forms of wealth in that country. However, I am pleased that the debate also gives an opportunity for others, with a much longer track record than mine, to raise important issues relating to the region. I know that other hon. Members applied for an Adjournment debate on the same subject.

The all-party group on the Great Lakes region and genocide prevention produced its own report on the exploitation of mineral resources in the DRC. I pay tribute in particular to the work of the hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Ms King), who chairs the group, in pointing out the challenges that the region presents for the international community.

The DRC has been ravaged by conflict since 1998. It is pretty clear that the cause of the continuing conflict has in large part been the desire of countries or groups to get their hands on the country's rich natural resources—gold, diamonds and other rare metals such as coltan, in particular, which is used in mobile phones and is probably present in this Chamber. Six foreign armies have been involved in this war-ravaged country: Uganda, Rwanda, Angola, Zimbabwe, Namibia and Burundi.

Back at the start of the events in question, in 1998, there were already 50,000 troops from various countries engaged in the conflict. Child soldiers have been used on all sides. In February a BBC news report suggested that the DRC was "awash" with child soldiers. A report on the north-eastern Ituri region cited aid workers as saying that children formed the bulk of the troops in some armed groups.

The conflict has left between 2 million and 3.5 million people dead—that is the scale of the disaster that has afflicted the country. Disease and abuse are widespread. There have been recent reports of cannibalism practised by the Movement for the Liberation of Congo. A report in January suggested that there was a UN investigation into claims that rebel groups send pygmies out on hunting expeditions and, if they come back with nothing, kill them and feed on their sexual organs. There are also reports that pygmies are forced to eat the remains of their colleagues who have been killed.

A peace process was begun in 1999 and stepped up in 2002. I do not underestimate the progress that has been made in bringing peace to the country, but it is a long way from completion, with trouble continuing throughout the DRC. In 2002 peace accords were signed in Pretoria by the DRC and the Governments of Rwanda and Uganda. However, atrocities have continued. In the past few days there have been reports of a massacre near the Ugandan border, committed by pro-Government forces, including members of the Ugandan army. Estimates of civilian deaths in that massacre range from 250 to 467. Some 150,000 people have been displaced by the latest violence.

[Norman Lamb]

The Guardian has reported that both Rwanda and Uganda have denied breaking the peace accords. However, many believe that both countries are still intent on exploiting diamonds, gold and other minerals in the DRC. *Africa Confidential*, a London-based newsletter, has accused them both of delivering fresh arms to proxy militias, in defiance of the South Africa-brokered peace accords of last year.

The UN panel of experts was first established in June 2000 to consider the illegal exploitation of natural resources, and to consider in particular the link between that exploitation and the continuation of the conflict. Foreign armies were using the conflict as an excuse to continue exploiting resources. The first report was issued in April 2001 and concluded that illegal exploitation of mineral and forest resources was taking place "at an alarming rate." It considered two forms of exploitation: looting on a mass scale, and systematic, systemic exploitation of those resources. It identified key individual actors,

> "including army commanders and businessmen and government structures",

as

> "the engine of this exploitation."

The report also referred to the enrichment of top Ugandan military commanders and civilians—remember that we give millions of pounds in aid to Uganda. It noted the emergence of illegal networks headed by top military officers and business men, and recognised the

> "opportunistic behaviour of some private companies and influential individuals."

Its recommendations included sanctions against both countries and individuals.

On 19 December 2001, the UN Security Council requested a renewal of the expert panel's mandate for a further six months. The panel was asked to provide an update on the situation and to make further recommendations. Its final report came out in October last year. Its conclusion was that there had been a

> "multi-billion dollar corporate theft of the country's mineral assets".

The panel looked at politically and economically powerful groups involved in exploitation activities which had become "highly criminalised". It looked further at the concept of an elite network of senior military people, business men and government officials in the various foreign Governments and in the DRC Government, all acting together to continue that exploitation.

It is important to state that various parties who are named and shamed in the final report heavily dispute aspects of it. I should be interested to hear the Minister's comments on the process, because the panel's remit came to an end when it published the report. When the Governments concerned sought further evidence to support the allegations in the report, they were told that the panel's remit had come to an end and that it was unable to respond. Thankfully, the panel's remit has been re-established through another UN resolution, but we are still waiting for further supporting evidence. That is wholly unsatisfactory, especially for people who have been wrongly named in the report, quite apart from the need to bring the illegal activity to an end.

The latest report describes the operation of criminal groups linked to the armies of the countries to which I have referred. It describes how the groups do not disband as the armies withdraw, which is why this important issue continues to be unresolved. The report describes how such groups

> "have built up a self-financing war economy centred on mineral exploitation."

As the armies withdraw,

> "the Governments of Rwanda and Zimbabwe, as well as powerful individuals in Uganda, have adopted other strategies for maintaining the mechanisms for revenue generation, many of which involve criminal activities."

The Ugandan defence forces have been training local militias to take over where they leave off, and Rwanda has engaged in similar tactics.

Senior Zimbabwean officers have enriched themselves by exploiting the DRC's mineral assets under the cover of arrangements to repay Zimbabwe for military services provided to the DRC Government. The Zimbabwe defence force has set up new companies and contractual arrangements to defend its economic interests. The report refers to the criminal activities that have been indulged in, which include theft, the embezzlement of public funds, the under-valuation of goods, smuggling, false invoicing, the non-payment of taxes, kickbacks and bribery—it is a pretty wide range.

In the Government-controlled area, the elite network that the report describes is made up specifically of Zimbabwean politicians and members of the military. The report says that the

> "key strategist for the Zimbabwean branch of the elite network"

is the Speaker of the Zimbabwean Parliament, Emmerson Mnangagwa. It also refers to Air Marshal Perence Shiri, who is a long-time ally of Mugabe and who helped to turn Harare into a significant centre for the illicit diamond trade. The report names several other Zimbabwean politicians and military people.

I want to deal now with an individual who has a base in this country and who, according to the report, has been very active in this disaster. John Bredenkamp must be a serious concern for the British Government. He denies the allegations against him, but serious questions have been asked, and it is important that progress is made with the investigation. His British business is based in Sunningdale, and he has extensive interests in the UK. His estimated personal wealth is $500 million. The report says that he

> "is experienced in setting up clandestine companies and sanctions-busting operations"

and

> "has a history of clandestine military procurement".

It is alleged that he was involved in sanctions busting for Ian Smith before the end of white rule in Rhodesia and, of course, before he transferred his allegiance to the Mugabe regime. It is alleged also that he supplied arms to both sides in the Iran-Iraq war.

In March 2001, *The Observer* reported close links between John Bredenkamp and the Mugabe regime, and critics claimed that he was making significant sums as a supporter of that corrupt regime. There were also reports that his companies were major suppliers of arms in the DRC war and that he had taken over the management of Zimbabwe's mining concessions in the DRC to make money from the exploitation of the resources to which I referred.

It is said that Bredenkamp favours one Emmerson Mnangagwa—the Speaker of the Parliament—as a successor to Mugabe. As I have already described, Mnangagwa cropped up as a key strategist in the Zimbabwean operation in the DRC. Bredenkamp operates through various companies, including Aviation Consultancy Services. ACS represents BAE Systems and has supplied Zimbabwe's air force with BAE Systems parts. Bredenkamp claims that that stopped when sanctions were imposed on the country, but the report refers to his discussions with senior officials and says that he

> "offered to mediate sales of British Aerospace military equipment to the Democratic Republic of the Congo."

It also claims that BAE Systems spare parts for the Hawk 60 aircraft were supplied to the Zimbabwe air force early in 2002, in clear breach of the sanctions. I have tabled numerous questions about that, and we still have not got to the bottom of exactly how those parts arrived in Zimbabwe. It is reported that the Zimbabwe air force has used Hawks for attack operations in the DRC.

I want to refer now to British business man Andrew Smith, who is a former Royal Engineers captain. He manages Avient Air, which supplied six attack helicopters to the Kinshasa Government and contracted to perform bombing raids over the eastern DRC between 1999 and 2000. The report also highlights transactions between Avient Air and the accused arms trafficker, Leonid Minim, an unsavoury character by all accounts.

What concerns me are the responses that I have received to my questions to Ministers about contact between Bredenkamp and Andrew Smith and UK Government officials. Given the alleged involvement of both men in profiting from the conflict in DRC, there is, understandably, serious concern about the extent of that contact. A parliamentary answer of November last year confirmed that, in the previous 12 months, two meetings and two telephone calls had taken place between John Bredenkamp and British high commission officials in Zimbabwe, but when I subsequently asked what was discussed at those meetings and who was present, I was told that the Government were not prepared to answer my questions. Why not? These seem to be perfectly legitimate points.

Concerns about the activities of the high commission in Harare were underlined by a report in the Zimbabwean *Financial Gazette* in March 2000, which stated that the then British high commissioner in Harare, Peter Longworth, had dispatched a confidential memo to the Foreign Office arguing for the lifting of an embargo on arms exports to Zimbabwe. As recently as 2000, the Ministry of Defence appears to have supported arms exports to Zimbabwe, and it is alleged that another batch of spare parts for the BAE Hawk was supplied via Kenya in 2000. Was that done with the knowledge of the MOD and BAE Systems? No one knows.

I was also told in parliamentary answers that Andrew Smith has had several meetings with British diplomats in Harare during the past two years. In October 2001, he met the defence attaché. Why? What was that meeting about? The Government are not prepared to say. The previous political councillor at the British high commission in Harare apparently met Smith on several occasions. Officials met Smith at several social events in 2001 and had several telephone conversations with him during the same year. As with Bredenkamp, the Government refuse to provide information about who was present at meetings and what was discussed.

I understand that the Minister is, in a sense, a stand-in today, so if he is unable to answer my questions, I would very much appreciate it if he would undertake to ensure that they are answered by whoever is responsible for the matter at the Department for International Development. First, have the Government specifically investigated how those BAE Hawk spare parts got to the Zimbabwe defence force last year? In a written answer of November 2002, I was told that the Government were urgently seeking details from the UN and would have to investigate. What is the result? In letters to me, the chairman of BAE Systems, Sir Richard Evans, claimed that the company did not know where the spare parts came from. What is the truth of the matter? Do the Government accept that assertion?

Secondly, on the contact between UK officials and Andrew Smith, what has been revealed by the further investigations that were promised in a parliamentary answer on 5 December? Further investigations about John Bredenkamp were promised in another parliamentary answer. What have they revealed? Furthermore, given the fact that Bredenkamp has a business base in this country and Andrew Smith is a British citizen, what is the Government's assessment of their role and that of their respective companies in the massacre in the Congo?

When I asked who was present at those meetings, I was refused an answer. Can that be justified? Surely we should know who was present and what was discussed with those characters, given the allegations against them in the report. Will the Minister confirm what investigations are under way into the allegations in the report, in particular those about companies and individuals based in this country and named in the report?

Has there been a further request to the panel of experts for evidence since the new resolution was passed in January? What has happened since then? It is important that progress is made on the matter but from my perspective, there seems to be an absence of it. That may be the UN's fault; it may be the UK Government's fault, but we need to know what logjam is preventing anyone getting to the bottom of the scandal.

In a written answer dated 11 December 2002, Clare Short specifically said—

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): The Secretary of State.

Norman Lamb: I apologise. The Secretary of State said that the report contained "notable and deeply regrettable" inaccuracies. That may well be the case, as I said earlier, but what are those inaccuracies? What are the UK Government's concerns about the report? A written answer dated 4 November 2002 stated that the Government were considering a substantive response to the report's findings. When will that response be given? Will it be in the form of a statement to the House of Commons? What progress is being made?

[Norman Lamb]

For future action, the UN report recommends, among other things, travel bans on individuals identified in the report. It also recommends freezing their assets and imposing banking restrictions. Given the extensive business connections with this country, that is an important question, and the Government must deal with it. What action are the Government taking to follow those recommendations about individuals closely connected to the UK, and what is the time scale for that action?

How do the Government respond overall to the report's recommendations, specifically in considering how the actions of the countries involved in the conflict in the Congo will affect future grants of development assistance? Will those grants be conditional upon proper conduct regarding the DRC? On 13 November 2002, the chairman of the panel of experts, Ambassador Kassem, recommended a five to six-month grace period to allow individuals and companies to change their working practices. What is the Government's assessment of the position three or four months on from that recommendation?

Again in a parliamentary answer, we were told that the behaviour in Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda would be factored into future assessments for development assistance for those countries. What does that mean? How will compliance with the recommendations be measured? Is it already taking place? Will the Government agree to the all-party parliamentary group's proposal for a regional strategy paper on the Great Lakes region and for a regional conference?

The whole matter has been an absolute scandal. When 1 million people or more are massacred in one country in four years, it is important for the international community to treat the report's recommendations with the utmost seriousness and to ensure that action is taken. We recently heard about the loss of 1 million lives in Iraq; we are talking about the loss of far more lives in Africa. There is a tendency for us in the west to put to one side the loss of life in Africa, but that is not acceptable. It must be taken extremely seriously, and I look forward to hearing the Minister's response.

2.23 pm

Mr. Tom Clarke (Coatbridge and Chryston): I congratulate the hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) on securing the debate and on his very illuminating introductory speech. As one who had the privilege of leading the interparliamentary group to Rwanda about five months ago, I came to the debate for an update on the situation. He has helped us by referring to that very important report, which was published since the IPG's visit, and with the questions that he asked.

I am delighted that the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) and the hon. Member for Tewkesbury (Mr. Robertson), who were members of the delegation, are present. During the delegation's time in Rwanda, as during a debate in this Chamber initiated by my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Ann McKechin) on 18 December 2002, we inevitably focused on the terrible issue of genocide, which was, in many ways, the reason for our visit. We saw the appalling evidence of what had taken place in 1994 and we were keen to see how the process of reconciliation was progressing and to ensure, in so far as we could influence matters, that never again would anything like that take place in Rwanda or anywhere else in the Great Lakes region. We were concerned then, as we are today, about the evidence of activity in the DRC. When we met President Kagame, he was not able to reassure us—he said that he had pulled out his troops but that if there were any suggestion of a threat to his borders, they would return.

We have no more reason for optimism today than we had then, particularly if, as the hon. Member for North Norfolk said, we consider the problems in Burundi as well. Three million people have perished in the DRC since 1998 and, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development reminded us in the debate on 18 December, there are still people in gacaca courts who want genocide to continue in the region. We still have great worries.

It is right, given the focus on international events, and the possibility of conflict elsewhere, that these terrible issues in Africa should not disappear from our thoughts. That is one of the reasons why I am delighted that the debate is taking place today. I welcome the Minister for Europe and look forward to hearing his views. When members of our delegation met President Kagame, we discussed with him three important issues, based on the memorandum of understanding between the United Kingdom and Uganda: respect for human rights, media independence and transparency. Those three issues remain at the heart of everything that we are trying to achieve in Rwanda and in the wider region.

It is right that we should put on record our questions and our concern about the achievements of the international criminal tribunal for Rwanda. A lot of funding and resources have been made available, there is a great deal of good will, and the nations of the European Union have given their support to its activities, but there is not as much action or as much evidence that long-standing problems are being dealt with as many of us might wish. Many people who should have been brought to justice have not been. That cannot be acceptable, given the knowledge that we have.

We discussed with the President and others the role of the European Union. I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development has a great interest in that, as well as in our own contribution towards conflict solution in the region. We were told, not least by the president, that in 1994, the international community stood by, aware that genocide was taking place, and did not respond in the way that that dreadful situation invited. My hon. Friends in the delegation, as recently as five months ago, saw some of the evidence. We visited the church where 5,000 people from both tribes had perished: men, women and children—babies as well. We visited Giterama prison, which holds 7,000 or 8,000 people. That visit reinforced our belief that reconciliation, welcome though it is, requires the speeding up of the legal process. People have waited far too long to see justice done.

When my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Maryhill spoke here in December she reminded those of us who were on the delegation of a very poignant visit to one of the gacaca courts. When eventually one of the prisoners was called forward, the proceedings were conducted in a very humane way, despite the dreadful backdrop. A woman walked out of the crowd, comporting herself with great dignity. She asked the prisoner a few questions. He responded by admitting to killing 13 people, including three of her children. None of us, shocked as we were, wanted to rush to judgment. When we saw that woman's dignity, we wanted to be sure that such things could never happen again. We supported the endeavours of the people of Rwanda to co-operate with such hearings.

We came away disturbed, but not without hope. Despite Rwanda's dreadful past, its lack of opportunities, its poor prospects for prosperity in tourism and agriculture—the hon. Member for North-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Moss) was firm on that point—the country does have opportunities. Commodity prices are falling, and we saw the problems that the country has in exporting coffee and cocoa, and market conditions in the EU are not helpful.

We had then, and still have, great hopes for the development of pluralism in Rwanda. We look forward to the elections that have been promised for July this year. If they do take place—and I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister will bring us up to date on them—I hope that all the political parties will have access to the voters; that the process will be seen as free and fair; and that when the results are declared we will see a society that is moving further towards genuine democracy. It will be able to inspire not just its own people but neighbouring countries in that vital region. It will offer them hope—

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): The right hon. Gentleman has very noble aspirations for Rwanda and the Great Lakes region, which we all share. Would he not agree with my hon. Friend the Member for North Norfolk and me that unless we do something about the legal and illegal—especially the illegal—exporting of arms to those countries we shall make little progress?

Mr. Clarke: The hon. Lady is right. I know that she worked tremendously hard during the delegation's visit. She raises a fundamental point. We cannot speak about the dreadful things that are happening while we continue to export arms to Indonesia, East Timor and African countries. We must ask why we are doing that. Her point is a profound one, and I am happy to end on it, because it raises a number of ongoing questions. I am delighted to have had the opportunity to contribute to the debate initiated by the hon. Member for North Norfolk.

2.34 pm

Mr. Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke). He ably led the parliamentary delegation to Rwanda in October, a group that I was privileged to join, as was the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge), whose skills extended to treating me when I became rather ill there. Thanks to her help, however, I did not miss much of our visit.

I congratulate the hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) on initiating the debate and speaking so knowledgeably on the subject of Rwanda and the Great Lakes. I shall confine my remarks to my experience of Rwanda. The right hon. Member for Coatbridge and Chryston covered much of what I wanted to say, and I shall not repeat it. However, he was right to say that although we were aware of what was going on in Rwanda, the world stood by and watched.

I understand people believing that politics is a hypocritical business. At the moment, we are rightly concentrating on what is happening in Iraq. After that, perhaps, we shall consider what is happening in North Korea, Pakistan and Iran; but we stood by and watched while 850,000 people in Rwanda were being massacred in the most horrific way.

We visited a church in Rwanda where people had taken refuge, and had literally to walk through piles of skulls and human bones. We laid flowers on massive collections of human remains, which brought home the horror of the genocide that had taken place only a few years before. Unlike a previous parliamentary delegation, we did not find out more about how those people—men, women and children—had been killed. However, it was the most horrific thing that I have ever seen, and I am sure that I shall never experience anything like it again.

It got worse, however. As the right hon. Gentleman said, we visited the court and saw what was described as justice on the grass. I happened to meet a woman who had lost her father, her husband, her sister and three children in the massacre. Her dignity was incredible. She told me that she did not want retribution. She did not want to see the young man who had just confessed to the crimes being put to death, because that would have added to the carnage. She wanted justice, but also the reconciliation to which people in Rwanda now seem committed.

The right hon. Gentleman was right to say that that reconciliation needs the help of the international community. Although people there are determined on reconciliation because of the horrors that they have experienced, the situation in Rwanda is fragile. Indeed, as the hon. Member for North Norfolk said, that fragility extends to the countries that surround Rwanda: when we arrived, we found that conflict had broken out on Rwanda's borders, albeit briefly, which was a reminder of how fragile the situation is.

The right hon. Gentleman graphically analysed what we found in Rwanda. I shall not repeat what he said, but shall finish by saying that although we concentrated on the carnage and the desperate genocide that took place there, it is too easy to forget that the country is poor and diseased, that it has no infrastructure and that it suffers under European Union trade rules. We need to address all those issues: we should not forget that side of Rwanda.

A short while ago, I had the privilege of leading a delegation to Ethiopia, which is facing drought and the possibility of starvation. However, people there can survive—they probably will—with the help of the international community. In Rwanda such help is necessary. I support the Prime Minister's stance against certain countries, but I ask the Minister to remind him that, in addition to the threat from Iraq—we must never take our eye off that ball—murders on the most massive scale have been committed elsewhere, right under our noses, in what is supposed to be a civilised age.

2.40 pm

Ms Julia Drown (South Swindon): I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) on securing the debate. I also congratulate the Government on their engagement with and support for the region. I have attended meetings with Ministers and officials, and I have seen a shift in policy. There is now a determination not to run away from the region's problems, but to remain engaged and to help to solve the problems that still have a devastating effect on millions of lives.

There are strong relationships between the countries of the Great Lakes region. For many years the all-party group has acknowledged a major issue: the need for a regional policy that recognises those inter-relationships. Although the UK Government initially did not seem to be persuaded of the need for such a policy, I understand that they have since recognised it and that there is now a regional policy paper. However, that paper is not a public document. There is much instability in the region, and there will be uncertainty about the impact of donor countries—supporter countries—such as the UK.

Sometimes it is in the interests of one of the Great Lakes countries to claim that the UK is biased in its support for another in the region. That does not help to produce a peaceful solution to problems. A public document—a published regional strategy—could show that the UK policy is focused not only on Rwanda and Uganda, but on peace, stability and fairness throughout the region.

The hon. Member for North Norfolk concentrated on the Democratic Republic of the Congo; he spoke on the involvement of the arms trade in that country and the illegal export of natural resources. I share his concerns about those issues. On the arms trade, it is right that we should consider the big issue of weapons of mass destruction, but we must also consider the minor weapons and the huge damage that they can cause. The UK is a large producer and exporter of arms and unless we make serious attempts at defence diversification, which we could do, there will always be concern because we fuel employment in this country by our continual sale and export of arms. We have many talented people working in the arms trade in this country, and they could be using their skills in other ways. It would be a better use of taxpayers' money if the subsidies that go into arms exports and other endeavours were used to diversify.

On illegal exploitation, I would urge the Government to respond publicly to the findings of the UN panel of experts. Is British and European bilateral aid likely to be linked to the cessation of the illegal exploitation of natural resources and to the implementation of the Lusaka accords? The all-party group welcomes the UN initiative to introduce certification schemes that detail the country of origin for diamonds; it also recommends that there be similar certification schemes, if that is possible and appropriate, to address the exploitation of other precious resources in the region. I also urge the Government to do all they can to ensure that an even-handed approach is adopted towards all the parties involved in the illegal exploitation of resources. Appropriate pressure must be brought to bear to end the suffering that has escalated, especially around the mineral-rich areas.

I hope that the Government will recognise that a sustainable peace in the DRC will not be possible without a solution to the crisis in Ituri and the Kivus. We must maintain the pressure on the Governments of the DRC, Rwanda and Uganda fully to implement the Pretoria and Lusaka accords. Primarily, those Governments must withdraw all foreign forces from DRC territory. We could guarantee the future territorial integrity of, and cease supplying the armed groups in, Ituri and the Kivus. I hope that the Government will do what they can to press all the parties that agreed to the political settlement on 17 September last year. The settlement has not yet been fully ratified to create and implement a full transitional Government in Kinshasa, which is needed as soon as possible.

The involvement of the MONUC forces is incredibly important. We must work with the United Nations to ensure that there are sufficient resources so that the forces can have a stronger mandate and an enhanced peacekeeping role. There must be protection of civilians because there is still a huge amount of rape and sexual violence in the region. I hope that the Government will make the strongest possible representations to the Governments of the DRC and Uganda to ensure swift effectiveness of the Ituri pacification commission.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke) rightly pointed out the real issues in Rwanda. I ask the Government to take more action on specific issues. The Rwanda-UK memorandum of understanding needs to be redrafted to strengthen the language on human rights and conflict prevention and resolution, especially in relation to the DRC. Concerns have been raised that Rwanda is getting away with human rights abuses and conflict in the DRC, although I understand that the UK Government have not seen evidence of that. However, if it is occurring, neither the UK Government nor the Rwandan Government should have any worry about strengthening the memorandum of understanding—indeed, they should welcome it.

Clearly, if the Rwandan Government are to withdraw troops fully and permanently from the DRC and ensure that there is no supply to the rebel groups involved in the unrest in the Kivu and Ituri region, we must play our part by showing the importance of that. Things could start to move forward if Rwanda were at least pressed to answer the allegations of serious human rights abuses that have been made, such as allegations in the report by the United Nations panel of experts.

Burundi has not been mentioned much today although it is an equally important part of the great lakes region. A ceasefire was agreed in December 2002 between the Government of Burundi and CNDD-FDD, but that has not come into force. Both sides have repeatedly violated the ceasefire, although of course each side blames the other for the aggression. I hope that the Government will continue to negotiate with that country. We need to press all parties in the conflict to respect international humanitarian law and to bring those guilty of human rights abuses to justice.

Mr. Andrew Love (Edmonton): Rumours are circulating that the Burundians are considering giving an amnesty to the leader of the FNL—which is responsible for several atrocities in the region, including the murder of one of my constituents—in the hope that that would shore up the peace process. Will my hon. Friend join me in condemning any such pact?

Ms Drown: Yes. There is a serious argument for bringing those people to justice. The issue must be considered from the point of view of both sides of the dispute and there is a call for people to be brought to justice.

There is a need to reintegrate the rebel and Government forces in order to give them another route in life. The British Government have had success doing that in other countries and we could use skills and talents that we have developed, although financial and political back-up will be required. The whole security sector in Burundi needs to be restructured, demobilised and reintegrated into civil society. Political and financial support is important in order to achieve the swift deployment of observers and peacekeeping troops that the UN Security Council requested in January.

The Minister knows that I have been interested in the issue of debt for many years. I am currently chair of the all-party group on highly indebted poor countries. I would be grateful for an update on the debt situation of the countries in the Great Lakes region. All of them are hoping to move to a post-conflict position, which means that they can be helped by the HIPC initiative. If we are going to assist such countries to reconstruct, and to make them economically and militarily stable, they will have to be enabled to build up their infrastructure and public services to show their populations that peace is worth working for. All of that must start before we begin to talk about millennium development goals for those countries. We should be achieving those goals in every country throughout Africa and beyond. If they are going to achieve them we need to ensure that their bilateral and multilateral debts are written off.

The region has many intractable problems, but I encourage the Government to stay engaged and to find solutions, and I am confident that they will do so. That is what the ordinary people of those countries want. The prize of peace and stability in the region is worth working for, and I am pleased to be able to play my part in pushing the Government to do their bit to help to achieve that.

2.51 pm

John Barrett (Edinburgh, West): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) on securing the debate. I have worked closely with him in the past, and I know that he takes a strong interest in these matters. I wish to draw particular attention to the work that he has done in relation to countries in the Great Lakes region.

I also congratulate the hon. Member for South Swindon (Ms Drown) on making an interesting contribution, and the hon. Member for Tewkesbury (Mr. Robertson) and the right hon. Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke), who led the delegation to Rwanda late last year. I heard both of them speak in the debate on the genocide in Rwanda, and I was greatly moved. Although I was not a member of that delegation I feel that I was because of their moving contributions both today and in the past.

Although the eyes of the world are currently focused on events in the middle east, it is equally important to remember the problems of the rest of the world. They may not involve weapons of mass destruction or threats to international security, but the Government and all of us would do well to confront these issues, and debates such as this help very much in achieving that purpose.

As several hon. Members commented, we thoroughly debated Rwanda in December. Particular attention was paid in that debate to the aftermath of the genocide, and Rwanda's problems were fully aired, but the debate also served as an opportunity to highlight some of the progress that has been made in that country. Today, we heard about the report by the UN panel of experts on the exploitation of natural resources and the way in which, under cover of conflict, looting has taken place in which the army and the Government have been involved.

I do not wish to repeat the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for North Norfolk, but he raised several questions that the Minister must answer. Not all the answers will necessarily be at his fingertips today, but they must be forthcoming. The behaviour of private individuals and companies leaves a lot to be desired, and we hope to hear more about that in the near future.

As I mentioned in the previous debate, Rwanda's commitment to development and the relief of poverty among its people must be accompanied by a commitment to peace with its neighbours. The agreement signed by Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo was crucial in laying the foundation for peace, but it was only ever going to work if all sides acted in accordance with the spirit of the agreement and if all aspects of it were implemented. Months later, despite good words, widespread evidence remains that that has yet to happen.

The October 2002 report of the UN panel of experts, which was mentioned by my hon. Friend, listed a series of recommendations on which I hope the Minister will comment. I was interested to read that the very first recommendation highlighted the importance of development aid for the region and stated that such assistance should be made a priority. It said:

> "the first set of initiatives could be for quick disbursing aid for the Democratic Republic of Congo and the other great lakes countries involved in the conflict, for reconstruction and rehabilitation programmes, aimed at creating jobs, rebuilding infrastructure, and improving conditions for local populations, notably in the areas of education, health and sanitation."

As in many other parts of the world, aid is the key to alleviating the poverty that often leads to hostility and warring between nations. If we can relieve that suffering, we will have come a long way in tackling conflicts such as those that have plagued east-central Africa in the past.

Although we Liberal Democrats welcome the investment that the Government have made in countries such as Rwanda and the increased spending that has occurred, I make no apology for returning to that old chestnut, 0.7 per cent. of GNP, which is so often highlighted inside and outside Parliament. We have consistently argued that the Government should set a clear timetable for raising UK contributions to 0.7 per cent. of GNP, but time and again they have failed to produce a satisfactory answer. To say, as they have said to me in parliamentary answers, that Department for

[John Barrett]

International Development contributions beyond 2005-06 are matters for future Parliaments is unacceptable. The Department of Transport can plan a budget 10 years ahead, so I cannot understand why DFID cannot do likewise.

Last week Paul Kagame, the President of Rwanda, issued a further appeal for international support, especially because the country is approaching the end of a transition period ahead of the presidential and parliamentary elections. As the Minister knows, a new constitution is soon to be produced that will provide the basis for the political situation that will develop after the transition period. I am keen to hear details of the support that the Government intend to provide.

My hon. Friend the Member for North Norfolk rightly placed great emphasis on problems in the DRC and the institution building that will have to take place if long-term peace and security are to become reality. What is needed is not only building in bricks and mortar, but building trust between countries and rebuilding people's lives. If the trust that has so often been lacking in the region is ever to be created, there must be transparency at all points in the process. The commission of enquiry that was set up to investigate allegations against Ugandan companies and individuals highlighted in the UN report has helped a great deal in that respect. The Government of Rwanda would do well to follow suit, and, in view of the arguments advanced by my hon. Friend, there may well be a case for similar action by the UK Government.

The United Nations mission has been widely credited with doing sterling work in the region, but it is clearly hampered by a lack of resources. Many of us have argued for an increased role for peacekeeping and protection of civilians, but good will must be backed up with hard cash if it is to be made into a reality.

The ongoing occupation of eastern Congo by Rwandan soldiers cannot be tolerated. I recall a story I read some time ago in *The Observer*, which accused many Rwandan soldiers of working in conjunction with Hutu militiamen to stay within the DRC and exploit the resources of the country. One American diplomat stated:

> "The Interahamwe is now a very convenient excuse for Rwanda to loot Congo. Maybe it is 20 per cent threat and 80 per cent for show."

Another UN officer said that security concerns of Rwanda had become "a joke".

I conclude by reiterating the needs of the countries around the Great Lakes and stressing why at this time of international crisis we must endeavour not to take our attention away from countries in real need. Figures that I have received from the World Bank and the Minister's Department show that about 70 per cent. of the households in Rwanda are below the poverty line. Life-expectancy in Burundi is little more than 40 years, and in Uganda almost two in every 10 children die before the age of five. Those countries, along with many others in Africa, are living in the stranglehold of HIV/AIDS, which was discussed at length in this morning's debate on the international AIDS crisis. Rwanda is now among the 10 most heavily affected African countries, with an estimated 13 per cent of its population now infected.

It is surely those statistics that prompted the Prime Minister at the Labour party conference to describe Africa as

> "a scar on the conscience of the world".

I look forward to hearing the Minister say what steps the Government are taking to help these African countries, at a time when our focus is elsewhere.

3 pm

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): I start by congratulating the hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) on securing the debate. It has provided an important opportunity to hear the thoughts of hon. Members, many of whom speak with deep knowledge and have long experience of the part of Africa under discussion.

I look forward to hearing the Minister's response to the hon. Gentleman's important and detailed allegations. It is a pleasure to see the Minister for Europe. I accept that he will not be able to answer all our questions. The Under-Secretary of State for International Development is on important business in Cambodia, and we wish her well, as that, too, is a part of the world that we should not forget. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will be so kind as to respond to some of the points that I shall be raising, as I am sure he will to those made by other hon. Members.

I have heard many people say how well the right hon. Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke) led the important Inter-Parliamentary Union delegation. I was pleased to hear him say that, in spite of everything, he had a message of hope for that part of Africa. My hon. Friend the Member for Tewkesbury (Mr. Robertson) described graphically the personal horrors that he had witnessed, and he reminded us that the situation remains very fragile in Rwanda, a poor country that continues to suffer.

The hon. Member for South Swindon (Ms Drown) asked whether UK policy was biased. I shall return to that important point, but I share her commitment to ensuring that the Government remain engaged in the part of the world under discussion. The hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (John Barrett) also made many important points.

Will the Minister respond to some intriguing questions that were answered in the other place yesterday? Several hon. Members have referred to the UN panel of experts on the DRC. Yesterday, Baroness Amos referred to Security Council resolution 1457, which extended the mandate of the UN expert panel for a further six months. She said:

> "In the light of the panel's findings, Her Majesty's Government will consider taking appropriate action where there is clear evidence of wrongdoing."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 4 March 2003; Vol. 645, c. *WA95*.]

Will the Minister explain what the appropriate action will be? The hon. Member for North Norfolk gave a well-rehearsed and detailed account, but not much action has followed. What is appropriate? What is action? In an important answer given in the other place yesterday, Lord Bach referred to reservists being called up

> "to support operations in Sierra Leone and the Democratic Republic of the Congo."

He said:

> "A new call-out order has been made under Section 56 of the Reserve Forces Act 1996 so that reservists may continue to be called out to support operations".—[*Official Report*, 4 March 2003; Vol. 645, c. *WA101*.]

What are the operations in the DRC? What is continuing to take place there with the assistance of the British military? I am delighted that the reservists are engaged there and I am sure that they are a great force for good, but I should be grateful to be updated and told exactly what British forces are doing in that part of the world.

An important aspect of illegal exploitation of natural resources is corporate social responsibility in the area. I start with allegations against British companies and nationals. As long ago as last November, according to the excellent briefing of the United Nations Association (UK), a long list of British companies were involved, but not a lot seems to have happened. It is a long time since last November and I hope that the Government will soon decide what action to take. Has DFID requested the available evidence from the UN panel of experts' report? A copy of the evidence could be placed in the Library in both Houses. What is the response to the report? Will DFID make a statement of its intentions in the light of access to the evidence?

The Government should also press Rwanda to publish a serious and comprehensive reaction to the allegations contained in the UN panel of experts' report. I hope that the Government of Rwanda will establish a commission of inquiry to investigate those allegations, similar to the successful commission established by Uganda. Have the British companies named responded and, if they have, has DFID seen copies of those responses? Again, those copies could be placed in the Library so that we can all know what is going on.

On the need for aid in Burundi, at the first donor conference in December 2000, President Mandela said:

> "it must be possible for the people of Burundi to materially distinguish between the destructiveness of conflict and the benefits of peace."

Jacob Zuma, the facilitator of the new ceasefire said:

> "regional efforts have achieved much progress in Burundi, but a complete peace could not be achieved without the full support of the international community."

The International Crisis Group said that donors should act now and release the promised dividends before faith is lost in the peace process and the situation deteriorates further.

There is a paradox in Burundi: peace will not be possible without international financial support, yet that support will not be forthcoming before peace is achieved. Will the Government release the funds pledged to Burundi? How will DFID deal with the paradox? What assessment has been made of the forthcoming change of leadership in the transitional Government in May? Many people wish to know what level of financial and political support will be provided to enable the swift deployment of observers and peacekeeping troops requested by the UN Security Council on 13 January. Will the Government put pressure on all parties to the conflict to respect international humanitarian law and to bring to justice those guilty of human rights abuses?

The hon. Member for South Swindon is wholly correct about the need for an integrated regional policy. UK involvement in the region has not been equally balanced. Total UK bilateral aid to Burundi in 2001–02 was £604,000, compared with £10,262,000 to the Democratic Republic of the Congo and £27,189,000 to Rwanda. Of the £604,000 for Burundi, £515,000 was humanitarian assistance. DFID recently appointed a permanent member of staff in Burundi—a positive sign that we welcome—and the Department has also contributed £1 million to the World Bank multilateral debt trust fund. DFID is apparently planning to expand its programme in the Democratic Republic of the Congo after the establishment of a transitional Government.

I am concerned by the Secretary of State's statement that Rwanda's security depends on regional security. The International Crisis Group report said that donor intervention now could be helpful to achieving peace. Even if the balance of aid is not biased, there is a perception of bias that could cause great tensions state to state and donor to state. Several British non-governmental organisations have said that there is a distinct anti-UK feeling in the DRC because it is perceived—rightly or wrongly—that the UK is bankrolling a country that occupied a third of its territory. There are still allegations of Rwandan involvement. What are the Government doing to deal with the problems surrounding the balance of aid in the region?

It is appropriate that we consider one other issue that has caused suspicion. The Secretary of State for International Development has developed a very good relationship with the President of Rwanda, whom she called, "Such a sweetie." In her genuinely charming way, she will not hear a bad word said against him, which is typical of the right hon. Lady. However, that sometimes gives the impression that there is a special relationship, and I wonder if something should be done to put that right.

Mr. Clarke: I must admit that other special relationships give me greater cause for concern that the one between my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development and the President of Rwanda. I suggest that the hon. Gentleman reads the *Hansard* account of the debate in the Chamber of 18 December last year, if he has not yet had the opportunity to do so. If he does so, he will acknowledge that what my right hon. Friend has achieved because of that relationship has been truly outstanding. I doubt whether anyone in our delegation disagreed with the views that have been conveyed to us confirming that.

Mr. Key: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for making that point. It is well worth reading that debate.

Dr. Tonge: The hon. Gentleman is very generous. I want to add that I would not describe the President of Rwanda as a sweetie, but many of us who know what he has done, what he went through and what he achieved to liberate his country believe that, on the whole, he is pretty good news.

Mr. Key: I am sure that he is, but it would be wrong of me not to reflect the concerns that some NGOs have put to me. That is all I want to say on the subject; I certainly do not want to build it up into some great tabloid experience.

Reference was made to MONUC and its work to maintain liaison between the parties and carry out various tasks. It was set up on 30 November 1999 and is

[Mr. Key]

hugely important. We must ensure that it has sufficient resources both to carry out its current work and to press for a stronger mandate and an enhanced role in peacekeeping and the protection of civilians. Furthermore, it should have unlimited access in its investigations into Governments' and other states' actions. I hope that the UK Government will fully support its work.

Regional peace is crucial. Several hon. Members referred to finding a solution to the crisis in Ituri and the Kivus. I hope that the Government will maintain pressure on the Governments concerned—those of the DRC and Uganda—to implement fully the Pretoria and Luanda accords, primarily to withdraw all foreign forces from DRC territory, to guarantee its future territorial integrity and to cease supplying armed groups in Ituri and the Kivus. I hope that the UK Government will make the strongest possible representations to the Governments of the DRC and Rwanda to ensure the swift effectiveness of the Ituri pacification commission. Reference was made to the memorandum of understanding between the Governments of Rwanda and the United Kingdom in the area of conflict resolution.

Before I conclude my remarks, I should briefly mention the problem of food and water faced by the Great Lakes region. Only 50 per cent. of people in rural areas have access to safe water, and almost 45 per cent. of the deaths of children under five relate to water. We would warmly welcome the Government applying pressure to deal with those problems.

We discussed HIV and AIDS at great length this morning, as the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West pointed out. Tearfund calls the problem of HIV/AIDS in the Great Lakes "the second genocide." A serious issue in the region, the problem is exacerbated by rape, poor infrastructure, and lack of education and access to medicines. The Government's programme on HIV/AIDS is crucial to the area.

Child soldiers are also of concern. They are still present in all the armed groups in the DRC—in some cases, they comprise as much as 35 per cent. of the troops—and they are being sent to the front lines. I hope that the Minister will reassure us that the Government are exerting pressure in that respect.

I end by repeating the message of hope for the region. We in this country are engaged and anxious for our Government to do more and to influence international organisations and the Governments of the countries involved. Above all, we send the people of that region the message that we are engaged. The Prime Minister has given a commitment and the rest of us in the House of Commons feel very strongly about the region. We will not forget its people, despite the other great issues of state that currently confront us.

3.15 pm

The Minister for Europe (Mr. Denis MacShane): I am aware that, in this interesting debate, I represent three Ministries. That shows the cross-cutting nature of our international engagement between the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Department for International Development and the Ministry of Defence. All three Ministries have been referred to, and it is important to understand the holistic nature of Britain's new international policy.

If we want to have a presence and be an effective power across the world, we must link our military abilities, development commitments and the diplomatic role of the Foreign Office. I am pleased that one of my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary's first duties on appointment was to go to the region with the then French Foreign Minister, Mr. Hubert Védrine. That shows the other side of joined-up foreign policy, which is that we cannot act alone.

Several hon. Members, notably my right hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke) and the hon. Members for Tewkesbury (Mr. Robertson) and for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge), referred to the delegation to the region of which they formed part. It is good that we as parliamentarians take an active and concerned interest, but other powers, in particular France, are involved, and it is vital that we co-operate as much as possible with our French partners.

If I may say so, it does not always help to indulge in some of the name calling that we have heard about some of our key European partners recently and in the past. If Europe is to have an effective policy and presence in the region, we must learn to work together, instead of reaching for the "book of scorn", to cite that excellent compendium by Matthew Parris, to make sour and unpleasant remarks. That is not the way forward.

I shall try to combine my overall remarks with answers to the specific problems raised. If there are issues that I cannot deal with, I will ask officials to write to hon. Members if they so desire. I also have to bear in mind the fact that serious and important allegations have been made, each of which will require investigation. There may be legal ramifications connected with that, so it would not be proper of me to prejudge the UN panel of experts, which, as hon. Members have noted, has been reactivated and is undertaking further inquiries. The Government will have to react to those in due course.

Dr. Tonge: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. MacShane: I would rather not, because the hon. Lady has made several interventions, and I should get on with replying to the points raised.

There has been significant progress on the peace process in the DRC over the past year, but that is not enough. The external participants in the war—Zimbabwe and Angola on the Kinshasa side and Rwanda and Uganda on the rebel side—have withdrawn from the DRC. That leaves the Ugandans in Ituri, to which my hon. Friend the Member for South Swindon (Ms Drown) referred. I shall return to that point shortly. Unfortunately, the Congolese parties have seemed unwilling or unable to take advantage of that advance to bring peace to their country. The inter-Congolese dialogue drags on even as we speak, and all hon. Members expressed disappointment about that. The British Government have taken a great interest in the peace process and continue to do so. As soon as the transitional Government are instated in Kinshasa, we will be keen to play our part in helping the Congolese rebuild and develop the DRC in the same way as we have helped the Tanzanians, Ugandans and Rwandans in their countries.

I want to touch on some of the external and internal dimensions of the peace process mentioned by hon. Members this afternoon. The Lusaka agreement in 1999 effectively brought to an end the fighting between the various Congolese armed groups and their foreign backers, but the foreign armies stayed in the DRC, so the end to fighting was an advance, but it lead to stalemate rather than peace. The subsequent Pretoria agreement between the DRC and Rwanda, which was brokered by the South Africans, was signed in July 2002 and was a major breakthrough. It offered the prospect of Rwanda withdrawing from the DRC—the withdrawal most strongly demanded by the Kinshasa Government. It also offered to address the fundamental issue at the centre of the war, which was the presence in the DRC of the Rwandan extremist groups that had perpetrated the genocide in Rwanda in 1994 and which were fighting from Congo to return to Rwanda to complete the job.

The Rwandans withdrew as promised but the Government in Kinshasa have not yet fulfilled their side of the bargain. They apprehended and handed over to the international tribunal one senior genocide suspect and, as requested, proscribed and expelled the FDLR, the political arm of the Rwandan Hutu extremists. They also pushed over to the east many of the Rwandan Hutu fighters who had been part of their army so that they were able to say the fighters were beyond their control. However, they continue to support and arm them in the east.

It is in the eastern DRC that we see the volatility and violence to which hon. Members referred. The vivid descriptions of my right hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge and Chryston and the hon. Member for Tewkesbury of the church that they visited will be on the minds of everyone who has listened to today's debate or will read it in *Hansard*. Such happenings are a source of deep concern and alarm. The abuse of human rights, whether it is brutal rape, the use of child soldiers or resource exploitation, is unacceptable, and we will continue to use our influence to demand improved respect for humanitarian rights by all parties. However, the real obstacle to progress is the failure of the Kinshasa Government to agree to the establishment of a transitional Government. That political decision must be faced. It would bring an end to most of the fighting and use of surrogates to create what is called in the jargon "facts on the ground".

The Ugandans must also now withdraw their forces fully from DRC. We should help them by pressing all parties involved in Ituri to stop fighting, and that is where our current diplomatic efforts are focused. The international community, including the United Kingdom, has been clear with all signatories to the Gbadolite agreement that the agreed terms of that and previous agreements must be respected. I call again on all Governments in the region, particularly the Kinshasa authorities, to do more to ensure the compliance of allied forces with the terms of those agreements. The UK has recently provided £1 million to the UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs to support efforts to co-ordinate humanitarian responses in the region, and we will continue to monitor the situation.

The fundamental goal is resolution of the conflict, which in turn will provide the necessary conditions to begin achieving the millennium development goals, such as halving poverty and boosting school enrolment for the Congolese population of some 50 million people. The key to any lasting political settlement will be to ensure achievement of power sharing within the transitional Government, followed by national elections.

Hon. Members referred to the issue of HIPC and the need to support debt relief in the region, and that remains a top priority of the Government. I am proud of the fact that we have doubled the amount of the people's money going on overseas aid, and I hope that the Liberal Democrats will stop their nonsense of endlessly demanding tax cuts. One cannot ask for massive cuts in taxation and then ask for massive increases in public expenditure.

We continue to provide substantial support to the UN operations in the Great Lakes region. We are also providing support—

Mr. Tom Clarke: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. MacShane: I would rather not, if my right hon. Friend will allow me to continue.

We are also providing support to civil society groups involved in grass-roots peace building and reconciliation. We have offered to play our part in enabling the establishment of a reformed national army drawing on the forces of the Kinshasa Government and the armed groups. We will also be helping in the enormous task of demobilising the tens of thousands of combatants who have taken up arms during the civil war. We have pledged £25 million over five years to the multi-donor regional demobilisation and reintegration programme in the Great Lakes.

The penalties of the region's severe instability fall most heavily on the civilian population, especially the most vulnerable. Civilians continue to die in large numbers, with mortality rates approaching five times the sub-Saharan norm in some front-line areas in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Only a small proportion of this "excess mortality"—I use the jargon term—is directly attributable to acts of violence. The main killers are not bullets and machetes, but diseases like malaria and malnutrition that have gained a hold and are spreading, as health services are disrupted and food production and distribution systems fail.

Access for humanitarian relief agencies is more complicated and challenging than ever, as the conflicts fragment. These can be very dangerous places to work. Relief agency staff, both expatriate and Congolese, have been attacked and killed by fighters who go unidentified and unpunished. It is estimated that only 20 per cent. of the population in Ituri in the Democratic Republic of Congo are accessible. The hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) gave us the most vivid and rather difficult-to-listen-to details of atrocities—one could almost use that word—that are taking place. Parts of Burundi are virtually inaccessible and yet access is vital in order properly to establish needs and to monitor assistance so as to ensure that the most needy are reached. Only a tiny proportion of the population in the area are fighters; the vast bulk are civilians caught up in a conflict not of their making, who need, value and deserve the help of the international relief agencies.

A major international relief operation is under way in the Great Lakes region to address these problems, and there are constant efforts at all levels, including at the

[Mr. MacShane]

UN Security Council, to improve humanitarian access. Significant resources have been allocated by the international community to meet humanitarian needs. In 2002, that amounted to some $270 million in humanitarian assistance from international and bilateral agencies, including DFID.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Swindon rightly asked about the need for a regional approach. The Government support the proposal for a regional conference to consolidate the peace and development process in the DRC once the transitional Government have been established. DFID is actively considering its future development strategy in the DRC following the establishment of the trans-national Government. Next Monday, DFID will host a round table to listen to the views of DRC experts in the UK and Europe. DFID notes carefully the view that one of the outputs of the process should be a regional strategy paper for the Great Lakes region. I hope that that goes some way to addressing the important matter placed before the Chancellor by my hon. Friend.

I am pleased to have this opportunity to explain the Government's position on the major challenges facing the Great Lakes region, and to explain what we are doing in terms of concrete assistance. It is of the utmost importance that the political groups in the region finally seize the chance for peace in the region. If they do so, I assure the House that we will play our full part in supporting its recovery. I am grateful to the hon. Member for North Norfolk and to other right hon. and hon. Members who have put on record the great concern of British parliamentarians for peace and reconciliation in the region.

Horse Racing

3.30 pm

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): I am delighted to introduce this short debate today on horse racing. I am not certain whether my horse racing column in *The Scotsman* on a Saturday qualifies as an interest to declare: if it does I willingly declare it. Some people reckon that it should be a matter of certification rather than declaration; nevertheless it is there on the record. The hon. Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale), who takes a keen interest in these matters, would have liked to be present but unfortunately he is elsewhere on parliamentary business. I know that he shares many of my concerns.

In general, the horse racing industry is in pretty robust shape, although there are a number of challenges and difficulties, some of which have been well publicised. Much of the underlying health and growth in the industry is due to the Government's wise decision in October 2001 to move to a gross profits tax on the industry. I particularly liked that decision. It was one of the few occasions when the Government took my advice on a matter: it was not just my advice as there was a widespread campaign. However, the occasions when I find myself in central agreement with the Government are few enough to make something of them. It was a wise decision.

That decision was based on the view that there was a win-win situation in horse racing. Horse racing depends for its funding on punters: the large numbers of people all over the country who want to back horses. That is where the real flow of income comes from in horse racing. The view was taken that we could have a large-turnover, low-margin, betting market that would be good for everyone. Potentially that is the present situation.

The issue that I want to focus on today could partly undermine that and spoil an otherwise rosy picture. I said that there were a number of issues in the industry. They have been well publicised in television programmes, such as "Kenyon Confronts" and "Panorama", which investigated scandals and difficulties in the racing industry. I do not underrate those. Unlike some, I consider investigation a perfectly legitimate journalistic activity. It is the job of journalists to draw attention to anything that goes wrong. Only then can they be put right. I am confident that over time the racing structures will adapt themselves to confront and to overcome those challenges.

I am delighted to welcome the Leader of the House of Commons, the right hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) to our debate—

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Richard Caborn): It must be serious.

Mr. Salmond: I am sure we are about to have a statement announcing an extension of time or a Government motion to extend time for the debate. I particularly welcome his presence here. I acknowledge his interest in the industry.

Many of these challenges will be overcome. It is an important part of the journalistic process that attention is drawn to them. There are other organic and regulatory issues in the industry. It has so many representative bodies that even people like myself, and perhaps the Leader of the House and others who are interested, find it hard to keep up with who represents whom and who regulates what. I suspect that the Minister shares my concern that we need a much more rational understanding of who are the gamekeepers, who is responsible for policing various aspects of racing and whose interests are being represented by whom.

I had an interesting meeting with Michael Singer of the Punters Protection Association yesterday. I was struck by just how frustrated Mr. Singer was. He has a long career of trying to represent punters' interests. Punter is not a derogatory term: it is fairly well celebrated in the racing industry. He asked the question: are punters not consumers? Where is the consumer interest being centrally represented in the various bodies of the racing industry? The Minister might like to touch on that. It seems a substantial question that should be answered.

From a Scottish perspective, all five Scottish racecourses are grouped together in an organisation called Scottish Racing. The Leader of the House may be an honorary president of that organisation. He certainly has some association with it. That is to his credit, because that grouping says a great deal about the potential of Scottish racing to grow, with more fixtures, trainers, jockeys, meetings and more employment, making a substantial contribution to the Scottish economy. People feel frustrated by the limited number of fixtures that they are allowed to have.

Several important issues surround the horse racing industry, and the central theme that touches them all is the question of who is responsible for regulating which parts of the industry, and which bodies are responsible for representing the consumers. The decision by the British Horseracing Board to impose a charge of 10 per cent. of gross profits on on-course bookmakers may have substantial and profound implications. How was that decision arrived at; can it be fair and just; and, above all, what are its implications for many people?

On-course bookies are part of the firmament of the racing industry. They are not all as rich as Barry Bismarck Dennis, but they are all characters, as he is, and form a crucial part of the racing experience. It would be regrettable if their ranks were thinned and that part of the market weakened. They are concerned that that is exactly what will happen as a result of the new charge arising from the British Horseracing Board's decision.

To help us to understand the background to the decision, I shall quote from a letter from Mr. John Stevenson, chairman of the National Association of Bookmakers, to the hon. Member for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page), which provides a crystal clear summary of the complex process behind the introduction of the new charge on 1 April next month. Last year, various large bookmaking companies were in dispute with the British Horseracing Board—almost everyone has been in dispute with the BHB recently. The dispute was resolved at a meeting in March 2002, when the chairman of Bookmakers Committee, comprising the big three bookmakers, took part in discussions. The letter states:

> "Peter Savill agreed to meet the only representatives of the 'Big 3' but it was pointed out that the Chairman of the Bookmakers' Committee . . . should also be present. Peter Savill agreed on the condition that he would only meet the above four bookmakers. This meeting was held at the Hilton Hotel on 26th March and was followed by a further meeting on 28th March at which Nigel Smith (BHB Commercial Director) also attended. At these meetings a number of decisions were agreed including that a 10 per cent. gross profits data charge should be paid by all bookmakers.
>
> The outcome of these meetings was circulated to members of the Bookmakers' Committee and discussed at a meeting of the Bookmakers' Committee on 5th April 2002 and ratified at a later meeting held on 15th April 2002 by a majority of 8:4 which under the Bookmakers' Committee Constitution was a virtual certainty"—

any "certainty" in respect of the racing industry is to be welcomed!

> "Thus, the NAB was specifically excluded by the BHB from taking part in the negotiations which led to the decision concerning the 10 per cent. gross profits tax although we were informed of this decision by the Bookmakers' Committee when it was a fait accompli. However, at no stage was the NAB allowed to be involved directly with the BHB in these negotiations. Since Warwick Bartlett was also the Chairman of the British Betting Offices Association . . . which represents small independent off-course bookmakers it is clear that the interests of all off-course bookmakers were represented in negotiations with the BHB and that racecourse bookmakers were not represented."

That provides a fair summary of what happened at last year's meetings.

I have also had sight of the agreement between the BHB and the body representing the biggest companies in the industry—Corals, the Hilton group, Stanley Racing, William Hill and the Confederation of Bookmakers Associations—which brought to an end the disputes over the imposition of the charge on all bookmakers. Significantly, in clause 4.3 of the agreement, the signatories had to forgo any suggestion of making complaints or submissions to the European Commission or to any other competition or anti-trust authority anywhere in the world, unless they had a legal obligation to do so. That was the document that on-course bookmakers were later invited to sign, but refused to do so, preferring to develop their case through the Office of Fair Trading.

There seems to be a strong case for arguing that a section of the industry was not represented at the genesis of the agreement, and was only afterwards consulted and outvoted on a committee on which they were a minority. The process of imposing the charge on the on-course bookmakers is wrong.

Is the charge fair and just? I have a host of information that shows the essential difference between an on-course bookmaker, who bets at a fine margin, who can make a profit as well as a loss and whose satchel can grow larger or smaller, and a major off-course bookmaking chain, which has guaranteed profits across its range of undertakings.

On-course bookmakers do not need all the data for which they are being asked to pay an astronomical increase in charges. Over the past few years the estimate of that increase has ranged from 2,000 to 4,000 per cent., depending on how much the charge will rake in. It does not seem fair that those bookmakers, who are in a different financial position from others, should face such enormous increases in their charges.

The most important point I want to make concerns the implications for the industry as a whole. The on-course market is a bulwark: a protection for the wider punting interest. Starting prices, which still denominate

[Mr. Salmond]

the majority of bets that are struck and returned, are centred on the on-course market. If the on-course market is weakened by a substantial tax increase on on-course bookmakers, one potential—or certain—result will be to force an increase in on-course margins, which will then result in a substantial increase in off-course margins.

One does not need a crystal ball to know that some major bookmaking chains have an ambition to raise margins in the industry. Mr. David Harding, the chief executive of William Hill, speaking at the annual industry seminar this year, said that margins were unsustainable at starting prices, and that he wanted to see them raised substantially. The ambition to raise margins, at least for that company, is clear.

I had a discussion with Mr. Alan Ross, the managing director of Ladbrokes, who takes a different view. He thinks that I am reading too much into the sequence of events by suspecting that there is a conspiracy to raise margins and prices in the industry. He believes that people were properly consulted and that their interests were taken into account. However, I would say that there is, at least, a serious question mark over those proceedings.

Government policy in the past, and, I hope, the policy of the current Government, has been to encourage a strong on-course market. The latest consultation document from the Treasury on the modernisation of gambling tax discusses the success of the movement towards the gross profits tax on betting, and notes that the duty exemption for on-course betting was introduced in 1987 to promote a healthy on-course market in the horse-racing industry. It appears to imply—I am sure that that is the case—that the Government support that.

The Government's policy seems to be to encourage that market to thrive and prosper, and not to see it weakened in any way. However, I believe that market to be threatened with weakening if the charge goes ahead as proposed.

When people say that I should not read a conspiracy or a plot into these proceedings, I am reminded of a quotation from Adam Smith:

> "People of the same trade seldom meet together, even for merriment and diversion, but the conversation ends in a conspiracy against the public, or in some contrivance to raise prices."

In my closing remarks, I should make it clear that my chief concern is not with the activities of the major bookmaking companies. I do not think that there is a company in any market anywhere that has not tried to raise its margins by one means or another. It is part of the natural job of a company to attempt to increase its profitability. I am much more concerned with the role of the BHB. It seems to me that the genesis of the BHB and some of its activities, and the control that it has over things such as racecourse information, mean that it should be holding the ring. It is meant to be the referee—a regulator of the industry. There is a difficulty if the BHB has a vested interest in profits increasing for bookmaking chains because, under the levy, it will get 10 per cent. of that profit increase. It is difficult when the referee becomes one of the players, and that may be the case now.

The 10 per cent. charge on on-course bookmakers may not be the central problem facing the horse racing industry, but it is unjust. It was arrived at through the wrong means. There was no effective process of consultation, and the charge might have serious implications for punters across the country—millions of people who have the right to expect the protection of a competitive market.

In betting activities for which there is not such a competitive market, bookmakers arrive at their own prices. In horse racing in South Africa or Italy, for example, only pool prices are returned, and there are sometimes profit margins of 180 per cent. in the bookmakers' own starting prices. The margins in UK horse racing are much finer because the on-course market that sets the SPs is very competitive. It would be against the public interest if, through one means or another, those margins were unfairly increased. It is also against the public interest if a section of the industry—a lynchpin, a protector for the punter at large—is treated unfairly. The charge and the way that it is being introduced treats on-course bookmakers unfairly. I hope that the Minister shares those concerns.

I do not say that the charge is the only issue facing the industry, or that people may not have decent motives for doing what they are doing. However, I hope that the Minister is prepared to address my central concerns about the confusion between the regulatory bodies involved in the industry; what their interests are; and who is representing the punters and defending consumer interest, now that the charge is being carried through. Unless we consider those concerns through the Office of Fair Trading, ministerial intervention or at least ministerial concern, we might find that this magnificent opportunity, to which the Government contributed through their wise decision to change the taxation structure, is dissipated as the lack of an effective referee begins to operate against the public and racing interest.

3.47 pm

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Richard Caborn): I congratulate the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) on securing the debate, even though I had to come back from a meeting of Ministers in Copenhagen to address the House this afternoon. It is nice of the hon. Gentleman to acknowledge that the Government have done quite a lot for the racing industry. He used phrases such as "win-win situation", "robust" and "very wise". The industry is doing extremely well on the betting side and on the horse racing side, which we are discussing. In fact, in a few years, horse racing income will have doubled.

3.48 pm

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

3.56 pm

On resuming—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Frank Cook): We can resume our sitting with eight minutes of injury time.

Mr. Caborn: As I was saying, the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan gave due credit to the Government for what they have done for the industry. In a few short years, the racing industry will have doubled its income, which shows the magnitude of the tax changes. If the recent results of Ladbrokes are anything to go by, the bookmakers are not poor either. It has been a win-win situation for the industry. We are talking about relative positions because, overall, both sides of the racing industry are thriving. The punters have had a reasonable deal, and reinvestment into facilities will pay dividends.

The hon. Gentleman is right that it is disappointing that the industry has probably not taken advantage of the opportunities placed before it. We have tried to create a framework for the industry, which is extremely important for leisure activities, employment and economic activity. The hon. Gentleman referred to some of the problems that we have tried to resolve. The Jockey Club responded positively to the "Panorama" programme, and I am confident that in the not-too-distant future we shall have a new regulatory structure to deal with jockeys, owners and trainers.

As the hon. Gentleman knows, until the Office of Fair Trading decides who owns the data, it is unlikely to make decisions on complaints that bookmakers have made to it. Until the major principle of who owns the data is decided, we can only speculate on that decision and the major implications of it. I assure the hon. Gentleman that I take an active interest in the industry, and I will watch what is happening throughout it, particularly in the area to which he referred. We have made a major investment in the industry through our tax reorganisation. We have tried to be fair with the industry. The fact that the money on the data is actually going through the levy structure makes it tax efficient in its own right. It does not bear VAT, which is a saving of 17.5 per cent. Again, we have raised no objections to that at this stage. We have tried to be as helpful to the industry as we can.

Some important points have been raised. The starting price has been the subject of some discussion. Changes in the industry have been brought about by the convergence of technologies. Betting exchanges are now coming into play, although I have no evidence at the moment that they are undermining the on-course market. I have no proof of that, and it is very difficult to consider that situation objectively. If there is an unwelcome impact, it should be negated for the time being by the enforcement of the current National Joint Pitch Council rule, which prevents on-course bookmakers from taking or laying bets through betting exchanges.

Our starting point on the SP system should be an acknowledgement that there is nothing sacrosanct about it. We, as a Government, have no locus on that matter. It is for the industry to determine. It is not enshrined in statute, and whether to use it has always been purely a matter of choice for off-course bookmakers. Off-course bookmakers are licensed in the same way as on-course bookmakers, and could offer their own prices on every race now if they wished. That is a clear position, and a debate is under way on it at the moment. The same position on starting prices already exists in every other betting opportunity apart from horse racing and greyhound racing.

Mr. Salmond: I suggest that there is a legitimate Government interest. The on-course market sets the starting price, which sets the majority of bets. If this imposition weakened the on-course market and resulted in a raising of margins, at a conservative estimate, some £40 million of off-course money would go straight from the pockets of consumers—punters—into Government profits, into the BHB via the Levy Board and into the profits of large bookmakers. That seems to me to be a matter of consumer interest, which is part of Government responsibility.

Mr. Caborn: I was coming to that. The letters to which the hon. Gentleman referred—it would be helpful if I could have copies of them—implied that a cartel is emerging. I can assure him that the OFT is already taking a passing interest in the matter. The hon. Gentleman suggests that there could be a lack of competition, which could become unhealthy and lead to operations under a cartel. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that the people who would suffer most would be the punters. We will watch that situation, and other institutions will look into it, too.

On BHB data charging, the commercial market and market forces will determine that. I shall take an active interest in any spin-offs from that, and will consider the matter carefully to ensure that the industry runs fairly for the punter. I have made it clear many times that the investment now going into the industry must be from not only the bookmakers and others, but the punters. Three areas should gain from the new fiscal arrangements in place. As I have mentioned, that matter has been referred to the OFT. I do not think that it will proceed at any pace until the OFT has taken the major decision on the rules and regulations and on who owns the data rights. Once that has been determined, the OFT may consider the imposition of the 10 per cent. requirement and whether it is fair to the industry and, in particular, to the punters. We shall probably have to wait a little while until the OFT concludes its work on the first inquiry.

4.4 pm

Sitting suspended.

Iran

4.8 pm

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): The people of Iran have now suffered some 40 years of tyranny. In 1963, the Shah undertook what was called the white revolution, clamping down on the people. Ever since, the people have been under tyranny. The Shah was regarded as a friend of ours and we tolerated him. In 1979 Ayatollah Khomeini succeeded in overthrowing the Shah. The tyranny continued, and the Ayatollah was our enemy. He died in 1989 and the current Ayatollah, or supreme leader, is Ayatollah Khamenei, who was previously the president.

In 1997, after Rafsanjani had been president, Ayatollah Khatami became president. People in the United Kingdom, and perhaps in the whole of the western world, almost breathed a sigh of relief because he had a reputation for being a moderate. As a result, in September 1998, at the General Assembly of the United Nations, the current Leader of the House—then Foreign Secretary—made a deal with the Iranian Foreign Minister, Kharrazi, to restart a relationship. In May 1999 that resulted in full diplomatic relations being restored.

President Khatami was seen as a man who espoused reform, was moderate and wanted change. The United Kingdom hoped that by contacting Iran we would help the reform process. That was summed up by the current Secretary of State for Defence—then a junior Minister in the Foreign Office—at a speech, appropriately enough, at Sandhurst, on 14 July 1999. He said:

> "We still have important concerns over Iranian policy, particularly over support for terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, and human rights. But we believe the current Iranian Government is making good progress in the right direction, and we are resolved to support that."

That sums up British policy in a nutshell. Since then, Foreign Minister Kharrazi has made two visits to the United Kingdom, in 2001 and earlier this year. The present Foreign Secretary has made two visits to Iran, and several other Government Ministers—Cabinet and non-Cabinet—have visited Tehran during those years.

The European Union takes a similar view. The External Affairs Commissioner, Chris Patten, in response to a US attack on Iran had this to say:

> "There is more to be said for trying to engage and draw these societies into the international community than to cut them off."

The United Kingdom and the European Union were as one in trying to create a dialogue involving both trade and human rights issues. The United States, however, remained totally unconvinced of President Khatami's ability to deliver the reform agenda. In February 2002, US Secretary of State Colin Powell posed the following questions, which were published in the *Financial Times* on 13 February:

> "How can we ignore the fact that this country continues to barrel straight ahead trying to achieve a nuclear capability?"

He added:

> "How can we ignore the fact that they are complicit in shipping arms of a very escalatory nature in the Middle East?"

He also stated:

> "Iran sponsors terrorist organisations. Should we hold back from pointing this out?"

The EU and UK, and the US have two quite diverse and different views.

What does the record tell us during the last few years? Huge amounts of material are available. There is a very useful House of Commons Library brief on Iran. The Foreign Office publishes human rights reports. There are reports from Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, United States Departments, the UN rapporteur on human rights, and a host of other groups with an interest in human rights and the situation in Iran, including the National Council of Resistance of Iran, the Iranian Women's Association in the UK, the Iranian Civil Rights Committee and the International Committee against Stoning. There are many more. What do those sources reveal about the progress being made in Iran through the process of engagement by the UK Government? The Foreign Office report of 2000 states:

> "Iran's reformers have made some progress over the last year. But there have been many setbacks too. The human rights situation . . . has on balance deteriorated over the past year despite the support of the reformers by an overwhelming majority of the Iranian people."

The 2001 report continues in much the same vein:

> "The pace of progress has slowed since he was first elected in 1997 mostly as a result of the continuing struggle between the reformists and conservatives.
>
> The conservative-dominated judiciary has closed down over 50 publications in the past two years . . . and imprisoned a number of journalists and editors . . . A number of members of the Majles have been given prison sentences, mainly for critical remarks made in the Majles"—

let us hope that that is not taken up here, Mr. Deputy Speaker—

> "although only one, Hoseyn Loqmanian, was actually imprisoned . . . His pardon by the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khameini, defused the short-term confrontation, but the underlying issue of Parliamentary immunity remains in doubt".

There is one small bright spark on the horizon. We note that there has been some improvement in the situation of the Baha'is over the past year, and that none are now under sentence of death just for being of that faith. The Human Rights Watch report of 2003 paints much the same picture:

> "Despite landslide electoral victories in every major election from 1997 to 2002, the reformers were unable to dislodge repressive policies favored by the clerical leadership, including far-reaching restrictions on freedom of expression, association and political participation.
>
> The Guardian Council repeatedly blocked bills passed by the Parliament in such areas as women's rights, family law, the prevention of torture, and electoral reform. The judiciary . . . undermined the rule of law with arbitrary closures of newspapers and imprisonment of political activists . . . Any pretence that legal principles would be observed in regulating the press disappeared. Iran's press courts acted as a law unto themselves, issuing closure orders by decree without legal basis".

The picture is not good. Executions, floggings, stonings, maimings and arbitrary arrests all continue at a high level. The National Council for Resistance of Iran, which monitors the official press, reported that 474 sentences of execution were granted last year and many of them were carried out. That is 50 per cent. up on 2001. In reply to my written question it was pointed out that 139 executions were recorded by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, or whoever takes down such information.

Three men and three women were stoned to death in 1997; two or possibly three women in 2001; and three stoning sentences were passed on women in 2002. The National Council for Resistance reports that 26 stoning sentences have been passed since 1997. This year 50 executions have been reported up to 5 February. Ninety prisoners have received nearly 5,000 lashes—this is just in January—and there have been four cross-amputations: one leg and one arm cut off on alternate sides of the body. A woman's eyes were gauged out. The situation is not pretty.

Many of the mullahs maintain that they have banned stoning, but there is no evidence that that is so. A Bill to abolish stoning is said to have been proposed, but an MP says that that is a lie and no proposal for the abolition of stoning has been presented to the Majles. An official in south-east Iran told the BBC in December that he had received no written or official instructions from the judiciary to cancel sentences of stoning. The situation is bleak.

For the first time in seven years a UN rapporteur has been allowed into Iran. In a report on the jails in Iran published at the end of February this year, the team reported:

> "Iranians suffer large-scale arbitrary detentions and some prisons operate outside the control of the judicial system".

They were given full co-operation, but it was

> "the first time the working group has been faced with such a practice on such a scale".

So the situation is not good in Iran's jails either. It is vital that within the European Union the UK makes sure that at the general assembly of the European Commission on Human Rights later this month a censure motion on human rights abuses in Iran is passed and the human rights rapporteur is reinstated, because last year for the first time in many years that motion failed by one vote. We must make sure that it happens.

It is not surprising for such a country to be the suicide capital of the world. It certainly has one of the highest rates of suicide. Some 75 per cent. of all suicides are women, and more than 80 per cent. of those are women between the ages of 15 and 31. The picture is not pretty.

We should consider the other areas of concern. The United States believes that Iran is the most active sponsor of terrorism and that it helps Hezbollah and Islamic jihad. Although it has condemned the 11 September atrocities and has sent some al-Qaeda people back to Europe for trial, early in January a boatload of arms was captured on its way to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Iran's nuclear plans are also a cause for concern. The National Council of Resistance of Iran revealed in August that the Iranians were working on new nuclear facilities for enriched uranium in heavy water, which would provide the opportunity to build weapons. Iran is a signatory to the non-proliferation treaty, but it nevertheless failed to report those new works to the International Atomic Energy Agency. I am not sure whether Mohammed el-Baradei has had a chance to go to Iran to check the situation, but he has expressed concern and intends to see what is going on.

The CIA national intelligence estimates reckon that Iran could have a nuclear weapon by 2015, but if it receives foreign assistance it could be a lot sooner. Its biological and chemical weapons programmes are recognised by the United States. It has a ballistic missile that can already reach 800 miles. The National Council of Resistance of Iran reports that the country is working on longer-range missiles, and the United States thinks that the country may have an intercontinental missile within the next decade, which is of grave concern.

I hope that our Government will do much more than carry on a dialogue. There have been recent local government elections in Iran. In Tehran, only 12 per cent. turned out. One of President Khatami's supporters said that that was an indication that the people had lost hope of achieving democratic change through the ballot box. That must be a serious warning of what might happen in Iran.

There was so much hope when Khatami came to power. There was a large turnout of 80 per cent. plus for his first election, but that is all turning to dust. On every front, the Government of Iran, instead of getting better, are getting worse. President Khatami seems to have been the fig leaf for the tyranny of Ayatollah Khamenei. The Majles has no power of its own and everything that it does must be approved by the Guardian Council. The country may want reform, but President Khatami has his legs manacled and one arm tied behind his back while being in the ring with Mike Tyson or Lennox Lewis—that is the measure of the struggle that the country faces. It is true that the people want change; they showed that by electing Khatami, a potential reformer. Reports in the western press coming out of Tehran also indicate that there is an underground desire for change. However, there is not much hope of it happening. Ayatollah Khamenei, the Guardian Council and the judiciary do not want change. People are certainly talking to them, but Ayatollah Khamenei is not listening. Many exiles, who live in countries around the world including the United Kingdom, fled from the tyranny of the mullahs and want to return to a democratic, free and tolerant state. They must recognise that those objectives are also our objectives.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet) *rose—*

The Minister for Europe (Mr. Denis MacShane) *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Frank Cook): Order. Perhaps I should explain to the Chamber that 30-minute debates are essentially between a Member and the Minister, unless prior arrangements have been made and passed on to the Chair.

4.24 pm

Mr. MacShane: That clarification is helpful, because last week there was a half-hour Adjournment debate in which five hon. Members spoke. I was happy to leave room for the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir Sydney Chapman), but your clarification of House practice is helpful, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) on securing the debate. The Government share many of his concerns about Iran, which is why I believe that we are right to pursue a policy of constructive and, where necessary, critical engagement. That allows us to support reform in Iran while maintaining a robust dialogue on issues of concern. Those issues include Iranian support to

[Mr. MacShane]

terrorist groups involved in the Israel-Palestine conflict—my hon. Friend has put the facts about that support before the House—Iran's reported development of weapons of mass destruction and aspects of its human rights record.

We continue to engage Iran on a wide range of issues of common interest, including bi-lateral co-operation in the fight against drugs, which is a matter of great concern for many of our constituents, and international support for reconstruction and the interim Administration in Afghanistan. For many years, Iran has hosted more than 2 million refugees from both Afghanistan and Iraq. The Department for International Development has provided substantial support--more than £4.3 million since 1999–2000—for refugee programmes in Iran and has agreed to fund several United Nations agency and non-governmental organisation projects. We regularly discuss Iraq with our Iranian counterparts. Like the UK, Iran is committed to the maintenance of Iraq's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its current borders.

Sir Sydney Chapman: I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for misunderstanding the convention. Has the Minister any evidence that the violent, barbaric punishments and executions in Iran are subsiding? Will he confirm that it is false to assert, as the regime has done, that there is a moratorium on stoning?

Mr. MacShane: I hope to cover those points in the rest of my remarks.

Our policy of engagement enables us better to put forward our views and concerns, which has only been made possible by the changes that have taken place in Iran since President Khatami was first elected in May 1997. The UK supports President Khatami's stated objective of a civil society based on the rule of law. We welcomed his re-election in June 2001 with an increased share of the vote, which demonstrated the Iranian people's clear will for reform and gave him a strong mandate. Unfortunately, owing to the complex political situation in Iran, to which my hon. Friend referred, President Khatami has had many problems in implementing his policies of political and economic reform.

Naturally, the Government share many of my hon. Friend's concerns about human rights in Iran, which we and our EU partners have addressed through dialogue, UN resolutions and practical projects. We and our EU partners regularly make clear to the Iranian authorities, at all levels, our concerns about human rights. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary did so most recently in his meeting with the Iranian Foreign Minister on 6 February. We use a wide range of independent sources to assess the situation. Our embassy in Tehran also gathers information from its sources and colleagues at other like-minded embassies.

We welcome the efforts that the Iranian Government and Parliament have made towards seeking to improve the human rights situation in Iran, but we regret that because of the political stand-off between reformers and their conservative opponents, who include members of the judiciary, there is still a long way to go. The people and elected Government of Iran want an improvement in the human rights situation. The Iranian Parliament has drafted a number of Bills on important issues, such as the prohibition of torture, which have been rejected by the Guardian Council as incompatible with religious teachings: that is, despite the fact that the Iranian constitution prohibits torture. The Iranian Parliament is determined to make progress on the issue, and we hope that it succeeds.

The United Kingdom and European Union believe that one way of expressing their concerns is to sponsor resolutions on human rights in Iran at the UN General Assembly and the Commission on Human Rights, as has been done for many years. We were disappointed that the Commission on Human Rights failed, by just one vote, to adopt the resolution on Iran in April last year. As my hon. Friend noted, that also meant the end of the mandate of the special representative. In practice, the special representative has not been allowed to visit Iran since 1996, but his reports on the human rights situation provided valuable detail on the human rights problems in Iran, and he was active in pursuing cases with the Iranian Government.

All EU partners are concerned about the human rights situation in Iran, and we are currently consulting on the most effective way in which to encourage positive change. A resolution is one of a number of tools currently under consideration.

Following the failure of the resolution last year, Iran made a number of gestures, including inviting the EU to engage in a dialogue on human rights. After an internal debate, the EU decided to take up the offer and the first round of the dialogue took place in mid-December. The next round will take place later this month, which will give us an opportunity to assess progress before the next Commission on Human Rights begins its work on 17 March. Discussions in December were frank, and the EU made it clear to the Iranians that they need to be able to show results to get agreement for the talks to continue. Initial impressions have been positive, although change, as ever, is likely to be slow. The EU delegation handed over a list of cases on which answers were sought, and those issues will be followed up this month. My hon. Friend quoted Commissioner Chris Patten. When Chris Patten visited Tehran in February he said that it was not enough just to talk about human rights and that we needed to see progress. Of course, he was right.

In a further development following the failure of the resolution last year, there has been an open invitation to UN Human Rights Commission inspectors to visit Iran. The UN working group on arbitrary detentions was the first to take up the invitation, and completed an inspection in February. The group has still to make a full report.

Together with our EU partners, we have repeatedly expressed concern about stonings, which is a subject on which reformers, and especially women's groups, in Iran have been campaigning for years. We welcomed the announcement at the end of last year by the head of the Supreme Administrative Court that the practice has been suspended. We have also been informed that, of the four women who were sentenced to death by stoning last year, three have been given alternative sentences and the fourth is awaiting the outcome of her appeal. We are monitoring the situation closely, because that barbaric practice is not acceptable to any decent human being anywhere in the world.

We are considering other ways of developing practical co-operation on human rights issues. We have supported a number of projects through the Foreign Office's human rights projects fund. The projects include technical assistance on specific issues relating to the rule of law and work by Penal Reform International, a highly regarded worldwide organisation, which was initially approached by the Iranian prison authorities, who are keen to reform their prisons. Other projects have included specialised training for judges working with juveniles, through UNICEF; strengthening the capacities of the Islamic Human Rights Commission; human rights training courses for young adults; and a familiarisation visit by five Iranian judges to the UK, which took place last March.

I accept the point that hon. Members have made about progress remaining slow. There is a steady, drip-by-drip attempt to show Iranian officials that an alternative system is possible. We noted at least 111 executions last year, some of which took place in public. The Government oppose the death penalty in all circumstances, and we urge all states to abolish it.

We regularly raise with the Iranian authorities our serious concerns about the treatment of the Baha'is. Persecution of individuals on religious grounds is unacceptable. Although no Baha'is remain under sentence of death, they continue to suffer harassment and discrimination in areas such as education, employment, housing and travel.

Despite moves to improve the situation of women, such as amending the divorce law to make it easier for women to initiate the divorce, there is continuing discrimination against women in the courts and in society generally. However, Iran has many women MPs and a woman Minister. Women are pursuing those matters and debating them with senior clerics, some of whom support their case. An increasing number of Iranian women go on to higher education and participate in politics, and that can only help them in their efforts to improve their status.

Freedom of speech remains under threat, particularly the freedom to speak out. However, there is lively debate in public and in the media on a wide range of subjects, and we acknowledge that Iran is a country of great culture and education. The Iranians want nothing more than to be able to enjoy the freedoms normally enjoyed by those who live in democracies. None the less, 90 newspapers and other similar publications have been closed during the past three years. Journalists and editors have been jailed, and lawyers have been jailed for speaking out on behalf of clients who claim that they have been tortured. Students have been imprisoned for taking part in demonstrations.

We take every opportunity to press the Iranian authorities on their approach to the middle east peace process. Peace in the middle east is in everyone's interests, including those of Iran. The Prime Minister and my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary have discussed the matter with the Iranian Foreign Minister. We believe that Iranians should be more constructive in their attitude to the middle east process, and that they should support efforts to resolve the differences between those involved.

I am concerned, as is my hon. Friend, about Iranian resources being used by Palestinian groups to carry out atrocious and unacceptable attacks on civilians in Israel. We might argue about the definition of terrorism, but attacks on civilians can never be justified, whether in Israel or Palestine—or by terrorist groups in Iran.

We continue to press the director general of the International Atomic Energy Authority to investigate allegations that Iran has weapons of mass destruction. We have encouraged Iran to be transparent about its nuclear activities in order to dispel concerns about the nature and purpose of those activities. The situations in Iran and Iraq are worrying. They cannot be ignored, and we seek a peaceful resolution to both.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising the matter. I assure him that the Foreign Office and the Government take seriously human rights and other political developments in Iran.

It being twenty-two minutes to Five o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the sitting lapsed, without Question put.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 6 March 2003

[MR. EDWARD O'HARA *in the Chair*]

Election Turnouts

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Mr. Jim Murphy.]*

2.30 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Yvette Cooper): I welcome this chance to discuss the important issue of increasing voter turnout, particularly through weekend voting. It is useful to debate those issues, because we have recently closed the consultation on weekend voting and combining the local and European elections in 2004. We have not yet considered all the responses to that consultation paper, nor have we taken any decisions on the way forward. We thought it right to give hon. Members the chance to debate some of the issues before any decisions were taken.

Mr. William Cash (Stone): I am sure that the Minister has anticipated what I am about to say. She said that she hoped that we would have a chance to discuss this matter, but she will recall that we discussed many of the same issues only a few weeks ago on 28 January, so I hope that some of my comments during that debate have been taken into account and that she will refer to them on this occasion; she did not do so at the time.

Yvette Cooper: I assure the hon. Gentleman that we always treat seriously the points that he makes in every debate.

It is right to give hon. Members the chance to debate this matter, particularly some of the issues concerning weekend voting and combining the elections in 2004, which we did not concentrate on in our debate at the end of January. That thoughtful and interesting debate about voter participation was initiated by my hon. Friend the Member for West Renfrewshire (Jim Sheridan).

Voter turnout has been falling, and compared with 15 years ago, millions more people are choosing not to vote. Since the mid-1980s, the number of people who vote has dropped by more than 5 million. At the last general election, 6.2 million fewer votes were cast than in 1987, when I first cast my vote, and the percentage of the electorate voting fell from 75 per cent. in 1987 to 59 per cent. in 2001. In the most recent European elections, 5.1 million more people stayed at home compared with the 1989 European elections, and in the local elections turnout dropped by around 2 million from 1986 to 2002.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): Has the Minister given any thought to why there was such a dramatic drop in turnout for the most recent European elections? Does she recall her right hon. Friend the then Home Secretary, who is now the Foreign Secretary, saying that as a result of his introducing a system of proportional representation he expected the turnout to rise significantly? In fact, it fell. Can the hon. Lady explain why the then Home Secretary's prediction was so wrong?

Yvette Cooper: There are a series of reasons why voter turnout falls, and I shall come to that subject later. In the debate at the end of January we discussed some of the issues concerning proportional representation. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that many people have suggested that proportional representation might increase voter turnout, and the European elections were an example of the PR system. Some supporters of that system are here now, so many of the issues may be raised this afternoon.

Many of the issues related to the turnout at the European elections are complicated, and not determined simply by the particular electoral system in place. It is interesting that there is no consensus at this stage on the reason for a drop in voter turnout. Such drops have happened in many western industrialised countries, and a range of theories have been offered by academics, journalists and politicians to explain why that has happened. Many traditional theories assumed that as populations became more educated, and had more information, voter turnout would increase, but that has not been the case. Theories about declining social identification, changes to social structure, a decline in deference and generational differences abound. There are also theories relating to political party behaviour; some argue that politics is too confrontational, and that is why people do not vote; others argue that politics needs to be more confrontational, and that we need more public rows to provoke people into voting.

There are also theories about the specific circumstances of the last general election and the expectations that surrounded it, such as whether it was perceived to have been a foregone conclusion. It is too early to say exactly what happened at that election, or what the different causes for the turnout were; it is too early to be clear whether we are looking at long-term trends or fluctuations. However, we cannot afford to wait until it is perfectly clear why voter turnout has been falling; if we wait, turnout may have fallen to the point at which the health of our democracy is seriously undermined.

Three challenges face us in addressing voter turnout. The first is the challenge for political parties, which is extremely important because parties are the vehicle by which people exercise their vote, campaign and conduct debate throughout the country. Political parties and politicians need to accept responsibility for the changes that are taking place, and they must address them. However, that is not the main subject of the debate this afternoon.

The second challenge is for the wider society and institutions to promote greater awareness, and to support voter education and a stronger sense of citizenship. I include in that the promotion of citizenship education in schools, and the role of the Electoral Commission in promoting information about elections, democracy and our political institutions.

Mr. Cash: The Minister will appreciate that one thing that causes people a great deal of concern is broken

[Mr. Cash]

promises. I shall not engage in a cheap exchange, because one side can say as much as the other, but does the Minister not agree that if the Electoral Commission and others are to engage in voter education through schools, it is terribly important for them to be conscious of the huge responsibility to make certain that that education is unbiased and meets the criteria of a democratic society.

Yvette Cooper: The purpose of setting up the Electoral Commission in the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 was to establish an independent organisation, separate from political parties and the Government, to promote voter information and education throughout the country in a non-party political, non-partisan fashion. The hon. Gentleman is tempting me to get into party political discussions, so I shall point out that the Opposition's weakness at the general election and their failure to offer clear alternatives to the voter had a significant impact on turnout.

Today we should concentrate on how we can make voting more convenient, and make it fit into people's lives, but no one should assume that convenience is a panacea for raising voter turnout, or that it is the whole answer. Some of the trials significantly raised voter turnout, and it is therefore right that we should explore ways in which we can make voting fit into people's lives so that they exercise their democratic rights.

The recently closed consultation canvassed the ideas associated with holding elections at the weekend. We should explore weekend elections, and have views on the idea. Unlike most of our European counterparts, this country has historically voted on a Thursday, but it is unclear why we have become so committed to that particular day of the week. The folklore is that the original reasons for choosing a Thursday involved a process of elimination. Sunday was no good because voters might be influenced by the sermon. Monday was too close to Sunday, and a persuasive priest might still hold sway. Tuesday and Wednesday were market days, while Friday was pay-day, which meant that voters might be influenced by alcohol. On Saturday they might still be drinking, or might be too hung over to vote. As a result, Thursday was the only day far enough away from the influence of both pulpit and publican, so that is the day on which people were trusted to cast their votes.

An international study by the Chicago election board in 1999 found that of the 34 countries studied, three quarters held elections on a Sunday. Italy, Spain, France, Germany, Belgium, Sweden and Finland all hold at least some of their elections on a Sunday, and their turnout levels are generally higher than ours. However, one cannot use that evidence alone, and one cannot make simple comparisons between one country and another. Recent academic work by Mark Franklin, which attempts to address some of the other factors, found that in a range of countries, voting on a rest day—in this country, that would be over the weekend—has a significant positive impact on turnout.

It is not too hard to see why that might be the case, because for people who work and have kids, or lead some other sort of busy life, voting on a busy Thursday can be a hassle, and it should not be a hassle for people to exercise their democratic rights.

Mr. Bill Wiggin (Leominster): People who work and have kids will almost certainly have some form of child care for their children while they are working, but that will not be the case on a Saturday. In the light of the contradictory comments that the Minister made about how, rather disappointingly, the more educated people become the less likely they are to vote, can she see that kind of contradiction in her argument? A Saturday election would be detrimental for working mothers with children.

Yvette Cooper: No, I do not think so. If we held elections over Saturday and Sunday, arguably people would have considerably more time in which to make appropriate arrangements, or to take their children to the voting booth. The case should not rest on a specific example: we can all imagine the people who rush to pick up their children at the end of nursery school or school and then struggle to get out to vote in the evening. Equally, Thursday might be more convenient for people who work shifts or weekends.

The question is what is likely to have the broadest impact on the greatest number of people by making voting more convenient. Mark Franklin's evidence, which we should take seriously, suggests that voting on a rest day could increase turnout. The consultation specified that weekend voting would mean both Saturday and Sunday, so as to recognise religious concerns, but we need to know people's views about weekend voting. We must also recognise that the only pilot that has been carried out on weekend voting, in Watford, was not successful; interestingly, voter turnout fell. However, the people of Watford voted the weekend after the Thursday on which everyone else voted. When the nationwide election results had already appeared in the Friday and Saturday papers, setting out the local elections as a done deal, everyone in Watford was expected to go out to vote. It is interesting to ask, therefore, whether pilots on weekend voting can be successful in small areas, when people in other areas still vote on different days.

We must also take account of cost. Weekend voting, in direct terms, is likely to be more expensive, especially if it is held over two days. It involves the higher costs of staff working at the weekend. On the other hand, an awful lot of schools would not have to close for the day, with all the hassle that that can create. There are mixed issues surrounding weekend voting, so we think it right to consult and take people's views before deciding on the way forward.

Personally, I am inclined to think that there is a case for further trials, perhaps as part of a programme, and on a much larger scale than the Watford example. We need to hear the House's views, however, and we need people to consider and debate the issues. The European elections might be the right elections in which to trial weekend voting, given that the other countries are voting in their elections at the weekend; but we must recognise the considerable logistic and practical problems to be overcome if weekend voting is to be introduced in time for the 2004 European elections.

The case for making voting more convenient, however we do that, is strong. I have concentrated so far on weekend voting, but various trials are already under way for different approaches to voting in pilot programmes across the country. It is worth reflecting on the progress made in those trials, and on the next wave of pilots. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister leads the programme of pilots for local authority elections, and there have been a series of pilots on postal voting, e-voting and other mechanisms. The results in the all-postal vote pilots have been the most significant. Average turnout in the pilot areas was considerably higher than in the country as a whole. In Crawley the turnout rose from 19 per cent. to 34 per cent. In Gateshead it rose from 30 per cent. to 57 per cent., in North Tyneside from 36 per cent. to 42 per cent., in Stevenage from 29 per cent. to 53 per cent., and in Chorley from 32 per cent. to 62 per cent. Those all-postal ballots had a considerable impact on voter turnout.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Minister has pointed out what happened in the postal votes, but can I point out what happens in my constituency, which covers two local councils? In Amber Valley, which has elections every year, the turnout is very poor, but in Derbyshire Dales, which has elections every four years, the turnout is significantly better. Does she think that there is anything to be said for the idea that people are getting a bit fed up with continually having elections forced on them?

Yvette Cooper: There is evidence that reduced frequency of voting can be correlated with higher voter turnout. A balance has to be struck between achieving the right level of accountability to the public and to voters—giving them the opportunity to vote often enough to maintain accountability—and maintaining turnout. Those are complex issues. That is why we have asked the Electoral Commission to examine the issues surrounding the timing and frequency of elections.

Mr. Cash: I was slightly worried that the Minister might not have read what I said in our previous debate, and she has just given a good illustration of why I was right to worry. She has mentioned the experience in Chorley, and on 28 January I said that:

> "in Chorley, electronic counting was piloted, and turnout increased from 31.3 per cent. in 1998 to 61.5 per cent. in 2002. However, the same system was used in City of Westminster, and turnout dropped from 32 per cent. in 1998, to 27.4 per cent. in 2002. It is extraordinary that the same system doubles turnout in Chorley but decreases it in City of Westminster."—[*Official Report, Westminster Hall*, 28 January 2003; Vol. 398, c. 239WH.]

She did not answer that question before. Can she answer it now?

Yvette Cooper: The Westminster pilot was an e-counting pilot. The all-postal pilots—Crawley, Gateshead, Greenwich, Havering, Middlesbrough, North Tyneside, North West Leicestershire, Preston, Stevenage and Trafford—did not involve separate counting methods, and all showed a significant increase in turnout.

Mr. Cash: What about Chorley?

Yvette Cooper: The hon. Gentleman is right to say that I also mentioned Chorley. Chorley held an all-postal and e-counting pilot. Chorley, Hackney and South Tyneside all had all-postal and e-counting pilots. Turnout in Chorley and South Tyneside increased but Hackney, which had an e-counting and all-postal pilot, experienced a 3 per cent. decrease. The e-counting pilots included Broxbourne, Epping Forest, Rugby and Westminster. That was a different group of pilots, of which Westminster was the only one of the four that showed a reduction. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that results have been varied, but overall the Electoral Commission, which assessed all the pilots independently, concluded that the all-postal pilots had a significant impact in increasing voter turnout.

Concerns about issues such as fraud and voter identification have been raised in relation to all-postal ballots. We should take those concerns seriously, and address them. In its report on the first wave of pilots, the Electoral Commission said that it could find no evidence of widespread fraud, or problems of voter identification. Nevertheless, we should take the possibility seriously, which is why the commission recommended further pilots of the all-postal vote approach, which we have accepted.

Mr. Richard Allan (Sheffield, Hallam): Is the Minister also considering the other factor that remains of concern with all forms of remote voting, whether postal or electronic, which is that electoral law requires us to ensure that voters can vote free from coercion and undue influence? That is clearly difficult when voting takes place at a remote location. Is that point being considered? In some ways it is more significant than the issue of fraud.

Yvette Cooper: It is embedded in the Human Rights Act 1998 that we should have free and fair elections, and it is important that we can be sure that they are taking place. As the hon. Gentleman says, we must be able to ensure that people can make their own choices free from undue interference or improper influence. We already, rightly, accept the principle of postal votes for those who choose to have them.

The solution that some have suggested to the problem that the hon. Gentleman raises is a multi-channel election. People would be able to choose to vote through one of many different routes. They would be able to vote with a postal vote or by going into a polling station. Our broad interest is in the idea of a multi-channel election being introduced in the future, which would give people options. The debate is not yet closed on that. We need to keep debating and discussing it as the pilots go on.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): In Stroud we have an e-voting and a texting pilot, which is as it should be. We should experiment with such methods. My worry is about what we mean by choice. That is all fine for those who have different ways of accessing the electoral system, but there will be others who have a limited choice. That could be overcome only through postal balloting, which seems to be the most successful alternative method. When the Minister evaluates the situation, will she consider how many people genuinely

[Mr. David Drew]

can make such choices? We cannot have discrimination in favour of people who are IT-literate and have access to the relevant means, and against people who do not.

Yvette Cooper: My hon. Friend is right. That idea affects not only voting but all kinds of areas in which we try to deliver services, opportunities or information through new technology. We must not introduce a different form of exclusion, whereby those who cannot get access to information technology cannot get access to a service. When we are talking about the right to vote, that is more important and fundamental than in any other context, so clearly it is a consideration.

My hon. Friend raises a broader point about turnout, which is that people who are on the lowest incomes, have the least education or come from particular minority ethnic groups are the least likely to vote. That is a troubling fact for democracy. The issue is not simply the overall turnout; it is the differential turnout between different groups. Clearly, that should have a serious impact on anyone who is concerned to ensure that everyone has an equal right to vote and an equal chance for their voice to be heard.

The postal ballot pilots have already demonstrated that there appears to be a significant willingness to vote so long as it is easy, and that that willingness is greater than the actual number of votes being cast under the existing system. As long as that is the case, that means that there are people who would vote if it was easy, or if the opportunity was there, who are not currently voting and are therefore not having their voices heard in a democracy, or being counted when it is decided who should represent them and take decisions on their behalf. That is a serious matter, and means that even for those who oppose all-postal votes, there are serious issues that need to be addressed. We cannot simply accept the current position.

I know that many Members want the chance to speak, so I will make my conclusion brief. There will be a further series of 59 electoral pilots in this year's May elections—nearly double the number held last year. They will include e-voting pilots, most of which will offer a range of e-voting channels, including remote voting via the internet, text messaging, touch-tone telephones and, for the first time, interactive digital television. The pilots will be the biggest ever test of e-voting in the UK.

We have also concluded the consultation on combining the European parliamentary elections with the local elections in 2004. That reflects the point made by the hon. Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin) about not asking people to turn out to vote too many times in a short period. Members' views would be welcome before the Government take a final decision on whether the elections in 2004 should be combined on the same day.

Declining turnout is clearly one of the biggest challenges faced not simply by political parties but by all those who care about democracy. We are here this afternoon as democratically elected representatives. We stand where for centuries elected representatives before us have stood to debate the concerns of the nation. Of course, most of our predecessors were not elected by the whole nation that they purported to represent. Many of us will have taken constituents to the little cupboard at the back of the Crypt, at the other end of the main Westminster Hall building, where, as the story goes, the suffragette Emily Davison hid in the Palace of Westminster on the night of the 1911 census so that, at a time when women were not allowed to vote, she could record her address that night as the House of Commons.

Votes for women, and for all men, were hard fought for and hard won. Emily Davison threw herself in front of the king's horse to draw attention to her case, yet four generations later, millions of women are not using the vote that Emily Davison died fighting for. Our political institutions depend on the legitimacy of the ballot box. As the ballot box gets lighter, the legitimacy of our political institutions becomes weaker. Most importantly, when turnout declines too far, anti-democratic movements and parties can more easily step into the void. None of us should kid ourselves that there are any easy answers to raising voter turnout.

Mr. Cash: I have listened to the Minister's peroration with great interest, but I am bound to reflect on the fact that only yesterday the Budget date was shifted, which is bound to affect the Welsh and Scottish elections, not to mention others. Can she equate that with her espousal of democratic procedures?

Yvette Cooper: For heaven's sake! That is not remotely relevant to the important issues that we are discussing. The judgment about the timing of the Budget must be made according to many considerations, but it has nothing to do with voter turnout. I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman chooses to make cheap party political points, because Westminster Hall was intended to be a forum for more considered debate that may, on many issues, cut across party lines. The issues related to voter turnout should concern any democrat, whatever their political party or affiliation. If we are concerned about democracy, we should work hard to address them.

3.1 pm

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire): There is much in the Minister's excellent speech with which we can all agree. Part of it might have been made on the Floor of the House. The moving bit about women getting the vote might have been said by her right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and Minister for Women, who has been speaking in the Chamber today in the debate on international women's day. I am grateful to the Minister who is here with us for making available the speech that she gave last month to the Association of Electoral Administrators—although I suspect that it was written on a word processor, as chunks of it reappeared in a very similar form in the speech that we have just heard.

I suppose that it makes sense for the Lord Chancellor's Department to have responsibility for elections, but that responsibility seems to move around somewhat. It used to be with the Home Office, then with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, and it is now with one of the few Departments that does not have an elected Minister at its head.

My contribution will be fairly brief, because I see that there are some serious psephologists in Westminster Hall this afternoon. The Minister gave several reasons why turnout dipped at the last general election, to which I would add just one. As the two major parties are closer together than they have been for some 40 years, many voters, as well as thinking that the election was a foregone conclusion, genuinely thought that it would not actually make much difference who won it. Indeed, some Labour MPs believe that the Prime Minister is at heart a Conservative, so the wider electorate might be excused for making the same mistake.

The European election was touched on earlier, and I believe that the adoption of a multi-member proportional representation system did have an effect. People prefer to vote for a face, not a list, and the election of Members for a large amorphous region such as the south-east somehow lacked the relevance and immediacy of an election of one Member for a smaller parliamentary constituency. The mechanics of elections, to which I shall return in a moment, can influence turnout.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I agree with the point that the right hon. Gentleman is making. He may recall that Liberal Democrats—and, I believe, some of his party—argued strongly that we should have either open lists or smaller constituencies and a single transferable vote, which to some extent would have overcome the disadvantage to which he refers. It is important not to brand all PR systems as identical.

Sir George Young: I agree with the hon. Gentleman to the extent that I believe that people prefer to vote for one person—a face—rather than a list of people. That should be an important component of a successful electoral system.

The Minister spoke about declining turnout and voter apathy, which must concern all of us. In some cases, disenchantment with the main parties manifests itself in the election of independents, and Wyre Forest showed what can happen when an MP does not get on top of an important local issue. I regard such election results as worrying but healthy. Too many independents in the House would obviously lead to problems in delivering a coherent political programme, but if there are a few—and the threat of more—that keeps us on our toes. We have seen that with independent mayors in London, Hartlepool and Middlesbrough. It is more worrying, and less healthy, when people turn to parties that really are nasty, such as the British National party and the National Front. The best answer to that is for the mainstream parties to show that they have sensible policies to manage the issues that worry people.

For many people, the solution to disenchantment is simply not to vote. I remember that when I first went out canvassing people were reluctant to admit that they were not going to vote, and found all sorts of reasons to conceal the fact. People are now open about it. Only 39 per cent. of 18 to 25-year-olds voted at the last general election, and the British social attitudes survey in 1999 showed that only one in 10 of that age group considered themselves "quite interested" or "very interested" in politics. For some of those young people, not voting has become part of a culture, and a statement that they are at arm's length from the democratic process. They will sign petitions and engage in single issue politics, and they are interested in what happens locally, but in the fast-moving, consumer-based society in which they live, which gives them relevant choices and instant results, voting once every four years for a remote assembly is old fashioned.

There is no point in blaming those young people. They are perfectly entitled not to vote, and for many it is a conscious decision. They simply do not like what is on offer—so we must ask why they are not voting. There are two responses. One addresses the mechanics of voting, including Sunday voting and voting by text message. The other response concerns the motivation for voting, and that is by far the most important. Most people do not vote not because it is inconvenient, or because they do not have the time. They do not vote because they do not want to vote.

There are all sorts of theories for that, and the Minister advanced some of her own. I will mention another. The Hansard Society sponsored a meeting at my party's last conference; similar meetings were also held at the other two party conferences. At it, the makers of "Big Brother" explained why more people voted for Kate Lawler in the third series of "Big Brother" than voted at the past general election. They pointed out that the two houses involved had some similarities. They are both difficult to get into—150,000 applied for "Big Brother"—and both houses are filled by media-seeking self-publicists.

However, the short answer to the question about why one captured the imagination of the British nation and the other did not was simple. Viewers empathised with the contestants in "Big Brother" because they behaved like human beings. They spoke the same language and had the same problems and emotions, and viewers found it easier to relate to them. They find it difficult to relate to us because we do not seem to live in the same world as they do. There is also an opportunity for interaction and involvement with "Big Brother", and there may be lessons for Parliament about making it more interactive and relevant.

On that theme, the former editor of "Newsnight", Sian Kevill, said that:

> "people see politics and political coverage as being mainly about white, middle-class middle-aged men being badgered by other white, middle-aged middle-class men in a secret shared language. It is a symbol of an apparent new political divide: it is no longer left and right; it's now us and them."

There is a message in that for all Members of Parliament. We need to consider what we can do as individual MPs to re-engage people and get on the same wavelength. We could start by recognising that our opponents get some things right and we get some things wrong. We should also recognise that there is little appetite for conventional adversarial politics. I think that we should change the format of Prime Minister's questions, which I regard as a switch-off rather than a switch-on. It reinforces people's worst prejudices about politics and politicians. It should be a serious exchange on a few themes with a view to eliciting some useful information.

Vernon Coaker (Gedling): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that people do not mind the clash of view or opinion and ferocious debate when they think that it is real, but that they think that what they see in

[Vernon Coaker]

Parliament is cosmetic and unnecessary confrontation? Does he agree that we need confrontation when ideas clash, rather than just as a stage performance?

Sir George Young: A lot of Prime Minister's Question Time is synthetic, and people would not normally behave like that; it is an act that they put on. It would be better if they did not do that, and asked questions in the usual way.

We all have our answers to the problem of voter apathy—I mentioned a few—and they are far more important than the mechanical ones, which I shall come to in a moment. We need to make people want to vote, and then we can ask how we could make it easier by changing how, when or where they vote. The basic question about Sunday voting is that if postal voting is freely available, do we need to change a well tried system to introduce weekend voting?

In the pilot schemes run by local authorities in 2000, which the Minister mentioned, postal voting was the only new electoral arrangement that had significant potential for increasing turnout at local elections. The Library analysed the results in a very good paper—02/33—and the Electoral Commission carried out its own analysis. It said:

> "The technology-based voting pilots appeared to have no significant impact on turnout."

It found that postal voting had again proved a success in improving voter turnout, although not in all the pilots. In Trafford, the pilot scheme produced an election turnout of 50 per cent., which is a significant rise from the 15 per cent. in 1997.

On the specific proposition of weekend voting, will the Minister say whether she means the weekend after the Thursday when we would usually vote, or the weekend before? General election campaigns are already lengthy, and I was alarmed to discover that the Electoral Commission is consulting on making them even longer by harmonising them with other elections. I hope that that move towards bureaucratic tidiness will be resisted. There is genuine election fatigue towards the end of the campaign, which would be made worse if it were three days longer. In any event, we are in permanent campaigning mode these days, and the campaign is much less significant than it used to be.

In its study of the previous general election, the Independent Television Commission found that 70 per cent. had little or no interest in coverage, and 40 per cent. switched channels to avoid it. The consultation paper published by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister referred to the experiment in Camden, in which voting was possible the weekend before the usual election day. Only 1.1. per cent. of the 28.4 per cent. who voted at all did so during the early voting period.

How good are the Government's arguments in the consultation paper for weekend voting? They argue that more leisure time at the weekend means more opportunity to vote. However, many of those who are disaffected have enough leisure time, and if time is an issue, as it is for some, they may vote by post. I suspect that my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) does not regard the Government's argument that an election should be held on the same day as elections in the rest of Europe as a strong one. We have different systems and different cultures, and that argument is unlikely to find favour with the public.

What really alarmed me was the proposition that the general election would take place on two days. It would be seriously bad news for the polling stations to be open for two days. Given all the other means of voting, do we really have to have an election for two days? I suspect that the second day would be like the extra hour that we now have at the end of polling day for local elections, when very few people actually vote, and we irritate many more by asking them why they have not voted—adding under our breath how close the race is locally. The same would happen if the general election were held over two days. Very few people would vote on the second day, and there would be a disproportionate effort for very few extra voters. I accept that the schools would not have to close, but in my constituency many people vote in a village hall, not a school, and taking a village hall out of play for two days over a weekend is serious local politics.

There are other issues, including exit polls and what the press and other media would be allowed to say on the second day, when perhaps more than half the country has voted, but the other has not. The sheer fatigue of a second day of chasing up the non-voters who do not want to be chased up is a strong argument against two days of voting. I understand the religious sensitivities that would be offended if we plumped for either a Saturday or a Sunday, but surely those who have religious objections to one of those two days could vote earlier by post, or by proxy on the day. Two days of polling seems dotty. It is tinkering with the system, not addressing the underlying causes of voter apathy.

To conclude, I am not sure that I would look for alibis such as changing the day on which we vote. The answer lies far closer to home, and relates to how we conduct ourselves as politicians, how we motivate our electorate, and how relevant and effective they perceive us to be. If we get that right, they will vote on Thursdays, as they used to.

3.14 pm

Mr. Alan Hurst (Braintree): I agree substantially with the remarks of the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young). Tinkering with the system helps us to avoid examining the real problem.

When one reaches a certain age and moves into one's late 50s—although by Chinese standards, I suppose that I am no great age—one has seen quite a few years in politics. The first elections that I took part in were in the early 1960s. In the borough where I lived—Southend-on-Sea—40 per cent. was regarded as a very low turnout. My father stood in a number of elections in which the turnout was 60 per cent., and that was regarded as not uncommon.

As the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire observed, in those days—although he may be speaking of a slightly later time—voters were at great pains not to make any admission that they would not vote. Officially, the only people who did not vote were Jehovah's Witnesses. Sometimes one was impolite enough to suggest to someone that they might be a Jehovah's Witness if they declined to vote, and they would then explain that there was some other reason. However, such admissions were rare.

Now, non-voting is worn like a T-shirt of honour—I think that would be the appropriate expression. People will say that they are not voting as though that were something to be rewarded. I suspect that, to some extent, the background to that is the media culture in which we now live. All of us in the House, and those on local councils, are regarded as scallywags or fools, or as people who are out of touch. The aim is to portray democracy in a way that cannot be attractive to the vast majority of voters. There is a dangerous tendency in the popular newspapers, television programmes and radio interviews to treat politicians—irrespective of party—as the accused. There is no understanding that people may go into political affairs out of a sense of high calling, or because they wish to make the world a better place. The assumption is that politics is about sleaze, self-advancement and pettifogging arguments about things that do not affect people. That is not true today, and it never was true.

In the period after the second world war, the newspapers were very partisan on both sides. It may now seem surprising, but in those days the *Daily Mirror* was a firmly Labour newspaper, and even the Liberal party had the *News Chronicle*. Those papers put forward their own political views strongly, but those views were argued on the basis of politics, not on the basis of the personality of the political opponents whom they faced.

It is therefore not surprising that after the second world war there was a generation of people, particularly people who had come back from the forces, who believed that politics was a channel through which the world could be improved. It is not surprising, either, that in the 1950 election the turnout reached the highest level that the UK has ever known. It was 84 per cent., and in some towns and divisions it was 90 per cent. That is all the more surprising when one considers that the election was not held on a bank holiday weekend, but in February. It was the middle of winter, and in some parts of the country there would have been snowfall, but people were so committed to taking part in the democratic process that nothing would induce them not to do so. They saw it as their duty and their privilege to take part in the elections.

We need to try to rekindle that view of politics, so that elections become a meaningful exercise for everyone in the country. That will not be a simple task, with the baying background cacophony of the popular media, pretending that we are all shams and frauds, and that nothing can be achieved.

We ourselves are not blameless. The pettifogging arguments that take place about nothing in particular are not very edifying for the general public. However, it is remarkable that people take delight in coming to see Prime Minister's Question Time, which is an elaborate stage show. Perhaps people separate that out in their minds and consider that it falls into the realm of entertainment. However, I suspect that—even if this debate is being broadcast now—the nation's televisions are not firmly tuned to that channel.

What can we do about all this? A number of things. First, we can try to conduct politics in a more adult and intelligent way. That applies to all parties, although not to all politicians, as many of them conduct themselves in that way already. However, we should put some constraints on the head offices of all the political parties, because when an election approaches they enter into the most inane buffoonery, which has no beneficial effect whatever.

I represent one of the governing party's most marginal seats, and received great and bountiful benefits from head office during the last election. There were a series of huge, expensive posters on film themes, but one had to be very keen of sight to detect that they were urging the election of the Labour candidate. One might have thought that the picture was about to play at the multiplex cinema.

Nationally, such things may seem like clever ideas, and they may appear very smart to the advertising agencies, but they are completely meaningless to the average voter. For some strange reason, head office delivered to my constituency office footprints that were supposed to be laid out at the entrance to the Labour hall. At that point, my agent drew the line. He said that we were not going to make ourselves a complete laughing stock by putting footprints down on the way to the hall. Those are some examples from the Labour side of the political fence, and I suspect that hon. Members on both sides of the House have had similar experiences with their political organisations.

Another important reason for the decline in participation is the lack of contact between candidates and the voters. We think that we meet hundreds and thousands of people, but we do not; we have a lot of people to do that for us. When I first went into politics all those years ago, candidates canvassed people; you knocked on the doors of their houses one after the other, and asked them if they were going to vote for you. If people wanted to raise anything they did so there and then, on the doorstep, and they could judge what manner of person the candidate was and what sort of effort he or she was putting into the local community.

There was a lot of canvassing, although the number of people canvassed was always exaggerated. As hon. Members know, the 100 per cent. canvass is an impossibility. I have called at one house about 20 times in the last 20 years and never found anyone in, although I am sure that someone lives there. Members need to meet personally the people whose votes we are seeking. We need to get back to engaging them in conversation and giving them our time.

Our head offices tell us that telephone canvassing, or "voter ID", is the answer. I had a strange experience of telephone canvassing shortly before the last election. I went to see a lady of 90, and was sitting in her bungalow talking about not terribly political things when the telephone rang. The lady jumped and asked me if I would mind her answering the call, as it might be her son. The caller turned out to be a political canvasser; thank goodness it was a Conservative, rather than one of our own. She said to me, "That's very strange. It was someone wanting to know about the Conservative party. Why would they be asking me about that?" That lady is very intelligent, and well involved in political issues. In a way, that call was an affront.

We all say that we do not like being canvassed by double-glazing salesmen who telephone us out of the blue just when we are going out. The more humane of us try to be polite when we turn them down but others are as rude as possible. However, when it comes to politics, we are told that telephone canvassing is the only way, as

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it is much more accurate. But we all know that it is not accurate at all. Most of the people who are telephoned have to be re-canvassed, because the responses are so negative that they do not provide an accurate picture. There is also no human contact in any real sense. I was quite pleased that my Conservative opponent used that method. I thought, "By golly, the poor chap must be so depressed each day when he gets up and asks his agent what the returns are."

We need to reinvolve ourselves in the community, which is not as easy as it was. In the past, political initiation took place through our parents, other family members, trade unions, Churches and fairly tight communities. However, much of that structure of society has weakened. Indeed, in some cases it no longer exists. It is much more difficult for people to become involved, because the mechanisms whereby they learn about these matters are a long way away. Things are beamed into their living rooms or delivered on to their doormats, so the bonding in society that is often a precondition of voting does not take place.

People can probably gather from what I have said that I am not a great enthusiast for weekend voting. It never does any harm to have been around a long time and to have read some history, because then one knows that this country has had weekend voting before. In many areas, the old rural district councils voted on Saturdays until 1974, so there is a precedent. In our county, we would help our friends across the border on the Saturday on the condition that they had helped us on the Thursday.

I do not have figures on whether the turnout for those elections on a Saturday was higher than the turnout for the other elections on a Thursday, because all turnouts were higher in those days. We could probably find the figures and discover whether weekend voting made a substantial difference, but it probably did not.

There is an argument for postal voting, provided that it does not lessen even further the amount of political activity that takes place. An agent who was not from my constituency once said, "Well, there's postal voting now, so when election day comes round, we don't have to do anything." That will reduce turnout yet again. As I have said, there may be a case for postal voting, but we should not be deluded into thinking that because the turnout for some of the local election postal votes is higher than the turnout with other forms of voting, there would be the same effect in a general election. Such votes are moving towards the maximum level of likely voters. Unfortunately, a large section of people in our society do not vote, cannot be persuaded to vote and have no interest in voting.

I am very hostile to some of the experiments on many-sided ways of voting. My hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew), who is no longer in his place, referred to that earlier. We do not want some groups in society to have an advantageous position in the electoral system. Many poorer and older people do not have all the electronic gadgets with which people can vote so easily. They will therefore be at a disadvantage, whereas those who have such gadgets and that type of lifestyle will be at an advantage. Elected politicians should be mindful of the fact that if some people vote and some people do not, the result may well be different from what it would otherwise have been.

We should tackle the core of the problem, which is our own behaviour and the cynical society that has been created for many people. We should try to restore idealism and activity to politics, so that it becomes an integral part of people's lives and communities.

3.28 pm

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): We have already had three substantial speeches in this debate, which once again shows the value of this Chamber for debating an issue of this type. Some of the themes to which I shall refer reflect what has been said.

I was struck by what the hon. Member for Braintree (Mr. Hurst) said about the 1960s. I first stood for Parliament in 1966, having already been elected a county councillor. Obviously, there have been all sorts of changes since then, but I should like to draw attention to the contrast between the turnout when I was first elected to this place in February 1974 and the turnout when I was elected last time. In 1974 the wise electors of the then Bodmin constituency knew that the race would be close—indeed, in the end there was a majority of just nine—so they turned out in large numbers. We had an 83 per cent. turnout, in a scattered rural area with snow falling. In June 2001, in our customary balmy summer, my turnout in north Cornwall was 63 per cent.—a fall of 20 percentage points. The big difference was not in the natural climate but the political climate—the electorate took the wise decision that I had a relatively safe seat and was likely to be returned. The critical issue with turnout is whether your vote counts.

I want to focus on the mechanics first, before the motivation. The Minister was right to offer no panacea for improving the mechanisms, but in her peroration she made an important point about the legitimacy of Parliament. I wondered—I have not had the chance to check—whether she agrees with her boss, the Lord Chancellor, that the second House of Parliament can remain legitimate by being wholly unrelated to the electorate's wishes, with no democracy, no ballot box and no opportunity for the electorate to influence the composition of that House.

The mechanics are important, which is the reason for this afternoon's debate. Part of the equation—perhaps only a small part, but we should not ignore it—is trying to keep pace with the times and make the process of voting more accessible to the voter. To that extent, I congratulate the Government on introducing the pilot schemes. Even if we discover that they have little value, they will have fulfilled a significant function. My office has averaged the various experiments—with the result that all postal ballots come out at plus 14.93 per cent., which is significant.

What of electronic counting? One might think that it makes no difference whatever. It probably does not, but three of the elections—North Tyneside mayoralty and council and Chorley—were all-postal ballot votes as well. We can largely discount electronic counting; I cannot imagine why electors should turn out more enthusiastically because a computer will do the counting. Extended voting hours produced a result of minus 7.15 per cent., electronic internet voting plus 6.32 per cent., and early voting 1.7 per cent.

Dr. Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test): I hate to be picky, but does the hon. Gentleman accept that aggregating the figures as he suggests is difficult unless one knows the relative weighting of the numbers voting in each election?

Mr. Tyler: The hon. Gentleman has much experience and a distinguished academic career in this subject area; I was about to make precisely the same point. Furthermore, the points of comparison are often difficult. I shall return to that in a few minutes in the context of my wider thesis that all these pilots of are dubious value in the longer term, precisely because of the difficulty of comparison.

I shall quote from the Electoral Commission report on the pilots of last August. Brief reference has already been made to one sentence, but I want to cite the whole paragraph:

> "In a majority of pilot authorities, turnout was up by comparison both with recent local elections and with non-pilot area local elections in 2002. In some cases, turnout increased significantly—even matching the general election figures from 2001. But there were differences in performance between different pilot areas, and variations between wards even in areas that secured significant increases overall. The technology-based voting pilots appeared to have no significant impact on turnout."

That is the mixed bag to which the Minister referred, and it is important to return to the more deep-seated issues to which the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young) and the hon. Member for Braintree have already referred.

Let me deal briefly with weekend voting. My colleagues and I support the idea of a pilot, because the case cannot be proved one way or another unless we have a go at it. I do not support the view expressed by the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire that we should just have one day—Saturday or Sunday. That is not just because of religious sensitivities. The Jewish community and other communities would not wish to vote on a Saturday, but we want them to take a full part in the process. Proxy voting is not an answer. Similarly, some Christian communities will find Sunday inconvenient, or perhaps even against their principles. Two-day voting is also a matter of convenience. Some people work all day on Saturday and do not work on Sunday, and vice versa. If we are to have weekend voting it should take place not on just one weekend day, but on both. Moreover, weekend voting should be combined with the European elections of 2004, because almost all our continental partners vote on a Sunday. There is some merit in the whole of that weekend being a Europe-wide electoral occasion, rather than its being confined to just one day, with us as the odd ones out.

The Local Government Association research report "Elections: the 21st century model", which was an evaluation of the May 2000 local electoral pilot, notes that one authority—Camden—conducted its local election in the weekend following the traditional Thursday polling day, and turnout declined there more than in any other authority in the country compared with 1999. The Electoral Commission also noted a fall in turnout in 2002 to 28.4 per cent. when there was a repeat pilot of weekend voting. It is by no means certain that we will see a major increase in turnout as a result of this one little tweak.

Mr. Cash: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman intends to go on to deal with this, but one of the things that has intrigued me about the Lib Dems is that of the 10 seats in England with the highest turnouts in the 2001 general election, five were won by Lib Dem candidates. I am quite surprised that the hon. Gentleman has not mentioned that. I think that there is something important there, not least that it demonstrates that where there is a fight going on, quite often in marginal seats—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Edward O'Hara): Order. The debate is about turnouts.

Mr. Tyler: I am grateful to the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash), but I obviously must not pursue him too far down that route, Mr. Deputy Speaker. He sounds as if he will support my view that turnout can be greatly enhanced if every vote has a reasonable opportunity of affecting the result. That is the critical issue.

Martin Linton (Battersea): Before the hon. Gentleman leaves the subject of pilots, will he reconcile his first comment that there should be a pilot with his subsequent comment that the previous pilot could not be taken as evidence because the results were probably affected by completely different causes? I doubt that a pilot would work in this area, because we will not know whether it has succeeded or failed, as the fact that the election is at a weekend is only one of many different factors. Indeed, that is probably one of the weakest factors in influencing whether people vote. We need to go over to having a general election at a weekend if we are to have any idea of the real effect.

Mr. Tyler: The hon. Gentleman makes a powerful point. My thesis is that comparability is extremely difficult in this area. That is why I will return to the careful analysis of the real life results of the 2001 election rather than going for averages. That will also be an answer to the hon. Member for Stone. We should not spend too much time tweaking here and tweaking there with these pilot schemes. We should go back to the motivation, and more radical reform.

I should like to quote back to the Minister the comments she made in this Chamber earlier this year. She said:

> "Convenience is an issue, although it is not the only issue".—[*Official Report*, 28 January 2003; Vol. 398, c. 243.]

She has made similar comments again this afternoon. I hope that she and her Department have that over the door of their office. I believe that there are much stronger reasons for reviewing our electoral processes than she and her colleagues have previously given credence to.

Mr. McLoughlin: I agree with a number of the points the hon. Gentleman has made. It has been suggested that if people were allowed to abstain in an election by marking a box saying that they wished to abstain, it

[Mr. McLoughlin]

would increase turnout. Does he think that that is the case? Would he welcome a box marked "None of the above" on the ballot paper?

Mr. Tyler: There is a genuine argument for that, but the aim would be achieved much more effectively if the choice were put the other way round. Rather than giving people the negative option, we should give people a preferential option to be positive. There are good examples of that. Currently we do not have compulsory voting in this country, so if people want to say "None of the above", they stay at home—as they clearly do. It is surely preferable to present them with a ballot paper enabling them to state their least bad option, which turns the negative into the positive.

As I said earlier, the biggest single factor is surely the perceived value of the impact of one's vote. I cited the case of the turnout figures in my constituency in Cornwall, but there are more recent examples. The average figures for the 2001 election are all from the same day—this is not making a comparison between different years, which is much less reliable than looking at figures from the same day—and if we look carefully underneath them we see that the foregone conclusion syndrome, which was to some extent a national one in June 2001, was even stronger in certain constituencies.

I have cited in this Chamber the turnout for Liverpool, Riverside of 34.1 per cent. I believe that the turnout there is always around that figure, because they weigh the Labour majority there, rather than constituents looking with interest to see who might win. Compare that with the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten), who in 1997 had a majority of just two. There, if anywhere, people knew their vote was likely to be of significance to the outcome, and he had a 72.3 per cent. turnout—more than twice that of Liverpool, Riverside—on the same day. That is a genuine comparison, rather than the pallid comparisons that we have been looking at.

A system of voting that allows a greater degree of proportionality will reflect the views of the majority of the voting public instead of a minority. We all know what proportion of the adult electorate actually voted for the present Government, despite their large majority. Such a system would also provide more diversity among the electoral representatives, which would do more than anything to engender a better connection between public and politicians, and more participation in elections. Surely we should be addressing that issue.

In that debate, the hon. Member for Battersea (Martin Linton) said:

> "On average across the whole globe, turnout in first-past-the-post elections is 58 per cent., which is similar to the figure in this country, while turnout in proportional systems is 68 per cent."—[*Official Report, Westminster Hall*, 28 January 2003; Vol. 398, c. 235WH.]

That is a real live difference, and it is extremely important that the Government address it.

The Scottish Executive have just published a draft Local Government Bill that proposes a proportional system for the purpose of returning local councillors. A lengthy and extensive consultation process was undertaken before that stage was reached. Even in Wales the subject is now back on the agenda. There may be progress—depending, I suspect, on the result of the Assembly elections. Northern Ireland already benefits from single transferable votes and has a marked tendency towards improved turnout. The Library tells me that in Northern Ireland, where a system of single transferable votes is operated in all European elections, turnout has been significantly higher than in the rest of the UK.

Mr. McLoughlin: The hon. Gentleman says that the single transferable vote has led to a higher turnout in Northern Ireland. Will he acknowledge that in the Northern Ireland elections to the United Kingdom Parliament, which are carried out on a first-past-the-post system, the turnout is also higher? The fact that it is higher for another system, too, does not lend his case much credence.

Mr. Tyler: I cannot confirm or deny that. I think that the discrepancy is much greater in the European elections than in general elections, but someone else can investigate that matter. An extremely valuable and well based independent review of electoral systems is currently being undertaken under the auspices of the Constitution Unit, under two distinguished chairs, David Butler and Peter Riddell, and I look forward to seeing what it produces. I hope that we shall have at least an interim report early in the summer. It will be interesting to see what comes forward from that.

The Government, including the Minister's Department, have already been tasked to undertake, lead or set up a more general review after the Scottish Parliament, Welsh Assembly and local elections have taken place in May. Perhaps the Minister will tell us a little more about that. I hope that she will be able to confirm, although she could not do so on a previous occasion, that she will pilot a single transferable vote system in the London borough elections of 2006. Lewisham has already offered to undertake such a pilot and others will, no doubt, follow if encouraged. That would be helpful.

As others have already said, the discussion of the various small-scale pilot options does not really provide a panacea; indeed, the Minister herself said that it did not. Weekend voting is probably worth looking at, but it is of marginal value compared with the radical change needed to reinvigorate the sense of purpose and commitment that we want the electorate to have in relation to the parliamentary system. To achieve that, we must have equal value voting systems. All the pilots will be dismissed simply as gimmicks if they are not accompanied by a more rigorous review of all the real options; they are like cutting our toenails when we need a hip replacement.

3.46 pm

Dr. Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test): We are discussing a fundamental dichotomy: the wished-for health of the democratic system on one hand and the main purpose of the voting that takes place in that democratic system on the other, which is to decide which party has won and therefore gets power, either locally or nationally. To achieve that result, the parties will undertake certain actions relating to those elections, which may or may not add to the first half of the dichotomy—the health of the democratic system.

I doubt whether this afternoon, between 2.30 and 5.30 in Westminster Hall, we shall between us come up with the panacea for the malaise that prevents people from voting. Inevitably, we will be talking to some extent at the margins. It is important to make points about the health of our democratic system and the extent to which we as politicians should behave better to encourage that and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Braintree (Mr. Hurst) said, to connect better with our voters. However, the dichotomy that I set out to some extent emphasises that it is difficult to see how, unless one legislates fundamentally to change that dichotomy, the things that cause people to be turned off voting can be tackled.

For example, attack campaigning is clearly seen to work. A number of studies show that, so if one is a party manager, seeking to undertake the second half of the dichotomy—to get one's party to win an election—one might decide to undertake attack campaigning, even though that does not help the health of democracy. Although people say that they are very annoyed by telephone canvassing approaches, that method works by and large, so people are likely to use it to try to advance their political purposes. Part of the problem connected with the dichotomy is that the discussion on who is going to win the spoils of power in an election might relate, perfectly coherently, to what slice of a cake is cut for a winning side, whether or not that cake is getting smaller because fewer people are going out to vote. If we are not careful, we could end up with two parallel discussions about the academic health of democracy and about how to win elections. We must recognise that both are relevant to our electoral system.

I believe that a system of proportional representation is morally right for this country and may well increase turnout, but in countries that have had proportional representation for a long time voting figures are declining although they are higher than in countries with a first-past-the-post system. The trajectory of voting over a period should be examined to inform our discussions.

The idea that turnout is a sign of democratic health is fundamental. It is important that people exercise their right to vote and decide one way or another how their lives should be run through the political process. I cannot think of a better system—this spills over into elections for second chambers, nominations to quangos and so on—of organising people's right to take decisions on behalf of other people. Having a system whereby the legitimacy of that election is guaranteed because many people have taken part in it is important in the first part of the dichotomy. What can we do now to guarantee that?

This afternoon, we are debating not changing the voting system, but weekend voting and new systems of voting that may increase turnout. Setting those aside, what happens at the moment? As my hon. Friend the Minister said, we vote on Thursdays and there may be good historical reasons for that. I can think of another reason: that the candidates are usually so tired at the end of the election that being able to have Friday off, as well as the weekend, before they have to take decisions as a result of winning the spoils of election is no bad thing for democracy. We ask people to vote on a Thursday in one place and if they do not turn up at that place they do not get a vote. We ask them to vote on a slip of paper that seems to have been printed by the last remaining letterpress printer in the country. We then ask them to fill in their preference on that letterpress-printed piece of paper using a carpenter's pencil attached to the wall by a piece of string. Finally, we ask them to do that in a horse box that has been set up in a school hall. That is probably one of the most bizarre activities that we ask people to do in their daily lives in expressing their opinions, preferences and thoughts. That might inform our thoughts on how to increase turnout and create the reinforcement to ensure that people are able to vote, although it may not necessarily be the answer to all our concerns about our democratic system.

It is true that some people may be disadvantaged by not having access to different forms of democratic participation that other people have. It is also true that the daily life expectations of society have changed radically. We do not all set off for work and return home at the same time. We do not all work in the same place, and we have different working practices. We used not to go to garden centres and the shops on a Sunday, but now we do. Several things have changed that relate to the assumptions that we make about our daily lives and what makes us vote. In the context of those changing ideas about our lives, it is important that we take that different way of doing things into account.

I was pleased to see the pilots that were originally set up by the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, and subsequently set up by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. We must consider whether those pilots are worth pursuing as far as local elections are concerned. Pilots were introduced for the 2002 council elections, and we shall see a further 41 this year; those relate mainly to e-voting, but also to other forms of participation.

I agree with the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) that it would be a good idea to agree with local authorities to have pilots on proportional representation voting systems, possibly under the public service agreement mechanism. For the Government to say to local authorities that high performing local authorities can have a great deal more freedoms but not the freedom to determine how to set up the voting system for their area may be viewed as a drawback to the otherwise admirable introduction of a system to enable local government to enjoy freedoms and flexibilities.

I shall spend a moment talking about the problems of pilots. As important as pilots are, there is a problem—this relates to my original point on how elections work—with the idea that we could select a better voting system, which overcomes faults and meets the needs of our lives, by examining the outcome of a pilot based on one local election in one area. Voting is by and large based on habit. Politicians know that, and apply that knowledge when deciding how their local electoral organisations will go about contacting voters. The political parties of all the people in the Chamber will have a note in their party office of who always votes, who votes in general elections but not in council elections, who votes in council elections but not always in general elections, who occasionally votes and who never votes. That information is in addition to information about whether people have always voted Labour, Liberal Democrat or

[Dr. Alan Whitehead]

Conservative. An element of the parties' approach is to ensure that those people who sometimes vote in council elections are encouraged to come out and vote in an election. Those people who always vote are also canvassed to ensure that they vote. The people who rarely or never vote are often set aside, not part of the efforts of the party. Parties operate in that way because voting is habitual.

However, when parties consider their longitudinal records, they will observe not only that electoral turnout is declining but that those people who vote habitually tend to be members of the older generation. The very oldest voters will die off, or perhaps I should say die—please excuse my infelicity—and the next generation of voters do not have the same habits. Not only do young voters not have that habit of voting, but they have a contrary habit, which I personally find concerning for the health of democracy: they have the idea that it is cool not to vote. Many see it as a positive thing to say, "No, I'm not voting. You're all the same, and that's the end of the matter." The question is whether those cohorts will acquire voting habits as they grow older, or whether the non-voting habit will pass on through the generations. In future, people may have an endemic habit of not voting very often.

Mr. Cash: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman could enlighten us as to why the turnout of young people has dropped to such an extent. What does he think would encourage them to vote?

Dr. Whitehead: There are a large number of reasons why young people do not vote. I am not sure that we have either time or the breadth of discussion this afternoon to go into those reasons in detail. There is clearly a combination of factors that I have already mentioned, such as the assumed lifestyle of young people, the dissociation from tribal loyalties in voting, the idea that politicians are divorced from the concerns of young people and a large number of other factors.

I was attempting to illustrate the danger for the democratic process if a cohort emerges that has a habit of not voting. That may pass on through the generations, and we shall end up with a population who do not vote. Voting may become a minority activity carried out by rather strange people who debate with one another. The net result could lead to very strange outcomes in which a very small number of voters in the grip of a particular enthusiasm gain representation despite the antipathy of the vast majority of the people who do not vote, or do not wish to. That was the precise outcome in some of the recent European election turnouts.

On the analysis of the pilots, I concluded that I was not sure that we could draw hard and fast conclusions from the offer of a particular voting method on one occasion, because voting is habitual. That phenomenon is not just something that occurs in elections. If someone sets up a park-and-ride scheme to get people out of cars and into buses, that scheme has to run for between 18 months and two years before anyone has the confidence to use it. That is usually about the time that the money for the pilot runs out and the local authority decides to discontinue the scheme, claiming that it has not been a success.

Some of the results of the 2002 pilots showed that there was no enormous change, even if we discount the fact that they might reflect the stopping of a decline. However, if we continued the process over a period, people might develop voting habits that were of far greater long-term benefit because they would be encouraged to vote in a way that was aligned with their lifestyle, rather than in the peculiar way in which they have to vote currently.

Martin Linton: Does my hon. Friend agree, in that case, that the Government sometimes suffer from what one might call pilotitis—a wish to have a pilot of every possible scheme, instead of having the courage of their convictions and making the reform?

Dr. Whitehead: I would not like the phrase pilotitis to be widely used. It does sound like something terrible that happens when people sit on radiators. My hon. Friend has a considerable point, which I was about to come to. The operation of pilots can tell us something, but not everything. Indeed, the hon. Members for Stone (Mr. Cash) and for North Cornwall raised that point earlier—albeit incorrectly, in the case of the particular significance of the Chorley election. The vast majority of authorities using electronic counting experienced an increased turnout, which is counter-intuitive inasmuch as the general voting public do not care how their votes are counted. One of the best increases in turnout, however, was based on that particular section of the electoral pilots.

Taking on board the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Martin Linton), my view is that pilots may be important, but if we base our entire future philosophy of elections on them, we may miss fundamental points about trends and habits. Frankly, the only way in which we can deal with that, short of having widespread placebo election experiments in which we run entire elections in parallel using different methods, is to bite the bullet and change things.

Mr. Tyler: I agree with a great deal of what the hon. Gentleman has said. I hope that he would agree that bringing together the local elections and the European elections in 2004 is valuable for reasons other than pilotry. I think that he would agree that voter fatigue is a problem, because having two elections within five weeks of each other may well be a disincentive to turning out.

Dr. Whitehead: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. Looking at the turnout in general elections and council elections in recent years, in 1979 council elections and the general election were held on the same day—that is also true of the most recent general election—and there was a much higher turnout in the council elections, for obvious reasons. I am uncertain whether the turnout for European elections will drag down the turnout for local authority elections. However, I agree in principle that the idea is an interesting way in which to address voter fatigue.

In conclusion, if we agree that pilots have limited validity in deciding how to change electoral behaviour to make turnout increase, which would enhance the legitimacy of our election to our seats, the decision comes back to the House. To some extent, we have to follow our noses. We should consider how the current voting system looks to those people who do not habitually engage in politics. In my canvassing for the previous election—this relates to why some young people do not vote—I found a number of people who simply did not know how to vote. Those people have not been to vote with their parents and find the process mysterious. They may well say that it is cool not to vote simply because they think that the process is more complicated than it actually is.

The Government should therefore press ahead with systems that bring our voting in line with how we live. We have to make a judgment because we do not have the empirical evidence to allow us to decide whether the leap will be beneficial. If we go down the weekend voting route and put together different methods of voting, it will make a difference. We will never know whether it made an empirical difference because we cannot judge the decision in the same way as a social science experiment. It is, however, our responsibility as politicians to make it happen.

4.8 pm

Mr. Richard Allan (Sheffield, Hallam): It is a pleasure to follow the previous contributions to the debate. The right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young) started the debate by dividing up the issue into motivation and practical factors. Voting is like planning a crime: one needs motive, means and opportunity, all of which have to come together for voting to occur.

The hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Dr. Whitehead) started talking about motivation, and he made some important points about the generational shift. I want to talk about that in the context of the way in which the concept of civic duty is changing. I shall start by talking about some of the opportunity questions, which relate to the opening hours and locations of polling stations, and the means questions, which are about novel forms of voting, such as postal votes, electronic votes and various other forms of remote voting.

Means and opportunity issues are important. The hon. Gentleman sensibly relayed the observation that going to vote is like going back 30 years for a lot of people. It is an odd experience. We are used to it because we live in the political world. However, he helpfully described the way in which the voting system appears to a lot of people outside political circles, who think of it as going back in time.

E-voting has rightly gained a lot of prominence and is seen as a way to bring voting into the 21st century. I am keen on e-issues, but even I am somewhat sceptical about the way in which e-voting is being heavily oversold as a turnout improver. E-voting certainly adds a layer of convenience, and I would never want to stand in the way of that. In such debates, there is sometimes a sense that voting should be made difficult and that barriers should be put in the way so that only people who are serious about voting get to do it. I count myself well out of that school. Voting should be made as easy as possible. There is no justification for trying to make things difficult and no advantage in doing so.

The potential for e-voting is sometimes oversold on the basis of being related to the number of internet users. About half the country has access to the internet. In particular, the younger age groups, which we want to target, have that access. I have started to consider the matter, in conjunction with people who work in the area of e-democracy, and I suggest that the realistic potential audience for e-voting is somewhere nearer 15 per cent. than 50 per cent. That proposition is based on the fact that the comparators for people who are likely to use e-voting are, much more accurately, people who are already using e-banking or e-government services, who are a very much smaller subset of the total number of people who have access to the internet. People who feel comfortable transacting online are not equivalent to people who are online in a more general sense. The experience of e-government bears that out. We get nothing like the usage figures that one might imagine from looking at the number of people who are online.

The hon. Member for Southampton, Test also made an important point when he talked about the problem of continuous pilots or pilots that change from year to year and the fact that habit is an important element in getting people to vote. I had an e-voting pilot last year and I am going to get another, slightly different, one this year. Rather than seeing new people voting, I saw people who already voted shift from using the traditional paper method to the e-voting method.

The hon. Members for Braintree (Mr. Hurst) and for Stroud (Mr. Drew) picked up on the fact that the method of voting can influence who votes, and who votes can clearly influence the outcome. From a politician's point of view, e-voting is incredibly tedious because all that happens is that an electoral officer comes up and says, "You got this number and they got that number." That is it. There is no fun or excitement. Right at the beginning of the count, the officer comes out with a little scrap of paper and says, "There's your result, mate."

It was, however, exciting news when the results from the e-vote in one of the wards in my constituency that the Liberal Democrats normally win showed that we were three to one ahead, whereas our vote was down on the paper vote. The experience showed something that other studies bear out, which is that Liberal Democrat voters tend to use the internet proportionately more than voters for other parties do. Therefore we were three to one ahead, but we were three to two on the final count, which is exactly comparable to the result that we get every year.

Looking at the figures, it is fairly safe to say that we saw Liberal Democrat voters voting online, instead of going to the polling station. The Conservative voters who always went to the polling station kept going to the polling station. To pick up on the point made by the hon. Member for Southampton, Test, I may have a potential problem if the e-voting pilot is taken away, because my supporters, who have got used to voting online, may feel miffed and not turn out to vote at all if the service is suddenly withdrawn. There is still more work to be done in teasing out some of the issues, but I had not considered the fact that habit is so significant. That is something to take away from the debate.

A more significant aspect of the debate is the question of civic participation and the recognition that democracy is about far more than voting, which is only a

[Mr. Richard Allan]

small part of it. If we become too obsessed about voting, voters may say, "You are interested in us only at election time." To me, the key to increasing turnout is what happens between elections, not what happens at election time. We should be focusing far more on the tie-up.

Again the electronic agenda is important. It is not the fact that someone makes a virtual cross in a box on a screen that is significant in increasing turnout, but the fact that someone who engages politically to vote on the internet will engage all the rest of the time. People may become involved in politics and political issues because they now have a set of tools that were not previously available. Such tools may fit more comfortably with their lifestyle and way of working, particularly if they are a younger voter. Therefore, the linkage is important. If e-voting has a value, it is as a link to e-participation.

The office of the e-envoy published a White Paper last year. I believe that it was published under the auspices of the Leader of the House. I know that the debate on it and many of the representations stressed the point that e-participation was important, rather than simply the voting, whereas the White Paper was more or less evenly split between the two. I believe that people want more work to be done on participation. I hope that the debate that is taking place in the context of the Lord Chancellor's Department's responsibility for elections is linked in a joined-up government fashion to other debates about the wider democracy agenda that are taking place in the office of the e-envoy and other forums.

Earlier, I expressed my concerns about the possibility of coercion and undue influence under all forms of remote voting. It applies to postal voting as well. I was interested in the Minister's response that she envisaged a multi-channel approach. That was helpful, but it means that I must counter the point made by the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire about weekend voting perhaps not being necessary if there is a large amount of postal voting. At present, I am very keen to see a multi-channel approach develop whereby, even if postal voting is available, there are also supervised polling places.

The key distinction between a polling station and any form of remote voting is that a polling station is a safe environment in which an individual can vote without coercion and undue influence. Obviously, there are situations in which one would be concerned about that. I think particularly of a man in a household who controls access to voting by controlling the computer. He would be setting up the voting procedure. Particularly when it comes to a husband and wife—or man and woman—situation in a household, the possibility that the man will direct the voting is obviously much greater than if the man and woman go to a polling station together but split up and go into separate booths to vote.

Some of those issues lead me to suggest that polling places will continue to be important no matter how far we go with remote voting. In that respect, we have not sufficiently explored the advantages of supervised electronic voting as opposed to remote electronic voting. An advantage of electronic voting methods and machines is that they can be linked to a central network, so that people can vote at any polling station anywhere in their district. They would not have to go to a particular polling station, which is an advantage in itself.

Such a system could allow us to provide more polling places as improvements in the technology reduce the costs. A polling place that is, essentially, a kiosk can operate with a lower staff ratio. A supervised electronic polling kiosk could be far more easily rolled out to multiple locations than the traditional paraphernalia of a paper-based polling station.

I stress that more polling places should be made available. Online banking is a good analogy for many things that are taking place in the online world. The banks have rapidly realised that online banking does not allow them to close all their branches. Many people want and value the branch network. In fact, banks are putting micro-branches in all sorts of places. Learning from that example could help us make polling accessible to people. Micro polling stations would be good for people. They would make it easier for them to vote but also give them certainty that they can vote free from coercion and undue influence.

I want also to cover the discussion about participation: whether people feel that they should participate and whether that leads them to vote. Important research is taking place at the moment, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, in the democracy and participation programme. It is led by Professor Paul Whiteley of the university of Essex and is starting to report now. Its findings will be illuminating to this debate. In particular, research carried out by Rachel Gibson, Wainer Lusoli and Stephen Ward of the university of Salford examined young citizens' political activity via the internet. Some of the research results are being released at www.ipop.org.uk.

The section of the population that the study considered is one that we could try to engage and persuade to vote via the internet. The results showed that while only 10 per cent. of those in the 15 to 24-year-old age bracket were currently engaged in real world politics, 30 per cent. had been active and carried out a political activity via the internet. The study also picked up on a small but notable group who engage in only virtual politics, eschewing entirely the traditional offline options. Rather than being a privileged elite, however, those people are more likely to be recent recruits to the internet and of a lower socio-economic status than those engaging in traditional politics. The study also found that a clear majority of those who used the internet to contact a political organisation—63 per cent.—claim that they would not have done so if they had had to rely on traditional means. That research programme is starting to pull out some interesting results about changes in behaviour, and I hope that we shall be able to feed some of them into the debate. The debates on civic participation and on voting should be seen as running together.

My next point relates to civic duty, which I mentioned earlier. It follows on from the comments of the hon. Member for Southampton, Test about the generational shift and relates to the British election survey 2001, titled "Britain (Not) At The Polls, 2001", which was conducted by Clarke, Sanders, Stewart and Whiteley and published in 2002. They examined several of the hypotheses that we have debated today about why people did not vote, but the one that struck me related to what is often termed the end-of-deference debate. People nowadays do not feel that they have to vote, whereas before, they continued to vote out of a sense of duty and guilt.

That important theory has been alluded to already. The Minister spoke about it in the context of women voters, and we often pick up the idea from older voters that as people died for us to get the vote, we must use it. The study's authors picked up a potential shift in attitudes by asking people whether they thought that failing to vote was a serious neglect of their civic duty. That was upping the stakes, as they had previously asked whether not voting was a neglect of duty. In the 18 to 25-year-old age group, only 41 per cent. thought that it was a serious neglect of their civic duty; in other words, three out of five felt that it was not. In the 66-years-old and over age bracket, 86 per cent. felt that it was a serious neglect. The difference is stark, and it was much more marked in that question than in the general neglect question. Younger people felt that they should vote, but they did not feel that it was serious not to do it. That is an important distinction.

The authors suggested that those answers show the generational shift that has been described. We have spent many years pursuing freedom, and that has included the freedom to choose not to participate. As the hon. Member for Southampton, Test said, one factor may be that people say that they are choosing not to participate when they are scared to do so because they do not understand. I have experienced that. I have knocked on someone's door and said that I am the candidate for this constituency for this election, and I have had to start defining terms immediately, when asked what a candidate is and what the constituency is. The notion that everyone has an easy association between their Member and constituency is false. I have had to explain, "Sheffield has six constituencies. You've heard of David Blunkett. He's one MP, and I'm another." People often start at a low base, and in such cases people may be scared to look ignorant. That is prevalent, but the wider belief is that people no longer feel that they have to vote, and if they choose not to, we cannot make them. That attitude is significant.

The study examined that aspect of the dynamics of civic duty in its conclusions, which are worth quoting. It says:

> "Although a comparison of 1997 and 2001 BES data does not suggest that the belief that voting is an obligation of British citizenship has diminished appreciably in recent years, already strong age-related differences are accentuated in response to a new civic duty question in the 2001 BES",

which is the one about serious failure if one has not voted. It continues:

> "If these enhanced differences signify growing life-cycle or—more ominously—generational gaps in civic duty, the 2001 decrease in turnout may be a harbinger of a future where levels of electoral participation in Britain more closely resemble those in the United States."

In other words, dropping to 40 to 50 per cent. will be the norm.

There are questions about whether democracies are legitimate once participation has dropped to 40 to 50 per cent. The United States is clearly an established democracy that functions at that level, but there is no suggestion in the United Kingdom that any of us would be comfortable with that. That generational shift may be the factor that finally tips us out of a comfortable situation in which participation has always been 70-odd per cent, although it occasionally slips down and picks up again, or slips down on elections that we all perceive to be relatively unimportant, such as the European ones. Interestingly, they were not seen as a crisis of democratic legitimacy, although the turnout was far lower than for the 2001 general election, which focused our minds because we all share a sense of the relative importance of general elections. The study highlighted the fact that dropping down to 40 to 50 per cent. at general elections is a real prospect as the generational shift takes place. We should all worry about it.

To conclude, I want the new methods to work, not fail. We should improve the opportunity to vote and the means of voting, but we always need to ensure that the integrity of the election is not compromised. I fear that it takes only one election result to be seriously challenged, or only one set of accusations about coercion or undue influence that cannot be properly resolved, for a whole new voting method to be written off in the minds of the public.

More important, we must improve the motivation of voters, especially by tackling civic duty head on. The democratic participation agenda research programmes will generate a lot of research and give us plenty of food for thought. We can make real progress if we get out of our cosy political environments and find out what is going on, and if we find imaginative new ways of conducting politics, rather than sticking a modern veneer on things and doing them in the way in which we have always done them.

4.27 pm

Vernon Coaker (Gedling): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan). I agreed especially with his concluding remarks, which built on the remarks made by the right hon. Member for [illegible]orth-West Hampshire (Sir George Young). Both made very good contributions to the debate.

I shall re[illegible]eat many of the points that have already been ma[illegible]However, I do so with some trepidation, as last sum[illegible]er—a few months ago now—I held a meeting for young people on voter apathy, but no one turned up. I therefore do not feel best placed to contribute to the debate, although the problem was more to do with timing and organisation than with the young people. I was the problem, which is one of the issues that we face.

The situation is serious. I take the point made by the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) that competitive elections help, but participation in elections is declining, whichever way we look at it. The figures for 2001 reflect that trend. As we know, 59 per cent. of people voted, but the figure declined to 39 per cent. among young people, as hon. Members pointed out. Among under-35s, the figure was only 45 per cent. Those figures trouble us all, and say something about the health of our democracy. As my hon. Friend the Minister said, if we consider the differential turnouts and break the data down so that we can focus on the detail, we see that in some parts of the country, particularly some cities, a very small minority of people vote. If we break the data down by age, we see that a very small number of young people in those areas vote.

[Vernon Coaker]

To understand what is going on, however, we must look beyond those figures and some of the measures that we are taking. There are problems with the formal political process. I make the obvious point that when we go to meetings or hear issues debated, there is no lack of interest in those issues or lack of desire to debate many of the great policies of the day. However, when it comes to making a statement about the formal political process through elections, people seem to see it as irrelevant. We must therefore find ways to make the formal political process much more relevant to people and to how they understand things are working. In other words, we have to increase the desire or propensity of people to vote.

The Minister and the rest of the Government are introducing various pilots, which I welcome. I have no problem with weekend voting. We could debate whether that should take place on a Sunday, a Saturday or both. I have no problem with e-voting, all-postal ballots or any of the other mechanisms that we could introduce for voting. We all agree that in encouraging people to vote, we need to make the act of voting as simple as we can. We need to make it easy, whether that involves the siting of polling booths, the electoral register or whatever. We need to help people.

However, these measures alone will not do the trick. If we think that by making voting easy we shall be doing anything other than tweaking the system, we are deluding ourselves and underestimating the scepticism, cynicism and mistrust that people have about the formal political process and, indeed, ourselves. That is reflected in election turnouts and the lack of desire to vote. That is the real challenge, which is why I particularly wanted to contribute to the debate. How do we as people's representatives in Parliament change, improve, reinvigorate, rejuvenate and enhance our democracy in such a way that people see voting for who should represent them in Parliament as worth while? Whether voting takes place on a Thursday, Sunday, Monday or Tuesday is irrelevant to the answer to that question.

A number of hon. Members have made that serious point. As the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam and my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test (Dr. Whitehead) said, a massive majority of people in the younger generation feel disillusioned and frustrated. Only in the older population is there a sense of civic duty and connection.

I very much agreed with the remarks that I think were made by the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire. I hope that I do not misquote him. We must consider what we do in this place and how we are perceived if we want people to vote and election turnouts to improve. We all say in elections, "Vote for me. I am not just here for you at election time; I am here all the time." However, one of the biggest criticisms that people can make is that politicians turn up only at election time. They say, "Because you turn up only at election times, we're not going to vote. If you're not interested in us between elections, we're not going to vote. If you knock on our door only when you want something from us, don't bother. We're not going to vote."

What happens between elections is important in people's decision whether to turn out and vote at the next election. If, having elected us as their representatives in 2001, the next time that people feel any sense of involvement with their MP or Parliament is in 2005 or 2006, no change to the mechanics of voting will do anything to increase voter turnout in the election. That is because people's cynicism, disillusion and despair will have grown during that time. It will be a real challenge for us to change that, but we must try to find ways to do so.

Members of Parliament are not delegates, and it would be a sad day if we ever became just representatives who are only ever accountable at an election. It would be increasingly difficult to sustain that position because people want a greater sense of involvement and to participate in democracy all the time, not just at elections. It is a real challenge to find ways of involving them.

I want to make some suggestions that could help us to reconnect with the public and overcome that cynicism and sense of disillusion, which would help to increase the turnout at elections.

First, we should consider how we conduct our debates in this place. The right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire made a good point about unnecessary confrontation in the Chamber, which people do not like. They do not mind clashes of views and opinions when they are genuinely held and passionately felt, as shown in the debate on Iraq last week. I did not participate in that debate but I spent many hours listening to it in the Chamber. It was a great debate; there were huge clashes of opinion and Members expressed strongly held views. They vehemently criticised each other's points of view, but they respected them. People outside this place did not mind that; they did not see it as unnecessary, so it did not breed that sense of disillusionment that leads to their feeling disconnected from Parliament, which in turn leads to their asking why they should bother to vote.

We need to look at how we conduct our debates, how we address each other and some of the language that we use. We must consider how to involve people in the decisions that we take in this place and how we can more effectively take account of people's points of view.

Mr. Cash: The hon. Gentleman is making an interesting speech. Does he agree with me about modification of the Whip system, a matter that I have raised many times? Many people are simply not interested in seeing Members being driven like sheep through the Lobby.

Vernon Coaker: I agree with the hon. Gentleman, and so do many other people; that is why Westminster Hall is such an interesting innovation. Many people, if asked, would probably say that there is some unnecessary whipping in Parliament. Certainly, that is what a lot of people say to me. Either we tell those people that they have got it wrong about their democracy, and that the whipping system works very well, or we listen to what people have to say.

People are becoming more frustrated by Members voting rigidly along party lines. They want more genuine debates on the issues of the day, in which Members allow their conscience to dictate how they vote, although we must remember that we have a party system of government. In answer to the hon. Gentleman, I would say that we must have a whipping system but that it is probably too rigid. We should consider ways of allowing more free votes and debates on issues in which Members genuinely have a free vote. That would be helpful, and I think that people in the country would appreciate it.

Reforming the way that we do our business in Parliament would allow people to feel more connected to the formal political process and should, in the end, improve electoral turnout. Greater involvement in decision making and changes to our practices here should help.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Braintree (Mr. Hurst) suggested, the media have a role to play in improving electoral turnout. I am not one of those people who view the media as the enemy, always getting things wrong. The media have a responsibility to report misdeeds and wrongs, but also to recognise and report people's genuine attempts to produce solutions to political problems of the day.

I have outlined a couple of ways of reforming the way that we do our business in this House. It is crucial to reflect on how we, as MPs, connect with our constituencies' and to gain an understanding of how we can give people a greater sense of involvement in the decision-making process. People in the 21st century do not accept that they voted for me, that I come to Parliament and that they have to wait another four years before passing judgment on how I have done. That factor has to be balanced against the dangers of a pure delegate system. To improve electoral turnout, we must start to deal with those issues as well as the mechanics of voting.

Let us be imaginative, radical and determined to change the factors that lead to disillusionment and despair, which often result in the declining participation of people, particularly younger people, in voting. We need to find ways of reforming ourselves, so that people see voting as part of the democratic process.

4.41 pm

Mr. William Cash (Stone): As in the previous debate of 22 January and despite my remarks at the outset that we would repeat what we had debated before, I have come away from this debate with a sense of considerable enthusiasm for the subject. All the speeches have been thoughtful and excellent. As other hon. Members have said, what a pity it is that so few people are participating in this debate. Frankly, the massive decline in voter turnout—down to 59.4 per cent.—that occurred during the last general election is a serious sign for all political parties. It is effectively a demonstration of despair in the system.

I am not criticising the Government, but I doubt whether the key issue is about systems and techniques. They could change things at the margin, but for practical purposes, with the possible exception of postal ballots, no more than that. I hope that the Liberal Democrats will forgive me for saying that the solution does not lie in proportional representation. The problem is much more fundamental. The previous worst figure in general election turnout was in 1918. By nature and inclination an issues man, I am more concerned about the relationship between the events of a period and the consequences for general elections than about the technical aspects of voting systems.

If people are seriously worried about a problem, they will turn out to vote. In an agreeable exchange with the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) we found that five of the 10 highest turnouts were reflected by Liberal victories, which tells us a great deal about the degree of interest generated in those constituencies. Perhaps there is some connection, although I cannot think of it immediately, between what was going on in constituencies such as Liverpool, Riverside which have demonstrably low turnouts. Perhaps it was just the sense that there was nothing to vote about because it was a foregone conclusion, or it might have been because not enough political energy was being shown by the people who were their representatives. In other words,

> "The fault, dear Brutus, lies not in our stars,
>
> But in ourselves, that we are underlings."

That takes me back to the point that I have made about the Whip system. We will inevitably have a whipping system in a party system. The parties, after all, represent the translation of opinions into policies and law. Those opinions are reflected by the body of people who gather together, as Burke would put it, on a common principle in the national interest as they see it. People in the 18th century understood these things. I should like to mention a matter of anecdotal historical interest. I say this with great respect to the Lib Dems, particularly the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan) who represents Ranmoor where I was brought up. My parents still live there and are his constituents.

The most illustrious member of my family was John Bright, who was effectively responsible for the 1867 Reform Act, passed by Disraeli. No one can doubt the degree of energy that he and others applied when they decided after the corn laws that they wanted to address the need for people to be given the right to vote, which was the point that the Minister made at the beginning. I entirely endorse that. I greatly admire the suffragettes for what they did. But this was not a feminist movement as such; it was a matter of the right to vote. The turnout was essential to those questions.

The Hyde park riots that preceded the 1867 Reform Act were a demonstration by people who were frustrated that, on the great issues of the day, what they said or thought was completely irrelevant. Although I am in favour of dealing with Saddam Hussein in an effective manner and although I am prepared to concede that it is not inevitable at the moment. I still think that the protest marches and other demonstrations are another form of turnout that is also extremely important not only in modern politics but in politics down the ages.

This is a terribly important debate. I suppose that I should not be surprised that there are not more hon. Members present, but I am disappointed that this is the second time that we have been around the circuit and there has not yet been a sufficient appreciation of the significance of the matter. I wish that we could have more debates like this and perhaps fewer of the other kind that often give rise to a comment that I frequently make at meetings—the best way to keep a secret is to make a speech in the House of Commons.

[Mr. William Cash]

I, too, am extremely alarmed by the lack of interest shown by young people. I am not entirely convinced that we have got anywhere near trying to appreciate it. The hon. Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) made important points about that. If I may again quote Disraeli,

> "The Youth of a Nation are the trustees of Posterity".

It would be an appalling state of affairs if the drop in interest among young people continued. If that trend were extrapolated into the next general election and the one after that, our democracy, which is already at risk for several reasons, would be severely tested.

I endorse and have always been enthusiastic about the idea of civic education. Some people would say that I am a traditional Tory, but they do not understand where I am coming from. Some of my more traditional colleagues are extremely suspicious of ideas of civic duty and teaching pupils in schools about the system of government, but I am all for it. It is terribly important. I wish that I had been better taught at that time. I was well taught in history, Latin and other such subjects, which have been useful in their time. But there is an important role for giving young people a clear understanding in this complicated, topsy-turvy world of why they should go out and vote.

Voting is the most important thing that a person does, when we think about it. Imagine if nobody voted, to put it in the most absurd context. The participation of a person in exercising his freedom of choice by turning out in an election and putting a cross against the name of the person who represents, in broad terms, the kind of society that he wants to live in is one of the most important things that a person can do. It is like eating, drinking and sleeping, but it happens only once in a blue moon. The fact that a vast number of people decide not to vote, for whatever reason, or think that politics is boring, uninteresting and irrelevant, or fail to understand the significance of what is going on is a dangerous sign of the times that we live in.

I was interested to hear on the radio this morning that George Orwell's "1984" has been rated the most important book in a poll of those who read books these days. Perhaps there is some significance in that. I am therefore extremely glad to know that the Electoral Commission is to take on this important role, but I issue a serious caveat, as I have done repeatedly in this House with respect to the BBC and the broadcasting authorities, about the manner in which it addresses these fundamental questions over which it has so much influence.

I suspect that unless we are determined in all parts of the House to ensure complete impartiality in these crucial arenas in the formulation of the culture of politics and democracy, we shall get into deep trouble. People will react against politics if there is not the necessary degree of impartiality. I also believe that we must give serious consideration to the manner in which we behave in Parliament. I do not just mean matters such as privacy that hit the headlines, but also the way in which we reform the House.

Two or three of our most interesting recent debates were on House of Lords reform, which produced an extraordinary result. It was a lesson in itself about the lack of navigation that we were able to bring to bear on that subject, for heaven's sake. I should have thought that it was an obvious matter, in concert with the views of the hon. Member for North Cornwall. The idea that we cannot have a second Chamber that is at least 80 per cent. elected is astonishing.

There is also the relative irrelevance of much of our Committee proceedings, where hon. Members are just babbling on, no one has the foggiest idea what about, and no one will ever look at the official record. It is a sort of game of chess that is being played between the civil servants and the party positions. Now is not the time to go into all that, but it is a problem.

I would also say, with respect to young people, that there is also the matter of the "celeb culture" and all that goes with it: the role models, what is considered to be important, the lack of discrimination, and the fact that young people are asked to form comparisons between politicians and celebrities. Celebrities may, of course, be very nice people. I often find that some of the people who have legendary mythologies built up around them are decent people when you get to know them, and some, such as Bob Geldof, whom I happen to know well, do an enormous amount of good.

However, young people will gain respect for politics and politicians only if they are given an understanding of their relevance to their lives. We are here to serve them, and I hope that we do the best that we can, but the turnout of young people will be reflected in the extent to which they have a respect for the institutions. That, perhaps, is why I am a Conservative, because I believe strongly in those things. I am not saying that other parties do not, but the Conservatives have, historically, put emphasis on that.

I believe that the problem is much more than a matter of systems. However, I must draw attention to the very mixed results that emerged from the pilot schemes. I assume that most people in this country are of more or less the same kind, whichever part of the country they come from, and that there is no obvious discrimination to be made between one constituency and another. I was therefore intrigued that the results for postal balloting were so mixed. Postal balloting is a simple thing—one either votes with a postal ballot or one does not. It is not dependent on whether people have new technology available to them—a point that the hon. Member for Braintree (Mr. Hurst) was right to raise.

A House of Commons research paper shows that turnout in South Tyneside almost doubled, from 24.2 per cent. in 1998 to 55.3 per cent. in 2002. Why should the people of South Tyneside double their response when they have a postal vote available to them? There were similar increases in Stevenage, from 25.5 to 52.9 per cent., and in Chorley, from 31.3 to 61.5 per cent. In Greenwich, however, it decreased from 32.5 to 31.9 per cent. That may not be a large decrease, but it is an interesting comparison with the others. There was also a decrease in Hackney.

I am loth to make any assumptions about those mixed results, or about other areas such as electronic/internet voting. In Crewe and Nantwich, where the website system was used, the turnout increased from 18 per cent. in 1998 to 31.4 per cent. in 2002. Perhaps more people are using websites in that area, but that trend may not be reflected in other parts of the country.

There is a mixed pattern resulting from the pilot schemes, so I am not convinced that, with the current low turnouts, we should be paying an undue amount of attention to the systems. I am convinced that the real problem is to do with the failure of democracy, or the increasing tendency for people to become disillusioned with what we are doing, which, after all, should not be seen as a separate function. It is part and parcel of their lives and affects them. The democratic deficit reflected in the low turnout in European elections—I shall mention Europe once, then not again—is another feature of centralisation.

The same problem increasingly applies to domestic politics, as more and more legislation is sucked and absorbed into a remote system that is so complicated in its institutional arrangements, which I deplore, that it is impossible even for Members of Parliament to understand the interaction between European and domestic legislation. I personally believe that that contributes to low turnout. People simply do not know who is taking decisions and how they are arrived at. The democratic deficit, with the European constitution, will cause an absolute nightmare and be a great danger in the future. The contrast between the attitude of France and Germany to the monumental problem with the Iraq war on one hand and the Prime Minister's advocacy of a common foreign and security policy on the other is enough to make anyone wonder whether they should turn out to vote. That is part of a much deeper problem.

The media, and interviewers, as I said in the previous debate, have a huge responsibility. I am not sure whether I want to use the word "blame", but it is sometimes necessary. We are now getting to a position in which, as the hon. Member for Gedling said, the media are not necessarily seen as the enemy. Sometimes, however, they are. I can be quite blunt about that. I have been on the receiving end of the media myself. Sometimes I do not mind if they want to do this, that or the other. I have had some extremely satisfactory and helpful debates, discussions and interviews with some important interviewers during the past 20 years. That has been pretty tough stuff, but I do not mind that. However, I am concerned by something that, I think, impacts on interest in the political system. People hear great interviews and real debates on such programmes as "Today" and "Question Time", and perhaps forget that the people involved, however good, important and skilled, are not elected. They are not people's representatives.

A distortion is taking place in the public mind, perhaps especially among young people—a failure to discriminate between what is really important to the law-making and policy-making processes in the national forum of Parliament and debate that takes place between unelected people. That is not a game; it is serious and influential debate, but the people involved do not have to take the same responsibility. John Humphrys wrote a piece in *The Sunday Times* recently in which he said that he can fill a village hall, whereas Members of Parliament holding public meetings get no response at all. I wrote a letter to *The Sunday Times* and ticked him off, saying, "Just get this right, John Humphrys. You are not an elected politician—just try to keep a sense of responsibility about this". I think that he is an extremely good interviewer and I have no doubt that he works very hard, but the problem is serious.

Now, politics is being taken on to radio, such as Radio One. Many, although by no means all, radio programmes on it are pure rubbish. There is no informed opinion there, just babble. The people who listen to that could be strongly influenced, especially young people who listen to pop programmes and come away believing that the people on those are important and so, perhaps by definition, politicians are not. I feel that we have a huge social and political problem here, and I am deeply worried by the way in which the disconnection from young people is escalating.

I also refer to the difficulties that arise from the growth of the far right; there is no far left these days. That growth comes from the centre right's lack of engagement in some of the serious problems of our time. The disillusionment and cynicism about asylum and immigration has been exacerbated by some Government policies, and that will be an increasing problem. In Stoke-on-Trent, which is near my constituency, there is a serious British National party problem. The Labour Members who represent constituencies there are aware of it. That problem exists not just in that area but elsewhere, and has a bearing on turnout. I shall not give the figures for Stoke-on-Trent, but turnout levels are a contributory factor to the increase in votes for the far right. It is far right parties that are often thought to have the passion and conviction; it is they who get out there and dish it out to the people. They play on people's apprehensions and concerns.

In some constituencies, Members of Parliament—I do not criticise those concerned—do not give the impression that they are that activated or bothered by the issues; they seem to be going through the motions. I feel passionately about politics, whether the issue is third-world debt, Europe or constitutional matters. The apathy among voters is a reflection of the lack of interest in the great issues that is shown by their representatives, who are over-controlled by the Whip system. That diminishes their confidence and determination to get up and speak for their constituents.

In my constituency in the previous election, my majority nearly doubled if for no other reason than because my constituents had a pretty clear idea about where I stood. Anyone who read my election address would know that there was no doubt about it. We need more direct discussion in Parliament, and far less finessing. There does not have to be sheer confrontation, but there has to be direct discussion. Then people will see the relevance to their lives of what we are doing. In my opinion, that is what this is all about.

I have found this debate fascinating, and I would like to say how much I have enjoyed listening to all hon. Members' speeches. I hope that we have all learned something from it; I have.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It might be helpful if I point out that if the Minister is to have an adequate opportunity to respond, she should be called no later than 5.15 pm.

5.8 pm

Martin Linton (Battersea): I value this opportunity to make a short contribution to the debate. I first became interested in the matter when I was a member of the

[Martin Linton]

Select Committee on Home Affairs in the previous Parliament, and we wrote a report on electoral law and administration. The hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan) may have been on the Committee; I do not remember. We suggested many changes, including the rolling register and postal voting on demand, which were later taken up and are now in force, but we had no illusion that they would make a huge difference. We were advised that any changes like that would make, at most, a 5 per cent. difference in turnout, and I thought that even that was an exaggeration. Indeed, since the report came out and those changes were incorporated into the Representation of the People Act 2000, turnout in parliamentary, European and local elections has fallen, so clearly there cannot have been any dramatic effect.

The fact that turnout went down after the changes came in does not prove a case of cause and effect; indeed, it may be possible that the changes have helped to increase the turnout, but that other factors have had a greater effect in reducing it. That is probably what has happened. We made the changes not because of the effect they would have on turnout, but because they were worth making in themselves.

I am sorry that some of the other changes that we proposed were not made at the same time—weekend voting is one of them. I think weekend voting is well worth pursuing. I got a slight hint from Opposition Members that they may be worried that, because so many of their voters have second homes that they go to at weekends, this might have a disproportionate partisan effect on their vote. They need not worry about this. In the previous debate, I quoted figures from Sweden where 40 per cent of the population have second homes. The country is made of islands and lakes, and many people have little cottages that they go to at the weekend. They have always had Sunday elections, and nobody has ever suggested that they have a disproportionate effect on one party or another.

Weekend voting has to be accompanied by sensible measures for early voting and postal voting. We now have postal voting on demand, but that involves applying at least a week in advance; there could be a far easier system than that. In Sweden, people can vote at any post office in any town in the country, up to and including polling day itself. There are main post offices in all major cities that take votes up until about 2 pm in most cities—up until 5 pm in Stockholm—and then convey them to the relevant local polling station. It is just as if people voted at their local polling station. As long as there are sensible provisions, people who are called away on business, or who decide to go away for the weekend, will still able to vote.

There are many more things that could be done—for example computer-linked registers. One of the main problems is that people have to vote in their own polling station and that is often inconvenient. In this day and age, when all electoral registers can be linked to a central register, there is no reason why people could not be allowed to vote anywhere, even within their own constituency. Many people go to different polling stations, only to be told that they cannot vote there. It is a simple process to allow them to vote at a different polling station.

Overnight re-registration is another matter. We are now able to re-register in a maximum of six weeks, but there is no reason why it should take anything like as long as that. In some countries people can go to their local tax office, sit down in front of a computer and type in their new address. The following morning not only their voter registration but their tax address and address for all public purposes will be changed on the computer system, and they need do no more. We should compare that with the difficulty of registering a change of address in this country.

Postal ballots could be sent to every elector. The one change in the Representation of the People Acts that made a substantial difference was all-postal ballots. That resulted in an increase of 30 to 60 per cent. in the turnout at Chorley and Gateshead. That was not consistent everywhere, but it was clearly a substantial increase, and how much better it would be if we could send out as a matter of course a ballot paper to every voter, which they could take either to their local polling station or to another polling station, or send in if they so decided. We would thus have those dramatic benefits from all-postal ballots reproduced countrywide.

We must not start a pilot project on everything—if something is worth doing in one area, it is worth doing everywhere. It is worth having a pilot only when there are alternatives available. Most pilots do not give the answer to the question that was asked, because that is one of many factors that the pilot is never going to identify unless it is done on a massive scale; and if one is going to do that, one might as well do it countrywide anyway.

The Minister talked about the practical difficulties of having Sunday as the start of weekend voting in the European elections in 2004. This is an ideal opportunity because legislation already allows every European country to choose any day from the Thursday to the Sunday on which to hold its European election. It is a good idea to hold several elections on the same day; many countries do so as a matter of course. Some have general, regional, local and even Church elections on the same day and that leads to a much higher turnout.

Why not use the latitude that we shall have in 2004 to introduce the first serious weekend voting experiment for a long time? Holding elections on a Sunday will allow many more people to vote. I know that that will create difficulties in the Western Isles and elsewhere, but our idea that we should hold all our elections on a busy working day is crazy. There is no doubt that thousands, if not tens of thousands, of people who could not otherwise vote will be able to do so at the weekend. The test as to whether it is worth doing is not whether it will increase turnout but whether it will help people who cannot vote to do so. We do not need to put all the reforms to some sort of utilitarian test because, however many pilots we run, we shall never be able to prove what the effect is on turnout. We must follow our instincts, and if we think that the reforms are worth making we must introduce them.

5.16 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Yvette Cooper): We have had an excellent debate, encompassing some interesting and thoughtful contributions.

Many hon. Members made the point that addressing the mechanical, practical issues that are involved in changing the way we vote does not address the underlying problem of whether people want to vote or the fact that increasing numbers of people do not vote. They are right: we should not use changing the practicalities as an excuse not to address the fundamental problem for which we must take responsibility as politicians and as political parties—the growing number of people who are disaffected, who actively choose not to vote, or who do not see enough purpose in voting. Equally, the reverse is true. The fact that there are deeper issues involved should not be used to justify ignoring practical changes that might make life easier or that might increase the number of people who find it more convenient to vote and therefore do so.

The right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young) made some important points about disenchantment. He described the attitudes of people who vote for "Big Brother". It is easy to do that—it involves sitting on a sofa and pressing the red button on the Sky remote control. To vote for "Fame Academy", one has only to pick up the phone—until the last minute, when one cannot get through at all. In some cases, one can vote early and often. There are all sorts of lessons there, I fear, about the ways in which people vote.

My hon. Friend the Member for Braintree (Mr. Hurst) raised some important points about people's attitudes towards community and civic duty. They are complex issues and we should recognise the changes that there have been in society. We must also ensure that that does not become an excuse not to address practical changes that can be made in the short term.

Let us consider the pilots that many hon. Members have quoted. In Preston, 16 per cent. more of the electorate voted in the all-postal ballot than did under the traditional system, according to the Electoral Commission review. In Trafford, 20 per cent. more of the electorate voted in the postal vote than in the vote using the traditional system. It is still the case, however, that in the ballot in Preston, 60 per cent. of the electorate did not vote in the local elections, and in Trafford 47 per cent. of the electorate did not vote, so there are clearly a huge number of wider issues. Those margins of about 16 and 20 per cent. are sufficiently large for us to take them seriously and to respond to the pilots. The worst possible defence of the status quo is to say that, because there are bigger issues, we cannot address some of the narrower questions to which solutions might be found. Just as I would never support using the voting system as an excuse for not addressing the wider issues, I would never say that, because of the wider issues, we should not make some practical changes to the system.

There are two important reasons for making changes. First, some of the evidence from the postal vote ballots suggests that making voting more convenient for some groups of voters makes a difference to whether their voices are heard and registered in our democracy. Secondly, as my hon. Friends the Members for Battersea (Martin Linton) and for Southampton, Test (Dr. Whitehead) made clear, if we can make it easier for people to vote, we should. All other things being equal, it is better if voting is more convenient. My hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test gave an amusing account of the way in which we vote and said how different certain aspects of voting are from ordinary life—for example, the horse boxes and little stubby pencils, although one can buy the little stubby pencils in IKEA, so perhaps they would catch on as part of a more modern system.

Hon. Members have referred to many issues in connection with the pilots and the evidence that they provide. I accept the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea that one cannot wait for pilots to show everything—pilotitis, as he described it—but we need pilots in such areas because no one should tamper lightly with the mechanisms of democracy. It would be a disaster to change the way in which we vote, if it turned out, for example, that the whole system fell apart or the method of counting the votes did not work. The hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan) was right to say that a mistake in implementing a pilot or a problem with a new voting mechanism could undermine it for the long term. Those practical issues matter. The purpose of the pilot programmes is to establish credibility and legitimacy, to test practical issues and to ensure that we do not introduce problems of fraud.

There is no evidence to support weekend voting. I agree that there is a case for following our noses and trying things out on a larger scale, but the e-voting pilots did not show any substantial impact on turnout. My suspicion is that the e-voting and text-voting pilots will make an impact not in the next election but 10 years down the line. If we do not explore different methods of voting, including electronic voting, now,—especially as there are so many complex issues relating to the technology and security of such systems—we shall find ourselves looking a little bit ridiculous in 10 years' time, because increasingly so much of our lives takes place through electronic means.

My hon. Friend the Member for Braintree made powerful points about inequality and who votes. That must be uppermost in our minds when we consider any changes to voting mechanisms. My hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test made some important points about voting habits. The Electoral Commission did some research after the 2001 election into why people did not vote. That involved discussions with focus groups of people who had not voted. They were asked why they had not voted: some said that they did not know enough about it, that they did not feel confident enough to vote, or that they did not know enough about what they were voting for. I doubt whether those young people knew less than young people 30 years ago. However, there may have been a change in people's expectations of what they should know—and what they want to know—before they feel confident about making their choices, in the same way that, as consumers, they can decide what kind of car they want to buy.

I would not underestimate the long-term effect of issues relating to citizenship and education in schools, to which the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) referred. He is right to say that the credibility of such things depends on their being non-partisan. People should be given information about our political institutions, where they are, how one has a say in them, and the role of the people.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) was also right: this is not simply about voting, but about participation in a wider sense. People no

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[Yvette Cooper]

longer think it is enough to have one encounter with the politician—one vote—every few years. We should be considering other, broader, ways to empower people.

There are broader issues relating to people's engagement with their communities and local institutions. The issue is not simply one of engaging with Parliament; it is about engaging with other community institutions and civic participation. Those who participate in other institutions are more likely to vote. A lot of work has been done on how to reinvest and re-establish communities and how to give people greater involvement and participation in them.

Many initiatives have not been effective, but the sure start programme is. It focuses on the point in people's lives—when they have small children—at which they are suddenly faced with a big change and want to know who else is in their community. They want to be a part of the community, they want to engage with it and they are suddenly very keen to become involved in local organisations and institutions. That may be a counter-argument to some of the points made by my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Southampton, Test. He said that such habits start early in life and are never kicked—people either start voting or they do not. However, people can change at different points in their life cycle. Fundamental life changes can have a huge impact on people's participation in things, which can also be a way of engaging people with voting.

The hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam mentioned the decline in deference and the sense of duty. He is right. We should not romanticise traditional communities. In many ways, it is a good thing that there has been a decline in deference. It is also true that people will no longer vote out of a sense of duty or deference. We must give them something else to vote for—other reasons to vote. That reflects many of the points made by the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire. He spoke about the importance of the roles played by politicians and political parties. So much of the process of allowing people to engage more effectively with our democracy comes down to politicians and political parties becoming the vehicles of democracy. We cannot ignore or walk away from that fact. It is right that we should recognise that we are responsible for doing that. That does not mean that hon. Members have easy answers about how to do that. We will conduct much of the debate about that within our political parties, rather than in forums such as this. There are many changes that we could make in Parliament by considering other voting systems.

There is much work still to do. Decisions on many of the issues surrounding the 2004 elections and weekend voting have not taken place within Government. The debate has been helpful in contributing to those decisions, and I welcome the contributions of hon. Members this afternoon.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes past Five o'clock.

HOUSE OF COMMONS PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES (HANSARD) ● 2002-03

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(HANSARD)

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24 February 2003

Written Ministerial Statements

Monday 24 February 2003

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Business Tenancies Regulatory Reform Order

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Tony McNulty): On 22 July 2002, we laid before Parliament a draft Regulatory Reform Order to reform the workings of Part 2 of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1954. The Act provides a framework for the renewal and termination of business tenancies, and the aim of our reforms was to make the process quicker, easier, fairer and cheaper.

The Order has undergone its first stage of Parliamentary scrutiny, and the House of Lords Delegated Powers and Regulatory Reform Committee and the House of Commons Regulatory Reform Committee published reports shortly before Christmas. I am grateful to the Committees for their thorough examination of our proposed amendments. I welcome their support for the bulk of our proposals to reform this complex and highly technical legislation.

The Committees had some reservations on our proposals to change the way in which landlords and tenants may agree to contract a business lease without the normal statutory rights of security of tenure. The Regulatory Reform Committee made specific recommendations to enhance the protection for tenants. However, the Committee on Delegated Powers and Regulatory Reform had more fundamental concerns at the lack of evidence about the degree of protection that the courts provide, and hence whether our proposals to abolish the requirement for a joint application to the courts would remove necessary protection from business tenants.

We acknowledge that while there is considerable anecdotal evidence, there is a lack of definitive statistical evidence about the outcome of applications to the court for approval of agreements to exclude security of tenure. We therefore propose to carry out research to indicate the outcome of recent applications to the court for approval to exclude security of tenure. The research will study the proportion of applications rejected and the reasons for rejection. We will also undertake some further consultation of organisations representing small businesses.

We propose to present the research findings and the outcome of the further consultation to the Committees. Subject to the outcome of the research and consultation and the views of the Committees, we would then lay for second stage scrutiny an amended draft Order incorporating the amendments suggested by the Regulatory Reform Committee and slightly modified in certain other detailed respects.

Supporting People Budget

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Tony McNulty): The Supporting People Programme aims to improve the quality of life of vulnerable people by supporting them to live independently in the community. It begins on 1 April. I am pleased to tell the House today that total provisional annual amounts of Supporting People Grant for England, based on estimates submitted by Authorities on 13, 16, and 17 December and other relevant information, for 2003–4, is 1.4 billion. I shall be writing further to Local Authorities to set out in detail their guidance.

The programme is now providing supported housing in the form of at least five hundred and thirty thousand household units for older people, mainly in sheltered services, forty five thousand household units for people with learning difficulties or mental health problems, four thousand household units to support the rehabilitation of ex-offenders, three thousand household units for women fleeing domestic violence and seventy five thousand household units for people who were homeless or from other vulnerable client groups, as well as a considerable and growing amount of non-accommodation based "floating" support (including community alarms and Home Improvement Agency (HIA) service) (around 410 thousand households in all). This is a major investment in some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged members of society, with the clear objective of helping them to become, or remain, full participants in their local communities. The programme's aim is to prevent crises such as hospitalisation, institutional care or homelessness, by providing early support when it is most effective.

For the last three years the Government has been working with local authorities, providers, and other partners to prepare for this programme. Our overriding priority has been to make sure that people receiving services see no interruption to their services on 1 April. Equally those people receiving transitional housing benefit at the point of transfer must see their services continued during the transitional period on the same basis and cost to themselves as before. This has been done by work to accurately capture the current cost and nature of services in order to transfer these to new interim contracts on 1 April

The new Supporting People programme will be delivered under the Local Government Act 2000 section 93. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister will therefore administer the programme under the normal arrangement of a cash limited budget using, in the future, an allocation formula on which there has been recent consultation.

Initial grant allocations are for six months since there remains work to be done to ensure that the estimates provided in December are accurate and fully evidenced. Final, fully verified, figures as at 31 March are required from local authorities by 30 September to confirm grant amounts. At that point any over or underestimates will be adjusted for.

We are also conscious that there are services in the pipeline, which are currently incurring capital spend, and which will require revenue finding once the buildings are completed. We have therefore made a provisional allocation for some of these, subject to confirmation of progress. We have made an allowance for expected savings due to declining obligations in respect of transitionally protected clients and the impact of early reviews. We are aware that authorities are entering into interim contracts in order to manage the process of transition, and are about to conduct reviews with a view to longer-term contracts. We will ensure that the allocations meet the validated contractual commitments authorities are obliged to put in place to meet their legal requirements and to manage the Supporting People programme on a stable basis up to Spending Review 2004 (covers 2005–6 onwards). We intend, by 1 April at the latest, to publish both further guidance on this and ground rules on how authorities can commit to longer term contracts, and how this fits with the Spending Review timetable at a national level. At this point, however, in the absence of the detailed figures from the final reconciliation, it would be inappropriate to set out definite figures for years two and three. Grant conditions are also for six months, allowing us to monitor progress of the new programme and make any small adjustment in year should these be necessary to allow the proper management of the programme.

It is now time for local authorities, providers, and their partners in health and probation to take ownership of this programme,. Every service must undergo a review during the first three years of the programme. This review is aimed at improving the quality of service, assessing its strategic relevance, and challenging its value for money.

The review process at the local level must be rigorous and disciplined to ensure that the services purchased through Supporting People are necessary, give good value for money, and are on a stable and appropriate contractual basis. Local authorities who do not carry out proper reviews or who provide insubstantial evidence of the benefits and strategic relevance of services cannot expect to receive continued levels of funding in future. We will also be looking carefully at the impact of the draft allocations formula, about which we are consulting at present.

This programme offers an exciting new opportunity to local authorities and their partners to develop local partnerships to meet effectively the needs of their local people, using innovative new models of preventive services. We look forward to the development and sharing of positive practice in achieving the targets of social inclusion of vulnerable groups in their local communities.

Regional Assemblies

The Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. John Prescott): In the White Paper *Your Region, Your Choice: Revitalising the English Regions (Cm 5511)* the Government invited views by the end of August 2002 on the question of how prescriptive we should be about the involvement of stakeholders in elected regional assemblies in England. In particular, the White Paper asked whether any requirements or principles should be specified and, if so, whether this should be done through legislation, guidance, or some other means.

By November 2002, 207 responses had been received on the involvement of stakeholders, of which most expressed views ranging more widely than these questions. The Government has today published an analysis of the responses received on my Office's website at http://www.odpm.gov.uk/, and I am placing a copy of this document in the House Library.

As we stated in the White Paper (paragraph 7.8), the Government is very keen that key regional stakeholders and their representatives should be involved within the structure of an elected assembly. I am therefore pleased to be able to announce today our proposed policy framework for the involvement of stakeholders in the work of elected regional assemblies. This framework will form the basis of the statutory provisions on stakeholder involvement in the legislation we intend to bring forward to establish elected regional assemblies when Parliamentary time allows and after at least one region has voted for an elected assembly in a referendum.

The Government wants to strike a balance between safeguarding the meaningful involvement of stakeholders in all relevant aspects of an elected assembly's work and allowing for regional flexibility to reflect regional priorities and build on existing working relationships. We also want to ensure that a wide diversity of regional stakeholders can be engaged. We therefore intend to make the following requirements and restrictions clear in the legislation:

> Each elected regional assembly will be required to actively engage stakeholders in the development and implementation of both the assembly's overall strategic vision for the region and the various specific regional strategies for which it is responsible.
>
> Each assembly should publish and make accessible an annual 'state of the region' report in a way which facilitates scrutiny and debate in the region.
>
> Only those elected may be full members of an assembly and thus eligible to sit on an assembly's executive.

In order to enable assemblies to fulfil these requirements, the Government intends to provide in the legislation for a non-prescriptive approach to additional forms of stakeholder involvement which assemblies may wish to adopt. This would give assemblies discretion to:

> involve all of the stakeholders they consider appropriate—with particular emphasis on ensuring that business, local government, the voluntary sector, and community groups are properly involved;
>
> co-opt stakeholders to serve on scrutiny committees, with the same rights and duties as elected members, including voting rights—although elected members should be in the majority and chair scrutiny committees;
>
> co-opt stakeholders to serve on policy development committees, appoint particular stakeholders to act as policy advisers in specific cases, or involve stakeholder groups in the preparation of specific strategies;
>
> establish a regional partnership forum to bring stakeholder organisations together;
>
> establish consultative groups with specific sectors or on specific issues to facilitate consultation and/or the provision of advice; and
>
> spend money to support the involvement of stakeholders in assemblies' work through these or any other reasonable means, and to develop stakeholders' capacity to participate.

We envisage that this legislative framework would need to be supplemented by statutory guidance in order to safeguard the effective involvement of stakeholders while avoiding over-prescription. The Government will ensure that a draft of any such guidance is provided for consultation at the appropriate stage.

London Borough of Hackney

The Minister for Local Government and the Regions (Mr. Nick Raynsford): We announced on 31 January 2002 that the Government would provide the London Borough of Hackney with £25 million of financial support in 2002–03. This was part of a package of measures including stringent conditions, requiring improvements in the authority's performance and the restoration of its financial stability.

The £25 million support is an exceptional measure, provided to prevent unacceptable cuts in services. It is being given to enable Hackney to get their finances back in order on a long-term basis and deliver the frontline services the people of Hackney deserve. Without this support Hackney would have been unable to balance their budget this year and action to turn the authority around would have been still further delayed. I am pleased to say I am advised that, with our help, Hackney are expecting to balance the 2003–04 budget, and are making good progress in a number of other areas to build for the longer term.

I am today laying before this House a Special Grant Report, number 113, which seeks approval for providing Hackney with the £25 million to support its 2002–03 finances.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

British Energy

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Ms Patricia Hewitt): My statement to the House of 28 November set out the basis on which the Government was prepared to support the restructuring plan put forward by British Energy (BE) to address its financial difficulties.

The Government's main objectives, which remain the same today, were: to ensure the safety of the nuclear power stations and the security of electricity supplies to the grid and consumers. In any circumstances, BE's significant nuclear liabilities require safe and experienced management. Because the Government has a responsibility to ensure safety, we had to consider how this goal could be most effectively delivered while protecting the taxpayer's interest. The company's plan, on which the Government imposed tough conditions, was acceptable because it met these tests.

The Government was therefore prepared to play its part in this restructuring by providing financial support for BE's nuclear liabilities—underwriting BE's enhanced arrangements for decommissioning, and contributing significantly to the historic spent nuclear fuel liabilities. We also extended a credit facility of up to £650 million until 9 March.

On 28 November we identified 3 key outcomes that the company would have to achieve by mid-February if the restructuring package were to be successful:

> agreement from existing creditors to a temporary freeze on payments, and a write-down in the value of what they were owed;
>
> agreement to sell its stake in Bruce Power in Canada; and
>
> implementation of a new trading strategy.

The company has announced its progress in fulfilling these conditions and I am placing copies of the relevant announcements in the Library of the House:

> its creditors have agreed to a binding standstill and agreed in principle to a significant write-down in the value of what they are owed as part of this plan;
>
> the completion of the sale of its interests in Bruce Power in Canada; and
>
> progress on the implementation of its new trading strategy.

The sale process for the company's stake in Amergen in the United States is also underway.

The company has also announced the appointment (with effect from 1 March) of a new Chief Executive, Michael Alexander, formerly Chief Operating Officer of Centrica, who has extensive experience in the energy sector.

On the basis of the company's announcements, I have confirmed that I intend to seek state aids approval from the European Commission for the restructuring plan. I have placed in the Library of the House a copy of the Government's announcement of 14 February to the Stock Exchange.

As I indicated in my statement on 28 November, the Government is prepared to continue to fund BE's operations while the restructuring plan is agreed and implemented. I have therefore indicated to the company that I am willing to extend their credit facility at a reduced level for a period after 9 March. The limit and duration of the facility will be decided and reported to the House in the light of the company's future requirements, and in order to protect taxpayers' interests as well as under state aid rules, will be the minimum necessary. I should like to re-emphasise that it is a temporary loan, and not a permanent grant. The company has received proceeds of £270 million from the sale of its stake in Bruce Power and will use this money to repay the majority of the current amount of the facility outstanding.

British Energy's announcement on 14 February is an important step forward in the implementation of its restructuring plan. But much remains to be done by the company, including effecting the sale of Amergen and securing binding agreements from its creditors to the restructuring.

It remains open to Government to withdraw the credit facility if the company does not continue to make progress in successfully delivering its restructuring plan. We shall therefore continue to be ready with contingency plans to fund the administration of the company. The Electricity (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill that helps with these contingency plans has been passed by the House of Commons and has now entered the House of Lords. As I said on 28 November, whatever happens, nuclear power stations will continue to generate electricity and will continue to employ staff. Pension entitlements will be met. Trade suppliers will be paid. Customers' lights will stay on.

Finally, I would like once again to express my thanks to the staff at British Energy for their vital contribution in maintaining electricity supplies and nuclear safety.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

UK Special Representative (Nepal)

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): I am delighted to announce the appointment of Sir Jeffrey James KBE CMG as the UK's Special Representative for Nepal from 24 February. The Government is committed to assisting Nepal and identifying ways to help resolve its problems, including putting an end to a conflict that has resulted in immense suffering for the Nepalese people. Sir Jeffrey's role will be to provide a strong focal point for UK policy towards Nepal and in particular to co-ordinate UK and international efforts in support of the recent ceasefire and the emerging peace process.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Bill Rammell): Officials in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Ministry of Defence have completed all the necessary work to enable the Government to proceed to ratify the Optional Protocol to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

We intend to complete the ratification process with the United Nations as soon as possible. To begin the formal process, I have today laid before Parliament an Explanatory Memorandum which explains the steps taken to meet our commitment to the provisions of the Protocol.

In particular, since 1 September 2002 Army personnel under 18 are no longer routinely deployed on operations outside the United Kingdom, although they may continue to participate in purely humanitarian missions where no hostile forces are involved. Furthermore, all three Services now have procedures in place to ensure that, wherever it is feasible to do so without undermining operational effectiveness or the safety of personnel, under 18s are removed from their units when there is deemed to be a greater than low risk of direct involvement in hostilities.

Written Ministerial Statements

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HOME DEPARTMENT

Juvenile Reconviction Rates

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Hilary Benn): The Home Office is today publishing its second annual report on juvenile reconvictions. The report, prepared by Research, Development and Statistics Directorate, covers the reconvictions within one year of juvenile offenders dealt with between January and March 2001. The proportion reconvicted has been cut by 22.5 per cent. compared with 1997, and this exceeds the Public Service Agreement (PSA) target of a 5 per cent. reduction by 2004. I would like to congratulate the Youth Justice Board and the other services involved in youth justice for this excellent result. I am placing a copy of the report in the Library.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Duty of Care Regulations

The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Michael Meacher): The Duty of Care Regulations 1991 have been amended to give waste collection authorities (WCAs) the power to serve notices on businesses, requiring them to furnish the WCA with their duty of care records. This will help WCA officers to check whether businesses are transferring their waste in accordance with the law. Businesses that do not have such arrangements could be prosecuted.

This measure should help to reduce the level of commercial and industrial waste that is fly tipped. It will also assist waste collection authorities in pursuing fly tipping offences as, in some circumstances, it will be possible for the fly tipped waste to be traced back to the originator of the waste.

The Environmental Protection (Duty of Care) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2003 came into force on 20 February.

Vulnerable Groups Consultation Paper

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): I have today issued a consultation paper "Reductions for vulnerable groups", which invites views from individuals and organisations on the Government's proposals for amending the protection offered to vulnerable metered water customers under the Water Industry (Charges) (Vulnerable Groups) Regulations 1999.

The current regulations offer assistance, in the form of a capped bill, to certain low-income households with water meters who need to use a great deal of water for essential household purposes. To qualify, a household must be in receipt of an income-related benefit, and contain either a large family, or a person who has special water needs because of a medical condition. The current definition of a large family is three or more children under the age of 16 years, while a medical condition is defined in the regulations. The cost of this tariff is borne by other customers.

The consultation paper discusses a range of options for amending the regulations to improve the protection of vulnerable households. The main recommendations are to extend assistance to include children up to the age of 18, instead of 16 as at present, and to extend the list of qualifying medical conditions.

The consultation will run for twelve weeks and will end on Friday 9 May. Following this we shall consider all the responses and will publish the Government's response to consultation along with a regulatory impact assessment. Any changes made to the regulations as a result of the consultation will come into effect on 1 April 2004.

Animal Movements

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): The Government are publishing today the emerging findings from the risk assessment and cost benefit analysis of animal movement standstills. The studies were commissioned in response to the recommendations made in July 2002 by the Lessons Learned and Royal Society Inquiries and have been carried out for Defra by Risk Solutions and the Veterinary Epidemiology and Economics Research Unit (VEERU) at the University of Reading.

On 23 January 2003, Official Report, columns 20–24WS, the Government announced the intention to reduce the standstill for cattle, sheep and goats to six days with effect from 4 March. A supporting document explaining that decision, and referring to the emerging findings from the Risk Solutions and VEERU studies, has already been placed in the Library and posted on the Defra website.

TREASURY

Cash Ratio Deposits Review

The Paymaster General (Dawn Primarolo): Cash Ratio Deposits (CRDs) are non-interest bearing assets deposited with the Bank of England by banks and building societies. They are used by the Bank to finance its unremunerated activities, in particular its efforts to secure price stability and the stability of the financial system in general, from which these institutions are key beneficiaries.

The CRD scheme was extended to include building societies, and was placed on a statutory basis, when the Bank of England Act became law in 1998. At the time the Government, in the Treasury's response to consultation (published on 20 April 1998) made a commitment to review the new scheme within five years of its application. The Treasury, working closely with the Bank, will begin that review today.

The review will include an assessment of the detailed arrangements of the scheme as well as the continuing suitability of the scheme itself compared to alternative sources of funding. It will also address the impact of the scheme on the eligible institutions. The review will conclude in May, and we will publish the broad conclusions in a statement to the House shortly afterwards.

Inheritance Tax

The Paymaster General (Dawn Primarolo): The Inland Revenue's Extra Statutory Concession F7 allows exemption from inheritance tax for works of art when they are only chargeable under strict law because they have been brought temporarily to the United Kingdom for cleaning or restoration, or for loan to an exhibition. That reflects a longstanding judgement that the public interest would not be served if foreign owners of works of art were unwilling to send them to the United Kingdom for these purposes for fear of a potential inheritance tax charge.

Similar disincentives can arise, outside the terms of the existing Concession, when foreign-owned works of art are kept in the United Kingdom for these reasons when they would otherwise have been taken elsewhere. That could occur, for example, where a work is already in the United Kingdom when it is first acquired by a foreign buyer, and the new owner allows a period of loan to a public collection here before taking it to a permanent home abroad.

I have therefore agreed that the Concession should be extended to cover such circumstances.

The revised concession (added words in bold) is as follows: "Where a work of art normally kept overseas becomes liable to inheritance tax on the owner's death solely because it is physically situated in the United Kingdom at the relevant date, the liability will—by concession—be waived if the work was brought into the United Kingdom solely for public exhibition, cleaning or restoration. The liability will similarly be waived if a work of art which would otherwise have left the United Kingdom to be kept overseas is retained in the United Kingdom solely for those purposes. If the work of art is held by a discretionary trust (or is otherwise comprised in settled property in which there is no interest in possession), the charge to tax arising under Section 64 IHTA 1984 will, similarly, be waived."

Financial System (Major Operational Disruption)

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Ruth Kelly): I am today publishing a Green Paper, The Financial System and Major Operational Disruption. Copies are available in the Vote Office and in the libraries of both Houses. The document is available online at the Treasury website: www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/. The 11 September attacks on the United States caused terrible loss of life and physical damage. They also showed the problems that physical disruption on such a scale brings for the financial system—as exemplified by the four-day closure of the New York Stock Exchange.

Financial services play a vital role in the UK economy. This makes it particularly important to be sure that we have good arrangements to maintain the financial system's resilience during major operational disruption. While the main responsibility lies with the financial sector itself, HM Treasury, the Bank of England and the Financial Services Authority are working together, and with the private sector, to help strengthen resilience.

This consultation asks if new statutory powers should be sought to assist in promoting order in the financial system in extreme circumstances of operational disruption. The Government are seeking views on whether such legislation would be justified by the nature and scale of the threat. The consultation also requests comments about additional ways in which the financial authorities could usefully assist the private sector's work in making financial markets more resilient.

The consultation closes on 25 April. If the Government considers it appropriate to seek legislation, further consultation would follow.

Self-Assessment Returns

The Paymaster General (Dawn Primarolo): I can today publish figures for the number of Self-Assessment returns filed by the 2003 January deadline.

The Inland Revenue has met its SDA target of 90.5 per cent. of SA taxpayers filing their 2001/02 tax return on time. The Department achieved 90.54 per cent.:

> 8,371,251—returns were received, out of 9,246,131 issued
>
> The number of returns filed electronically rose significantly. At 31st January 2003, around 700,000 had been received electronically. 325,000 of these were received from Internet filers, compared with around 75,000 in the same period last year. The remainder were received from agents using the Electronic Lodgement Service (ELS).

Activities that helped the department to meet the target were:

> an extensive media campaign, involving TV, radio and newspaper ads
>
> front-line staff reminding people about the deadline in day-to-day contact with customers
>
> phoning a quarter of a million (mainly new-to-SA) customers to remind them about the deadline, and offer help.
>
> a News Release in the run-up to the deadline, emphasising the message about late filing penalties, and interest and tax surcharges for late payment
>
> publicity on the Internet, promoting the Department's electronic services
>
> sending two mailshots to 1.4 million self employed customers on the back of an existing national insurance letter raising awareness amongst agents with publicity in the Department's Tax Bulletin publication
>
> using the Department's network of Local Radio Broadcasters to publicise the deadline message

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Business Rates

The Minister for Local Government and the Regions (Mr. Nick Raynsford): I have today laid in Parliament new clauses by way of an amendment to the Local Government Bill which will provide for local authorities to retain some or all of growth in business rate revenues.

These proposals will allow us to introduce a scheme, along the lines the Chancellor announced in his 2002 Pre-Budget Report. The scheme will increase the incentives for business and local authorities to work in partnership to maximise local economic growth and regeneration while at the same time generating additional resources to address local priorities.

Any scheme introduced will generate additional revenues from increases in the tax base generated by local authorities successfully encouraging growth, and not from increasing the tax on existing business. The money raised would be genuinely additional to local authorities and they will be free to decide how to spend it.

The scheme will only allow local authorities to keep revenues associated with any growth in the business rate tax base and will not replace the current business rate pooling system. The business rate pool acts to reduce the unfairness of business rates and ensure that revenues are distributed in a more equitable way.

It is not the Government's intention that the new scheme should only serve to reward authorities that are already doing well at the expense of declining areas. We are looking at a range of options to get the best distributional fit, with each local authority receiving an incentive that is relevant to them, whilst keeping the scheme as simple as practical.

We have also been clear that local authorities will not bear the downside risk of a declining business rate tax base. We are considering options that will allow local authorities to benefit from the scheme, even though they are in a situation of economic decline, should they manage to slow the pace of decline.

We will be consulting on the options, including the distributional consequences, in the summer

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Cyprus

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): The Government's aim remains a comprehensive settlement in time for a reunited Cyprus to accede to the European Union on 16 April. For this to happen, the UN has set 28 February as the deadline for a decision on the Secretary-General's proposals. On Sunday 23 February Kofi Annan put forward ideas to the two sides on how he might revise his 10 December proposals, and is consulting the governments in Ankara and Athens before his historic visit to Nicosia tomorrow. President-elect, Mr. Tassos Papadopoulos, has made clear that the change of government underway in Cyprus will not impede the UN timetable. The UK has supported the UN throughout this process, and has welcomed the balanced and comprehensive settlement proposals tabled by the Secretary-General. We urge both sides now to secure a settlement.

During the intensive negotiations which followed the Copenhagen European Council, it became clear that the issue of territorial readjustment was a key one, needing to be resolved if there was to be a settlement. In particular, it became clear that both sides attached great importance to adjustments which represented a relatively small percentage of the area of Cyprus. The Government therefore gave urgent consideration to whether it could in some way help to bridge the remaining gap. A decision was reached to inform the UN Secretary-General that Britain would be prepared to cede part of the UK's Sovereign Base Areas and this offer has now been included in the UN Secretary-General's ideas of 23 February.

The offer consists of 45 square miles just under half of the total area of the SBAs. This makes up 1.2 per cent. of the area of the new state of affairs in Cyprus. The areas involved would bring a number of Cypriots living near Limassol, and in the Dhekelia Sovereign Base Area, within the administration of their respective constituent state. It will also open up areas of coastline for possible development. The areas involved do not contain military infrastructure, and this offer will not have any adverse impact on the functioning of the SBAs. The offer would only become valid if there were agreement by both sides to the UN's proposals. And, of course, legislation would be introduced to bring the transfer of territory into operation. In the event that either side in Cyprus rejects the proposals, or the proposals are rejected in a referendum by either side, the offer, along with the rest of the UN proposals, will become null and void.

We urge both sides not to let this historic opportunity to heal the division of Cyprus slip away; and to go the last mile to conclude negotiations and secure the settlement.

HEALTH

Medical Careers

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Hutton): I have today placed in the Library copies of "Modernising Medical Careers" the response of the four UK Health Ministers to the consultation on "Unfinished Business: Proposals for Reform of the Senior House Officer grade"

The document sets out the results of our consultation which began last summer on the reform of training for senior house officers, who are doctors in the early stages of their specialist training. We received over 250 responses to our consultation and our proposals were broadly welcomed. The document we are publishing today sets the way ahead based on the results of the consultation and work which has been done since with the key stakeholders.

Plans for reform will also extend to general practice training and will embrace the existing non-consultant career grades with easier routes back into training.

Partnerships will work to test these out in a variety of NHS environments. Pilot projects will start later on this year and with major implementation following in 2004.

TRANSPORT

Railway Safety

The Minister of State, Department of Transport (Mr. John Spellar): I am pleased to announce that today the Government has published its report on the management of the accidental obstruction of the railway by road vehicles. The report has been produced in response to the 19 separate recommendations made by the Health and Safety Commission[1] and Highways Agency[2] reports published in February last year.

The report sets out the work of representatives of the highway authorities, railway infrastructure authorities and other organisations to identify the steps we consider should be taken jointly by railway infrastructure authorities and highway authorities to manage the risk of the accidental incursion of road vehicles onto the railway. It includes a protocol for apportioning responsibility and costs of mitigation measures. Also, following the adoption of an initial risk prioritisation framework a second stage assessment process has been produced for sites where the risk of a road vehicle accidentally getting onto the railway is not clear cut. Good practice guidance measures have been identified to help mitigate risk at specific sites. British Transport Police have agreed to collect the data about such incidents on a common basis. In order to update the standards for safety barriers on major roads in a clear and open procedure, the Highways Agency has let a contract and set up a technical project board to steer the update of standards for safety barriers on major roads in a clear and open procedure.

Copies of the report will be sent to all local highway authorities and railway infrastructure authorities. Copies will be placed in the Library of the House. Details will be made available on the Department for Transport's website at http://www.roads.dft.gov.uk/roadnetwork/bridgesites/index.htm

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[1] "Obstruction of the railway by road vehicles" ISBN 07176 2294 0 available from HSE books price £5.00 or to download at http://www.hse.gov.uk/railway/obstruct.pdf

[2] "To review the standards for the provision of nearside safety fences on major roads" available to download at http://www.highways.gov.uk/

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Historic Environment

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tessa Jowell): I would like to update the House on the progress made on implementing the recommendations contained in the Government's statement on the historic environment: *A Force for Our Future* during the past six months.

Since August 2002 the following has been achieved:

August
English Heritage completed its programme of establishing a Historic Environment Forum in each of the Regions.

October
HM Treasury confirmed that the Listed Places of Worship grant scheme would continue until the review of the European Union VAT regime had been completed.The Government formally acceded to the 1970 UNESCO *Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property.*

November
English Heritage launched the first State of the Historic Environment Report, which set out a framework for establishing indicators to measure the contribution the historic environment makes to the economy, education and communities.

I announced a review of current heritage protection legislation. This will also cover the ecclesiastical exemption and consider a range of options for enhancing Sites and Monuments Records.

The Historic Houses Association (HHA) and the Black Environment Network (BEN) announced a joint scheme to identify new audiences for the historic environment by encouraging ethnic communities to become more involved with nearby historic attractions. Local community leaders will be invited to work with selected properties to extend involvement and enjoyment of these attractions within ethnic communities. Five pilot projects will be in place by Spring 2003. They will be closely monitored and evaluated with a view to extending the programme in 2004.

December
The Dealing in Cultural Objects (Offences) Bill was introduced into Parliament. The Bill will make it a criminal offence to trade in illegally removed cultural goods.

The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill was introduced into Parliament. It will take forward a number of commitments arising from the Planning Statement *Sustainable Communities: Delivering through planning.*

Heritage Link was officially launched. It will be co-funded by English

Heritage and The National Trust. Priority areas for action in 2003 are: the needs and potential of the voluntary sector; funding; inclusion; and land-use planning.

National Archaeology Days 2002, organised by the Council for British

Archaeology, achieved a 5 per cent. increase in participating venues to 62, and a 66 per cent. increase in estimated visitors to 90,000.

January 2003

The National Trust launched "Untold Story", a pilot project involving National Trust properties in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. It will involve people in exploring and interpreting the significance of local properties through the medium of the performing arts.

The National Trust began work with Creative Partnerships in Cornwall to develop a number of projects involving artists, poets and writers workingwith local schoolchildren to develop ideas and activities inspired by National Trust properties in Cornwall.

February

Responsibility for underwater archaeology will be transferred to English Heritage shortly.Management Plans are now in place for all but five of the World Heritage Sites in England.

Management Plans for the Tower of London and the City of Bath are scheduled for completion by February and October 2003 respectively. Work on the Plans for Blenheim Palace and Westminster Palace and Abbey is ongoing, whilst work on Durham Cathedral and Castle will begin shortly.

Written Ministerial Statements

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DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Tourism

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Tony McNulty): Following the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's review of Planning Policy Guidance note 21 on tourism, I am announcing today the publication of a consultation paper. This seeks views on a proposal to replace PPG21 with good practice guidance on planning for tourism. Copies of the consultation paper have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Local Government Association

The Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. John Prescott): Today we published a protocol agreeing with the Local Government Association (LGA) a clear approach for engagement and intervention where council performance is unacceptable.

The approach set out in the protocol provides for the Government and LGA to discuss policy for the use of intervention powers, including how best to facilitate a role for the LGA in supporting local authorities.

It has been broadened in scope to encompass Government engagement with poorly performing local authorities on a voluntary basis. The protocol derives from a Framework for Partnership signed under the central local partnership in November 1997.

The protocol sets out the general principles that will underpin the engagement of central government with individual local authorities whose performance, including their capacity to improve, is categorised under the system of comprehensive performance assessment as poor or weak with little or no prospect for improvement.

It also applies to other circumstances where the Government take the view that an authority's performance in a particular service area is sufficiently poor to justify Government engagement or intervention.

The protocol also sets out general principles for the orderly resumption of service by local authorities following intervention.

Transport and Social Exclusion

The Minister for Social Exclusion and Deputy Minister for Women (Mrs. Barbara Roche): The Social Exclusion Unit has today published Making the Connections, its final report on Transport and Social Exclusion. Copies have been placed in the Library.

This report sets out a new strategy to help people on low incomes get to work and key services like jobs, schools and hospitals. The report includes a package of measures across government to improve transport links and to support people on low incomes and in deprived areas in reaching the services we all need.

The cornerstone of the report is a new commitment to accessibility planning, in which local transport authorities will lead a process of auditing and action to ensure accessibility—meaning that people can get where they need to go.

The report builds on existing Government initiatives to help improve accessibility, like the £123 million funding of the Rural and Urban Bus Challenges. It includes action right across central and local Government, for example:

> Better travel information in Jobcentre Plus offices to help broaden horizons for those seeking work
>
> £14 million to help fund new transport to college
>
> Transport to healthcare organised around the needs of the patient and supported by better information on travel options
>
> Better joint working between local authorities and Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships to reduce crime and fear of crime around public transport
>
> Revised planning guidance so new services are easier to reach

To help tackle higher rates of pedestrian deaths in deprived areas—a further issue highlighted in the report—Transport Ministers announced last November that £17 million of Government investment will go to the most deprived local authorities to help bring those rates down.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act (Northern Ireland)

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Desmond Browne): During the making of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 (Disapplication of Part IV for Northern Ireland Parties, etc) Order 2001 in February 2001, the Government gave an undertaking that they would review the need for the Order after two years. This stage has now been reached and I am therefore requesting views from interested parties as to whether the Order is still applicable to the funding of political parties in Northern Ireland. I shall be writing to the Northern Ireland political parties, the Northern Ireland Affairs Select Committee and the Electoral Commission.

The Order, made under section 70 of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 (PPERA), exempted the Northern Ireland political parties from the requirement to comply with part IV of the Act for four years. Part IV is intended to impose restrictions on the source of donations so as to prohibit foreign and anonymous donations to political parties.

The provisions of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act are based on the recommendations contained in the fifth report on Standards in Public Life, chaired by Lord Neill and published in 1998. The Neill Committee concluded that it would be unsafe to disclose the names of those who made donations to the Northern Ireland parties as this may result in their intimidation. It was also recommended that it would not be right to ban contributions from Ireland given its special role in Northern Ireland's political life, as set out in the Belfast Agreement.

The Government accepted the Neill Committee recommendations including those in respect of Northern Ireland. However, the consequence of this was that donations from countries other than Ireland could not be prohibited as there would be no way to prevent donations from other countries being routed through Ireland. It therefore became apparent that a ban on foreign funding could not be policed in Northern Ireland.

Once the review is concluded, I will, of course, report back to the House.

TRANSPORT

Thames Safety (Marchioness Sinking)

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. David Jamieson): On 20 August 1989 the passenger vessel Marchioness and the dredger Bowbelle collided on the Thames. The Marchioness sank and 51 people tragically lost their lives.

Ten years later the Deputy Prime Minister announced a wide ranging public inquiry into the current safety regime on the River Thames and the circumstances surrounding the sinking of the Marchioness. The public inquiry also considered whether there should be a formal investigation into the tragedy.

Following all the inquiries Lord Justice Clarke has made a total of 74 recommendations on Thames safety. Since November 2001 I have kept both Houses informed on progress on these through two reports placed in the Libraries at six monthly intervals.

I have placed a third update in the Libraries today. Much progress has, and continues to be made and this will therefore be the final report of its kind.

Since the inquiry:

> manning and training on passenger ships has been reviewed and guidance prepared on safety training for crew and support staff on passenger vessels;
>
> the Safety Management Code for domestic passenger ships has been introduced, and we believe this is supporting a more focussed safety culture in the industry;
>
> the London Coastguard now co-ordinates all Search and Rescue activities on the tidal River Thames, and the five RNLI lifeboats installed in January 2002 have proved their value by attending 679 incidents in their first 12 months;
>
> MCA continues to work with other Member States to ensure that the introduction of European standards for passenger ships on inland waterways does not compromise passenger safety in the UK;
>
> a Formal Safety Assessment, carried out since the introduction of many recommendations from the Thames Safety Inquiry and Marchioness Formal Investigation has shown that the overall level of safety on the River Thames falls within acceptable limits, judged against HSE criteria. Work is continuing to identify areas where additional safety measures could bring the most significant safety benefits. This work will be completed by the end of this year.
>
> recommendations in respect of alcohol are being implemented through the Railways and Transport Safety Bill which is currently before the House.

We believe that the safety measures put in place immediately after the Marchioness disaster and again more recently following the Thames safety inquiry and Marchioness formal investigation, substantially reduce the risk of a further tragedy and would significantly improve the response to such an incident. However, we continue to look for ways to improve safety on all passenger ships through education, proportionate regulation and enforcement.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

School Buildings

The Minister for School Standards (Mr. David Miliband): The quality of school buildings is central to the quality of pupils' education. High-quality buildings are an essential support for our educational vision of ambitious expectations, specialism and excellence, local collaboration, community involvement and high-quality teaching and learning. We are today publishing a consultative document, "Building Schools for the Future", to take forward a radical approach to improving the stock of school buildings. This document, which is being sent to all schools and other relevant bodies, shows how we aim to reform the way we allocate capital funding, design schools and procure school buildings. Our aim is to transform the conditions in which our secondary school children are educated, and to continue improving the quality of primary schools.

Over the last six years, schools and local education authorities have used increasing capital investment to tackle the backlog of repairs caused by decades of under-funding. Capital investment in this period has risen from less than £700 million to £3 billion. This money has been spread relatively evenly across schools and local education authorities. This has been right when most schools and all local education authorities had urgent repair needs, and they have done well in tackling the backlog. But understandably, investment until now has focused on repairs and maintenance, not on achieving systematic structural change. We believe that the most urgent of the backlog will soon have been addressed.

The increase in schools capital investment to over £5 billion in 2005–06, announced by the Chancellor last July, gives us the opportunity for a new approach which will aim to support a step change in standards. We can continue existing, successful capital programmes, such as those already available to all schools and local education authorities. But we can do more.

The Government commit themselves, in "Building schools for the future", to a programme of rebuilding and renewal to ensure that secondary education in every part of England has facilities of 21st-Century standard. The aim of this programme will be to deliver this goal successfully for every secondary school within 10 to 15 years from 2005–06, subject to future public spending decisions. We will also aim to provide substantial investment in primary school buildings.

The programme will be driven by standards—focused plans generated locally—by partnerships of local education authorities, schools, governors and the wider community. Proposals will be prioritised on the basis of agreed criteria, which could include educational standards, deprivation, condition of buildings, and readiness to deliver step change in provision.

We need to support local endeavour in the delivery of our aims. Therefore, we are planning a range of exemplar designs for primary and secondary schools as a basis for local decisions about renewal plans. We will consult widely to ensure that the interests of all stakeholders are addressed. We also want to reform the procurement process, to address capacity pressures at all levels and to bring innovation and efficiency into the construction of school buildings. We are working on the creation of a new national procurement body for this purpose. A balance of conventional and PFI funding will be used, where each is most appropriate.

We believe this educational vision and new approach to capital investment will benefit all. We aim to have school buildings that:

drive reform of the secondary system and improvements in educational standards;

support teachers' teaching and pupils' learning;

are used by the community;

are well-designed, built on time and at a reasonable cost to the taxpayer, and properly maintained over their lives.

Copies of the launch document will be placed in the Library.

HEALTH

Food Standards Agency

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): The Food Standards Agency's annual report and accounts 2001–02 was laid before Parliament today.

Copies have been placed in the Library.

Written Ministerial Statements

Thursday 27 February 2003

NORTHERN IRELAND

Prison Service

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Jane Kennedy): I have today laid before Parliament the report of the Prison Service Pay Review Body on the pay of governor and officer grades in the Northern Ireland Prison Service for 2003. Copies have been placed in the Library of both Houses.

Both the Secretary of State and I welcome the recognition in the report of the work of staff in the Northern Ireland Prison Service.

The Review Body has recommended a consolidated increase of 2.5 per cent. on existing rates of pay for the 12 month period commencing 1 April 2003 and an increase of 1.5 per cent. on allowances.

I have decided to accept the recommendations and implement the award in full.

TRANSPORT

Airports Consultation

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Alistair Darling): Last summer the Government published a set of seven consultation papers on the Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom.

On 26 November the High Court upheld a challenge against the exclusion of options for additional runways at Gatwick Airport. On 28 November I told the House, *Official Report*, columns 474–87, that I would not appeal against the judgment, because an appeal would result in an extensive period of uncertainty for people up and down the country. I therefore announced that I was keeping open the consultation, which had been due to end on 30 November, and that I would publish a further consultation paper including runway options at Gatwick.

I am today publishing the further consultation material. I have decided that it would be easier for consultees to publish it in the form of second editions of the full South East consultation paper, the summary South East paper and the questionnaires for both the South East and other areas of the UK. Consultees can easily see the text added as a result of including the Gatwick options.

The new documents include the original consultation material on options at Heathrow, Stansted, Luton and other South East airports, and the option for a new airport at Cliffe. In addition, in accordance with the High Court decision, the papers now include options for additional runways at Gatwick.

As for options on the other South East airports published last July, the papers now set out for Gatwick all the options which were appraised in detail in the later stages of the South East and East of England Regional Air Services (SERAS) study. Accordingly, there are two options for a single new runway at Gatwick and one option for two new runways there. The papers also set out alternative assumptions on the timing of these Gatwick options.

The consultation, for all parts of the UK, will now close on 30 June. We will consider carefully all responses received by that date, including proposals for options other than those which have been included in the Government's consultation documents. As I told the House on 28 November, this is an opportunity for anyone to express their views on all the options in the consultation, as well as to put forward any reasonable alternatives.

Copies of all the new documents are available in the Vote Office and in the Library. My officials are writing to everyone on the original consultation list, and to all those who have responded to the consultations so far, to alert them to the new documents and to the 30 June deadline, and explaining that people who have already submitted responses can choose either to let their response stand, or to add to, or amend, or withdraw their response in the light of the new material.

Night Noise Restrictions (Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted Airports)

The Minister of State, Department of Transport (Mr. John Spellar): We have been considering the timetable for the forthcoming consultation about night restrictions at Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted airports. The present night restrictions regime at those airports is due to end in October 2004. We have decided to consult shortly on an interim proposal to extend this regime for a further year, to October 2005. This would allow us to consider comments received in response to the question about the five yearly review cycle in the consultation paper *Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom: South East* (the second edition of this paper has been published today), as well as the wider policy context, before we consult on a regime to take effect from October 2005.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Agri-environment Scheme

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Margaret Beckett): The Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food recommended that an entry-level agri-environment scheme should be made available to as many farms in England as possible. The Government accepted this recommendation and announced in the Sustainable Farming and Food Strategy in December 2002 that, subject to a successful pilot, the Entry Level Scheme would be made available to farmers across England from 2005.

I am pleased to inform the House that the pilot for this new scheme begins today. Guidance Booklets which give full details of the scheme design, including the environmental management options that farmers will implement under the scheme, the application process and application forms are now available. Farmers in the four pilot areas will be able to apply for the new scheme from now until 30 May 2003.

All farmers with land in the four pilot areas have been invited to launch meetings in the week beginning 3 March, at which they will be able to collect copies of these booklets. Defra staff and representatives from our partner organisations will be on hand at the meetings to answer farmers' questions and provide further information. These meetings will be followed by workshops in the four pilot areas, which will provide further practical help for farmers.

The design of the pilot for the Entry Level Scheme, including the location of the four pilot areas, has been developed in close consultation with key partner organisations through regular meetings of an Entry Level Scheme Working Group.

The pilot areas were chosen carefully, according to a range of objective criteria, to be representative of a variety of English farm types and landscapes. There are approximately 200 farms in each of the pilot areas. The areas chosen to pilot the new scheme are:

Area	*Nearby towns*	*Pilot area broadly Representative of:*
North East	Barnard Castle (Co.Durham)	Upland farming
South West	Tiverton (Devon)	Grassland farming
South East	Mortimer (Berkshire, nr Reading)	Mixed farming
East Midlands	Market Deeping (Lincolnshire)	Arable farming and cropping

Maps showing the precise boundaries of the pilot areas have been placed in the Defra library in Nobel House.

The basic features of the Entry Level Scheme Pilot will be as follows:

> Farmers taking part in the Pilot Scheme will have to identify important environmental features and areas on their farm. They will also have to make a commitment to carry out simple, yet effective, environmental management activities, which they will select themselves from a wide-ranging list of options. Examples of options available include wildlife-friendly hedge management, buffer strips around key features on the farm, the maintenance of stone walls and managing low input grassland.
>
> Each option will be worth a certain number of points, related to the cost to the farmer of implementing that option. If the farmer achieves a target number of points for their farm they will be guaranteed entry to the scheme and payment. The target number of points will be based on farm size. Farmers will have to get 30 points per hectare, except for LFA land in parcels of 15 ha or more where the threshold will be 15 points per hectare.
>
> There will be a flat rate payment of £30 per hectare over the whole holding, paid annually. However, for LFA land in parcels of 15 ha or more, farmers will receive £15 per hectare. The lower rates reflect the fact that this land, which is normally extensively grazed, is generally managed less intensively, farmers could not be expected to implement such a wide range of measures, or at the same level of intensity, as in lowland farming situations.
>
> The scheme will be open to all farmers who farm land within the pilot area boundaries.
>
> Agreements will be for 5 years.

A key aim of the scheme is high take-up, as the environmental management activities available will be most effective if they are applied across a wide area. To facilitate high uptake, the scheme has been designed to be simple to administer for both the farmer and Government. We hope that farmers participating in the pilot will be able to understand and implement the entry level scheme themselves, without the need for specialist advice on a one-to-one basis.

The pilot will be closely monitored and evaluated for the next two years. The evaluation will assess the application of the environmental management measures at the farm level, including their potential to deliver the expected environmental benefits. The accessibility and popularity of the scheme, and an analysis of the factors affecting uptake, will also be considered.

The experience gained from the pilots will enable us to adapt and improve the scheme design before aiming to roll out the Entry Level Scheme across England in 2005.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Pension Schemes 2003–04

The Minister for Pensions (Mr. Ian McCartney): I am pleased to announce that there will be no increase in the General Levy rates for 2003–04. Rates will remain at the 2000–01 level as set out in the tables, due to buoyant levy receipts and good housekeeping.

I am also pleased to announce that although some payments have been made out of the pension compensation fund, it will not be necessary to raise a Compensation Levy in 2003–04.

The Government's Green Paper, "Simplicity, Security and Choice: Working and Saving for retirement", Cm 5677, published 17 December 2002, sets out plans for a new, risk-focused pensions regulator, which also provides support, advice and guidance to the pensions industry.

The General Levy rates for 2003–04 are as follows:

Table 1—Occupational Pension Schemes

Scheme Size (Number of Members)	*Basis*	*Amount per Member*	*Minimum Payment Per Scheme*[1]
2 to 11	£12 Per scheme	-	-
12 to 99	Per Member	£1.25	-
100 to 999	Per Member	£0.90	£125
1,000 to 4999	Per Member	£0.70	£900
5,000 to 9,999	Per member	£0.53	£3,500
10,000 or more	Per member	£0.37	£5,300

Table 2—Personal Pension Schemes

Scheme Size (Number of Members)	*Basis*	*Amount per Member*	*Minimum Payment Per Scheme*[1]
2 to 11	£5.20 Per scheme	-	-
12 to 99	Per Member	£0.50	-
100 to 999	Per Member	£0.35	£50
1,000 to 4,999	Per Member	£0.30	£350
5,000 to 9,999	Per member	£0.20	£1,500
10,000 or more	Per member	£0.15	£2,000

Note: 1. Minimum payments ensure that schemes in the lower bands do not pay more overall than those the higher bands

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Employment Relations Act

The Minister for Employment Relations, Industry and the Regions (Alan Johnson): I have today placed in the Libraries of the House copies of a consultation document as part of the Government's review of the Employment Relations Act 1999.1 have also placed in the Libraries copies of the draft regulations prohibiting the blacklisting of trade unionists, which arose from the review. The review was announced on 11 July by the Secretary of State, with the following terms of reference:

> The Government has reformed the labour market to build a durable and fair basis for constructive employment relations. By a range of measures, the UK labour market is achieving high levels of employment and combining fairness and flexibility.
>
> In line with commitments made in the 1998 Fairness at Work White Paper, the Government will review the operation of the statutory union recognition and derecognition procedures in the Employment Relations Act 1999. The review will also look at the operation of the other provisions of the Act.
>
> The review will be carried out by the DTI through full public consultation. The DTI will complete this task to a timetable enabling any legislative recommendations which the review may make to be introduced within the lifetime of this Parliament.

Based on the evidence, the review has found that the Act is working well. The review has concluded that the central pillars of the Act should remain unchanged, but it makes a number of proposals to amend other parts of the Act to improve their practical operation. The consultation document also presents the Government's proposals to change trade union law in line with the judgment reached on 2 July by the European Court of Human Rights in the Wilson and Palmer case. The consultation period ends on 22 May.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Hong Kong

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Bill Rammell): The twelfth Report on the implementation of the Sino-British Joint Declaration on Hong Kong was published today and copies have been placed in the Library of the House. A copy of the Report is also available on the Foreign and Commonwealth Office website http://www.fco.gov.uk/. The Report includes a foreword by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary. I commend the Report to the House.

European Union Council Business (March-September 2003)

The Minister for Europe (Mr. Denis MacShane): The business for the period March to September is as follows:

MARCH

1 -2—Athens—Informal Education
3—Brussels—Competitiveness Council
4—Brussels—Environment Council
6—Brussels—Meeting of the Presidium
6—Luxembourg—Employment, Social Policy, Health & Consumer Affairs
6—Brussels—EUROGROUP (Evening)
7—Brussels—ECOFIN
7—Luxembourg—Transport, Telecom & Energy Council
13—Brussels—Meeting of the Presidium
14–15- Athens—(Informal Defence Meeting)
17–18- Brussels—Convention Plenary
17–18- Luxembourg—Agriculture & Fisheries Council
18–19—Brussels—General Affairs & External Relations Council (GAERC)
21—Brussels—EUROPEAN COUNCIL
27—Brussels—Meeting of the Presidium
27–28—Luxembourg—Transport, Telecom & Energy Council
27–28—Brussels—EU-RIO Group, EU MERCOSUR
28–29—Veria—Informal Justice & Home Affairs
31—Brussels—Agriculture & Fisheries Council (to be confirmed)

Date	*Location*	*Event*
April		
2	Brussels	Meeting of the Presidium
3–4	Brussels	Convention Plenary
4	Brussels	Justice & Home Affairs
4–6	Hania (Crete)	Informal ECOFIN (Ministerial)
5	Lisbon	Europe—Africa Summit
10	Brussels	Meeting of the Presidium
14–15	Luxembourg	General Affairs & External Relations
14	Brussels	Agriculture & Fisheries
16	Athens	Signature Of The Accession Treaty
17	Athens	European Conference
23	Brussels	Meeting of the Presidium
24–25	Brussels	Convention Plenary
May		
2–4	Olympia	Gymnich (Informal Foreign Ministers)
3–4	Athens	Informal Environment (Ministerial Informal)
5–6	Brussels	Education, Youth & Culture Council (To be confirmed)
8	Brussels	Meeting of the Presidium
	Corfu	Agriculture (Ministerial Informal)
12–13	Brussels	Competitiveness
12	Brussels	EUROGRUP
13	Brussels	ECOFIN
14	Brussels	Meeting of the Presidium

Date	*Location*	*Event*
14	Brussels	Transport, Telecom & Energy Council
15–16	Brussels	Convention Plenary
16	Brussels	EU–ACP Ministerial
16-17	Halkidiki	Informal Regional Policy (Ministerial)
16–18	Cruise off Greece	Informal Transport & Merchant Marine (Ministerial)
17	Brussels	EU–W. Balkans (Zagreb Process)
19	Brussels	General Affairs & External Relations (+ Defence)
20	Brussels	General Affairs & External Relations
22	Brussels	Meeting of the Presidium
24	Thessaloniki	Informal Culture (Ministerial)
26–27	Brussels	Agriculture & Fisheries Council
26–27	Crete	EUROMED Conference (Mid Term Ministerial)
27	Brussels	Environment Council
28	Brussels	Meeting of the Presidium
30–31	Brussels	Convention Plenary
31	St Petersburg	EU—Russia Summit
June		
2	Brussels	EUROGROUP
12–13	Alexandroupoli	Development Co-operation (Ministerial Informal)
2–3	Brussels	Transport, Telecom & Energy Council
3	Brussels	ECOFIN
4	Brussels	Meeting of the Presidium
5–6	Brussels	Convention Plenary
5–6	Brussels	Justice & Home Affairs Council
5–6	Brussels	Employment, Social Policy, Health & Consumer Affairs Council
6	Rhodes	Public Administration (Ministerial Informal)
11	Brussels	Meeting of the Presidium
11–12	Brussels	Agriculture & Fisheries Council
12–13	Brussels	Convention Plenary
17–18	Luxembourg	General Affairs & External Relations
20	Halkidiki	EUROPEAN COUNCIL
21	Halkidiki	Zagreb II Summit
22	Brussels	General Affairs & External Relations
24	Brussels	Employment, Social Policy, Health & Consumer Affairs Council
July		
2–3	Rome	Research Ministerial Informal)
4–5	Naples	Transport Infrastructure (Ministerial Informal)
6	Brussels	Trade (Ministerial Informal)
10	Varese	Informal Council/Troika
11–12	Varese	Informal Council of Ministers of Labour and Social Affairs
15–16	Brussels	ECOFIN
11–12	Varese	Informal Council of Ministers of Labour and Social Affairs
15–16	Brussels	ECOFIN
17–18	Treviso	EU Employment Committee (Informal)
18–20	Montecatini	Energy & Environment (Ministerial Informal)
22–23	Brussels	Agriculture & Fisheries Council
22	Brussels	General Affairs & External Relations
24–25	Milan	European Conference on Discrimination
25–26	Verona	Education (Ministerial Informal)
August		No Meetings Planned
September		
3–5	Viterbo	Telecommunications (Ministerial Informal)
12–14	Stresa	ECOFIN (Informal Council)
19–20	Rome	Justice & Internal Affairs (Informal Council)
22–23	Brussels	Competition (Internal Market, Industry & Research)
29–30	Brussels	General Affairs & External Relations
29–30	Brussels	Agriculture & Fisheries Council

HOME OFFICE

Prison Service Pay Review

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Hilary Benn): The second report of the Prison Service Pay Review Body (PSPRB) on the pay of governing governors and operational managers, prison officers and related grades in England and Wales in 2003 is being published today and copies will be placed in the Library.

The PSPRB have continued to be impressed by the professionalism and dedication they found amongst the remit group staff, particularly in view of the pressures of rising prisoner numbers. They have recommended a basic rise of 2.8 per cent, which is in line with the rate of inflation in December 2002 and other review body awards.

My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has decided that the recommendations will be implemented in full, with effect from the operative date of the award of 1 April 2003.

The key recommendations of the report are:

A 2.8 per cent increase to basic pay rates from 1 April 2003;

Locality allowances paid to Prison Service staff in eligible areas in London and the South East will be increased from 1 April 2003:

from £3,500 to £3,800 per annum for the top rate from £2,300 to £3,000 per annum

for a new "higher" rate

from £2,300 to £2,500 per annum for the middle rate

from £1,000 to £1,100 per annum for the lower rate

An improved performance-related progression system for operational managers from 1 April 2003 and assimilation to a new pay spine retrospectively to 1 January 2003;

An increase of 2.8 per cent. to the Healthcare specialist allowance paid to prison officers from 1 April 2003. Other specialist allowances frozen at current rates; and

Other allowances increased by 2.8 per cent.

Criminal Records Bureau

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): On 6 September 2002 I announced the appointment of an Independent Review Team, led by Patrick Carter, to take a fundamental look at the operations of the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB). In particular, the Review Team was tasked to support the CRB management in the short-term and to identify necessary longer-term changes in the way the

CRB operates to ensure that it can deliver its twin objectives of providing greater protection for children and vulnerable adults whilst ensuring that the Disclosure process does not act as a bar to speedy recruitment.

I have today placed in the Library the main findings and recommendations of the Independent Review Team.

I am extremely grateful to Patrick Carter and his two colleagues—John Holden and Ron Skelley—for their rapid and thorough examination of the situation at the CRB and their recommendations on the way forward. The team has come up with a wide-ranging set of recommendations for improvements to the CRB intended to enable it to meet future challenges as demand for its services continues to grow. The CRB is a vital element of the Government's programme to improve the protection of children and vulnerable adults from those who might wish to harm them. It needs to be put on a sounder footing to meet these objectives more effectively and provide the levels of service rightly expected by its customers.

The Independent Review Team's recommendations build on the steady improvement in the GRB's performance over the last six months which has seen the average number of Disclosures issued rise from 24,500 per week in August 2002 to the current 40,000 per week. Some 80 per cent of Standard Disclosures and 50 per cent. of Enhanced Disclosures are now issued within three weeks. These improvements have been achieved by both the Agency and Capita working in partnership to deliver the service that the CRB's customers are entitled to receive.

The Government propose to take forward the 10 recommendations in the report as follows:

> Ways should be sought of optimising the end-to-end CRB process efficiency, by reviewing and rationalising the management responsibilities and respective roles in the complete chain undertaken by Registered Bodies, the CRB Agency, Capita and local police forces.

The Government agree that the roles of the different parties involved in the CRB process should be strengthened and clarified. In particular, we intend to enhance the intelligent customer function within the Agency so that there is a stronger focus on setting standards across the whole operation and ensuring that these are met. There also needs to be better management co-ordination of the CRB end-to-end business processes. This may involve the more flexible deployment of Agency and private sector staff and to this end we will take powers in the Criminal Justice Bill to enable the Secretary of State's functions under Part V of the Police Act 1997 to be exercised by the private sector as well as Agency staff.

> The critical role of Registered Bodies in the CRB process needs to be recognised and upgraded. Registered bodies should be unambiguously responsible for validating the identity of those for whom they seek Disclosures and for ensuring the quality and completeness of applications submitted to the CRB. The number of Registered Bodies should be optimised to establish sensible economies of scale and improve proficiency.

The Government accept this recommendation and will legislate this session to make it clear that Registered Bodies are responsible for verifying the identity of an applicant. It would, as now, be open to a Registered Body to delegate the function of validating identity to the prospective employer or other agent while retaining overall responsibility, as long as we are satisfied in a particular case that delegation provides a reasonable safeguard. To ensure that Registered Bodies discharge their responsibilities effectively, we will take powers to attach conditions to a registration and to revoke a registration where such conditions are breached. We share the Review Team's view that optimum levels of efficiency within a Registered Body can best be achieved by handling a sufficient number of Disclosure applications. With the new responsibilities for Registered Bodies, a number of those currently countersigning relatively small numbers of applications may seek to de-register of their own volition. We will monitor the situation carefully. The Government will take reserve powers to set a threshold for the minimum number of applications to be processed by a Registered Body each year and to de-register those Registered Bodies which fall below the threshold. Registered Bodies and others across the sectors which use the CRB's Disclosure service will be fully consulted before these changes are implemented. We will take particular account of concerns that have been expressed about access to Registered Bodies and the level of fees charged by some umbrella bodies. As part of the consultation exercise, we will seek views oh placing a cap on the fees that may be levied by Registered Bodies.

> There should be a progressive move to mandate electronic submission of applications by Registered Bodies.

The CRB will introduce an electronic application channel as soon as practicable; a pilot will be undertaken later this year. We believe that many Registered Bodies will want to adopt this channel as their preferred means of submitting Disclosure applications. In time, as more and more Registered Bodies migrate to the electronic channel there will be a diminishing case, on efficiency grounds, for maintaining the existing paper and telephone channels. At that point, consideration would need to be given whether to mandate—by means of a condition attached to registration—the electronic channel for registered bodies to submit applications to the CRB. This will not preclude individuals submitting their applications to registered bodies by paper or telephone channels where mutually agreed.

> Given that the production of Enhanced Disclosures is significantly more costly and ties up local police force resources, new arrangements should be established for the Agency to set priorities, in accordance with Government Guidelines, on which applications should get Enhanced and which should get Standard Disclosures.

The Government agree with the spirit of this recommendation, but it is important that the criteria are set by ministers, in consultation with relevant stakeholders, on the basis of a risk assessment. Having established the criteria for Standard and Enhanced Disclosures it is important that there is some mechanism to ensure that they are properly observed. It is proposed, therefore, to amend the Police Act 1997 first to enable the type of Disclosure for any given occupational group to be determined by regulations and then to enable the CRB to give effect to such regulations. Where necessary, the CRB would be expected to seek additional information from the registered body in order that it could make its assessment in any given case. We will take account of the views of Registered Bodies and others before implementing these changes.

> It is recommended that the Police National Computer (PNC) files are "flagged" to denote the existence of intelligence information on any individual held at local force level and not included in convictions recorded on the PNC.

The cost and feasibility of introducing a system of flags on the PNC to denote the existence of local intelligence will be tested in a pilot due to commence in three forces (Metropolitan Police, Staffordshire and West Midlands) in the spring. Decisions about the rollout of such a system will be taken in the light of the outcome of the pilot.

> It is recommended that the launch of Basic Disclosures be postponed until the CRB systems have been developed to provide a substantially greater capacity. It would be inappropriate to launch Basic Disclosures until higher priority categories of applicant for higher level Disclosures are seeing their needs fully accommodated. It is also recommended that Basic Disclosure applications should be routed through Registered Bodies, with identity validation undertaken by these Bodies, rather than allow direct submission from applicants as currently envisaged by the legislation.

The Government concur that the priority for the CRB is to ensure that demand for higher level Disclosures is fully met and that applicants for such Disclosures receive a satisfactory service. Basic Disclosures will not be introduced until these objectives have been achieved. The Government note the case for routing applications for a Basic Disclosure through a Registered Body as in the case of Standard and Enhanced Disclosures, but will want to consult fully with employer organisations and others on the implications before coming to a final view. In the event that the Government decide to proceed, legislation would be needed to implement this recommendation.

> The Information Technology system built and operated by Capita has been subject to a range of improvements and enhancements since original delivery, as a result of which performance has improved. A further programme of significant enhancement will be required. Additionally, almost all the recommendations set out here would lead to requirements for system change and therefore would have contractual consequences. It is therefore recommended to attempt to renegotiate the contract with Capita to implement necessary technology renewal and align the contract to the changed and evolving circumstances.

The Government accept this recommendation and will seek to renegotiate the contract with Capita so that it reflects the changed environment in which the CRB will be operating.

> An investigation should be undertaken into the possibility of requiring fingerprints to be submitted by applicants for Disclosures where the sensitivity of the employment role to be undertaken makes this appropriate. This would enable a more rigorous linking of police records (which in turn are mostly linked to fingerprints) and the individuals submitting applications for Disclosures. This investigation will need to look at the balance to be struck between such increasing rigour of CRB identity processes and the cost and convenience of the service to the customer.

The Government will undertake a further study in consultation with Registered Bodies and others on the case for, and practicalities of, requiring applicants for Disclosures in particularly sensitive employment roles to submit their fingerprints with their application. Among the issues the study will need to address, is how to avoid any unnecessary intrusion into the privacy of applicants. A decision whether to proceed will be taken in the light of the results of the consultation exercise. Legislation would be needed to implement this change.

> While recognising the benefits derived from establishing the CRB under the wing of an existing Agency, it is now recommended that an independent Executive Agency is created within the Home Office to carry forward the CRB's changing and increasingly demanding functions. There will need to be a transitional period which will be overseen by a transitional Management Board operating within an appropriate governance framework.

The Government agree that the CRB, currently part of the Passport and Records Agency, should be reconstituted as a free-standing Agency. The new Agency will be established as soon as practicable. A Transitional Board has been established to ensure a smooth transition. John Holden has agreed to serve as the non-executive chairman of the Board and Patrick Carter and Ron Skelley as non-executive members. A stakeholder group will be established under John Holden's chairmanship to represent the interests of Government Departments and the police.

> In order to implement a number of the recommendations, changes to the legislative framework under which the CRB operates (Part V of the Police Act 1997) will be required.

As indicated above, the Government will take forward in the Criminal Justice Bill the necessary legislative changes needed to implement recommendations 1, 2 and 4.

Certificates of Identity

The Minister for Citizenship and Immigration (Beverley Hughes): On 6 February we announced that we would consult on plans to tighten the policy on issuing Certificates of Identity. We have completed the consultation as quickly as possible, as there was evidence of abuse. I can now announce that, from 27 March, these documents will only be available to people who can prove that they need them.

The change has proved necessary because some people who claim to have fled their home countries in fear of their lives have used our documents to travel back. Recently, we found 125 Iraqis using these documents on just 16 flights to Damascus, which is 140 miles from the Iraqi border. (There are no direct flights to Iraq). We cannot allow this to continue. We have decided that all applicants for a Certificate of Identity, including those who have indefinite leave to enter or remain, must prove that they cannot obtain a passport from the authorities of their own country. People who have exceptional leave to enter or remain (i.e. leave for a limited period) will also have to show that they need to travel for an essential reason, such as business, education, religion or compassionate circumstances. They will have to tell us which country they need to travel to and will not be allowed to go to any other countries using the Certificate of Identity.

With this change of policy, we also intend to send a clear message that the United Kingdom takes its obligations seriously, and we expect those who benefit from our protection to do the same.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Councillor Codes of Conduct

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Christopher Leslie): Promoting high standards of ethical conduct among Councillors is one of the most important requirements for the strengthening of local democracy and the building up of trust between people and their elected representatives. The Government are today laying an amendment to the Local Government Bill which will lead to new regulations allowing local authorities to play a more active role in dealing with cases of councillor misconduct.

The amendment has been prepared following an extensive consultation exercise last summer on the proposed regulatory framework which would allow local investigation of allegations and local hearings. Close consideration of more than 1,000 responses to that consultation led to the conclusion that a robust and workable set of regulations could not be made without changes to the primary legislation.

The Government now intend to issue regulations in two parts. The first set of regulations will set out the regime within which local standards committees will be able to consider reports on alleged councillor misconduct completed by ESOs and referred to the monitoring officer of the relevant authority under section 59 (4)*(c)* of the Local Government Act 2000. The intention is that these regulations will be laid before Parliament in early April. I understand that the Standards Board for England intend to publish guidance for local authorities on the operation of these regulations

The second set of regulations will provide for the conduct of investigations by monitoring officers, or their deputies, following a decision by an ESO to cease an investigation and refer the matters to the monitoring officer under section 60 (2)*(b)* of the Local Government Act 2000. Our intention is not to lay these regulations until a change has been made to the Local Government Act 2000 which would allow a monitoring officer to appoint another person to conduct an investigation, especially in circumstances where the monitoring officer might have a conflict of interest. The amendment which is being laid before Parliament today is designed to achieve this change. Subject to Parliament's enactment of the amendment, regulations dealing with investigations will be laid in the Autumn.

Written Ministerial Statements

Friday 28 February 2003

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Departmental Expenditure

The Minister for Rural Affairs and Urban Quality of Life (Alun Michael): Subject to Parliamentary approval of the Supplementary Estimate, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' DEL will be increased by £10,571,000 from £2,458,720,000 to £2,469,291,000, and the administration costs limit will be decreased by £26,217,000 from £486,690,000 to £460,473,000. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are set out in the table:

£'000

Resources				*Capital*			
Change	*New DEL*	*Of which: voted*	*Non voted*	*Change*	*New DEL*	*Of which: voted*	*Non voted*
+59,568	1,901,764	1,521,150	380,614	-48,997	567,527	472,541	94,986

The change in the resource element of the DEL arises from: *(i)* a take-up of £500,000 programme resources from DfES for school milk; (ii) a take-up of £6,044,000 administration resources from ODPM for accommodation costs (Ashdown House); (iii) a take-up £500,000 administration resources from ODPM for staff costs; (iv) a take-up £60,000 administration resources from ODPM for local Public Service Agreements; *(v)* a take-up £179,000 programme resources from DfT for best practice programmes; (vi) a take-up £2,512,000 administration resources from the Invest to Save Budget, representing Defra's successful projects in the fourth round of awards; (vii) a transfer £22,000 resources to the Maritime Coastguard Agency (MCA) for engine power surveys; (viii) to take-up £65,000 administration resources from HMC&E for CAP export licensing under the Invest to Save scheme; (ix) a switch of £7,075,000 from capital to administration resource in respect of information technology (IT) costs, as agreed with Treasury; (x) a transfer £90,000 administration resources to ODPM for Planning Inspectorate;

(xi) a transfer £1,200,000 programme resources to DfID for the Environmental Know-How Fund; (xii) a transfer £20,000 programme resources to DfT for PEP implementation; (xiii) the increase in programme resources and appropriations-in-aid in RfR 1 of £2,571,000 for the Over Twenty Months Scheme (OTMS) and £1,220,000 for international environmental purposes; (xiv) the increase our in Executive Agencies administration resources and appropriations-in-aid of £14,200,000 to meet appropriations-in-aid target in Estimate; (xv) a transfer from RfR 1 to RfR 2 of £4,700,000 programme resources for the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) in respect of the England Rural Development Plan (ERDP); (xvi) to switch £15,000,000 from capital and move £2,700,000 to administration resources and £12,300,000 to programme resources, as agreed with Treasury; (xvii) to switch £45,075,000 administration resources to programme resources in respect of front line services, as agreed with Treasury; (xviii) the reclassification of £27,100,000 flood defence capital grants to the Environment Agency as grant-in-aid and matching non-Voted resource budget cover, to reflect the Agency's accounting treatment of these grants; (ixx) the increase in Resource DEL of £1,865,000 as a result of the transfer of English Nature's unfunded pension liabilities into the Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme.

The change in the resource resource element of the DEL takes account of the take-up of our departmental unallocated provision (DUP) of £15,290,000 programme resources.

The change in the capital element of the DEL arises from: *(i)* the drawdown from Treasury of £50,000 capital for the Evidence Based Policy Fund; (ii) the switch of £15,000,000 from capital to administration and programme resources, as agreed with Treasury; (iii) the reclassification of £27,100,000 flood defence capital grants to the Environment Agency as grant-in-aid and matching non-Voted resource budget cover, to reflect the Agency's accounting treatment of these grants; (iv) to take-up £128,000 capital from the Invest to Save Budget, representing Defra's successful capital projects in the fourth round of awards; (v) the switch of £7,075,000 from capital to administration resource in respect of information technology (IT) costs, as agreed with Treasury.

The change in the capital element of the DEL takes account of the move onto the Estimate as capital grants of £2,397,000 supplementary credit approvals (SCA's).

TREASURY

Departmental Expenditure (Inland Revenue)

The Paymaster General (Dawn Primarolo): The Inland Revenue Departmental Expenditure Limit will be decreased by £124,000 from £2,601,986,000 to £2,601,862,000 and the administration costs limit will be decreased by £124,000 from £2,644,712,000 to £2,644,588,000. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are as set out in the table:

£'000

Resources				*Capital*			
Change	*New DEL*	*Of which: voted*	*Non voted*	*Change*	*New DEL*	*Of which: voted*	*Non voted*
124	2,601,862	2,252,675	349,187	0	168,086	168,086	0

The change in the resource element of the DEL arises from the transfer of debt management activity to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

Departmental Expenditure (National Savings and Investments)

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Ruth Kelly): Subject to Parliamentary approval of any necessary Supplementary Estimate, National Savings & Investments' Resource DEL will be increased by £11,500,000 from £156.898,000 to £168,398,000 and the administration costs limits will be increased by £11,500,000 from £156,898,000 to £168,398,000. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are as set out in the table:

	Resources	*Capital*
Change	12,000,000	—
New DEL	168,398,000	300,000
Of which:		
Voted	*167,398,000*	*300,000*
Non voted	*1,000,000*	—

The increase in Resource DEL comprises of an increase of £12,000,000 in the voted element offset by a reduction of £500,000 in the non-voted element.

This will be used to cover expenditure relating to NS&I's modernisation programme, specifically the Savings Account Implementation programme and signing up to the Banking Code.

There is no change in the capital element of the DEL.

Departmental Expenditure (Treasury)

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Ruth Kelly): Subject to Parliamentary approval of any necessary Supplementary Estimate, HM Treasury DEL will be increased by £170,224,000 from £205,514,000 to £375,738,000 and the administration costs limits will be increased by £16,815,000 from £110,204,000 to £127,019,000. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are as set out in the table:

Resources				*Capital*			
Change	*New DEL*	*Of which: voted*	*Non voted.*	*Change*	*New DEL*	*Of which: voted*	*Non voted*
26,724,000	226,449,000	162,625,000	63,824,000	143,500,000	149,289,000	148,989,000	300,000

The change in the resource element of the DEL arises from:

- an increase in Treasury administrative costs of £6,600,000
- funding of £9,000 from the Capital Modernisation Fund for a project on regional inequalities
- an increase of operating appropriations in aid of £10,000 for conference fees from 1 Horse Guards Road
- an increase in OGC administrative costs of £4,681,000 for restructuring costs and a voluntary retirement scheme
- an increase in OGC other current of £4,900,000 to finance changes in the accounting treatment of transactions related to the OGC residual estate
- a reduction in OGC operating appropriations in aid of £10,544,000 (£7,044,000 administrative A in A, £3,500,000 other current A in A)

The change in the capital element of the DEL arises from:

- 1 Horse Guards Road being brought on to HM Treasury's balance sheet (£141,000,000)
- refurbishment costs of £2,500,000 for the OGC headquarters building Trevelyan House

Departmental Expenditure (Customs and Excise)

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (John Healey): Subject to Parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, the H M Customs and Excise DEL will be increased by £4,259,000 from £1,158,728,000 to £1,162,987,000 and the administration costs limit will be increased by £23,535,000 from £1,017,967,000 to £1,041,502,000. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are as set out in the table:

Resources				*Capital*			
Change	*New DEL*	*Of which: voted*	*Non voted*	*Change*	*New DEL*	*Of which: voted*	*Non voted*
23,400,000	1,097,710,000	1,093,671,000	4,039,000	-19,141,000	65,277,000	64,277,000	1,000,000

The change in the resource element of the DEL arises from the following administration costs adjustments: a claim on the reserve of £1,600,000 in relation to team bonuses as part of the second year of Makinson trials; drawing down £22,000,000 Departmental Unallocated Provision to reflect investment in the e-Government programme; a transfer of £65,000 to the Rural Payment Agency in support of CAP Export Licensing; and an increase of £135,000 in the level of appropriation in aid receipts.

The change in the capital element of DEL arises from: the take up of end year flexibility entitlement of £3,234,000 as set out in Public Expenditure White Paper (Cm 5574); a reduction in capital expenditure of

£510,000 concerning round three of the Capital Modernisation Fund; a transfer of £22,000,000 Departmental Unallocated Provision into resource DEL to reflect investment in the e-Government programme; and an increase in capital expenditure by £135,000 in relation to capital costs in running Money Service Businesses.

As a result of the specified resource DEL changes mentioned in the above paragraph, not including the appropriations in aid adjustment, the administration costs limit has increased by £23,535,000.

Departmental Expenditure Limits (Office for National Statistics)

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Ruth Kelly): The Office for National Statistics Resource Departmental Expenditure Limit (DEL) will be decreased by £764,000 from £128,236,000 to £127,472,000 and the administration costs limit will be decreased by £764,000 from £127,437,000 to £126,673,000. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are as set out in the table:

Resources				*Capital*			
Change	*New DEL*	*Of which: voted*	*Non voted*	*Change*	*New DEL*	*Of which: voted*	*Non voted*
-764,000	127,472,000	123,112,000	4,360,000	NIL	22,063,000	22,063,000	0

The change in the resource element of the DEL arises from an increase in Resource DEL due to the draw down of £308,000 from the Invest to Save Budget in respect of the "Citizen Information Project: feasibility study" and due to the draw down of £50,000 from the Evidence-Based Policy Fund towards the costs of the English Longitudinal Study on Ageing. This increase is outweighed by transfers of £1,122,000 in total to other government departments. £537,000 of the transfer is in relation to data development work [illegible] the Neighbourhood Statistics programme. The transfers comprise £50,000 to the Department for Transport, £247,000 to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and £240,000 to the Home Office. Furthermore, ONS is repaying to the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit £585,000 administration costs which they advanced to ONS in 2001–02 to finance initial work on the Neighbourhood Statistics programme.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Departmental Expenditure

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): Subject to Parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate the Department for International Development DEL for 2002/2003 will be increased by £77,305,000 from £3,376,958,000 to £3,454,263,000. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are as set out in the table:

(£'000)

Resources				*Capital*			
Change	*New DEL*	*Of which: voted*	*Non voted*	*Change*	*New DEL*	*Of which: Voted*	*Non voted*
455,277	3,440,889	2,269,255	1,171,634	-377,972	13,374	13,374	—

The change in the resource element of the DEL arises from:

RfR 1: Eliminating Poverty in Poorer Countries

a transfer of £1,200,000 resource from DEFRA representing a contribution to the environmental know-how fund to Bilateral Development Assistance resource;

to give effect to the take up of DEL end year flexibility of £52,458,000 resource (non-discretionary—EC Attribution rollover) on programme expenditure to Bilateral Development Assistance resource;

a transfer of £988,000 from Multilateral Capital to Bilateral Development Assistance resource;

a transfer of £19,000,000 from non-voted capital to Bilateral Development Assistance resource;

a transfer of £18,000,000 from non-voted capital to Multilateral Development Assistance resource;

a transfer of £339,984,000 from non-voted Capital to non-voted Resource for the unwinding of Provisions;

to give effect to the transfer of £24,472,000 resource from the Central Reserve as a contribution to HIPC 100% expenditure to Bilateral Development Assistance;

a reduction of £3,600,000 resource to the Bilateral Development Assistance net cash figure to account for the value of VAT receipts taken in 2002/03;

a transfer of £18,000 resource from DFID to the Home Office for the balance of DFID's contribution to GRECO membership;

to give effect to the take up of Administration DEL end year flexibility of £4,893,000 resource (discretionary) on Administration;

a reduction of £955,000 resource to Administration net cash figure to account for the value of VAT receipts taken in 2002/03;

RfR 2: Conflict Prevention

a transfer of £3,588,000 resource from sub-Saharan Africa Conflict Prevention non-voted Departmental Unallocated Provision (DUP) to sub-Saharan Africa Conflict Prevention;

a transfer of £1,945,000 resource from sub-Saharan Africa Conflict Prevention non-voted Departmental Unallocated Provision (DUP) to the Ministry of Defence;

a transfer of £1,450,000 resource from sub-Saharan Africa non-voted Departmental Unallocated Provision (DUP) to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office;

a transfer of £17,000 resource from sub-Saharan Africa non-voted Departmental Unallocated Provision (DUP) to Global Conflict Prevention.

a transfer of £2,250,000 resource from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to Global Conflict Prevention;

The change in the capital element of the DEL arises from: transfers from the capital to the resource budget as listed above.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Departmental Expenditure

The Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Mr. Charles Clarke): This Written Statement explains the changes being proposed to the Department for Education and Skills' Departmental Expenditure Limit (DEL) (including the Office for Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools (OFSTED) which has a separate Estimate), which subject to Parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, will be increased by £681,049,000 from £23,500,366,000 to £23,984,215,000.

There are no Spring Supplementary changes to the OFSTED Estimate and hence they are excluded from the tables below.

The Administration Costs limits which will be changed as follows:

	Original £000	*Change* £000	*Revised* £000
DfES (RfR1)	207,541	+3,505	211,046
Sure Start (RfR2)	5,450	+1,005	6,455
Children's Fund (RfR3)	4,005	-81	3,924

Within the DEL change, the impact on the resources element and the capital element are as set out in the following table:

	Resources				*Capital*			
	Change £000	*New DEL* £000	*Of which: Voted* £000	*Non-voted* £000	Change £000	New DEL £000	*Of which: Voted* £000	*Non- voted* £000
RfR 1	428,439	20,050,932	7,395,624	12,655,308	252,015	3,334,477	1,964,018	1,370,459
RfR 2	771	285,404	285,404	0	0	164,008	164,008	0
RfR 3	-176	149,394	149,394	0	0	0	0	0
Total change	429,034	20,485,730	7,830,422	12,655,308	252,015	3,498,485	2,128,026	1,370,459

The £182,716,000 increase in the voted element of the resource DEL for RfR1 arises from the take up of £196,480,000 of End Year Flexibility (EYF) provision; the net transfer from the Home Office of £2,759,000 for Education in Prisons, for Adult Learning, for the Community Champions and for shared premises; the net transfer from the Department for Work and Pensions of £481,000 for Employment Service contribution to shared premises for facility management in Caxton House, for support of Detached National Experts and for Machinery of Government changes adjustment; the transfer from the Department of Health of £33,000 for Education Advisors; from Office of the Deputy Prime Minister of £240,000 for Local Public Service Agreement and from the National Assembly for Wales of £187,000 for the International Education Programme and for Students on Dance & Drama Schemes; the transfer to the Department of Environment Food & Rural Affairs of £500,000 for the school milk subsidy scheme; the net virement of £17,017,000 to non-voted DEL (£22,720,000) for the establishment of the Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA); (£797,000) for the Student Loans Company Grant in Aid and (£6,500,000) tc voted expenditure for the modernisation of Student Support and the take up of Evidence Based Policy Funding of £53,000 for Child Outcome and Parental Characteristics research.

The £3,505,000 increase in the Administration Costs limit for RfR1 arises from the net reclassification virement of £7,826,000 from administration to programme expenditure; transfers of £1,331,000 from the Department for Work and Pensions (£890,000) for the Employment Service contribution for shared premises and for support of Detached National Experts, from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister of (£240,000) and from the Home Office (£201,000) for shared premises, and the take up of £10,000,000 from the End-Year Flexibility provision.

The £771,000 increase in the voted element of resource DEL for RfR2 arises from the take up of EYF of £714,000 and the transfer of £57,000 from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) towards the administrative costs of the Childcare Policy team.

The £1,005,000 increase in the Administration Costs limit for RfR2 arises from the take up of EYF of £714,000, virement from current grants of £234,000 and the DWP transfer of £57,000.

The reduction in the voted element of resource DEL for RfR3 arises from the transfer of £176,000 (£81,000 is from administration costs) to the Home Office for work associated with the Strategy Programme.

The £200,015,000 increase in the voted element of the Capital DEL for RfR1 arises from the take up of £200,697,000 from EYF for schools and Other Educational Institutions capital projects (of which £88,823,000 is from the Capital Modernisation Fund element of EYF) and the offset of additional former Grant Maintained School loan repayments of £682,000.

The £245,723,000 increase in the non-voted element of the resource DEL for RfR1 arises from take up of £229,638,000 of End Year Flexibility provision for funding the Learning and Skills Council (£196,732,000), the Higher Education Funding Council for England (£30,000,000), the Student Loans Company (SLC) (£1,132,000) and the General Teaching Council (£1,774,000); from virements of £22,720,000 for the set-up of the SSDA, the virement of £6,500,000 to resource DEL for the modernisation of Student Support and the virement of £797,000 for SLC and transfers to the Department of Transport of £1,100,000 for the

Merchant Navy training Scheme, transfer of £300,000 to the Department of Health for the Clinical Scientist Scheme and the transfer from the DWP of £468,000 to pay for Adult Learning Inspectorate inspection of training providers used by JobcentrePlus .

The £52,000,000 increase in the non-voted element of the capital DEL for RfR1 arises from the draw down of £51,000,000 from EYF provision for the Learning Skills Council (£40,500,000), for Teachers Training Agency (£6,500,000) and HEFCE (£4,000,000) and the transfer of £1,000,000 from the Department of Health for the Research Capacity Development programme.

TRANSPORT

Departmental Expenditure

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Alistair Darling): Subject to Parliamentary approval of any necessary Supplementary Estimate, the Department for Transport departmental expenditure limit for 2002–03 will be increased by £69,265,000 from £8,928,473,000 to £8,997,738,000 and the administration costs limits will be decreased by £134,940,000 from £479,446,000 to £344,506,000. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are as set out in the table:

Resources				*Capital*			
Change	*New DEL*	*Of which: voted*	*Non voted*	*Change*	*New DEL*	*Of which: voted*	*Non voted*
67,483	3,320,718	1,888,498	1,432,220	1,782	5,677,020	3,369,387	2,307,633

The change in the resource element of the DEL arises from:

(i) take up of £66,784,000 end year flexibility, comprising:

(a) £17,000,000 for programme expenditure by the Highways Agency;

(b) £4,636,000 (administration costs) for administration expenditure by the Highways Agency;

(c) £9,118,000 (administration costs) for administration expenditure by the Department for Transport; and

(d) £36,030,000 (administration costs) for administration expenditure by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency.

(ii) a net transfer of £4,162,000 to other government departments, comprising:

(a) £1,627,000 (administration costs) from the Home Office to support DVLA's Vehicle Crime Reduction initiative

(b) £1,444,000 (administration costs) from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister following Machinery of Government changes;

(c) £1,100,000 from the Department for Education and Skills for SMarT seafarer maritime training by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency;

(d) £179,000 to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for Energy Efficiency Best Practice programmes;

(e) £75,000 (administration costs) from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for local Public Service Agreement (PSA) costs;

(e) £8,000 (other current) from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister following Machinery of Government changes;

(f) £50,000 from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office for the Hamilton project;

(g) £50,000 (administration costs) from the Office for National Statistics for work done on the Neighbourhood Statistics programme;

(h) £43,000 to the Department of Trade and Industry for the Framework 5 GROWTH programme; and

(i) £20,000 from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and £10,000 from the Department of Health for the World Health Organisation PEP project;

(iii) a transfer of £85,000 from the capital element of the DEL to the resource element for automatic traffic counter renewal;

(iv) an increase in receipts of £3,548,000 to offset capital expenditure by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency.

Within the resource element of the DEL there has been a net transfer of £41,941,000 from voted to non-voted programmes,comprising:

(a) a transfer of £44,833,000 to non-voted DEL in respect of payments against provisions for Government Support liability payments from British Rail and National Freight Company pension funds and from the NFC travel concessions programme;

(b) a transfer of £4,092,000 (administration costs) from non-voted Departmental Unallocated Provision to support voted administration expenditure by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency;

(c) a transfer of £1,200,000 to offset reduced (non-voted) Civil Aviation Authority forecast profit.

In addition to the changes listed above, there has been a net decrease of £187,920,000 in the administration costs limit, comprising:

(a) a reclassification of £147,452,000 administration costs related receipts to now score within administration costs limit; and

(b) a reclassification of £40,468,000 costs of frontline staff from administration costs to costs of the relevant programmes.

The change in the capital element of the DEL arises from:

(i) take up of £652,000 of end year flexibility for the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency;

(ii) a transfer of £2,333,000 to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister to cover revised forecast;

(iii) a transfer of £85,000 to the resource element of the DEL for automatic traffic counter renewal;

(iv) an increase of £3,548,000 in respect of capital expenditure by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency, offset by resource appropriations in aid.

Within the capital element of the DEL there has been a net transfer of £5,510,000 from non-voted to voted programmes, comprising:

(a) a transfer of £11,400,000 from non-voted to voted programmes to meet a Highways Agency pressure;

(b) a transfer of £5,890,000 from voted to non-voted programmes to reflect a change in the treatment of Electronic Service Delivery and Capital Modernisation Fund allocations to trading funds.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Departmental Expenditure

The Minister for Pensions (Mr. Ian McCartney): Subject to Parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, the Department for Work and Pensions Departmental Expenditure Limit will be increased by £82,134,000 from £7,752,174,000 to £7,834,308,000 and the administration cost limit by £65,205,000 from £5,558,199,000 to £5,623,404,000. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are set out in the table:

Resources				*Capital*			
Change	*New DEL*	*Of which: voted*	*Non voted*	*Change*	*New DEL*	*Of which: Voted*	*Non voted*
61,793,000	7,575,539	6,513,501	1,062,038	20,341	258,769	252,465	6,304

The change in the resource element of the DEL arises from:

(i) take up of end year flexibility entitlements (£62,510,000 of which (Administration Costs), £6,000,000 of this entitlement was announced by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury in Table 6 of the 2001–2002 Public Expenditure Outturn White Paper (Cm 5574) as other discretionary

(ii) an increase of £2,300,000 (Administration Costs) from the Capital Modernisation Fund for costs associated with the Modernising Appeals Delivery Programme

(iii) the transfer of £1,116,000 (Administration Costs) to the Scottish Executive for expenditure in connection with Work Based Learning for Adults

(iv) the net transfer of £1,006,000 (£538,000 Administration Costs and £468,000 Other Current expenditure) to Department for Education and Skills for the costs of several minor items which arise from the continuing effects of the Machinery of Government changes

(v) the transfer of £450,000 (Other Current) to the Home Office as a contribution towards the cost of the Street Crime Initiative

(vi) an increase in provision of £732,000 (Administration Costs) for the cost of collecting expenses associated with Road Traffic Accidents in England, Scotland and Wales

(vii) an increase in provision of £350,000 (Administration Costs) for costs associated with accommodation previously shared with another government department

(viii) a reduction of £190,000 (Administration Costs) -as a result of a recalculation of the costs associated with the unwinding of the PRIME Barter deal

(ix) an increase of £124,000 (Administration Costs) as a result of a transfer for costs relating to debt management in relation to Working Family Tax Credit

(x) an increase of £208,000 (Administration Costs) following the transfer from Lord Chancellors Department for costs associated with the Personal Details Programme

(xi) an increase of £70,000 (Administration Costs) following the transfer from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister of costs relating to local Public Service Agreements

(xii) Administration Cost Limit changes arise from a reduction (£3,165,000) following a review of expenditure requirements, a reduction of (£2,301,000) resulting from the correction to the classification of certain transfers made in the Winter Supplementary Estimate, an increase (£5,595,000) following the virement from Grants, a reduction (£575,000) from the transfer to the Disability Rights Commission Grant in Aid and a reduction (£1,201,000) in Administration Cost related Appropriations in Aid

(xiii) there is an increase in Appropriations in Aid of £1,739,000.

The change in the capital element of the DEL arises from:

(i) take up of end year flexibility entitlement of £20,211,000 as announced by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury in Table 6 of the 2001–2002 Public Expenditure Outturn White Paper (Cm 5574).

(ii) A reduction of £130,000 in non operating Appropriations in Aid.

HEALTH DEPARTMENT

Departmental Expenditure (Department of Health and Food Standards Agency)

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Alan Milburn): Subject to Parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, the Department and the Food Standards Agency departmental expenditure limits (DELs) will be increased by £448,742,000 from £56,476,255,000 to £56,924,997,000 and the administration cost limits (ACL) will decrease by £10,539,000 from £379,782,000 to £369,243,000. The Department's DEL will be increased by £448,742,000 from £56,341,630,000 to £56,790,372,000 and the ACL will increase by £8,829,000 from £324,663,000 to £333,492,000. The Food Standards Agency DEL remains unchanged at £134,625,000 but the ACL will decrease by £19,368,000 from £55,119,000 to £35,751,000. The impact on resource and capital are set out in the table.

	Resource (£'000)	*Capital (£'000)*
Change	393,200	55,542
New Department of Health DEL	54,385,885	2,404,487
Voted	54,858,261	1,161,967
Non Voted	-472,376	1,242,520
Food Standards Agency DEL	133,988	637
Of which		
Voted	133,988	637
Non Voted	0	0
TOTAL DH/FSA Group DEL	54,519,873	2,405,124

The change in the resource element of the department expenditure limit for the Department arises from: a claim for early take of additional end year flexibility from 2001–02 £120 million and the take up of end year flexibility £16.111 million (£6 million revenue allocations and £10.111 million administration cost limit) as set out in Table 6 of the Public Expenditure

2001–02 Provisional Outturn White Paper Cm 5574 published in July 2002; a change in the level of National Health Service trust depreciation £58.216 million; a transfer from the capital element of the Department's DEL of £197.051 million; additions from the evidence based policy fund £0.229 million; net transfers from the Home Office of £3.433 million for training bursaries drug research and drug action teams, training of staff, offset by a grant for match funded social care projects; net transfer to the National Assembly for Wales £-5.960 million (£-0.022 administration cost limit) mainly for out of area treatments, high security psychiatric services, cross border prescribing and prison healthcare offset by contributions to committee costs and post graduate medical education; net transfer to the Scottish Executive £-2.050 million for out of area treatments, offset by a contribution to HIV surveillance funding, contributions to postgraduate medical education, the high security infectious diseases unit and the Beta Interferon risk sharing scheme; a transfer to the Department of Transport £-0.010 for a contribution to the international transport programme, environment and health programme; a transfer to the Department for Work and Pensions £-1.699 million for costs associated with the road traffic accident compensation recovery unit; from the Department for Education and Skills £7.067 million for medical student bursaries offset by a contribution for funding education advisers; to the Cabinet Office £-0.175 million for development of a website; from DHSS Northern Ireland £0.747 million for out of area treatments and the Beta Interferon risk sharing scheme and from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister £0.240 million (administration cost limit) for public service agreements.

The change in the capital element of the department expenditure limit for the Department arises from: the take up of end year flexibility £58.942 million as set out in Table 6 of the Public Expenditure 2001–02 Provisional Outturn White Paper Cm 5574 published in July 2002; additional resources for private finance initiative balance sheet adjustments £153.571 million; a transfer to the resource element of the Department's DEL of £-197.051 million; additions from the capital modernisation fund £42.670 million; a transfer to the National Assembly for Wales £-0.540 million for accelerated discharge; to the Department for Education and Skills £-1 million for a contribution for Derby Medical School; to the Cabinet Office £-0.575 million for development of a website and to the Ministry of Defence £-0.475 million for capital contribution for Royal Hospital Haslar.

The Department's administration cost limit has increased by £8.829 million from £324.663 million from £333.492 million as detailed above, offset by a transfer of £-1.5million for capital provision. The Food Standards Agency (FSA) administration cost limit has decreased by £19.368 million from £55.119 million to £35.751 million as a result of re-classifying meat hygiene service (MHS) costs from administration to programme and refining the FSA's and MHS's budget for 2002–03.

CABINET OFFICE

Departmental Expenditure

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Mr. Douglas Alexander): Subject to Parliamentary approval of any necessary Supplementary Estimate, the Cabinet Office DEL will be increased by £ 16,549,000 from £261,159,000 to £277,708,000, the gross administration costs limit will be increased by £4,514,000 from £164,613,000 to £169,127,000 and the net administration costs limit will be decreased by £1,847,000 from £2,922,000 to £ 1,075,000. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are as set out in the table:

	Resources £000	*Capital £000*
Change	2,122	14,427
New DEL	208,565	69,142
Of which:		
Voted	*208,566*	*69,142*
Non voted		

The change in the resource element of the DEL arises from Machinery of Government transfers of £2,018,000 to other departments; a virement from capital of £4,000,000; additions from the Invest to Save Budget of £280,000; and net transfers to other government departments of £140,000.

The change in the capital element of the DEL arises from additions from the DEL reserve of £9,000,000; transfers from other departments of £6,087,000; a transfer to the Security and Intelligence Agencies of £385,000; draw down of capital end year flexibility of £4,125,000; virement to resource of £4,000,000; and the difference of £400,000 between expenditure using proceeds from the sale of assets and the net book value of the assets.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Departmental Expenditure

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Paul Murphy): Subject to Parliamentary approval the Northern Ireland Office (NIO) will be taking a 2002/2003 Spring Supplementary Estimate. The effect this will have is to increase the NIO's DEL by £35,101,000 from £1,211,862,000 to £1,246,963,000 and the administration costs limit will be increased by £13,269,000 from £154,716,000 to £167,985,000. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are as set out in the table:

£'000

Resources				*Capital*			
Change	*New DEL*	*Of which: voted*	*Non voted*	*Change*	*New DEL*	*Of which: voted*	*Non voted*
30,591	1,177,900	1,177,900	0	4,510	69,063	41,575	27,488

The change in the resource element of the DEL arises from the draw down of £12,000,000 End Year Flexibility, a Reserve Claim for the Bloody Sunday Inquiry of £18,542,000 and net transfers into the Department of £49,000. This amount includes a total of £13,236,000 for administration costs.

The extra resource costs cover a range of areas within the Department such as policing plus security, central administration, political, criminal justice and prisons. The change in the capital element of the DEL arises from the draw down of £5,000,000 End Year Flexibility, and a capital transfer to the Northern Ireland Departments of £490,000.

The extra capital costs cover a range of areas within the Department such as policing plus security, central administration, political, criminal justice and prisons.

The NIO Spring Supplementary Estimates will also be used to increase the Grant payable into the Northern Ireland Consolidated Fund by £372,000,000, from £8,089,000,000 to £8,461,000,000.

The increase in Grant payable is a cash increase to fund activities undertaken by Northern Ireland Departments during 2002/03. This cash increase allows the use of End Year Flexibility and net transfers to Northern Ireland Departments which will be utilised in delivering departmental programmes.

As a result the Northern Ireland Departments' DEL increases by £338,824,000 from £6,130,919,000 to £6,469,743,000. The increase comprises a take up of EYF of £337,440,000, a claim on the Reserve of £1,326,000 in respect of the disposal of fridges under EU regulations and net transfers of £58,000 from other Government Departments.

LORD CHANCELLOR

Departmental Expenditure

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Ms Rosie Winterton): Subject to Parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimates, the Lord Chancellor's Departments (including Northern Ireland Court Service and Public Records Office) DEL will be increased by £419,953,000 from £2,897,414,000 to £3,317,367,000 and the administration costs limit will be increased by £160,001,000 from £639,888,000 to £799,889,000. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are as set out in the table:

All figures are £000's.

	Resources				*Capital*			
	Change	*New DEL*	*Of which: voted*	*Non voted*	*Change*	*New DEL*	*Of which: voted*	*Non voted*
TOTAL	411036	3206627	2946067	260560	8917	110740	99348	11392

The change in the Lord Chancellor's Department resource DEL is the net effect of:

> A transfer of £27,000 administration costs and £11,760,000 appropriations in aid to the Home Office; a transfer of £110,000 administration costs from the Home Office; a transfer of £208,000 administration costs to the Department for Work and Pensions; a transfer of £48,000 administration costs from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister; an increase of £11,760,000 appropriations in aid from a short surrender of CFERS; a transfer of £70,000 resources from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; a reclassification of £444,000 from capital to resource DEL utilising the 2½ per cent. capital to resource allowance; a transfer of £78,000 administration costs from the Office of Government Commerce; reclassification of £6,245,000 resources from resource to capital DEL, of which £7,000,000 is administration costs; take up of £412,000,000 resources from the DEL Reserve, of which £167,000,000 is administration costs.

The change in the Northern Ireland Court Service resource DEL is the net effect of:

> take up of DEL end year flexibility of £1,581,000 administration costs and a virement of £1,581,000 from administration to capital DEL; a reclassification of £26,600,000 from administration costs to programme costs; take up of non-voted DEL end year flexibility of £271,000 Consolidated Fund expenditure; the take up of DEL end year flexibility of £1,955,000 on legal aid fund expenditure.

The change in the Public Records Office resource DEL arises from:

> the take up of £2,542,000 administration costs from end year flexibility.

The change in the Lord Chancellor's Department capital DEL is the net effect of:

> a reclassification of £444,000 from capital to resource DEL utilising the 2½ per cent. capital to resource allowance; reclassification of £6,245,000 resources from resource to capital DEL.

The change in the Northern Ireland Court Service capital DEL is the net effect of:

> the take up of capital end year flexibility of £1,475,000; and a virement of £1,581,000 from administration to capital DEL.

The change in the Public Records Office capital DEL is the net effect of:

> take up of end year flexibility of £60,000 resources.

The increases will be offset by inter-departmental transfers, increases to Appropriations in Aid, take up of End Year Flexibility entitlements and a charge to the DEL Reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Departmental Expenditure

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Ms Patricia Hewitt): Subject to Parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate the Department of Trade and Industry's DEL will be increased by

£92,689,000 from £4,763,244,000 to £4,855,933,000 and the Administration Costs limit will be increased by £18,592,000 from £423,187,000 to £441,779,000.

Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital is as set out in the following table:

£'000

Resources Change	*New DEL*	*Of which: voted*	*Non voted*	*Capital Change*	*New DEL*	*Of which: voted*	*Non voted*
51,189	3,773,918	1,175,588	2,598,330	41,500	1,082,015	-9,146	1,091,161

The change in the resource element of the DEL arises from:

RfR1

(i) an increase in the non Voted expenditure of Postwatch of £1,180,000 offset by an equivalent increase in voted licence fee receipts;

(ii) transfer of £43,000 from the Department for Transport in relation to the EU Fifth Framework Programme;

(iii) transfer of £221,000 to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister Neighbourhood Renewal Unit for the Business Brokers Pilot Project;

(iv) transfer of £700,000 to the Northern Ireland executive for innovative broadband schemes;

(v) transfer of £1,000,000 from the Department of Culture, Media and Sport to assist in the establishment of Ofcom;

(vi) a virement of £272,000 from voted business support to non voted expenditure of the Regional Development Agencies;

(vii) an increase in non voted expenditure of the Regional Development Agencies by £949,000 to reflect additional receipts from British Trade International;

(viii) to increase the gross provision for grant in aid to Regional Development Agencies by £7,332,000 and increase appropriations in aid by an equivalent amount to reflect additional receipts from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister;

(ix) utilisation of £21,100,000 from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement to provide for advisers and legal costs in relation to British Energy;

(x) utilisation of £1,100,000 from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement for corporate communications and brand strategy;

(xi) transfer of £26,000 from the Home Office to non voted expenditure of the Design Council for the Design Against Crime project;

(xii) utilisation of £4,000,000 from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement to provide for increased non voted expenditure of the Regional Development Agencies.

Within the change to the resource DEL, the changes to the administration costs limit are:

(xiii) utilisation of £13,602,000 and £2,961,000 from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement in relation to administration;

(xiv) utilisation of £324,000 from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement for the ACAS Work Life Balance Invest to Save project;

(xv) reclassification from programme to administration of £348,000 received in the Winter Supplementary from the Department for Education and Skills in relation to Work Life Balance to reflect funding via ACAS;

(xvi) an increase in gross administration expenditure and receipts of £418,000 to reflect increased receipts from other Government Departments;

(xvii) transfer of £439,000 from the Cabinet Office in relation to Women and Equality as a result of Machinery of Government changes;

(xviii) a virement of £500,000 from programme to administration in respect of business information start-ups.

RfR2

(i) utilisation of £200,000 from the Departmental Unallocated Provision for OST initiatives;

(ii) utilisation of £2,515,000 from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement for Knowledge Transfer;

2. There is also an increase in non-Voted expenditure on Enemy Property Claims liabilities of £5,000,000.

The change in the capital element of the DEL arises from:

RfR1

(i) utilisation of £4,500,000 from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement for the Small Business Service National Gateway Capital Modernisation Fund project;

(ii) take up of £3,000,000 from the business.gov Capital Modernisation Fund project;

(iii) utilisation of £8,000,000 and £26,000,000 from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement to provide for increased expenditure and reduced receipts in relation to the Rolls Royce Trent 600 and 900 projects;

(iv) to increase the gross provision for grant in aid to Regional Development Agencies by £35,039,000 and increase appropriations in aid by an equivalent amount to reflect additional receipts from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

Sizewell B Nuclear Power Station

The Minister for Energy and Construction (Mr Brian Wilson): In the statement made by the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, South (Nigel Griffiths) on 14 January 2003, *Official Report*, col. 547–50, he said that the Greenpeace protestors who entered the Sizewell nuclear power station had not penetrated any of the internal security barriers.

My hon. Friend's statement was made on the basis of the best information available at the time from the nuclear operating company, British Energy. However, it is now known that although initial reports did not indicate that any sensitive area had been breached at the time of the Greenpeace incursion, a subsequent inspection by the Office for Civil Nuclear Security has established that some of the intruders entered through a door, which amounted to a breach of the Sizewell inner security barrier. Further defences within the inner security barrier contained the intruders and I should stress that at no time were any sensitive areas of the plant breached. The incursion was accurately assessed at the time not to pose a security threat and the response was measured and appropriate.

The Director of Civil Nuclear Security has implemented a full investigation into the incursion, including this breach, with the full co-operation of the operating company. Immediate remedial action has been taken to prevent a recurrence of this breach of the inner security barrier and other lessons learned from the incident are being acted on appropriately.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Departmental Expenditure

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tessa Jowell): Subject to Parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport DEL will be reduced by £965,000 from £1,330,773,000 to £1,329,808,000 and the Administration Costs limits will be reduced by £4,731,000 from £42,166,000 to £37,435,000.

Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are as set out in the table:

£'000

Resources				*Capital*			
Change	*New DEL*	*Of which: voted*	*Non voted*	*Change*	*New DEL*	*Of which: voted*	*Non voted*
-965	1,166,432	166,837	999,595	-	163,376	116,495	46,881

The £2,908,000 increase in the voted element of the resource DEL for RfRI arises from the recovery from sale proceeds of £223,000 for repairs to Apethorpe Hall; the transfer of £20,000 administration costs expenditure from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (RfR4) toward the administration costs of local public service agreements (PSAs); a transfer of £749,000 to the Home Office for the Queen's Golden Jubilee Award scheme plus an addition of £351,000 fully offset by a transfer of £1,100,000 from non-Voted resource DEL; a transfer of £1,000,000 to the Department of Trade and Industry for the costs of setting up OFCOM fully offset by a transfer of £1,000,000 from non-Voted resource DEL; and additional resources of £2,760,000 for the costs of the funeral for the late Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother, also fully offset by a reduction in non-Voted resource DEL

The £3,873,000 reduction in the non-voted element of the resource DEL for RfR1 arises from the transfer of £830,000 from the Departmental Unallocated Provision; the reimbursement of English Heritage of £223,000 for repairs to Apethorpe Hall; a reduction of £4,030,000 in non-Voted resource DEL cover for the Historic Royal Palaces deficit; the provision of additional resources of £14,000 to the Public Lending Right, of £674,000 to English Heritage, and £76,000 to the Broadcasting Standards Commission for the costs of paying accrued superannuation liability contributions in excess of pensions payments following their transfer into the Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme.

The £4,731,000 decrease in the Department's Administration Costs Limit arises from the transfer of £4,751,000 from administration costs to resource DEL as a result of the reclassification of the delivery of services of The Royal Parks; and a transfer of £20,000 administration costs expenditure from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (RfR4) toward the administration costs of local public service agreements (PSAs).

The Voted and non-Voted elements of Capital DEL are unchanged.

PRIME MINISTER

Departmental Expenditure

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): Subject to parliamentary approval of any necessary Supplementary Estimate, the Security and Intelligence Agencies DEL will be increased by £36,655,000 from £973,949,000 to £1,010,604,000 and the administration costs limits will be increased by £6,865,000 from £477,256,000 to £484,121,000. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are as set out in the table:

	Resources £	*Capital* £
Change	12,905,000	23,750,000
New DEL	846,819,000	163,403,000
Of which:		
Voted	846,819,000	163,403,000
Non-voted	—	—

The change in the resource element of the DEL arises from:

1. the take up of End of Year Flexibility (EYF) of £10,500,000;
2. a PES transfer of £120,000 from the MOD;
3. a PES transfer of £1,050,000 from the Home Office;
4. a transfer of £1,235,000 to Resource from Capital

The change in the capital element of the DEL arises from:

1. the take up of End of Year Flexibility (EYF) of £24,600,000;
2. a PES transfer of £385,000 from the Cabinet Office;
3. a transfer of £1,235,000 from Capital to Resource.

SCOTLAND

Departmental Expenditure

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mrs Helen Liddell): Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, the Scotland Departmental Expenditure Limit (DEL) will be increased by £310,555,000 from £18,290,311,000 to £18,600,866,000. The Scotland Office administration costs limit is unchanged.

The DEL increase takes account of the following:

A reclassification into DEL of £189,603,000 for Edinburgh Royal Infirmary;

The take-up of End Year Flexibility (EYF) by the Scottish Executive amounting to £90,000,000;

An increase of £1,562,000 to meet the costs of the Lockerbie trial;

An increase of £1,156,000 for the Scottish Parliament elections;

A reclassification into AME of £5,400,000 for fire service pensions.

The DEL increase also includes the following transfers between the Scottish Executive and other Government departments, amounting to a net increase of £33,634,000. These are:

A transfer of £26,086,000 from the Department of Transport;

Net transfers of £4,337,000 from the Home Office;

Net transfers of £2,050,000 from the Department of Health;

Net transfers of £880,000 from the Department for Work and Pensions;

A transfer of £358,000 from the Northern Ireland Executive;

A transfer of £60,000 from the National Assembly for Wales; and

A transfer of £137,000 to the Department for Education and Skills.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Departmental Expenditure

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): Subject to Parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, the Home Office's Departmental Expenditure Limits (DEL) for 2002–03 will change as follows.

£'000

Resources				*Capital*			
Change	*New DEL*	*Of which: voted*	*Non voted*	*Change*	*New DEL*	*Of which: voted*	*Non voted*
947,615	10,378,398	8,937,731	1,440,667	21,112	1,099,814	928,938	170,876

The change in the resource element of the DEL arises from:

(i) Claims on the DEL reserve:

Claims on the Treasury DEL reserve of £822,410,000 for RfR01 comprising £185,000,000 to subhead H1 for costs arising from the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND); £601,696,000 to subhead H2 to cover asylum support costs significantly in excess of budget allocation (£600,000,000) and funding from the Organised Crime Reserve for Project Reflex (£1,696,000); £25,000,000 to RfR01: subhead AN3 to increase resources for compensation payments and £7,014,000 for additional grant in aid to provide cover for non-recoverable VAT payments. The remaining £3,700,000 is in respect of the Criminal Records Bureau. The bulk of this claim, as last year, simply aligns the resource budget for IND more closely with the actual spend and reflects a long-planned in-year adjustment to the unrealistic budget level originally set in July 2000.

(ii) Criminal Records Bureau:

A reduction of £11,485,000 in RfR01: subhead E1 and a corresponding increase of £37,447,000 in RfR01: subhead E.5 consisting of a reduction in the forecast of receipts, as well as contributions totaling £10,200,000 from Department of Health and Department for Education and Skills. The £25,962,000 increase in the Home Office Admin Resource DEL is offset by additional resources of £3,700,000 from the Treasury Reserve and Admin savings of £22,262,000 from within the Department which will ensure that the Admin cost limit is not exceeded.

(iii) Transfers from Other Government Departments (OGDs) totaling £15,706,000 including:

Cabinet Office to RfFM: subhead C1 of £250,000 to provide the appropriate provision for the transfer of the CBRN (Chemical, Biological, Radiological & Nuclear) Team. Department of Culture, Media and Sport to RfR1: subhead G2 of £749,000 for the transfer of the Golden Jubilee Awards Team. Department for Education and Skills of £196,000 to RfR01: subhead J2 in respect of Children & Young peoples Boost (£95,000); subhead G3 for a contribution towards the Voluntary Sector Portal Project (£20,000) and subhead JT for a transfer from the Children's Fund relating to On Track Evaluation (£81,000). Department of Health to RfR1: subhead G3 of £62,000 for matched funded Intermediate Care Services Project. Department of Work and Pensions to RfR1: subhead AQ3 of £450,000 for Street Crime Initiative Funding to link street crime offenders into employment opportunities. Lord Chancellor's Department to RfR01: subhead C3 of £11,760,000 to provide the appropriate provision for payments from the Recovered Assets Fund. Northern Ireland Office to RfR1: subhead D3 of £4,000 for a contribution to GRECO. Office of National Statistics to RfR01: subhead B3 of £240,000 to provide the appropriate provision for NeSS project work—funding for CO4—Crime Data Extraction. Scottish Office to RfR1: subhead D3 for £13,000 for a contribution to GRECO. Welsh Office to RfR01: subhead A3 of £13,742,000 to provide the appropriate provision for the costs of centrally managed police projects.

(iv) Transfers to OGDs totaling £23,829,000 including:

Crown Prosecution Service of £1,200,000 to provide the appropriate provision to video suspects. Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs of £1,500,000 to provide the appropriate provision for Locks For Pensioners. £1,539,000 to Department for Education and Skills for Moorfoot MOTO (£201,000) transfer for a Match Funding Project (£1,113,000): Transfer for the Community Cohesion Pathfinder Programme—Community Champions (£225,000). £3,495,000 to the Department of Health from RfR01: subhead J2 for National Drug Treatment Monitoring System (£316,000), Drug Testing Treatment Orders (DTTO) (£60,000) and Crack Treatment Pilots (£150,000); from subhead AQ3 to increase the number of DTTO's in seven street crime areas (£540,000); from subhead D2 for Staff induction costs for DSPD unit at Broadmoor (£218,000); from subhead C3 to provide the appropriate provision for 'DAT Training on Treatment Commissioning' (£25,000), to provide the appropriate provision for 'Central drug treatment Fund' (£1,161,000), to provide appropriate provision for 'In House training for Drug Treatment Workers' (£100,000) and to provide the appropriate provision for 'Drug Related Deaths' (£925,000). £26,000 to the Department of Trade and Industry from RfR01: subhead B3 to provide the appropriate provision for Design Against Crime. £1,627,000 to the Department of Vehicle Licensing Agency from subhead B3 to provide the appropriate provision for Vehicle Crime. £110,000 to the Lord Chancellors Department from RfFM: subhead D1 for JT inspections cross cutting civil justice project. £34,000 to the Northern Ireland Office from RfR1: subhead G1 for the Golden Jubilee Awards. £8,693,000 to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister from RfR01: subhead G1 (£310,000) for the Golden Jubilee Awards, subhead G1 (£180,000) for the Community Cohesion Pathfinder Programme for staffing, subhead G1 (£380,000) for the Time Limited Development Fund, from subhead B1 (£6,104,000) to provide the appropriate provision for RCU tariff costs for the crime reduction teams, subhead C3 (£1,280,000) to provide the appropriate provision for 'Rough Sleepers Unit1 and subhead A2 (£439,000) to provide appropriate provision for Government Office involvement in Street Crime Initiative. £4,384,000 to the Scotland Office subhead H2 of (£4,350,000) for Local Authority Asylum Support Payments and subhead Clot (£34,000) for the Golden Jubilee Awards. £1,050,000 to the Security Intelligence Service from RfROT: subhead C2 to provide the appropriate provision for overseas drugs related assistance. £61,000 to the Wales Office from RfR01: subhead G1 (£34,000) for the Golden Jubilee Awards and subhead C3 (£27,000) to provide the appropriate provision for 'Iechyd Morghannwg DAT'. £110,000 to the Cabinet Office from RfR01: subhead D1 for exchange demonstrator work funded from CJIT.

(v) Transfers between RfR01 and RfR02 £265,000 from RfROI to RfR02 comprising:

£235,000 from RfR01: subhead H1 to RfR02: subhead A1 for costs associated with the Immigration Removal Centres at Haslar, Dover and Lindholme. £30,000 from RfR01: subhead F2 to RfR02: subhead C2 in respect of OASys OPOL project funding. £14,825,000 from RfR02 to RfROI comprising: £115,000 from RfR02: subhead CT to RfROI: subhead D1 representing a transfer of CJS Reserve £40,000 from RfR02: subhead C1 to RfROI: subhead F1 representing a transfer of funding for the OASys IT project £20,000 from RfR02: subhead C1 to RfROI: subhead J1 in respect of long term evaluation contracts £9,600,000 from RfR02: subhead A1 to RfROI: subhead A1 in respect of crime reduction £4,800,000 from RfR02: subhead A1 to RfROI: subhead D1 representing a transfer of CJS reserve, £250,000 from RfR02: subhead C2 to RfROI: subhead AL3 representing a transfer of funding for policing through the National Crime Squad.

(vi) Funding changes:

to provide additional resources of £14,326,000 in subhead A1, £200,000 in subhead A2 and additional income of £14,526,000 in subhead A5 in respect of additional funding from the Youth Justice Board; a reduction of £3,278,000 resources from subhead A1 and a matching reduction of £3,278,000 income from subhead A5 in RfR02 in respect of funding from DfES for prison education an increase of £1,240,000 income in subhead A5 in RfR02 in respect of additional funding from DfES for prison education an increase of £1,400,000 in RfR02: subhead A5 in respect of additional rental income from prison service property Lord Chancellor's Department to RfR01: subhead C5 of £11,760,000 receipts and a corresponding increase in subhead C3 to provide the appropriate provision for payments from the Recovered Assets Fund; HM Treasury to RfR01: subhead K5 of £2,341,000 receipts and a corresponding increase in subhead K1 in respect of the transfer of the lease of Allington Towers.

(vii) Exchange

Exchange with HM Treasury capital in RfR01: subhead A7 with resource in RfR01: subhead A2 of £49,700,000 to provide the appropriate provision for DMA, science and technology projects and electronic chipping.

(viii) Drawdown of Departmental Unallocated Provision:

Drawdown of £11,460,000 from the DUP into RfR01: subhead A1 to provide additional resources for policing.

(ix) EC Receipts:

Additional receipts of £60,000 in RfR01: subhead G5 and additional resources of £60,000 in RfR01: subhead ATS, representing a payment from the European Union to the Commission for Racial Equality for the Raxen project.

(x) Correction:

A reduction of £872,000 A in A in RfR01 subhead G5 corrects calculation of item CXXX in the 'Introduction' to the Winter Supplementary Estimate in which an increase of £436,000 A in A was recorded instead of a decrease.

(xi) Further changes:

Additional provision of £16,400,000 in RfR01: subhead APS for the YJB; £1,488,000 in RfR02: subhead A1 for the video links project and £1,216,000 in RfR02: subhead A1 for the Prison Service drug strategy.

The change in the capital element of the DEL arises from:

(i) DEL Reserve:

Claims on the Treasury DEL reserve of £2,900,000 to RfR01: subhead AN3 to provide additional grant in aid to provide cover for non-recoverable VAT payments.

(ii) Transfers to OGDs:

£779,000 to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office from RfR01: subhead H7 for the setting up of the Zimbabwe Visas Regime (£515,000) and for the setting up of the Jamaican Visas Regime (£264,000). £5,337,000 to the Cabinet Office from RfR01: subhead D1 for exchange demonstrator work funded from CJIT

(iii) Transfers between RfR01 and RfR02

£26,000 from RfR01: subhead H7 to RfR02: subhead A7 for costs associated with the Immigration Removal Centres at Haslar, Dover and Lindholme

(iv) Funding Changes:

To provide additional resources of £270,000 in subhead RfR02: subhead A7 and a corresponding increase in income in subhead A8 in respect of additional funding from the Youth Justice Board. An increase of in RfR02: subhead A7 of £2,631,000; and subhead B7 of £170,000; and an increase of non-operating income in subhead A8 of £2,631,000; and in subhead B8 of £170,000 in respect of capital funding from DfES for prison education projects. In RfR02 a reduction of £16,350,000 income from sale of assets in subhead A8 and a corresponding reduction of £16,350,000 in subhead A7 in respect of the prison building programme.

(v) EYF

Take up of £12,719,000 End Year Flexibility in RfR01: subhead D7 from the CJS reserve.

(vi) Exchange:

Exchange with HM Treasury capital in RfR01: subhead A7 with resource in RfR01: subhead A2 of £49,700,000 to provide the appropriate provision for DMA, science and technology projects and electronic chipping.

(vii) Switch:

Switch from capital to resource of £13,850,000 from RfR01: subhead D7 to subhead D2.

(viii) Further changes:

EYF of £36,632,000 in RfR01: subhead A7 and £38,000,000 CMF in RfR02: subhead A7.

Video-recorded Interviews

The Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community Safety (Mr John Denham): The Home Office has today made available an additional £2 million for police authorities to provide facilities for video recording interviews with vulnerable witnesses. This funding will help to improve the service that the police can provide to some of the most vulnerable witnesses and victims of crime.

Funding will be distributed by competition and grants will be targeted to provide the greatest benefit to witnesses and to complement other justice initiatives. Bidding guidance and a timetable will be issued shortly.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

Israel (UK Defence Equipment)

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Jack Straw): In my written reply to the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr Campbell) on 15 April 2002, *Official Report*, col. 723W, I informed Parliament that we had questions about other possible breaches of the Israeli assurances about the use of UK-supplied equipment in the Occupied Territories (OTs) exported under previous Administrations. The Government has looked into the issue further and I am now able to inform Parliament of the outcome of our inquiries.

The only equipment that has been identified as being used by the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) in the OTs, and that can justifiably be regarded as constituting a breach of the assurances, is a combination of Puma and Nachpadon armoured personnel carriers (APCs). These are derivative APCs on a Centurion chassis, which therefore have a significant and recognisable UK content. Parliament was informed of this in Mr Bradshaw's reply to a parliamentary question from Mr Galloway on 11 March 2002.

In our view the Israeli assurances do not cover equipment consisting of components exported by the UK to a third country, which components were then incorporated in that country into products for onward export. The Foreign Secretary's announcement of 8 July 2002 set out how the Government will approach licence applications for goods where it is understood that the goods are to be incorporated into products for onward export.

We intend to inform the Israelis of the results of our inquiries. We shall re-emphasise our current concerns about exporting arms to Israel that might be used against Palestinian targets, and that our policy on assessing Israeli export applications has not changed: we shall continue to assess export licence applications for the proposed export of controlled goods to Israel on a case-by-case basis against the consolidated EU and national arms export licensing criteria.

Our staff will continue to monitor the deployment and the use of equipment by the IDF in the OTs during their regular tours of the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem; and will report to me any sightings of British-supplied equipment.

Departmental Expenditure

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Bill Rammell): Subject to Parliamentary approval of any necessary Supplementary Estimate, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Departmental Expenditure Limit (DEL) will be increased by £5,611,000 from £1,463,838,000 to £1,469,449,000 and the administration costs limits will be increased by £60,097,000 from £678,042,000 to £738,139,000. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are as set out in the table:

Resources				*Capital*			
Change	*New DEL*	*Of which: voted*	*Non voted*	*Change*	*New DEL*	*Of which: voted*	*Non voted*
82,706,000	1,401,303,000	1,250,326,000	150,977,000	-77,095,000	68,146,000	62,346,000	5,800,000

The change in the resource element of the DEL arises from

i. A Public Expenditure Survey (PES) transfer to the Department of Transport of £50,000 in respect of the setting up of a Register of Shipping by the Maritime and Coastguard agency for certain Caribbean Overseas Territories.

ii. A PES transfer to the Ministry of Defence of £183,000 in respect of business rates applicable to the 'Old Admiralty Building—Citadel' formally paid by the FCO and now the responsibility of the MoD.

iii. Reclassification of £62,410,000 from Capital to Resource (Administration costs of £56,810,000, Grants of £5,600,000) to improve budgetary flexibility.

iv. A decrease of £11,750,000 in respect of an adjustment for Overseas Price Movements.

v. An increase in Admin costs of £1,630,000 in respect of increases to Consular services overseas.

vi. A transfer from BBC World Service Capital to BBC World Service Resource of £30,000,000 to facilitate effective management of BBC World Service budgets.

vii. A PES transfer from the Department of Trade and Industry of £100,000 in respect of Invest UK DTI funded overseas slots at the time of the Winter Supplementary Estimate, details of which were not published at the time.

viii. A PES transfer to the Department for International Development (DfID) and Ministry of Defence of £2,000,000 and £4,884,000 respectively in respect of the remainder required to fund planned Conflict Prevention (CP) programme activity to the end of the FY.

ix. A PES transfer from the CP Global Programme pool to DfID and the Ministry of Defence of £250,000 and £572,000 respectively in respect of baseline repatriation to Departments.

x. A PES transfer from DfID of £1,450,000 to fund payment to a Military Officer in Angola, á project management transfer and the FCO's one-third share of the existing CP Africa Pool Reserve.

[illegible] Take up of EYF if £11,531,000 from a combination of underspends on the 2001/02 CP DUP and DfID and FCO CP Programme underspends.

xii. A PES transfer to DfID of £5,000,000 for planned CP programme activities at the time of the Winter Supplementary Estimate, details of which were not published at the time.

xiii. A PES transfer to the Security and Intelligence Agencies of £225,000 for CP activities at the time of the Winter Supplementary Estimates, details of which were not published at the time.

xiv. An increase of £499,000 for additional security at Posts in the Middle East.

The change in the capital element of the DEL arises from

i. A PES transfer from the Home Office of £515,000 and £264,000 to defray the extra costs to the FCO of setting up Visa regimes for Zimbabwe and Jamaica.

ii. Reclassification of £62,410,000 from Capital to Resource to improve budgetary flexibility.

iii. A decrease of £585,000 in respect of an adjustment for Overseas Price Movements.

iv. A transfer from BBC World Service Capital to BBC World Service Resource of £30,000,000 to facilitate effective management of BBC World Service budgets.

v. An increase of £5,121,000 for additional security at Posts in the Middle East.

vi. An increase of £10,000,000 to cover a shortfall in non-operating appropriation in aid in respect of asset recycling.

DEFENCE

Departmental Expenditure

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): Subject to Parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimates, the Ministry of Defence Departmental Expenditure Limits will be increased by £1,552,201,000 from £24,984,813,000 to £26,537,014,000. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are as set out in the table:

Resources				*Capital*			
Change	*New DEL*	*Of which: voted*	*Non voted*	*Change*	*New DEL*	*Of which: voted*	*Non voted*
1,034,825	20,177,493	19,787,783	389,710	517,376	6,359,521	6,283,093	76,428

The change in the resource element of the DEL arises from:

An increase of £500,000,000 as a result of the Comprehensive Spending Review 2002 outcome whereby the MOD was provided with a Sustainability Fund to enhance the Department's capability to sustain military operations.

A net reduction of £102,960,000 due to a transfer of £340,000,000 to capital to reflect compliance with the accounting policy change in FRS15, offset by a transfer from capital of £237,040,000 to reflect in-year Departmental re-allocations.

An addition of £21,233,000 towards the MOD's liability to British Nuclear Fuels Ltd.

An increase of £314,000 towards the purchase of two Landing Ship Dock (Auxiliary) vessels, offset by the repayment of an advance in 2001–02 of £1,000,000 towards the purchase of two RoRo ferries. This gives a net decrease of £686,000.

A transfer out of Resource DEL of £120,000 to the Single Intelligence Account relating to electricity charges on a shared site.

A transfer in of Resource DEL of £183,000 from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office for the OAB Citadel costs.

An increase of £617,175,000 in the Request for Resource for Conflict Prevention to cover the net additional costs of military operations in Kosovo, Bosnia, the Gulf, Afghanistan and contingency planning for possible operations.

The change in the capital element of the DEL arises from:

A net increase of £102,960,000 due to a transfer of £340,000,000 to capital from resource to reflect compliance with the accounting policy change in FRS15, offset by a transfer from capital to resource of £237,040,000 to reflect in-year Departmental re-allocations.

An increase of £48,909,000 for the purchase of two Landing Ship Dock (Auxiliary) vessels.

A reduction of £43,300,000 being the repayment of an advance in 2001–02 for the purchase of two RoRo ferries.

An increase of £1,600,000 from the Capital Modernisation Fund for the Drug Stopper Project.

A transfer in of Capital DEL of £475,000 from the Department of Health for the Diagnostic Treatment Centre at the Royal Haslar Hospital.

An increase of £406,732,000 in the Request for Resource for Conflict Prevention to cover the net additional costs of military operations in Kosovo, Bosnia, the Gulf, Afghanistan and contingency planning for possible operations.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Departmental Expenditure

The Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. John Prescott): Subject to Parliamentary approval of any necessary Supplementary Estimate, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's Departmental Expenditure Limits for 2002–03 will change as follows.

(a) The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister Main Programmes DEL will be increased by £68,963,000 from £5,432,646,000 to £5,501,609,000 and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister administration costs limit will be increased by £8,593,000 from £342,131,000 to £350,724,000. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are as set out in the following table:

(£'000)

	Resources Change	*New DEL*	*Capital Change*	*New DEL*
Total DEL	+ 33,850	1,955,445	+ 35,113	3,546,164
Of which				
Voted	*+ 148.589*	*1,635,990*	*+ 55,852*	*1,492,405*
Non voted	*- 114,739*	*319,455*	*- 20,739*	*2,053,759*

The change in the resource element of the DEL arises from:

(i) The changes for Request for Resources 1 are as follows:

Take up of End Year Flexibility of £117,077,000 comprising £7,332,000 for Regional Development Agencies and £109,745,000 for Fire Service costs. A net transfer of £566,000 to non-voted provision consisting of £755,000 transferred from Housing research and publicity partially offset by £185,000 for the Planning Inspectorate Executive Agency and £4,000 for miscellaneous Fire Service expenditure. Take up from the Capital Modernisation Fund of £55,000 for the business regeneration of deprived areas. A technical increase of £156,000 to reflect a transfer from Department of Trade and Industry. A net increase of £1,543,000 arising from the following inter-departmental transfers: £1,280,000 from the Home Office for homelessness strategies, £221,000 from the Department of Trade and Industry for the Business Brokers project, £90,000 from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for the Planning Inspectorate Executive Agency, £126,000 from the National Assembly for Wales for the Planning Inspectorate Executive Agency offset by receipts of the same value, and £48,000 to the Lord Chancellor's Department for costs of amending Section 26 of the Housing Act. A transfer of £51,800,000 from the Scottish Executive (£18,500,000), the Northern Ireland Executive (£10,000,000) and funds from fire authorities in England and Wales (£23,300,000), matched by equivalent expenditure, for costs of providing emergency fire cover. A transfer of £3,600,000 from Request for Resources 4 for the administration costs for the Planning Inspectorate Executive Agency. A transfer from non-voted capital provision of £25,245,000 to meet: Fire Service costs (£17,959,000), Jubilee fire service medals (£923,000) and Regional Chambers (£6,363,000).

(ii) The changes for Request for Resources 4 are as follows:

Take up of End Year Flexibility of £10,000,000 for administration costs. A net increase of £127,000 arising from machinery of government transfers transfer from the Cabinet office (£1,579,000) partially offset by a transfer to Department for Transport (£1,452,000). A decrease of £5,048,000 arising from other interdepartmental transfers to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (£6,604,000), the Department for Education and Skills (£240,000), the Department of Health (£180,000), the Department for Work and Pensions (£70,000), the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (£20,000), the Department for Transport (£75,000), partially offset by transfers from the Home Office (£1,309,000) and the Office of National Statistics (£832,000). A transfer of £3,600,000 to Request for Resources 1 for the Planning Inspectorate Executive Agency administration costs.

(iii) Provision within the non-Voted resource element of the DTLR Main Programmes Departmental Expenditure Limit will be decreased by £114,739,000 to reflect a transfer to the Local Government DEL (£10,062,000), a transfer to the Department for Works and Pensions in respect of Large Scale Voluntary Transfers (£105,243,000), partially offset by a net transfer from voted provision on Request for Resources 1 (£566,000)

(iv) As a result of the changes to Requests for Resources 1, and 4 the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister administration provision has been increased by £18,953,000 from £343,372,000 to £362,325,000.

The change in the capital element of the DEL arises from:

(v) The changes for Request for Resources 1 are as follows:

Take up of End Year Flexibility of £36,540,000 for the Regional Development Agencies. A transfer of £2,110,000 from Request for Resources 4 for the Rent Service Executive Agency (£1,570,000) and the Planning Inspectorate Executive Agency (£540,000). A transfer from non voted provision of £16,979,000 for the Planning Inspectorate Executive Agency (£2,464,000), for miscellaneous Fire Service costs (£11,515,000) and homelessness (£3,000,000).

(vi) The changes for Request for Resources 4 are as follows:,

A transfer of £2,333,000 from the Department for Transport for administration capital. A transfer of £2,110,000 to Request for Resources 1 for the Rent Service Executive Agency (£1,570,000) and the Planning Inspectorate Executive Agency (£540,000).

(vii) Provision within the non-Voted capital element of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister Main Programmes Departmental Expenditure Limit will be decreased by £20,739,000 in respect of a transfer to voted provision on Request for Resources 1 (£42,224,000), a transfer to Local Government DEL (£4,515,000), partially offset by a technical increase of £26,000,000 for the Urban Regeneration Agency.

(b) The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister Local Government DEL will be increased by £25,000,000 from £37,684,963,000 to £37,709,963,000. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are as set out in the following table:

'000

	Resources Change	*New DEL*	*Capital Change*	*New DEL*
Total DEL	+ 25,000	37,428,935	-	281,028
Of which				
Voted	*+ 25,000*	*37,336,082*	*-*	*273,028*
Non Voted	*-*	*92,853*	*-*	*8,000*

The change in the resource element of the DEL arises from:

(i) The changes for Request for Resources 3 are as follows:

Take up of End Year Flexibility of £10,423,000 of which £5,614,000 has been converted from capital provision within the allowed flexibility to provide support for intervention in Hackney. A transfer of £14,577,000 from the non-voted element of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister Main Programmes DEL to provide support for intervention in Hackney.

WALES

Departmental Estimates

The Secretary of State for Wales (Peter Hain): The Wales Departmental Expenditure Limit will be increased by £238,626,000 from £9,349,333,000 to £9,587,959,000. The increase is a result of:

(i) the take up of end year flexibility of £245,000,000 for the National Assembly for Wales

(ii) the take up of end year flexibility of £323,000 for the Office of the Secretary of State for Wales in respect of Administration Costs

(iii) the take up of £150,000 for the Office of the Secretary of State for Wales for the North Wales Child Abuse Inquiry

(iv) net transfers from the National Assembly for Wales to Other Government Departments of £6,847,000

These transfers are as follows:

(i) £ 13,742,000 to the Home Office for Police Funding

(ii) £27,000 from the Home Office for the Confiscated Assets Fund

(iii) £28,000 to the Department of Health for Post Graduate Training

(iv) £89,000 to the Department of Health for Joint Higher Training Committee

(v) £22,000 from the Department of Health for Prison Health Care

(vi) £60,000 to the Scottish Executive for Out of Area Treatments

(vii) £42,000 from the Northern Ireland Executive for Out of Area Treatments

(viii) £4,342,000 from the Department of Health for Out of Area Treatments

(ix) £172,000 from the Department of Health for High Security Psychiatric Services

(x) £1,819,000 from the Department of Health for Errw Vane Prescribing

(xi) £12,000 from the Department of Health for Dental SIFT

(xii) £10,000 to the Department of Health for the Mental Health Act Commission

(xiii) £280,000 to the Department of Health for the Nursing and Midwifery Council

(xiv) £540,000 from the Department of Health for Accelerated Discharge Measures

(xv) £573,000 from the Department for Education and Skills for Medical and Dental Bursaries

(xvi) £93,000 to the Department for Education and Skills for the International Education Programme

(xvii) £94,000 to the Department for Education and Skills for Students on Dance and Drama schemes

The Wales Office Administration Costs Limit will be increased by £473,000 from £2,830,000 to £3,303,000.

The increase in DEL will be offset by transfers from other Departments, from the Reserve or take up of end-year flexibility and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Written Ministerial Statements

Monday 3 March 2003

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Ruddy Duck Control

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): The North American ruddy duck is an introduced non-native species. A native of North America, where it has a secure conservation status, it was introduced to wildfowl collections in the UK in the 1940s, but a small number escaped from captivity and began to breed in the wild. As the UK population of wild ruddy ducks has risen, so has the number of ruddy ducks on the European mainland. The ruddy duck has been proven to hybridise with the globally threatened white-headed duck in Spain. The West European population of white-headed ducks is estimated at around 2,300 birds and hybridisation is recognised as the most significant threat to the species' long-term survival.

In July 2002, my Department published the results of the ruddy duck control trial, copies of which are available in the Library of the House. The report indicates that eradication of ruddy ducks from the United Kingdom was feasible within ten years, and that shooting was the most effective means of control tested in the trial.

Defra sought advice from its statutory scientific advisors and consulted with the devolved administrations on the outcome of the trial, and the next steps to protect the white-headed duck from the threat of hybridisation. It took the views of landowners and non-governmental organisations, and on 27 February I met representatives of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust and the Wildlife Trusts.

On the basis of these discussions the Government agree in principle that eradication of the ruddy duck in United Kingdom is the preferred outcome. The UK holds by far the largest proportion of ruddy ducks in Europe, and without action in the UK, the survival of the white headed duck as a distinct species would be severely compromised. However, in confirming this decision, the Government have also concluded:

> that further research work into control techniques is still required. This will determine more efficient techniques of control, and further explore the use of alternative control measures, such as egg pricking;
>
> that the protection provided by domestic legislation to protect the ruddy duck should be removed;
>
> that the UK cannot act alone in removing the threat posed by the ruddy duck. We will continue to work with our European partners to ensure that all appropriate action is taken to sustain the white headed duck.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH

Bermuda: Order in Council

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mike O'Brien): On 27 February, an Order in Council was made to amend the Constitution of Bermuda. This amendment, which has received widespread political support in Bermuda, will change the system of elections to Bermuda's House of Assembly from 20 dual-seat constituencies to 36 single-seat constituencies, as recommended by the Bermuda Constituency Boundaries Commission in its 2002 report.

The consultation process adopted in deciding upon this amendment has highlighted concerns in Bermuda that there should be a clear and generally acceptable procedure for considering future proposals for constitutional amendment. The Secretary of State wishes to ensure that, subject to the sovereign rights of Her Majesty, the process of considering such proposals is as transparent as possible, and that the citizens and political parties of Bermuda are consulted as widely as possible before changes are made. He has therefore asked the Governor to explore the issue locally to see whether interested parties in Bermuda can come forward with acceptable proposals for procedures to be followed in future, which can then be put to him for consideration. These proposals are to include the means by which the public is consulted over proposed constituency boundary changes when a future Constituency Boundaries Commission is undertaking its work. The Secretary of State understands that the Governor plans to canvass suggestions from individuals, political parties and organisations.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Terrorism (Civil Contingency Planning)

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): The Government moved to strengthen arrangements for emergency planning and civil protection immediately after the 2001 general election. In July 2001 a new Civil Contingencies Secretariat (CCS) was created within the Cabinet Office, bringing together the Home Office's former responsibilities for emergency planning with a new capability at the centre of Government to assess and respond to emergencies as they arise. In August 2001 the CCS published a comprehensive review of emergency planning arrangements in England and Wales.

The September 11 2001 attacks in New York and Washington, however, changed our understanding of the terrorist threat.

In the aftermath of those attacks, the UK Government instigated a comprehensive review of the UK's preparedness and contingency plans to deal with terrorist threats. This led to new organisational arrangements with all relevant Departments working together, co-ordinated at the centre with the Home Secretary in overall charge, and to the passing of the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security (ATCS) Act 2001.

Today the House will debate the continuance of Sections 21–23 of the ATCS Act which are measures designed to pre-empt a terrorist attack. This statement, which will be referred to in the debate, deals with the other side of preparedness which is the ability to respond to an incident if it occurs. The statement sets out improvements in contingency planning that have taken place and announces the next steps in improving our resilience, including plans for legislation.

IMPROVEMENTS TO CONTINGENCY PLANNING

Measures already put in place to improve preparedness to deal with terrorist attacks should they occur are:

Chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) threats

The Home Office leads on dealing with CBRN threats. The first responders, the emergency services, whose capability to cope with these threats is the key to minimising loss of life, have had major investment in equipment and training:

AMBULANCE AND A&E SERVICES

Under a £5 million programme, the Department of Health has provided 360 mobile decontamination units and 7,250 national specification Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) suits around the country, which will enable the Ambulance Service and A&E Departments to treat people contaminated with CBRN material.

POLICE

The CBRN Police Training Centre has been established at Winterbourne Gunner and has already delivered command training to at least four Commanders from each force.

The police now have over 2,350 officers trained and equipped in CBRN response, and this training roll-out is continuing.

FIRE SERVICE

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (HM Fire Service Inspectorate) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Department of Health which provides for Fire Fighters to support the Ambulance Service by decontaminating people at a CBRN incident.

Fire brigades have all been involved in work to prepare for this role and an interim decontamination methodology has been disseminated to all brigades; £43 million from the Capital Modernisation Fund, plus an extra £13 million from ODPM has been provided for the Fire Service to provide a national mass decontamination capability. Procurement of equipment (response vehicles, portable contamination facilities and specialist protective clothing) is underway, supported by development of training.

HEALTH

The Department of Health, in conjunction with Health Departments in Devolved Administrations, is funding measures to counter bio-terrorism: A UK Reserve National Stock of vaccines and antibiotics suitable for the treatment of infectious diseases and specialist equipment has been built up over the past year and now stands ready for deployment. Guidance on handling infectious diseases was disseminated throughout the NHS in October 2001.

As the Minister of State for Health announced on 2 December 2002, 12 Regional Smallpox Response Groups are being established around the UK. Vaccine will be offered to volunteer healthcare personnel who will be able to react quickly and work safely with patients of actual or suspected smallpox. A similar group of specialist military personnel will also receive vaccination against smallpox. We have also identified reference laboratory centres capable of rapid diagnosis of the disease.

A total of £16 million was allocated by the Department of Health in 2001/02 to provide medical counter-measures against CBRN agents and a further £80 million has been allocated for 2002/03, including spending on extra vaccines and antibiotics.

CIVIL NUCLEAR INSTALLATIONS

Companies operating Civil Nuclear Installations have always been required to have in place robust, detailed and well-rehearsed plans for responding to radiological releases. These plans involve the emergency services and local authorities in the surrounding area and are regularly checked by the Nuclear industries Inspectorate.

The arrangements were significantly enhanced following the Chernobyl disaster in 1986, and have been thoroughly reviewed and further enhanced since 11 September 2001.

An improved fire-fighting capability means that fires can quickly be brought under control. Central stores of specialist equipment for use in mitigating the spread of radiation have also been established by the nuclear industry. Contingency plans were tested against the threat posed by a major incident at a live exercise in Bradwell on 10 May last year.

PROTOCOLS AND GUIDANCE

All the emergency services have specific protocols for dealing with chemical or biological attack. These are regularly practised and refined. On 3 February 2003 the Home Office published Strategic National Guidance on the Decontamination of People exposed to Chemical, Biological, Radiological or Nuclear Substances or Materials for use by emergency services and other responders.

NATIONAL CAPABILITY

The Government have in place a programme of work to enhance 11 key generic capabilities that will allow us to respond to the most demanding emergencies, however caused. The Civil Contingencies Secretariat manages this programme and drives the progress of Departments involved in delivering each of the capabilities, which are:

central response

local response

decontamination

site clearance

treatment of infectious diseases

treatment of mass casualties

mass evacuation

identification and assessment

warning, informing and alerting

dealing with mass fatalities.

LOCAL AND REGIONAL CAPABILITY

The local response capability is one of the key building blocks of the UK's resilience. The Government maintain close contact with local responders, including the Local Authorities and the emergency services, through formal and informal channels.

Action has been taken to improve communications with local and regional responders through face to face briefings at senior level, presentations by the Civil Contingencies Secretariat at Emergency Planning College courses and a series of workshops in January and February 2003 in each of the Government Offices of the Regions to brief responders, including Emergency Planning Officers and the emergency services, on plans to enhance the regional resilience capability.

Local Authorities have been allocated a specific Civil Defence grant of £19 million for 2002–3 which is a third more than the previous year. The grant is central government's contribution to civil protection work undertaken by Local Authorities and is just part of what Local Authorities spend on resilience.

LONDON RESILIENCE

London has lived with the threat of terrorism for over 30 years. Operational responses are well co-ordinated, regularly practised and continually reviewed. Since September 11 2001, additional measures taken include:

In 2002–3, £49 million counter-terrorism funding to the Metropolitan police.

Detailed work by London Underground with the emergency services and Security Services to ensure systems are in place to deter or deal with an attack.

A new Cabinet sub-committee for London Resilience and the setting up of the London Resilience Team to review and plan London's preparedness. A new strategic emergency planning regime in the capital has been established, managed by the London Resilience Forum which Nick Raynsford, the Minister for London Resilience, chairs and within which a wide range of interests are represented including the Mayor.

Information is available through http://www.londonprepared.gov.uk.

HORIZON SCANNING

We are now better able to anticipate and prepare for the potential impact of terrorist threats through a new capability within the Cabinet Office to identify potential challenges to the smooth operation of Government or the life of the nation. This complements the work of the Joint Intelligence Committee which provides strategic assessments on domestic and overseas terrorist threats.

ORGANISATIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

Clear leads at Ministerial and Department level have been established and central resources provided to plan and coordinate contingency planning for terrorist threats:

John Denham was appointed Minister for CBRN coordination, reporting to myself, at the end of 2001. The Home Office is the lead Department in preparing and responding to public order and terrorist incidents.

Sir David Omand was appointed as Security and Intelligence Co-ordinator and Permanent Secretary to the Cabinet Office in July 2002 to enhance capacity at the centre to coordinate security, intelligence and contingency management.

The CCS was set up in June 2001 to improve the UK's resilience to disruptive challenge through working with others inside and outside Government on anticipation, preparation, prevention and resolution.

The CCS placed a paper in the Library on 23 July 2002 setting out the role of the lead Government Departments in planning for and managing crises. All Departments have a responsibility to plan, prepare, train and exercise for handling major incidents and emergencies in their areas of responsibility. The Devolved Administrations are responsible for elements of emergency planning in their own jurisdictions and are invited to attend meetings of appropriate Cabinet Office committees to ensure co-ordination across the UK.

We believe this arrangement of central co-ordination, accountable to Ministers, coupled with Departmental responsibility for delivery is the best resilience structure. It engages a wider pool of expertise, avoids the need for a huge new bureaucracy at the centre while at the same time has a clear chain of command.

Information for agencies and the public is available through www.ukresilience.info/ and http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk./

NEXT STEPS IN IMPROVING OUR RESILIENCE

Strengthening Regional resilience

We are improving our ability to co-ordinate planning for major emergencies at a regional level by recruiting resilience teams in each Regional Government Office. Teams will be in place by 1 April 2003. These will be dedicated units, similar to the London Resilience team but on a smaller scale, to enhance regional civil contingency planning, including dealing with terrorist threats and other major emergencies.

From April 2003, each Government Office, in addition to their regular contacts with emergency planning officers, will arrange an annual meeting to bring together senior CCS staff and local emergency planning staff. The Home Office will provide an input on counter-terrorism and CBRN consequence management to these meetings.

A larger role for the Reserves in home defence and security authorities if they are asked to do so.

The Volunteer Reserves are a capable, integrated and usable part of our resource for military operations of all types at home and abroad. The limited measures we are now implementing represent a highly effective way to build a new capability to meet some of the home defence risks which 11 September 2001 highlighted. By the end of 2003 there will be 14 Civil Contingency Reaction Forces (CCRFs), each comprising up to 500 volunteers drawn from existing Reservists. Each will be based on a Territorial Army infantry battalion. Army division and brigade headquarters will provide regional, planning, liaison and command and control capability for home defence operations. Brigades will work closely with the emergency services and local authorities to develop specific plans for the use of CCRFs in their areas.

Any military participation, including the deployment of Reserves, in the response to a counter-terrorist threat would be at the request of the Chief Constable in the Force area where the incident occurred and would be subject to Ministerial decision.

A CO-ORDINATED EXERCISE PROGRAMME

An important element of resilience is the confidence that plans will be effective on the day. A prioritised programme of exercises is being drawn up that will reflect and test effectively the lead Government responsibilities, the involvement of devolved administrations, regional and local authorities and other responders.

Under this new programme of co-ordinated exercises, it will be possible to test whether all key stakeholders are appropriately engaged and working together. Future planned exercises will cover a catastrophic incident in central London (this exercise will take place shortly), disruption to the national gas supply and flood defences. The programme is expected to cover the 11 key capabilities such as mass evacuation and decontamination.

PLANNED LEGISLATION

The Government are preparing new Civil Contingencies legislation—a step recommended by the local emergency planning community. We will issue proposals for a new Civil Contingencies Bill in the summer. The aim will be to

> produce a single statutory and regulatory framework for dealing with all forms of disruptive challenge to modern society including those from terrorist attack.

The legislation will enhance the local response by providing clarity and certainty about roles and responsibilities. It will replace existing legislation, which in some cases dates back to the 1920s, with more modern equivalents. The justification for the legislation is the desirability of putting in place for the long term a solid administrative and legal structure within which emergency planning can develop. It is not driven by operational deficiencies in relation to the present counter-terrorist effort.

DEFENCE

QinetiQ (Long-term Partnering Agreement)

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): I am pleased to announce that, after 12 months negotiations and restructuring work, the MOD has successfully concluded a long term partnering agreement (LTPA) with QinetiQ for the delivery of the MOD's Test and Evaluation requirements. MOD customers examined a number of options for the delivery of future test and evaluation services and concluded that a long term partnering agreement with QinetiQ was the approach most likely to maximise value for money and ensure the continuing success of these key capabilities.

The new contract, which will take effect from 1 April 2003, will replace the current short-term Facilities Management Contract, which was put in place at QinetiQ vesting and which is due to expire on 31 March.

The LTPA contract, which is worth up to £5.6 billion to QinetiQ over its 25 year life, will progressively introduce efficiency measures and innovation in order to reduce overall Test and Evaluation costs. The contract, which will be the subject of periodic review at agreed intervals, is expected to deliver savings to MOD of around £700 million (at current prices) over its lifetime.

The LTPA establishes a framework within which the MoD's relationship with its contractor can grow. QinetiQ will be given opportunities to develop further innovation and make proposals to achieve better value for money and, based on performance, there will be opportunities for business growth.

Written Ministerial Statements

Tuesday 4 March 2003

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Town and Country Planning (Use Classes Order)

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Tony McNulty): In January 2002, the Government issued a consultation document on possible changes to the Town and Country Planning Use Classes Order. Responses were to be received by 24 April 2002. We received over 2000 responses, which the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has since been considering.

During the course of the Parliamentary debates that have taken place on the Licensing Bill, attention has been drawn to an issue on which we received many representations as part of the Use Classes review. There is widespread concern that the inclusion of pubs and bars with other uses such as restaurants and cafes in the A3 class is contributing to the increase in the number of licensed premises in some areas and that such changes in use do not require planning permission. I have considered these representations carefully and I am announcing today that it is our intention to change the Use Classes Order so as to put pubs and bars into a separate class. The effect of this change will be to require any proposal to change use of an existing building into a pub or bar to apply for planning permission.

I expect to make a full statement on the outcome of our consultation on proposals for changes to the Use Classes Order shortly.

Tall Buildings

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Tony McNulty): This statement is to bring to the attention of the House the guidance note on tall buildings prepared jointly by English Heritage and the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE), published today.

The Government expect new development to be well-deisgned, safe and sustainable, whether it comprises a tall building or low-rise. It considers that all buildings should be designed with regard to their likely impact on their immediate surroundings and the wider environment. The policy is set out in PPG1 General Policy and Principles, and is supported by good practice guidance, By Design. In its response to last year's Select Committee inquiry on tall buildings, the Government encouraged English Heritage and CABE to finalise their draft guidance note Guidance on tall buildings, taking full account of the Committee's recommendations. The Government consider that such a note, in support of Government policy and existing good practice advice, will contribute to sound planning decisions on tall buildings.

The Government therefore welcome the publication of the joint guidance note. The Government consider that the good practice advice provided will be of value to local planning authorities in drawing up their planning policies for tall buildings, and capable of being material to the determination of planning applications.

I will place a copy of the document in the Library of the House of Commons shortly.

DEFENCE

Reservists

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): A new call-out order has been made under section 56 of the Reserve Forces Act 1996 so that reservists may continue to be called out to support operations in Sierra Leone and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. This order will take effect from 1 March 2003, the date the previous order expired. There are no plans to call reservists up compulsorily under this order, as it is expected that the small numbers needed will be met through volunteers for service in those countries.

Written Ministerial Statements

Wednesday 5 March 2003

DEFENCE

Research Acquisition Organisation

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): The defence research community has been subject to major change in recent years. The Public Private Partnership arrangements for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency, which led to the formation of QinetiQ, and the establishment within the Ministry of Defence of the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory, coupled with a move towards increased competition in contracting for defence research has required a major change in the management of the defence research programme.

A review of science and technology in defence, commissioned in 2000 by the Ministry of Defence's Chief Scientific Adviser Sir Keith O'Nions, recommended the establishment of a new research management organisation to meet these challenges. This new organisation, called the Research Acquisition Organisation (RAO), comprising up to 80 technical and support staff, will be responsible for formulating a coherent research programme, drawing together the many requirements from across the Ministry of Defence, determining optimum procurement strategies and placing appropriate contracts.

The majority of staff working in this organisation are currently located in two Ministry of Defence buildings in Central London (Northumberland Avenue) although some Research Directors work from other defence sites across the country. This is clearly a sub-optimal solution if the organisation is to function at maximum effectiveness. Recruiting new staff has also been hampered by the lack of sufficient accommodation at a single site. There is therefore a strong business case for collocating all staff in the organisation in one location.

Following an extensive review, the existing Ministry of Defence site at Shrivenham has been identified as the most suitable to collocate the RAO, both from a cost effectiveness perspective but also driven by the requirement for the new organisation effectively to interface with its many customers. Close contact with the Defence Academy at Shrivenham will also be of mutual benefit. Consultation with the Trade Unions on this proposal has now been concluded and no concerns were raised. Ministers have therefore agreed that the move to Shrivenham should take place and it is our aim to commence the move by September this year and that full collocation will be completed by March 2004.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Local Authority Social Housing Grant

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Tony McNulty): LASHG was an unfair funding mechanism that did not allocate funds to areas of greatest need, consistently under-spent nationally, and gave unfair advantage to debt-free local authorities.

As part of the measures outlined in "*Sustainable Communities: building for the future*", we have decided to abolish LASHG to allow a more strategic use of resources. The change is to take effect from 1 April 2003.

We understand the concerns that have been raised over the timing of this change, and recognise the difficulties this is causing for the planning of schemes coming forward over the next few months. However, it would be indefensible to retain the current arrangements, at a time when there are pressing housing priorities that are not getting sufficient funding.

We are also clear that there should be no hiatus in housing investment. We are therefore putting in place transitional arrangements to cover schemes that could have gone ahead in 2003–04 if we had continued with a £500 million provision for LASHG.

The transitional arrangements will be as follows:

> for debt-free authorities, provision will be increased from £175 million to £275 million; the money will be allocated by the Housing Corporation direct to the RSL.
>
> for with-debt authorities, revenue support of up to £11 million will be provided to compensate them for the loss of investment income (at an interest rate of 4 per cent.) they would have expected on repayments from the Housing Corporation for schemes supported by their own resources; this will fund up to a further £275million of investment in 2003–04; this money will be paid through a special grant under section 88b of the Local Government Finance Act 1988.

These arrangements will cover schemes which will have already started by 31 March 2003. We are also extending the deadline for submitting bids for new schemes to the Housing Corporation for 3 months to 30 June 2003, provided that schemes have planning permission, are approvable and are programmed to draw down the start-on-site tranche of grant by the end of January 2004. We do however need to ensure that the funding limits are not exceeded. If the total claims submitted by 30 June exceed the money available, the Housing Corporation will prioritise schemes with the Government Offices in terms of their contribution to the regional housing priorities. Transitional funding will therefore support investment in housing of up to £550 million. This is an increase of £50 million on the provision for LASHG in 2002–03, and is higher than in any previous year. It is fully in line with the measures we have set out in the Sustainable Communities Plan to increase substantially the resources made available for delivering sustainable communities for everyone.

Social Exclusions Unit Projects

The Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. John Prescott): With the Prime Minister's agreement, I have asked the Social Exclusion Unit to take on two new projects.

In the first, the Unit will work with other Government Departments to look at what more might be done to help people in the most deprived areas in England move into jobs.

The Unit will consider whether existing policies are being delivered as effectively as possible in these areas. They will look in particular at whether more might be done to promote two ways of entering work: leaving the informal economy for legitimate jobs and businesses; and moving into self-employment and enterprise.

I have also asked the Unit to work with other Government Departments to consider what more can be done to reduce social exclusion among adults with mental health problems.

The Unit will look at how to improve rates of employment for adults with mental health problems, through support both in taking up and in retaining work. The Unit will also consider how to promote greater social participation and better access to services for this group.

I have asked that the Unit report to Ministers on these two new topics early next year.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Sex Offenders (Travel Ban)

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Hilary Benn): The Government are committed to tackling the sexual exploitation of children wherever it occurs in the world. This includes where UK citizens go abroad with the intention of abusing children. We have already put in place a number of measures to deal with this problem but the Sexual Offences Bill currently before Parliament provides us with an opportunity to ensure that we are doing everything we can to deal with those who commit sexual offences overseas.

Under current legislation the courts do not have the power to stop an offender who has been convicted of sexual offences against children from travelling overseas. We believe this is wrong and that it should be addressed. We therefore intend to bring forward a Government Amendment to the Sexual Offences Bill that will introduce a new foreign travel banning order that will enable courts, in certain circumstances, to prohibit those convicted of a sexual offence against a child from travelling to specified countries. We hope to introduce this amendment by the end of March.

The new order would be a civil preventative order made following an application from a chief officer of police. It would apply to those convicted of a sexual offence against a child under 16 either in the UK or overseas. The order would be available where the court was satisfied that it was necessary to protect children overseas from serious sexual harm by the offender and that there are no other, equally effective means, to prevent such harm. The orders would last for up to six months renewable on further application from the police.

In addition to introducing the proposed foreign travel banning order, we will be consulting with interested parties on the arrangements for the notification of foreign travel by "registered" sex offenders. We are aware that this issue has generated considerable interest. We will consult quickly on this issue with a view to making the Government's intentions clear by the end of March. This will enable our intentions to be considered and debated fully during the passage of the Sexual Offences Bill through Parliament.

A paper with further details on the Government's proposals has been placed in the Library.

TREASURY

The Budget

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gordon Brown): I plan to deliver the Budget Statement on Wednesday 9 April 2003.

Written Ministerial Statements

Thursday 6 March 2003

DEFENCE

Armed Forces Pay Review Body

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): In line with the main Armed Forces' Pay Review Body (AFPRB) recommendations for Armed Forces' Pay announced on 7 February, the Review Body has recommended an interim pay increase of 3.2 per cent. for all regular and reserve defence medical services medical and dental officers. The Review Body also recommends an interim 3.2 per cent. increase to the Sustained Quality Payments, General Medical and General Dental Practitioner Trainer pay and to the value of Distinction Awards. The AFPRB will submit their final recommendations following the announcement of the Doctors' and Dentists' Review Body report later this year and further written and oral evidence from the Ministry of Defence, the British Medical Association and the British Dental Association.

The additional cost to the Defence Budget will be some £5 million. This will be met within existing Departmental expenditure limits.

The Review Body's interim recommendations are to be accepted in full, with implementation effective from 1 April 2003.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Remploy Ltd

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Maria Eagle): Following the Mid-Term Quinquennial Review of Remploy Limited, the final report has been published. The report has been distributed to those people formally consulted during the process and copies have been placed in the Library. It is also available on the Jobcentre Plus website http://www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk/Aboutus/Publication in English and Welsh. Hard copies are also available in Welsh, Braille, audio and large print*. We have also agreed an additional £17m to enable Remploy to strengthen its balance sheet and maintain its manufacturing operations. The Mid-Term Quinquennial concluded that: Remploy has been, and remains, the principal delivery agent for the Government's WORKSTEP programme;

The current model of providing Remploy with external finance through an annual grant in aid is appropriate;

The Company's Corporate Plan provides the best option for taking its agenda forward;

The remit, whilst not clearly expressed, is within the parameters of the Government's Welfare to Work strategy; and

Remploy's Non-Departmental Public Body status remains the most appropriate vehicle for Remploy to deliver Government policy, ensuring the necessary level of security for its disabled employees and allowing Remploy the freedom and flexibility to operate successfully in a commercial environment.

The recommendations of the Review are as follows:

A set of financing principles should underpin determination of the annual Remploy Financing Limit, together with a clearer framework for the relationship between Remploy and Government;

Remploy's remit needs to be clearly expressed and fully understood by all those involved in the management of Remploy both within the Company and within Government. This remit should be expressed in a new 'Main Agreement' between Remploy and Government; and

Remploy's status as a Non-Departmental Public Body should be retained but more explicit governance arrangements need to be implemented to ensure greater clarity in the relationship between the Company and Government.

In addition, I have, on behalf of my Right hon Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, written to the Chairman of Remploy approving the 2002–03 Annual Performance Agreement between the Department and the Company. This agreement covers the year from 1 April 2002. It has been negotiated by the Chief Executive of Jobcentre Plus on behalf of my Right Hon Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions. The targets are:

> the average number of progressions of disabled people will increase to 2,000, including a minimum of 1,400 to mainstream unsupported employment;

Remploy Ltd will maintain a total unit cost target (operating deficit per disabled worker) of £10,173;

> the Company will achieve Gross Margin of £53.7m;
>
> the Company will achieve employee development time of 5 per cent.

The text of the Annual Performance Agreement has been placed in the Library. Remploy published its Report and Accounts for 2001–02 in July 2002 and copies are available in the Library.

* Copies of this publication can be obtained from Disability Support Division, Level 3 East Wing, Rockingham House, Sheffield S1 4ER.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

European Structural and Cohesion Funds

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Ms Patricia Hewitt): My Department is today, in conjunction with Her Majesty's Treasury and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, making proposals for a new European regional policy, and launching a public consultation on the future of the European Structural and Cohesion Funds. The consultation will run until 4 July. I have deposited copies of the consultation document in the House of Commons Library. Electronic versions are available on our Departments' websites.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Right to Buy Scheme

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Tony McNulty): The Housing (Right to Buy) (Limits on Discount) (Amendment) Order 2003, reducing the maximum discounts available under the Right to Buy scheme in 41 areas in London and the south of England, has today been laid before Parliament.

To coincide with the laying of the Order, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) has today published a report *Exploitation of the Right to Buy scheme by companies* by Professor Colin Jones of Heriot-Watt University. The full text of the report is available on the ODPM website. http://www.housing.odpm.gov.uk/information/rtb/index.htm

Hard copies of the report have been placed in the Vote Office, Printed Paper Office and the Libraries of the House.

Written Ministerial Statements

Friday 7 March 2003

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

British Energy

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry: The current British Energy ("BE") Credit Facility Agreement (CFA) came into effect in September 2002 and expires on 9 March 2003.

In my statement to the House on 24 February, I confirmed that the Government would be prepared to continue to fund BE's operations while its restructuring plan was agreed and implemented, and that I was willing to extend the credit facility at a reduced level for a period after 9 March. In that statement, I also confirmed that I intended to apply for state aids approval from the European Commission for this continued financing as Restructuring Aid. This application is being sent to the Commission today.

Sufficient proceeds have been received from the sale of BE's stake in Bruce Power to enable BE to repay all outstanding amounts under the credit facility (amounting to about £215 million including interest and commission) to my Department today. On a contingency basis, I have decided with BE's agreement, to continue the credit facility, with the maximum amount available being reduced from £650 million to £200 million.

The credit facility will be extended to the earlier of 30 September 2004 or the date on which the restructuring plan becomes effective. The controls governing any drawings proposed by BE will remain in place. The credit facility will become repayable if certain milestones in the restructuring process are not achieved. We shall therefore continue to be ready with contingency plans for the administration of BE to ensure safety and security of supply.

Energy Advisory Panel

The Minister for Energy and Construction (Mr. Brian Wilson): As announced in the recently published Energy White Paper (Cm 5761) we propose to establish a Sustainable Energy Policy Advisory Board. Against this background we have reviewed the position of the Energy Advisory Panel.

The Panel has provided very valuable assistance in our analysis of energy policy issues since it was established in 1993. This assistance has included advising Ministers direct as well as Departments. I am particularly grateful for its recent expert help in advising us in relation to the analysis underlying the Energy White Paper.

The Sustainable Energy Policy Advisory Board will advise the new Ministerial Group which will oversee the delivery of the commitments in the White Paper. The Advisory Board will be made up of senior, independent experts. It will provide the Ministerial group with a source of well-informed, independent advice on the approach and work of the network of departmental policy units involved in delivering the white paper. We shall be appointing members to the Advisory Board in due course.

We therefore propose to wind up the existing Energy Advisory Panel and I am writing to the Panel members thanking them for their service.

TREASURY

Finance Bill

The Paymaster General (Dawn Primarolo): It is expected that the Finance Bill will be published on Wednesday 16 April. Explanatory notes on the Bill's clauses will be available in the Vote Office and the Libraries of both Houses on that day. Member of the public will be able to obtain copies of the Explanatory Notes from the Treasury; these will also be available on the Treasury's website www.hm-treasury.gov.uk

HOME DEPARTMENT

National Asylum Support Service

The Minister for Citizenship and Immigration (Beverley Hughes): I have previously announced an independent review of the operations of the National Asylum Support Service (NASS). The independent Review has now been established with the following terms of reference:

> To review the organisation, management and staffing and expertise within NASS to identify changes necessary in the short to medium term to enable it consistently to achieve the appropriate standards of operational and administrative performance. Consideration of the staffing arrangements should include the balance between permanent, consultant and agency staff and the match between the skills of the staff and the job to be done, including the handling of complex and publicly sensitive projects and business. Consideration of the organisational arrangements should extend to relations with the remainder of IND, including whether tasks such as procurement should be centralised within IND and the linkage necessary between procurement and project terms.
>
> To submit a report, with recommendations, to the Minister of State responsible for immigration matters through the Director General of IND by the end of May 2003.

The independent Review will be conducted by Gill Noble, CB, formerly Director, Law and Order, Health and Local Government, HM Treasury, Ernie Finch, formerly of Marks and Spencer plc and Alan Barnish, retiring Chief Executive of Cambridgeshire County Council.

Written Answers to Questions

The following answers were received between 14 and 21 February 2003

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Afghanistan

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what proportion of her Department's annual budget for *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03 was allocated to Afghanistan (i) as a proportion of the total annual budget and (ii) in pounds sterling. [97486]

Clare Short: In financial year 2001–02, DFID allocated £60 million to Afghanistan. This represents 1.9 per cent. of my Department's annual budget for that year.

In the current 2002–03 financial year, the allocation for Afghanistan has been increased to £70 million. This represents 2.1 per cent. of my Department's annual budget for the current year.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what financial resources have been allocated for the year 2003–04 *(a)* as a percentage of her Department's budget and *(b)* pounds sterling for Afghanistan. [97487]

Clare Short: My Department has allocated at least £200 million for Afghanistan over the five years 2002–03 to 2006–07. We are currently reviewing our country allocations for the 2003–04 Resource Allocation Round. These will be published in the 2003 DFID departmental report.

Animal Welfare

Dr. Palmer: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans she has to produce a statement of policy on animal welfare based on the report she commissioned entitled Human Development and Animal Welfare; and if she will make a statement. [97694]

Clare Short: We have used a commissioned study on Human Development and Animal Welfare to inform our thinking on animal welfare and livestock-dependent livelihoods. We have no plans to produce a statement of policy on animal welfare.

Health, Education and Water Provision

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what percentage of her Department's budget was spent on *(a)* health, *(b)* education and *(c)* water provision in each financial year 1998–99 to 2001–02. [97489]

Clare Short: In the last complete financial year the bilateral aid programme represented 52 per cent. of my Department's spending. The proportion of the bilateral programme allocable by sector spent on health, education and water from 1998–99 to 2001–02 was:

Percentage

	2001–02	*2000–01*	*1999–2000*	*1998–99*
Health and population	20	22	20	17
Education	12	17	14	18
Water and Sanitation	4	4	4	4

These figures represent expenditure on projects specific to these sectors but do not capture the full extent of our efforts in each policy area because they exclude multisector projects and programmes, strategic funding to civil society organisations and budget support and balance of payments. Also excluded are activities funded through multilateral channels.

Computer Crime

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many cases of computer *(a)* hacking, *(b)* fraud and *(c)* theft her Department recorded in 2001–02; and on how many occasions computer systems have been illegally accessed by computer hackers (i) within and (ii) outside her Department. [97561]

Clare Short: The information is as follows:

1. No cases of either computer hacking or computer fraud were recorded in DFID during the period 2001–02.

2. Eight cases of computer theft were recorded during the same period. Seven of these involved the theft of laptop computers:

Three were taken from DFID premises

Two were lost in transit

Two were stolen in break-ins from private homes.

The eighth was a palmtop Personal Digital Assistant that was believed to have been taken from DFID premises.

3. There were no recorded incidents of DFID computer systems being illegally accessed by computer hackers either from within or from outside of the Department during the period 2001–02.

Departmental Consultations

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list consultations her Department has conducted since 1997; and when each consultation *(a)* opened and *(b)* closed. [97435]

Clare Short: We do not keep a record of all consultations held since 1997 and it would involve disproportionate cost to compile such a list. However, all current consultations are now featured on DFID's website (www.dfid.gov.uk), as well as being available in printed format.

Domestic Violence

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps she is taking to raise awareness of domestic violence in third world countries; and what developments are being made in providing services for victims. [97745]

Clare Short: Gender equality is an essential precondition for poverty eradication and upholding human rights. Addressing domestic violence is an important component of this work. My Department is making a substantial effort to raise awareness of this complex issue, through partnerships with many poor countries, and with the donor community, including the World Health Organisation, the International Labour Organisation and the UN Development Fund for Women. Support for legal literacy, and access to justice programmes, focus on women and address the root causes of disempowerment and vulnerability to violence—especially domestic, but also by police, and in prisons.

In working to meet our objective to increase women's personal security and reduce gender-based violence, we are supporting for example:

Reform and strengthening of criminal and civil law

Awareness-raising of women's rights among police and judiciary

Public information campaigns

Women's organisations

Improved knowledge and statistics

For illustration, DFID assistance is helping to establish the first family protection unit in the Arab world, providing £2 million over three years in Jordan. We are supporting work to sensitise the police in Bangladesh to violence against women, and counselling for the survivors of domestic violence (£4 million over five years). In Pakistan, we are assisting in the design of a comprehensive national strategy including awareness-raising through a national "zero tolerance" media campaign, and the building of referral systems to provide support and recourse for victims, and for community-based dispute resolution (£2 million over three years). In Uganda, we have supported pilot work to establish policy, procedures and practical measures at community level (£95,000). There are many other similar examples.

Iraq

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) what financial resources have been allocated for the establishment of safe havens in Iraq in the event of war; [97484]

(2) what financial resources have been allocated for the provision of clean water to Iraqi refugees in *(a)* Turkey, *(b)* Syria, *(c)* Jordan, *(d)* Saudi Arabia, *(e)* Kuwait and *(f)* Iran and their borders with Iraq in the event of war; [97492]

(3) what financial resources have been allocated for the provision [illegible] shelter for Iraqi civilian refugees in *(a)* Turkey, *(b)* Syria, *(c)* Jordan, *(d)* Saudi Arabia, *(e)* Kuwait and *(f)* Iran, and their borders with Iraq, in the event of war. [97536]

Clare Short: My Department does not pre-allocate financial resources for response to humanitarian crises before they happen. DFID provides a contingency reserve of £100 million which we will draw on for the Iraqi emergency.

DFID's funding for the UN and other humanitarian agencies includes provision for emergency preparedness for a variety of contingencies across the world. We are supplementing this funding with an additional £3.5 million contribution to support UN humanitarian contingency planning for Iraq, including the prepositioning of basic supplies by UN agencies including UNHCR. We also fund a programme of assistance to Iraqi Refugees in Iran, which is managed by AMAR Appeal, an NGO, and consists of the provision of emergency supplies and primary health care for refugees living both in and outside of official camps.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) what discussions she has had with Save the Children regarding research they have carried out on the impact of any impending war against Iraq on Iraqi children; and if she will make a statement; [97603]

(2) what discussions she has had to help ensure that Iraqi people receive aid in terms of food, water, clothing and accommodation in the event of a war against Iraq; and if she will make a statement; [97605]

(3) what discussions she has had with aid organisations regarding the possible impact of a war against Iraq on existing food aid deliveries; and if she will make a statement. [97602]

Clare Short: The Iraqi people, including the children who make up half of the population, are already vulnerable. The prevalence of low birth-weight babies has increased more than five times in the last 10 years. A sudden disruption to this already fragile situation, including to the UN Oil for Food programme on which 60 per cent. of Iraqi people are dependent, could lead to a spiralling human catastrophe.

My Department is holding regular discussions with the Ministry of Defence, the US, UN and others about ways to minimise the suffering of the Iraqi people. One key priority would be to re-establish the Oil For Food distribution network as quickly as possible if it is disrupted. We are also providing an additional £3.5 million funding for support to UN humanitarian contingency planning for Iraq, including the prepositioning of food and other essential supplies. My officials continue to discuss the humanitarian situation with NGOs, especially those who we are funding for ongoing humanitarian work in Iraq, including Save the Children.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions she has had with the United Nations regarding their estimates of the number of *(a)* children under five at risk of death, *(b)* mothers and children needing food and *(c)* people needing shelter in the event of a war in Iraq; and if she will make a statement. [97604]

Clare Short: My Department holds regular discussions with UN agencies about the humanitarian situation in Iraq and measures to respond to any crisis. United Nations planning estimates of the numbers who may be affected vary according to different scenarios of the extent and length of disruption to existing systems.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what extra money is being made available for helping Iraq after possible military intervention. [97847]

Clare Short: DFID provides a contingency reserve of £100 million which we will draw on for the Iraqi emergency.

Kyrgyzstan

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what proportion of the UK aid budget was given to Kyrgyzstan in each of the last five years; and if she will make a statement. [97165]

Clare Short: Figures on the total UK bilateral programme spend within which Kyrgystan is included is shown in the table:

£ million

	Total UK programme	*Spend Krygystan*
1997–98	1,439	0.5
1998–99	1,382	0.5
1999–2000	1,655	1.2
2000–01	1,758	1.5
2001–02	1,954	1.8

In addition the following amounts of UK funds were channelled through multilateral organisations, on a calendar year basis, over the same period:

UK imputed multilateral shares

	£ million
1997	11.6
1998	9.1
1999	2.8
2000	5.9

Laptops

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many laptop computers were used by *(a)* Ministers and special advisers and *(b)* officials in her Department in each year since 1995; how many were (i) lost and (ii) stolen; what their cost was; and if she will make a statement. [97502]

Clare Short: In September 2001 there was a change in the system used by my Department for recording the number of laptops in the temporary loan pool. All previous records have been destroyed. There are currently 134 laptop computers in the pool and they are available for use by Ministers, special advisers and officials in my Department.

The number of laptops purchased by DFID by financial year is as follows:

Financial year	*Number of laptops purchased*
1995–96	57
1996–97	185
1997–98	121
1998–99	125
1999–2000	148
2000–01	265
2001–02	251
2002–03 (to date)	308

A total of 20 laptop computers were stolen during the 7-year period 1 April 1995 to 31 March 2002. None were lost. The breakdown by financial years with costs is as follows:

£

	Number of laptops	*Value*
1995–96	2	2,387.50
1996–97	2	1,986.00
1997–98	2	2,732.00
1998–99	Nil	
1999–2000	3	4,420.00
2000–01	8	8,678.56
2001–02	3	3,497.25

Online Sales/Purchases

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what *(a)* products, *(b)* goods and *(c)* services were (i) bought and (ii) sold online by her Department in each of the last five years. [97463]

Clare Short: DFID purchases a small range of low value goods online, mainly IT peripherals, stationery, books and office equipment. Total expenditure records are not held centrally and could be produced only at disproportionate cost. DFID does not currently purchase services on-line.

DFID has started using the Government Procurement Card, which will increase our electronic purchasing. We do not sell products, goods, or services.

Overseas Assistance

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what financial resources from the UK Government have been *(a)* pledged and *(b)* transferred to (i) Afghanistan and (ii) Kosovo, broken down by (A) Government Department and (B) departmental budget heading. [98005]

Clare Short: In July 1999, DFID pledged £90 million in humanitarian assistance to Kosovo. This was followed by a further pledge of £29 million in November 1999. In February 2001, we pledged a further £6.95 million as budget support and £5 million as technical assistance for 2001.

Since these pledges were made, we have disbursed £108 million as humanitarian aid, £14 million as budgetary support and £8.6 million as technical assistance. In addition, we have contributed substantially through our share of the EC's development assistance to Kosovo, which has amounted to £122 million since 1999.

On Afghanistan, I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave her at column 1W above.

We are unable to provide details of funding from other Government Departments, as this information is not held centrally.

Reproductive Health Services

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list her Department's bilateral funding commitments to reproductive health services in each country in 2001. [97672]

Clare Short: The following table shows DFID commitments, including multi year commitments, made under the bilateral programme, to reproductive health activities, including HIV/AIDS, in 2001–02:

£

Country	*Commitments*
Bangladesh	6,940,159
Belarus, Republic of	150,000
Burma	236,295
China	150,000
Congo, Dem Rep	379,248
Ethiopia	300,000
Ghana	60,000,000
India	499,750
Kenya	3,500,000
Malawi	30,922,100
Moldova, Republic of	150,000
Mongolia	250,000
Montserrat	538,953
Mozambique	10,340,000
Nigeria	158,609
Pakistan	4,380,052
Peru	7,500,000
Russian Federation	5,900,000
Rwanda	3,000,000
Senegal	250,000
Sierra Leone	1,994,010
South Africa, Republic of	7,717,301
Sudan	220,000
Tanzania	35,250,000
Uganda	985,656
Zambia	769,490
Zimbabwe	12,915,000
Total	195,396,623

World Trade Organisation

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make it her policy to encourage the World Trade Organisation to *(a)* give a higher priority to and *(b)* treat with greater urgency issues brought by poor countries under special and differential treatment. [97960]

Clare Short: We are giving high priority to the issue of special and differential treatment for developing countries in the WTO. An effective system of special and differential treatment is a key element in ensuring that the current round of WTO negotiations is truly a development round. Special and differential treatment needs to ensure that the implementation of WTO rules and efforts to negotiate and implement future disciplines make sense from a development perspective.

DFID is working with other key partners such as the World bank in order to push this issue forward. As part of this on-going programme of work, DFID will be hosting a seminar on special and differential treatment on 7 March this year which will be attended by representatives of the WTO, UNCTAD, the World bank, and developing country Governments, as well as NGOs and academics working in the area.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Airport Policing

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland why PSNI officers are not permanently stationed at Belfast City Airport; and if he will make a statement. [94450]

Jane Kennedy: The Police Service of Northern Ireland are not employed in an overt policing role at any airport in Northern Ireland, including Belfast City Airport. The provision of armed police at Belfast City Airport is currently being considered by Belfast City Airport.

Energy (Northern Ireland) Order 2003

David Burnside: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will confirm whether there will be a difference in the treatment of gas pipeline companies involved in gas transportation for Northern Ireland whose pipelines would be designated under the Energy (Northern Ireland) Order 2003. [98365]

Mr. Pearson: All discussions to date with interested parties regarding the postalisation of gas conveyance charges in Northern Ireland have been conducted in an open and transparent manner. All future issues pertaining to the designation of pipelines and the implementation of postalisation will be dealt with in the same manner. In implementing postalisation, the Department will of course comply with its legal obligations including those under Community Law such as Article 3, paragraph 1 of Directive 98/30EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 June 1998 concerning common rules for the internal market in natural gas, which requires Member States not to discriminate between natural gas undertakings such as pipeline operators as regards either rights or obligations.

Firefighters' Dispute

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the impact of the firefighters' dispute in Northern Ireland. [98332]

Mr. Browne: Throughout the periods of industrial action by the Fire Brigades Union, the emergency fire cover service provided by the armed forces, supported by the police service for Northern Ireland and the retained firefighters who were not on strike, was able to deal effectively with all major fire-related and road traffic incidents. The armed forces operated well within capacity and there were no major disruptions to transport or other essential public services as a result of the dispute.

Although there were a number of road traffic fatalities and two fire-related deaths during the strikes, there are no indications that any of these deaths could have been avoided had normal fire cover been available.

We have always maintained that the alternative fire arrangements provided by the armed forces cannot replicate the normal firefighting capability. I therefore welcome the Fire Brigades Union decision not to set any new strike dates and to again engage in a fresh round of negotiations at the National Joint Council under the auspices of ACAS, to find a negotiated and fair settlement to this dispute.

Fisheries

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much money was made available through the 2002 Northern Ireland fishing vessel decommissioning scheme; how many applications were received; how many successful applicants decommissioned their vessels; how many successful applicants declined decommissioning; how much of the available funding is left; and if he will allocate remaining funds to the original bidders who were unsuccessful in their application to the scheme. [97571]

Mr. Pearson: The information is as follows: (1) Under the Fishing Vessel Decommissioning Scheme (Northern Ireland) 2001 £5 million was made available for vessel decommissioning; 66 applications were received; 27 successful applicants have decommissioned their vessels and a further two successful applicants have accepted the offer of decommissioning grant; six successful applicants have declined decommissioning grant; and £0.6million of available funding is left.

(2) I have recently announced a new decommissioning scheme, whose terms and conditions will take account of those applying elsewhere in the United Kingdom. It is not my intention at this time to make any further offers under the existing scheme.

Foundation Hospitals

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to accord foundation status to hospitals in Northern Ireland. [98333]

Mr. Browne: I have no plans at present to extend NHS Foundation Trusts to Northern Ireland.

Linguistic Diversity

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the draft linguistic diversity policy of the National Museums and Galleries of Northern Ireland was completed for submission to the Chief Executive. [98200]

Angela Smith: The Chief Executive of the National Museums and Galleries of Northern Ireland has been actively involved in the development of the draft linguistic diversity policy from an early stage. It is therefore the members of the Board of Trustees rather than the Chief Executive to whom the draft policy is submitted.

A first draft was prepared in 1999, but it soon became clear that more work was required, and the Trustees agreed to set up a small working group to take the matter forward. The outgoing Trustees did not have an opportunity to consider the next draft before the end of their term of office in June 2002. Since then, some further detailed work has been carried out, and it is hoped that the new Board will be able to consider and formally adopt the new draft shortly.

Nurse Recruitment

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on nurse recruitment in Northern Ireland during each of the last three years. [98334]

Mr. Browne: Recruitment of qualified nursing staff is a matter for HSS Trusts as employers. In recognition of recruitment difficulties, the number of pre-registration nurse training places was increased from 580 to 680 in 2001 and from 680 to 750 in 2002.

The number of qualified nurses and midwifes employed in the HPSS as at 31 December 2000, 2001 and 2002 was 13,607, 13,645 and 14,670 respectively.

There are currently 1,863 pre-registration nursing students with another 160 expected to commence training next month.

Public Liability Insurance

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the number of insurance underwriters prepared to quote for public liability insurance for charities working with children in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement. [98263]

Mr. Browne: There have been a number of reports within the Northern Ireland voluntary and community sector of significant increases in relation to public liability insurance costs. There have also been reports stating that organisations perceived by insurers to represent a greater risk, include groups involving children. I understand that there have been reports throughout the United Kingdom.

To date no assessment has been made of insurance brokers prepared to quote for charities working with children in Northern Ireland. Representatives from the voluntary and community sector are still gathering details of the extent of the problem faced by the sector as a whole in Northern Ireland. This information will be provided in due course to the Joint Government Voluntary and Community Sector Forum. The information will then be relayed to officials in Great Britain who are responsible for this matter on a UK wide basis.

Red Button Alert Device

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much was distributed through the Social Fund for the red button alert device scheme in Northern Ireland in each year since 2000; how many people have a red button alert device; what plans he has to increase free provision of the red button alert device for pensioners; and what plans he has to update the red button alert device technology. [98363]

Mr. Browne: Information is not available on the value of Social Fund payments which have been made in respect of the red button alert device. The Social

Security Agency has specific arrangements in place with groups in the voluntary sector who represent pensioner interests to ensure that requests for help to purchase this particular device are dealt with promptly.

At this time there are no plans to increase free provision of the red button alert devices. As the device is not the responsibility of the Department we do not hold information regarding the updating of the technology.

Where the provision of the red button alert device forms part of an assessed care management package the cost may be funded from the relevant Health and Social Services Trust's budget.

PRIVY COUNCIL

Ministerial Cars

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the President of the Council (1) what progress has been made in the last three years in replacing *(a)* his and *(b)* his predecessor's ministerial car on a lower emission basis; and what type of (i) power unit and (ii) fuel each car used by him and his predecessor in the course of his ministerial duties used; [97016]

(2) at what annual rate he or his predecessor has replaced his ministerial car in the course of the last three years. [97018]

Mr. Robin Cook: The information requested is as follows:

		Present car		*Previous car*[1]	
Minister	*Date changed*[2]	*Power unit (litre)*	*Fuel used*	*Power unit (litre)*	*Fuel used*
Robin Cook MP	22 October 2002	2.6	Unleaded	2.5	Unleaded
Ben Bradshaw MP	17 April 2002	2.0	Unleaded	1.8	Unleaded

[1] Inherited from predecessor.

[2] Only such change in the past three years.

Both past and present ministerial cars were leased under an agreement with the Government Car Service (GCS). The types of car provided followed the "Prime Minister's guidance on travel by Ministers".

GCS recognises that reducing vehicle omissions is a key transport issue and a Government priority. Against a baseline of 2002–03, GCS aims by 31 March 2006 to reduce road transport vehicle carbon dioxide emissions by at least 10 per cent. and to require at least 10 per cent. of fleet cars to be alternatively fuelled. Moreover, the Deputy Leader and I both endeavour to use public transport, cycle or walk, where value for money and time constraints permit.

CABINET OFFICE

Computer Crime

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many cases of computer *(a)* hacking, *(b)* fraud and *(c)* theft his Department recorded in 2001–02; and on how many occasions computer systems have been illegally accessed by computer hackers (i) within and (ii) outside his Department. [97554]

Mr. Alexander: Within my Department and its Agencies during 2001–02 there have been no cases of computer hacking from (i) within or (ii) outside and no instances of fraudulent use of computers although there has been one theft in 2001–02.

Electricity

Norman Baker: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what changes in unit payments for electricity have resulted from the switch by his Department to purchasing renewable energy which is exempt from the Climate Change Levy. [96398]

Mr. Alexander: The switch to purchasing Climate Change Levy exempt renewable energy has resulted in a 2.14 per cent. (average) increase in cost.

In view of the considerable contribution to the ENV (G) target and associated CO_2 savings, Cabinet Office agreed to pay the additional cost to secure a 12 month contract for the supply of electricity from entirely renewable sources to three buildings on its central London estate. This contract came into effect on 1 October 2002.

Entertainment Expenditure

Mr. Laws: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what reasons underlie the change in his Department's entertainment expenditure between 1998–99 and 2001–02; and if he will make a statement. [95433]

Mr. Alexander: The increase in entertainment expenditure between 1998–99 to 2001–02 is mainly a result of the Cabinet Office's widening span of responsibilities in recent years and Machinery of Government changes. There has been a corresponding rise in necessary entertainment expenditure by an increased staff resource. All expenditure is in accordance with published departmental guidance on financial procedures and propriety based on the principles set out in Government Accounting.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Court Video Links

Geraint Davies: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will provide additional funding to extend the use of live links to enable witnesses other than the defendant to give evidence through a live link in criminal proceedings. [97901]

Yvette Cooper: Video link equipment is used in the Crown and magistrates' courts for two purposes: to enable defendants held in custody to participate in pre-trial hearings without having to attend court; and to allow vulnerable or intimidated witnesses to give evidence from outside the courtroom.

All Crown Court centres have TV link equipment, which allows witnesses to give evidence from outside the courtroom but within the court building. 12 Crown Court centres have video conferencing facilities, which allow witnesses to give evidence from a remote location. In addition, equipment linking courtrooms with specific vulnerable and intimidated witness rooms will be installed in 29 Crown Court centres by the end of 2003. This equipment will also allow witnesses to give evidence from a remote location.

133 vulnerable and intimidated witness rooms had been installed in magistrates' courts by the end of September 2002. Work is currently under way to establish the number of additional video links that are required to meet current and future demand. The Court Service will then liaise with Criminal Justice System partners, including the Crown Prosecution Service and the Home Office, on how to take this forward.

Geraint Davies: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what measures her Department is putting in place to ensure that the waiting time for child witnesses is kept to a minimum where the use of a live link is required. [97902]

Yvette Cooper: Crown and magistrates' courts ensure that priority is given to cases involving children or other vulnerable or intimidated witnesses. Courts offer fixed dates for trial at the earliest possible opportunity, subject to the readiness and availability of those involved in the case. Additional video links are being installed in the Crown Courts during 2003. The provision of equipment in the magistrates' courts is now under review to ensure that current and future demand is met, as far as funding allows.

Capital Projects

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will place the evaluations for Capital Modernisation Fund projects in the Lord Chancellor's Department since 1998 in the Library; and if she will make a statement. [97031]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Department received funding for three projects from the Capital Modernisation Fund for a range of initiatives contributing towards modernisation in the courts. As the projects have not concluded, a full evaluation report is not yet available.

Computer Crime

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many cases of computer *(a)* hacking, *(b)* fraud and *(c)* theft her Department recorded in 2001–02; and on how many occasions computer systems have been illegally accessed by computer hackers (i) within and (ii) outside her Department. [97562]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The number of cases of computer hacking, fraud and theft recorded by my Department in 2001–02 is: computer *(a)* hacking—2; *(b)* fraud—0; *(c)* theft—25. Illegal access by computer hackers in 2001–02 (i) within the Department—1; (ii) outside the Department—1. Neither of the hacking incidents caused damage to the Departmental computer systems.

Domestic Violence

Mr. Connarty: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what steps her Department is taking to inform victims of domestic violence of their rights. [96736]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Government remain committed to tackling domestic violence. My Department's main responsibility is to make sure that victims of domestic violence have a swift and effective route to protection and perpetrators of violence are brought to justice.

We were involved in the production of the Law Society's "Family Law Protocol", which covers best practice in all aspects of private family law disputes, including domestic abuse. One of the many actions we are currently taking is to look at good examples of inter-agency working at local level, from which we shall produce a template of good practice.

I have set up a Domestic Violence Advisory Group that consists of people from voluntary organisations, lay magistrates, judges and police officers. We use these experts to make sure that our policies have a real impact in improving the lives of the families who suffer as a result of domestic violence.

The Community Legal Service (CLS) Just Ask! website provides on-line CLS leaflets and an up-to-date CLS Directory of legal suppliers, including solicitors, law centres and Citizens Advice Bureaux within England and Wales. The site also provides legal information in different languages and an Advice Search function so that users can search for legal information and advice from a selection of about 300 screened and approved sites. The Legal Services Commission produces a "Divorce and Separation" leaflet which gives information about further help and contacts. The LSC have plans to produce a new leaflet specifically covering domestic violence which they hope will be available in the summer.

Margaret Moran: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) when she plans to consult on new guidance in respect of child contact and domestic violence; [97741]

(2) when the second survey of guidelines on domestic violence and contact will be available; and if she will place a copy in the Library. [97740]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The report on the second survey to monitor the "Children Act Sub-Committee Guidelines for Good Practice on Parental Contact in Cases where there is Domestic Violence" will be available at the end of March 2003. A copy will be laid in the Library of both Houses. No other recent guidance in respect of child contact and domestic violence has been issued.

E-mail Addresses

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department by what e-mail address members of the public may contact *(a)* The Lord Chancellor and *(b)* each of the Ministers in her Department; and for each e-mail address if she will state *(i)* the date it became active and (ii) the number of e-mails received in each month since activation. [97452]

Yvette Cooper: Members of the public may contact the Lord Chancellor and each of the Ministers in his Department via the following e-mail addresses:

LordChancellor@lcdhq.gsi.gov.uk (this e-mail address became active on 6 January 1999);

Baroness.Scotland@lcdhq.gsi.gov.uk (active from 12 June 2001);

Rosie.Winterton@lcdhq.gsi.gov.uk (active from 12 June 2001);

Yvette.Cooper@lcdhq.gsi.gov.uk (active from 29 May 2002).

It has not proved possible, in the time available, to collate information on the volume of e-mails which have been received by each e-mail address since activation. However this information is being collated and I will write to the hon. Member with the information shortly.

External Consultancies

Mr. Laws: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how much *(a)* his Department and *(b)* each agency and non-departmental public body spent on external consultancy in each year from 1995–96 to 2002–03 (planned); and if he will make a statement. [92236]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The information available (1995–96 to 2001–02) is provided in the table.

A record of planned expenditure for the current financial year is not held centrally and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost. Information relating to actual spend will be collated early in the next financial year.

The level of expenditure in recent years with external consultants is explained by a wide-ranging and fast paced programme of change, designed to modernise and increase efficiency, provide better customer service, and value for money.

Delivering such a programme has necessitated the use of external expertise to supplement internal resources.

£

Department	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Lord Chancellor's	1,235,732	397,662	377,522	827,891	926,893	1,444,381	2,548,064
Agencies							
Court Service	552,064	690,802	341,197	362,975	996,949	1,167,030	3,997,630
Land Registry	[1]—	449,710	482,320	1,026,000	722,681	1,049,458	1,755,136
Public Records Office	[1]—	532,000	1,027,762	1,111,427	1,356,634	1,031,485	757,828
Public Guardianship Office	[1]—	69,281	230,500	273,233	101,447	810,000	2,162,000
NDPBs							
Legal Services Commission	44,429	59,691	125,550	60,777	66,540	91,002	47,388
CAFCASS	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	334,488	1,276,596

[1] No information available.

[2] Prior to establishment.

Transsexual People

Lynne Jones: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if the Government will make it their policy to use the powers under Section 10 and Schedule 2 to the Human Rights Act 1998 to bring UK legislation in line with the decision of the European Court of Human Rights in Goodwin and I v UK (judgment of 11 July 2002); and if she will make a statement. [96888]

Ms Rosie Winterton: As I announced on 13 December and in my written ministerial statement on 16 December, *Official Report,* column 36WS, the Government are committed to legislating as soon as possible to give transsexual people their Convention rights. We have decided against using a Remedial Order under the Human Rights Act because the Convention issues go beyond identifying possible incompatibilities with current law. The necessary response is so wide-ranging that only a Bill would be appropriate. I have corresponded on this subject with the Joint Committee on Human Rights, which agrees that proceeding by way of a Bill is the only proper approach in the circumstances.

We are therefore taking forward work towards a draft Bill which we hope it will be possible to publish during the course of this session of Parliament.

Heritage and Antique Assets

Mr. Laws: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what sales of heritage assets and antique assets have been made by his Department since May 1997; if he will list such assets; and if he will estimate the total sales proceeds. [92369]

Yvette Cooper: The Department's current fixed asset register came into being in April 1999 and it confirms that no operational heritage or antique assets have been sold since that date. Prior to April 1999 we have no specific records on heritage or antique asset disposals. However, it has never been my department's policy to dispose of such assets.

Access to Justice (Homeless People)

Mr. Connarty: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what action has been taken to improve legal access and representation to homeless people. [96738]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Through the ongoing development of the Community Legal Service (CLS), the Legal Services Commission (LSC) is working to improve access to justice in England and Wales for all. In addition to the £734 million spent in total last year on civil legal aid, the LSC has introduced a variety of initiatives to improve access to legal advice and meet the representation needs of the socially excluded including a number aimed specifically at those with housing problems, and the homeless. These include a pilot project funding duty schemes in the county courts to cover housing possession cases; and spending £2 million per year on a telephone advice pilot under which several housing advice services are providing legal help. We are also working to integrate the CLS into a number of cross Government initiatives on tackling social exclusion and working closely with other Departments to increase the number of quality marked outlets for CLS information. At a regional level, CLS Partnerships have also helped to improve access to legal help through grants from the Partnership Innovation Budget and joint work with Local Strategic Partnerships.

Legal Services (Consumer Choice)

Mr. Connarty: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what progress has been made in increasing consumer choice in legal services. [96737]

Ms Rosie Winterton: In April 1998, the Institute of Legal Executives joined the Bar Council and the Law Society as an authorised body in its own right and as a fully fledged part of the legal profession, in November 1999, the Chartered Institute of Patent Agents was similarly designated. These developments represent a small but important increase in the number of people qualified to appear before the courts, widening the availability of legal services to the public. Reform of the law relating to conditional fees agreements has also allowed innovative products to be developed which have increased the funding options available to individuals with winnable cases.

The Government remains keen to remove restrictive practices not in the public interest. The removal of such practices could provide an incentive for lawyers, or other providers, to introduce innovative, high quality and affordable services to the public. In most cases, open and competitive markets are the best way to ensure that consumers get the best possible service, while continuing to protect consumers and ensuring probity. The Government has consulted on matters that fall to it following on from the Office of Fair Trading's report on competition in professions. We are currently considering the responses to that consultation.

Lord Chancellor (Income)

Norman Baker: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the total income from public funds of the Lord Chancellor has been for each year from 1 May 1997, broken down by *(a)* salary and *(b)* expenses claimed. [96417]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Lord Chancellor's annual salary during the period in question and from the date shown in each case was as follows:

	£
1 April 1997	140,665
1 December 1997	142,506
1 April 1998	148,850
1 December 1998	151,002
1 April 1999	160,011
1 April 2000	167,760
1 April 2001	173,875
1 April 2002	180,045

Under section 3 of the Ministerial and other Pensions and Salaries Act 1991 and the Ministerial and Other Salaries Order 1996 the Lord Chancellor's salary is set at £2,500 more than the salary of the Lord Chief Justice for England and Wales. In a recently published report the Senior Salaries Review Body (the SSRB) stated that it was proposing to review the relationship between judicial salaries and those of the Senior Civil Service. The Lord Chancellor has asked that this review be extended to cover the statutory relationship between his own salary and that of the Lord Chief Justice.

The Department's Ministers do not have personal expense accounts. Costs incurred by Ministers, in the course of their official duties, are met by the Department. Occasionally, Ministers pay such costs themselves and are then reimbursed, rather than having them billed direct to the Department. Since 1 May 1997, the Lord Chancellor has paid, and been reimbursed for, the following amounts. These costs were incurred in furtherance of departmental objectives including, for example, the provision of hospitality to overseas judges.

	£
1997–98	0
1998–99	149.71
1999–2000	1,113.49
2000–01	159.91
2001–02	0
2002–03	1,033.19

Marriage and Relationship Support

Mr. Flook: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if the Marriage and Relationship Support branch of the Department will include the use of pre and post marital psychometric inventories as part of the criteria for considering bids for LCD grants. [96499]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The criteria currently used for evaluating bids received in 2002 for funding in 2003–04 are derived from recommendations set out in the strategy document "Moving Forward Together", published by the Lord Chancellor's Advisory Group on Marriage and Relationship Support ("AGMARS") in April 2002: and also from wider Government objectives to support the family and children.

No decisions have yet been taken over the criteria which will be applied in the next MARS bid round, which is schedules from launch in Summer 2003. Inclusion of specific criteria in the next bid round will depend on the extent to which they can assist in achieving the strategic objectives of AGMARS and/or the wider Government family policy objectives.

Mr. Flook: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what proportion of, and how many, grants given by the Marriage and Relationship

Support branch of the Department in each year since 1997 [illegible]re to organisations that use psychometric testing [illegible]eir clients. [96500]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Information on the details of Marriage and Relationship Support ("MARS") grant funding since 1997 is not held centrally in sufficient detail to be able to provide a substantive response to this question. A number of relationship support service providers who have received—or are currently receiving—MARS funding from the Department use various models of psychometric testing as part of their couple support work.

Mr. Connarty: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what recent assistance his Department has given to Relate to strengthen family relationships. [96735]

Ms Rosie Winterton: We have paid the following core and project funds to Relate, from the annual Marriage and Relationship Support grant fund, in the last three financial years:

£000

	Core	*Project*
2000–01	2,053	344
2002–02	2,104	281
2002–03	2,104	102

All MARS funding made to Relate helps to deliver the overarching objective of strengthening adult couple relationships—a key element of strengthening family relationships more widely. Support for relationships can make a significant contribution to reducing relationship breakdown and its adverse impact, especially on children.

Public Guardianship Office

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many outstanding items of casework there were at the Public Guardianship Office in the last four quarters. [97142]

Ms Rosie Winterton: At the end of April 2002 there were 15,356 outstanding items of casework, at the end of July 15,580, at the end of October 6,510 and at the end of January 3,637.

Solicitors (Complaints)

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many complaints the Department received about the performance of solicitors in each of the last five years; and if she will make a statement. [97940]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I would refer my hon. Friend to my answers on 15 March 2002 to his earlier questions, *Official Report*, column 1282W. I also refer him to the statement that was made on 30 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 174W, informing the House that the Lord Chancellor had appointed Dr. Zahida Manzoor as Legal Services Ombudsman.

Special Advisers and Press Officers

Mr. Laws: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many *(a)* special advisers and *(b)* press officers have been employed by his Department in each year from 1994–95 to 2002–03; and at what cost in each year. [92432]

Ms Rosie Winterton: In relation to *(a)*, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Minister of State for the Cabinet Office (Mr. Alexander), on 31 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 1056W.

With regard to *(b)*, the number of press officers employed by the Lord Chancellor's Department and Court Service since 1994 is as follows:

	Press Officers	*Paybill (£)*
1994–95 to 1998–99	3	not available
1999–2000	3	146,558
2000–01	5	152,840
2001–02	6	186,894
2002–03	10	not yet available

The number of press officers does not include the Director and Deputy Director of Communications who also include media work among their responsibilities.

The increase in numbers of press officers reflects the increasing workload of my Department, including extra responsibilities transferred to us from other Government Departments following machinery of Government changes.

Full annual paybill figures prior to 1999–2000 are not available because press office functions were incorporated into a new group in 1998 and the Department changed accounting systems.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Capital Projects

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will place the evaluations for Capital Modernisation Fund projects since 1998 in the Library; and if he will make a statement. [97028]

Mr. McCartney: The Capital Modernisation Fund provides capital funding for innovative projects which will deliver genuine improvements in public services. It is a requirement of receiving this funding that the Department has robust arrangements in place for the implementing, monitoring and final evaluation of these projects.

Round 1 provided resources to develop a sophisticated IT and call centre system to match jobseekers to employers, final evaluation reports for these were produced in July 2002 and have subsequently been placed in the Library.

Round 2 provided funding for an electronic claim form and telecentre costs to deliver the Minimum Income Guarantee. Initiatives within MIG are awaiting evaluation reports and will be placed in the Library in due course.

Round 3 provided funding for WORKSTEP, a project to provide support in work to disabled people facing complex barriers to working. This project is ongoing and due for completion in 2003–04.

Round 4 provided funding for three projects, Interactive e Services, Modernising Appeals and Transport and Worklessness. These projects are all in the very early stages and as such have not yet reached the evaluation process.

When the rounds are completed the Department is committed to placing the evaluation reports in the Library in due course.

Departmental Vehicles

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the annual rate is at which his Department and its agencies renew their vehicle fleets, by *(a)* volume and *(b)* percentage for each (i) category of vehicle, (ii) type of power unit, and (iii) type of fuel. [97970]

Mr. McCartney: Petrol and Alternatively Fuelled vehicles are replaced when they have covered 80,000 miles, are four-years-old or when they become financially non viable to retain, which ever comes first.

Diesel vehicles are replaced when they have covered 100,000 miles, are four-years-old or when they become financially non viable to retain, whichever comes first.

The percentage of vehicle replaced each year depends on the size of the fleet that continually fluctuates in line with essential business needs.

There is a continual audit and review of fleet requirements based on the daily usage and mileage covered by all our vehicles. The overall size of the fleet has been reduced by 382 vehicles compared to the fleet of the former Department for Social Security and the former Employment Service in April 2001.

Entertainment Expenditure

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his estimate is of the total spending of his Department on entertainment in each year from 1994–95 to 2002–03; and if he will make a statement. [92401]

Mr. McCartney: All expenditure on official entertainment is made in accordance with published departmental guidance on financial procedures and propriety, based on the principles set out in Government Accounting.

It is not possible to provide expenditure figures back to 1994–95 for the Department for Work and Pensions as it was only created with effect from 1 April 2001. The figures for 2001–02 and 2002–03, therefore, are the only expenditure figures relating to the Department for Work and Pensions.

In order to provide figures which are reasonably comparable, information for the earlier years has been provided by combining expenditure on "official hospitality" by the former Department of Social Security, and on "official entertainment" by the former Employment Service (ES) which, together with relatively small numbers of staff from the Employment Policy Divisions of the former Department for Education and Employment (DfEE), combined to form the new Department for Work and Pensions. However, information on entertainment expenditure by ES is only available from 1996–97 onwards, whereas expenditure by the former DfEE Policy Divisions is not separately identifiable.

Estimated expenditure on this basis is set out as follows:

	£	*Department*
1994–95	127,000	DSS
1995–96	100,000	DSS
1996–97	147,000	DSS and ES
1997–98	46,000	DSS and ES
1998–99	86,000	DSS and ES
1999–2000	327,000	DSS and ES
2000–01	127,000	DSS and ES
2001–02	155,000	DWP
2002–03	100,000	DWP (Estimated outturn)

Notes:

1. Figures rounded to the nearest £000.

2. Expenditure for the 2002–03 financial year represents estimated outturn.

New Deal

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he plans to adopt the definition of New Deal achievement proposed by the Select Committee on Work and Pensions at paragraph 55 of its Third Report of 2001–02; and if he will make a statement. [91614]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The sustainability of jobs is one of a number of key measures we already use to analyse the success of the New Deal programmes.

Up to September 2002, 313,700 New Deal clients had moved into jobs lasting 13 weeks or more. The programme is continuing to help significant numbers of disadvantaged young people into work. Many of these have moved into jobs more quickly and have stayed there longer than they would have done without the New Deal.

We are building on this success, developing further measures to help even more young people to move into sustained jobs. We have introduced initiatives such as progress2work and StepUP to provide more assistance for those who face the greatest barriers to work. We are piloting post employment mentoring support to increase job retention and we are testing tailored pathways to help young people use the New Deal Options more flexibly and move into sustained jobs.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many New Deal for Disabled People job brokers are active; and how many have stopped offering their services since the programme went nationwide; [96604]

(2) how much the New Deal for Disabled People job brokers receive for placing a disabled person into work for six months or more; [96605]

(3) what advice is available to New Deal for Disabled People job brokers on cost-effective ways to attract new clients. [96607]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: We believe that disabled people should be provided with the same opportunities as everyone else. New Deal for Disabled People enables those with a health condition or disability to find and move into work and to help themselves become, and remain, more independent.

A network of Job Brokers across Great Britain are providing support and services to people on incapacity benefits who want to participate. The aim is to achieve lasting paid employment for people with health conditions and disabilities.

There are currently 60 Job Brokers delivering New Deal for Disabled People. Of the 66 Job Brokers who were originally contracted, six have withdrawn from their contracts for a variety of reasons. Consequently, some of the existing Job Brokers have extended their provision so as to ensure national coverage.

Job Brokers have access to a variety of advice and support in marketing their services to new customers. In particular there is a Job Broker website which provides details of marketing tools and techniques and information on how best to maximise opportunities to place customers in work.

Job Brokers individually negotiate prices for successfully delivering the New Deal for Disabled People reflecting their operational processes, business assumptions and local labour market conditions. They receive a payment for customers who remain in work for 26 weeks out of 39 following a job entry. The average payment is £1,274.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* received into the reasons why new deal participants eligible for new deal photocards failed to take up the scheme; if he will place it in the Library; and if he will make a statement; [94003]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 17 December 2002, *Official* Report, columns 773–74W, on New Deal photocards, by what means the reduced rail fare scheme is brought to the attention of New Deal participants at the initial interview with their personal adviser; what forms are required to be completed in order to apply for the photocard; and if the reduced fares applies to all rail travel or only to that connected with the New Deal. [94056]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Up to November 2002, over 129,000 photocards had been issued to New Deal participants, helping them reduce the cost of travelling to job interviews and getting to work in the early days of a new job. Take up of the scheme has risen greatly since its launch, with the number of photocards issued growing by more than a third on average each quarter.

New Deal personal advisers are responsible for ensuring that all eligible New Deal participants are aware of the reduced rail fares offer. They issue to the New Deal client, either with the first New Deal invitation letter or at the first Gateway interview: an Association of Train Operating Companies Fact Sheet; an application form; and the terms and conditions of the offer. The personal adviser will also inform the participant that two passport-sized photographs should be submitted with the completed application form, and that the photocard is valid for up to three calendar months (after which repeat applications can be made). Photocards should only be used for rail travel connected with the New Deal.

The Department has not commissioned any research on the take up of the New Deal Reduced Rail Fare Scheme.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Adjudication Panel

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the relevant qualifications are of Mr. Angus Andrew for holding the post of Chairman of the Adjudication Panel for England. [97228]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I have been asked to reply.

Chairmen of the Adjudication Panel are drawn from a pool of part-time Legal Members of the Adjudication Panel for England.

The qualification for appointment is a five-year general qualification as defined in section 71 of the Court and Legal Services Act 1990. Solicitors had to appear on the Roll of Solicitors in order to qualify.

Part-time Legal Members of the Adjudication Panel for England are appointed by the Lord Chancellor following open competition and after consultation with the Secretary of State. Mr Angus Andrew met the qualification, and was appointed on 12 February 2002.

HEALTH

Ambulance Service

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hoax calls the Ambulance Service has received in the last 12 months for which figures are available in *(a)* Greater London and *(b)* England. [97822]

Mr. Lammy: This information is not collected centrally.

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many ambulances are owned by TENYAS; and how many were fully operational in each of the past 12 months; [93781]

(2) *(a)* how many fully equipped ambulances there were in TENYAS, *(b)* how many ambulances there were in TENYAS per 1,000 of population and *(c)* what the average number of ambulances per 1,000 of population was for each ambulance service in the United Kingdom in each year since 1997. [93843]

Jacqui Smith: On average, Tyne, East and North Yorkshire Ambulance Service national health service trust (TENYAS) owns up to 100 accident and emergency vehicles, together with 15 rapid response vehicles. The number of vehicles owned by TENYAS fluctuates as new vehicles become available and others await different routes of disposal, either by being sent to auction, passed on to charities or in some cases being scrapped.

TENYAS has on average peak development of 72 fully equipped ambulances serving a population of two million. This represents on average one ambulance per head of 28,000 population. Information for the number of ambulances per 1,000 of population is not centrally available.

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what training is given to personnel manning first responder vehicles. [93844]

Mr. Lammy: It is the responsibility of each ambulance trust to provide training for personnel manning first responder vehicles.

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answers of 6 February, refs 95639–95642, about 999 calls made to the London Ambulance Service about people needing emergency help in another part of the country, for what reasons callers are not told that *(a)* the London Ambulance Service has responsibility to pass on the details of the emergency to the ambulance service in the area concerned and *(b)* that this can and will be done. [97418]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 11 February 2003]*: The 999 system is designed to put callers in touch with the emergency services locally. If an ambulance service receives a call that is outside their area then it is their responsibility to pass it on to the ambulance service in the appropriate area.

The London Ambulance Service (LAS) believes that it may cause unnecessary confusion if 999 callers are given details of the responsibility to pass on information to other ambulance services and that such an explanation of procedures could create delays in responding to emergency calls.

The LAS believes that an assurance that an ambulance is on its way is more important than knowing what its responsibilities are according to national control procedures. Therefore the LAS has no plans to begin informing callers of its responsibility to pass on details of an emergency to the ambulance service in the area concerned.

Age-related Macular Degeneration

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his estimate is of how many people were affected by age related macular degeneration in each of the last six years. [97860]

Mr. Lammy: The Department does not hold centrally details of the number of people with age related macular degeneration. However, a study sponsored by the Macular Disease Society in 2001 estimated that there were 182,000 people with age related macular degeneration with a best eye visual acuity below that judged appropriate for certification as blind or partially sighted.

Beta Interferon

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment he has made of how consultant *(a)* neurologists and *(b)* specialist nurses in post have coped with implementing the prescription plus monitoring scheme for beta interferons; and whether further resources will be made available to facilitate the scheme; [97146]

(2) by what date everyone with MS who is eligible for beta interferons will have received these drugs under the prescription plus monitoring scheme; and how many people potentially eligible for the drug have received it. [97145]

Mr. Lammy: We do not hold detailed information about the local implementation of the scheme, but a survey of strategic health authorities conducted last autumn showed that services were being developed to initiate treatment under the scheme. Funding is included in primary care trust general allocations, which on average are increasing by more than 9 per cent. in cash terms over each of the next three years.

It is the intention to complete recruitment of patients to the scheme within 18 months of the scheme being initiated by centres.

Capita

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many meetings *(a)* he, *(b)* Ministers of State, *(c)* Parliamentary Under-Secretaries of State, *(d)* special advisers, and *(e)* officials have had with Capita employees and members of the Capita board since May 2001; what was discussed at each meeting; who attended; and if he will make a statement. [95982]

Mr. Lammy: As with previous Administrations and in line with exemption 7 of the "Code of Practice on Access to Government Information", it is not this Government's normal practice to release details of specific meetings or their content, as some of these discussions may have taken place on a confidential basis.

All such contacts are conducted in accordance with the rules set out in the "Ministerial Code" the "Civil Service Code", and "Guidance for Civil Servants: Contacts with Lobbyists". Copies of these documents are available in the Library.

Capital Projects

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library the evaluations for the Capital Modernisation Fund projects relating to *(a)* modernising coronary heart disease, *(b)* A&E and primary modernisation, *(c)* action on cataracts, *(d)* meningitis vaccinations, *(e)* decontamination and *(f)* NHS LIFT PPPs; and if he will make a statement. [97023]

Jacqui Smith: Of the six Department of Health Treasury Capital Modernisation Fund (TCMF) projects that you have identified, only five are capital investment projects.

The meningitis vaccination programme, whilst financed by TCMF cash, consisted exclusively of vaccinations and we have no plans to evaluate it.

The Action on Cataracts project is complete and the "good practice" it generated and a full evaluation report is expected to be published on the "Action On" website at www.modern.nhs.uk/action-on later this year. Once it is available, a copy will also be placed in the Library.

The remaining projects are currently incomplete. Once they are complete, they will be subjected to thorough post project evaluation, to ensure that any lessons learned are applied to other projects.

Care Homes

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library a copy of the standard letter that was sent to care homes who failed to pass on the free nursing care payment onto residents; and how many have been sent. [97143]

Jacqui Smith: The Department has not issued a standard letter to care homes.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he plans to lay the Statutory Instrument that amends the regulations to extend the time limit for staff who were employed in care homes immediately before April 2002 for obtaining checks from the Criminal Records Bureau. [97212]

Jacqui Smith: We are currently finalising the details of the changes to the regulations and we plan to lay the necessary statutory instrument shortly.

Child Protection

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the retention rates are for child protection social workers employed in each social services department in England in the last three years; and what this represents as a percentage of total staff in that area of work on the fully staffed pay rate. [95997]

Jacqui Smith: We do not hold central information on retention rates for social workers employed in each of the social services departments in England.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what extra training is to be implemented for social services departments child protection social workers in how to deal with abusive and intimidating parents and guardians of children deemed at risk. [96080]

Jacqui Smith: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave him on 7 January 2003, Official Report, column 175W.

The National Task Force on Violence Against Social Workers recommended in 2001 that employers urgently undertook an audit of their organisation's ability to deal with violence and abuse and then did a training needs analysis for their workforce. They were then asked to prepare and begin an action plan to effect planned developments.

Those social workers who are working with children and families should undertake the post-qualifying (PQ) child care award. This was created in 1999 to equip qualified social workers with the required level of knowledge, understanding and skills to carry out the full range of expectations and duties of contemporary children's personal social services. However, as part of the reform of social work education, the General Social Care Council (GSCC) is undertaking a review of the current framework for post-qualifying training for social work. This will include a review of the PQ child care award.

In addition to this, the prescribed curriculum of the new social work degree includes the national occupational standards for social work, which require students to demonstrate the management of risk to individuals, families, carers, groups and communities and to assess, minimise and manage risk to self and colleagues.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance his Department has issued to local authority social services departments regarding the recruitment of child protection social workers from abroad; and if he will make a statement on the policy of recruiting social workers involved in child protection from abroad. [96089]

Jacqui Smith: Guidance has not been issued to local authority social services departments regarding the recruitment of social workers from abroad. Qualified social workers from abroad who wish to work in this country register with the General Social Care Council, who validate their qualification.

It is the responsibility of individual employing agencies to ensure that their recruitment policies and procedures comply with current legislation whether recruiting within England or abroad.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many child protection social workers recruited from abroad work in local authority social services departments in England. [96090]

Jacqui Smith: We do not hold data centrally on social workers recruited from abroad. Qualified social workers from abroad who wish to work in this country register with the General Social Care Council, who validate their qualification.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action has been taken to investigate claims during the Victoria Climbié Inquiry that unaccompanied child refugees were placed in bed and breakfast accommodation by Brent Social Services. [96113]

Jacqui Smith: Giving evidence on Friday 12 October 2001 to the Victoria Climbié Inquiry, Mr. Turner, QC for the London Borough of Brent, made clear that Brent Social Services had a clear policy of not placing unaccompanied children under the age of 16 in bed and breakfast accommodation. At that time, the local authority also undertook a check on the actual position and reported to the inquiry that no such children were placed in such accommodation.

The Social Services Inspectorate has, this month, confirmed with Brent that this continues to be the case in practice.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the compatibility of the confidentiality considerations contained in the Data Protection Act 1998 and the sharing of information about vulnerable children between agencies recommended by Lord Laming. [96035]

Jacqui Smith: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health, has said that we will consider Lord Laming's recommendations carefully and will publish a full response to the report in the spring.

Further, we plan to publish guidance to the national health service in September 2003 on patient confidentiality issues, including those relating to the Data Protection Act 1998.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to issue the guidance on information-sharing, as recommended in the Victoria Climbié Inquiry recommendation 16. [96633]

Jacqui Smith: My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Health, has said that we will consider the report's recommendations carefully and will publish a full response in the Spring.

Independently of Lord Laming's recommendation, we plan to publish guidance to the National Health Service in September 2003 on patient confidentiality issues including those relating to Data Protection Act 1998.

Clinical Negligence White Paper

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will publish the White Paper on Clinical Negligence Reform. [96062]

Mr. Lammy: The Chief Medical Officer, Professor Sir Liam Donaldson, is working up a comprehensive report for the Government outlining options for reforming the present system for handling clinical negligence claims, which aims to make the system fairer for all those who suffer injury through negligent National Health Service service. We hope to publish them shortly.

Clothing Provision (NHS Trusts)

Mr. Laxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how local NHS trusts assess the clothing needs of their long-term patients; and what procedures are in place to ensure these needs are met. [95301]

Mr. Lammy: Trusts have a duty to ensure patient privacy and dignity is upheld at all times. This includes having arrangements in place to meet the clothing needs of all patients.

Trusts are supported by the introduction of modern matrons—senior sisters and charge nurses who are easily identifiable to patients and who have the authority and support they need to make sure the fundamentals of care are right. Also, patient advice and liaison services are available in most trusts, to provide information and on the spot help for patients, their families and carers.

Commission for Patient and Public Involvement

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health to have its first meeting. [97306]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 13 February 2003]:* It is for the chair of the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health to convene the first meeting of the Commission and to set the day and place.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many staff formerly employed by community health councils will be employed within the new system of patient and public involvement. [97303]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 13 February 2003]:* It is not possible to predict the number of community health council staff that will secure posts within the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health, supporting patients' forums or providing independent complaints advocacy support. These posts will be advertised and recruitment to them will be subject to open and fair competition. It is for the Commission to decide its staffing requirements.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to ensure there will be a smooth transition between the abolition of community health councils and their replacement. [97400]

Mr. Lammy: The Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health has said that it will be working towards achieving full coverage of patients' forums by the end of the year. Arrangements will be in place to ensure there is continuous support for patients through the transition.

The new system for patient and public involvement goes beyond patients' forums.

For example, independent complaints advocacy support for patients wanting to complain against the national health service will be available, patient advice and liaison services in trusts and primary care trusts routinely feed up patients views to trust boards, overview and scrutiny committees (OSC) have to be consulted where substantial variation and developments are planned and individuals or patient groups can approach their OSC directly where they have concerns.

In addition, the Commission will set up a national telephone help-line, which will help people access local support arrangements.

Laptops

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many laptop computers were used by *(a)* Ministers and special advisers and *(b)* officials in his Department in each year since 1995; how many were (i) lost and (ii) stolen; what their cost was; and if he will make a statement. [97499]

Mr. Lammy: The Department does not retain detailed, historical records of laptop ownership and is therefore not able to provide the information requested. Information is only available for the current financial year, 2002–2003.

Ministers have one laptop each. Special advisers have one laptop each and there are approximately 2000 laptops in use by officials of the Department; a number of which are shared or 'pooled' laptops, used by a number of staff.

The Department takes the protection of its assets very seriously and its security policy and procedures are under constant review to find ways to reduce losses.

Figures for the numbers and cost of laptop computers lost or stolen belonging to the Department or its Executive Agencies covering financial years' 1995—96 to 2002–2003 are shown in the table.

Financial year	*Lost/stolen*	*Cost (£)*
1995–96	12	27,035,90
1996–97	18	29,277,45
1997–98	23	43,098,68
1998–99	19	40,068,70
1999–2000	18	36,260.35
2000–01	23	46,917.62
2001–02	35	62,275.69
2002 to date	26	40,997.26
Total	174	325,931.65

Consultations

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list consultations his Department has conducted since 1997; and when each consultation *(a)* opened and *(b)* closed. [97426]

Mr. Lammy: The Cabinet Office Code of Practice on Written Consultations applies to all formal national public consultation documents issued by Departments from 1 January 2001. The information requested is not comprehensively available before July 2001. Information on formal written consultations undertaken by the Department since July 2001 has been placed in the Library.

Criminal Records Bureau

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the impact of the postponement of Criminal Record Bureau checks on domiciliary care staff and the implications it has for the Protection of Vulnerable Adults List; and what systems have been put in place to ensure vulnerable adults are protected from harm or abuse in their own home. [97208]

Jacqui Smith: From 1 April this year, for the first time we are introducing regulation to the domiciliary care sector that will bring into force new requirements for employers when checking the suitability of new employees. These new requirements will add significantly to the level of protection from abuse to vulnerable adults in their own homes.

The protection of vulnerable adults (PoVA) list will be implemented when we are confident that the CRB are able to cope with the demand. When PoVA checks are introduced they will further enhance the level of protection offered to the recipients of domiciliary care services.

Dentistry

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether current dental qualifications from *(a)* South Africa, *(b)* Australia and *(c)* New Zealand are recognised for registration as a UK dental surgeon. [96790]

Mr. Lammy: Dentists who qualified in these countries have to sit the General Dental Council's International Qualifying Examination, which was introduced in 2001, to be eligible for registration in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether dental qualifications achieved up to 1984 are recognised for registration as a UK dental surgeon; and if he will make a statement. [96791]

Mr. Lammy: Yes, provided the qualifications are included in section 15 of the Dentists Act 1984.

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many vacancies for dental surgeons are estimated to exist. [96793]

Mr. Lammy: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply my right hon. Friend the Minister of State (Mr. Hutton) gave him on 8 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 276W.

In addition to this, there may also vacancies for dentists in dental practices providing general dental services. However, these are independently owned practices and we do not have numbers of such vacancies.

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans he has to improve the system of temporary registration as a dental surgeon; and if he will make a statement; [96794]

(2) how many opportunities for paid employment as a dental surgeon with temporary registration there are in *(a)* the UK and *(b)* London; and if he will make a statement. [96795]

Mr. Lammy: This information is not held centrally. The General Dental Council (GDC) approves temporary registrations when a dentist from overseas finds a post where there is appropriate supervision of his or her training and developmental needs. Currently such posts are only found in dental hospitals but the Department is exploring with the GDC and dental professional bodies whether temporary registrations could be approved for dentists wishing to train in the community dental services and in primary dental care practices.

Richard Ottaway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer of 19 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 1046W, what form the consultation exercise will take; if he will list consultees; when he expects the consultation to end; when in 2003 he expects to publish his draft legislation; and if he will make a statement. [96961]

Mr. Lammy: The form of consultation is laid down in paragraph 9 of schedule 3 to the Health Act, 1999 (c.8) and involves publishing a draft of the Order amending the Dentists Act, 1984. This paragraph also lays down who must be consulted. We aim to publish the consultation document in the summer, with a closing date three months later.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average ratio of NHS dentists to patients was in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2000; and what the average is now in (i) England and (ii) North Yorkshire. [98051]

Mr. Lammy: The number of general dental service (GDS) patients registered per GDS dentist in England and North Yorkshire Health Authority at 30 September 1997, 2000 and 2002 is shown in the table.

General dental service: Number of patients registered per dentist[1] *at 30 September 1997, 2000 and 2002*
England and North Yorkshire Health Authority

At 30 September	*England*	*North Yorkshire*
1997[2]	1,599	1,608
2000	1,311	1,366
2002	1,276	1,263

Note:

1. Dentists counted more than one Health Authority have been counted only once, in the Health Authority where they carry out the majority of their treatment.

2. Registration data for this year is not comparable with later years due to the change in the registration period.

The number of patients that a GDS dentist sees is dependent on several factors including their amount of commitment to the GDS and the amount of treatment that their patients require.

A patient becomes registered with a GDS dentist when that dentist accepts the patient for treatment. Registrations lapse if patients do not return to their dentists within 15 months of their last visit. The number of patients registered per dentist will exclude patients who have not been to their GDS dentist within the past 15 months.

GDS dentists are required to provide a full range of National Health Service treatment to maintain the oral health of the patients that are registered with them for capitation (Children) or continuing care (adults).

The 1997 registration numbers are not comparable to those for 2000 and 2002 because of the reduction in the registration period to 15 months. Previously the period for adult registrations was 24 months and children's registrations lasted until the end of the next calendar year.

Registrations are included in the area of the dentist. The registration rates for some areas may be affected by some patients receiving their dental treatment in a different area from the one in which they live.

Patients wishing to register with a GDS dentist for tratment can obtain details of dentists accepting new patients in their area by contacting NHS Direct.

Patients do not need to be registered with a GDS dentist to get NHS dental treatment. The personal dental services and community dental services provide NHS dental treatment and some patients receive GDS dental treatment on an occasional basis.

Digital Hearing Aids

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how long it takes to train NHS staff to fit digital hearing aids. [97880]

Jacqui Smith: Current career grade staff working in national health service hearing aid services require approximately six days of additional training to allow them to fit digital hearing aids.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how long he estimates it will take to convert all analogue hearing aid users to digital. [97889]

Jacqui Smith: All National Health Service hearing aid services in England will be fitting digital aids by the end of March 2005. These will be provided as appropriate for all new patients and for existing hearing aid users upon review. For adults that review would not normally be less than three years from fitting of their last aid, unless their hearing has become significantlyworse in the interim. A shorter review period applies to children's services.

Domestic Violence

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what advice is given to paramedics and accident and emergency staff as to their responsibilities if they regard injured persons they attend as victims of domestic violence; [97171]

(2) what training is given to paramedics and ambulance personnel in dealing with people they perceive to be the victims of domestic violence and their responsibilities of *(a)* confidentiality and *(b)* to report the commission of crime. [97239]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answers 11 February and 12 February 2003]:* It is the responsibility of individual trusts to develop policies on dealing with people they perceive to be the victims of domestic violence.

To assist individual trusts, the Department published Domestic Violence: A Resource Manual for Health Professionals two years ago. This manual sets out to increase the knowledge and understanding of health care professionals including staff in accident and emergency and ambulance trusts about the nature of domestic violence and how it is likely to be evident in the patients they care for.

Donor Transplant Operations

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice he has sought on asystolic donor transplant operations and elective ventilation procedures. [97179]

Mr. Lammy: At the Transplant Summit in February 2001, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health, announced draft Government plans to increase the rate of asystolic donor transplants. UK Transplant has been allocated extra funding to increase organ donation rates including developing more asystolic donor transplant programmes.

The Department currently considers the practice of elective ventilation to be unlawful.

EMI Patients

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many beds in *(a)* Sunderland Royal Hospital, *(b)* Hartlepool General Hospital and *(c)* Ryhope Hospital are accepted by EMI patients who could be cared for in the community; and if he will make a statement. [97161]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is not held centrally.

Empty Properties

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for how long his properties known as Burntwood Villas and Myrtle Cottages in Burntwood Lane, Tooting, London SW17 have been empty; and if he will make a statement. [96612]

Mr. Lammy: The properties were transferred to the South West London and St Georges Mental Health National Health Service Trust in March 2002. Myrtle Cottages have been empty since the late 1970s and Burntwood Villa since 1998.

Burntwood Villa has been let to the Bendon Care Foundation for keyworker accommodation. The future use of Myrtle Cottages is under consideration by the NHS trust, Wansworth Primary Care Trust and the London Borough of Wandsworth as a potential site for general practitioner provision.

Enuresis

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what treatments for enuresis he proposes to cover in the National Service Framework for children; [97887]

(2) whether he proposes to include targets for combating enuresis in the NSF for children. [97886]

Jacqui Smith: An external working group to the national service framework covering healthy children and young people is taking forward work on standards for universal services that every child and young person needs to optimise health and well-being. Initial findings from this group have shown that these standards will be relevant to, although not specifically about, treatments or targets for the management of enuresis.

External Consultants

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money the NHS Modernisation Agency has spent on external consultants in the current financial year. [96885]

Mr. Lammy: In the current financial year, the Modernisation Agency has spent £1,752,000 on external consultants.

Fluoridation

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the percentage of the population affected by dental fluorosis in areas where the water supply is *(a)* fluoridated and *(b)* not-fluoridated. [94248]

Mr. Lammy: The report, "A Systematic Review of Water Fluoridation", published by the University of York in October 2000, estimated that the prevalence of dental fluorosis at a water fluoride level of 1.00 parts per million was 48 per cent. for all grades of fluorosis, including those which can only be identified by close professional examination and 12.5 per cent. for fluorosis of aesthetic concern.

It should be noted that these figures include all enamel marks, whether from fluoride or not. Information is not held centrally on the prevalence of dental fluorosis in areas where the water supply is not artificially fluoridated.

Former NHS Sites (Development)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many affordable homes have been built on former NHS sites sold by his Department over the last six years to the private sector. [97920]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 13 February 2003]:* The Department does not keep records of the number of affordable houses that have been built on sites that it has sold.

Free Nursing Care

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many people have been waiting *(a)* less than one month, *(b)* over one month and less than two months, *(c)* over two months and less than three months, *(d)* over three months and less than four months and *(e)* over four months for an assessment for free nursing care; [97793]

(2) how many people are awaiting an assessment for free nursing care and what proportion that represents of people who require an assessment for free nursing care. [97794]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answers 13 February 2003]:* The Department does not collect this information centrally.

General Practitioners

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS general practitioners there were in Shrewsbury and Atcham in each year since 1997. [96286]

Mr. Lammy: Information for individual constituencies is not available. The figures for Shropshire Health Authority are shown in the table.

All Practitioners (excluding GP retainers)[1] *in Shropshire Health Authority as at 1 October 1997–99, 30 September 2000–01 and 31 March 2002*

Year	Numbers (headcount)
1997	260
1998	259
1999	268
2000	262
2001	261
2002[2]	260

[1] All Practitioners (excluding GP retainers) include GMS Unrestricted Principals, PMS Contracted GPs, PMS Salaried GPs, Restricted Principals, Assistants, GP Registrars, Salaried Doctors (para. 52 SFA) and PMS Others. GP Retainers were first collected in 1999 and have been omitted for comparability purposes.

[2] March

Source:

Department of Health General and Personal Medical Services Statistics

Health and Social Care Directorates

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate *(a)* the cost of establishing and abolishing the directorates of health and social care and *(b)* the budgets for the directorates in each year since they were established. [97815]

Mr. Lammy: For the financial year 2002–03, the revenue budget of the four Directorates of Health and Social Care (DsHSC) was £58.7 million, which represented the costs of the eight former regional offices of the NHS Executive rolled forward, after the transfer of certain functions to other parts of the Department. Expenditure against this budget is forecast to be £49 million.

Additionally, there were set-up costs of £2.4 million attributable to establishing and equipping the public health function in the nine government offices of the regions. The budget of the DsHSC for 2003–04 is £24.5 million, a saving of £34.2 million over 2002–03.

It is too early to assess the consequences of the proposed Departmental re-organisation.

Helplines

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many telephone helplines are sponsored by his Department; and which of these helplines are charged at *(a)* national rate, *(b)* premium rate and *(c)* local rate. [95716]

Mr. Lammy: The Department currently sponsors 40 helplines. Of those, 17 are freephone numbers, 14 are charged at local rate and nine are charged at national rate. None are charged at premium rate.

Hospitals

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which of the six key targets under the Better Hospital Food Programme will have been fully delivered by the end of December 2002 in each *(a)* region and *(b)* health authority. [96725]

Mr. Lammy: I refer the hon. Member to the response I gave on him 14 October 2002, *Official Report*, volume 390, columns 481–82W.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) of 22 January, *Official Report*, column 393W, on hospital hygiene, how long it took to produce the "Process Mapping the Housekeeper Service—A Toolkit for Change" guidance; and whether this superseded previous guidance on this issue. [96046]

Mr. Lammy: The guide, "Process Mapping the Housekeeper Service—A Toolkit for Change", was produced to assist trusts when introducing housekeeping services. It was developed in conjunction with the National Health Service over a period of time following publication of the NHS Plan and was launched by the Chief Nursing Officer, Sarah Mullally, in November 2002. The development included a period of feedback and consultation.

The toolkit is not prescriptive. Its aim is to help trusts examine their own service and develop local solutions. Information included about the withholding of payment or termination of contracts expands upon but does not supersede any previous guidance or local service level agreements. It makes clear that nurses have a major role to play in setting and monitoring standards of cleanliness at ward level.

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which hospitals he visited in 2002. [90039]

Mr. Lammy: In 2002, my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, had the opportunity to visit the following hospitals, some on more than one occasion.

Epsom General Hospital, Maidstone Hospital, St Thomas' Hospital (London), Liverpool Women's Hospital, Peterborough District Hospital, St Mary's Hospital (London), Worcester Royal Hospital, Ilkeston Community Hospital, King's College Hospital (London), The Whittington Hospital (London), Addenbrookes Hospital, St George's Hospital (London), The Royal Marsden Hospital, Alder Hey Children's Hospital, Medway Hospital, Barnet General Hospital (London), Chase Farm Hospital and Darlington Memorial Hospital.

Independent Complaints Advocacy Services

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has permanently to establish the Independent Complaints Advocacy Services once its pilot ends. [96719]

Mr. Lammy: An independent complaints advocacy service will be established. Decisions on the operational arrangements for this new service are being finalised. The Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health will be involved in providing advice and setting standards for independent complaints advocacy services.

Infectious Diseases (Home Treatment)

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the pilot project in Warwickshire to treat patients with infectious diseases in their own homes. [96513]

Mr. Lammy: The proposed pilot project in Warwickshire, led by the South Warwickshire General Hospitals National Health Service Trust, would treat selected patients who have presented at the hospital with infections of the skin, wound or bone. The service is for patients who would be in hospital only to receive intravenous antibiotic therapy. The hospital's clinical teams would still carefully manage the patients. Patients with highly contagious infections who require isolation in hospital will continue to be treated as inpatients.

This project is patient-centred and offers a choice to both patients and carers. The patient would have a reduced risk of hospital-acquired infection and conversely existing patients would not be exposed to the infection.

Inventures (Bidding Process)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects the report of the National Audit Office into the bidding process for Inventures will be completed; and whether it will be published in full. [97872]

Mr. Lammy: The National Audit Office (NAO) work on the bidding process should be completed in February 2003. A response will then be sent by the NAO to the Pears Group, the complainant.

In addition, the NAO will send an internal management report to the Department of Health, summarising their findings and conclusions. No decision has yet been taken as to whether the report will be published.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to finalise the details of the sale of Inventures to the Miller Group; and when he will publish the details. [97917]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 13 February 2003]:* The sale is expected to be finalised by September 2003, provided value for money is demonstrated.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those NHS properties which have so far been agreed as being included in the list of sites to be transferred from NHS Estates to the Miller Group. [97918]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 13 February 2003]:* Details of the proposed contractual Joint Venture with the preferred partner are currently being finalised.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many properties being sold by NHS Estates to the Miller Group will be sold with planning permission. [97919]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 13 February 2003]:* Details of which properties will be the subject of the proposed contractual Joint Venture between NHS Estates and Miller/Bank of Scotland are still being finalised.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list *(a)* the members of senior management and *(b)* the number of employees, who formerly worked for Inventures, whose employment has been transferred to the Miller Group Consortium. [97921]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 13 February 2003]:* The proposed contractual Joint Venture between NHS Estates and Miller/Bank of Scotland is still being progressed and no staff have been transferred.

Doctors

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many and what percentage of those entering medical training to qualify as doctors in each of the past 10 years were *(a)* men and *(b)* women; [97580]

(2) what percentage of those entering medical training were *(a)* men and *(b)* women in the last year for which figures are available. [97579]

Mr. Lammy: The information requested is shown in the table.

Number and gender of English medical school intake 1991–92 to 2001–02

Academic Year	*Total*	*Male Number*	*Male Percentage*	*Female Number*	*Female Percentage*
1991–92	3,191	1,615	50.6	1,576	49.4
1992–93	3,263	1,542	47.3	1,721	52.7
1993–94	3,374	1,654	49.0	1,720	51.0
1994–95	3,514	1,701	48.4	1,813	51.6
1995–96	3,486	1,777	51.0	1,709	49.0
1996–97	3,594	1,711	47.6	1,883	52.4
1997–98	3,749	1,697	45.3	2,052	54.7
1998–99	3,735	1,690	45.25	2,045	54.75
1999–2000	3,972	1,748	44.0	2,224	56.0
2000–01	4,300	1,826	42.5	2,474	57.5
2001–02	4,713	1,959	41.5	2,754	58.5

Intake to English medical schools has risen by 1,522 during the past 10 years to its current level of 4,713, an increase of 48 per cent.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what figures he has collated on how many qualified medical doctors cease to work in the profession *(a)* during the first five years after qualifying and *(b)* during the first 10 years after qualifying, broken down by gender; [97583]

(2) how many and what percentage of those who qualified as medical practitioners but who did not enter and work in the profession in the last year for which figures are available were *(a)* men and *(b)* women. [97584]

Mr. Lammy: We do not collect data on the number of medical graduates who do not enter the medical profession, nor do we collect data about the number of doctors who cease to work in the profession. However, the medical careers research group in the University of Oxford have undertaken cohort studies based on data collected by questionnaires sent to individual doctors emerging from United Kingdom medical schools.

Of a 25 per cent., sample survey of the qualifiers of 2000, the latest data available, only tworespondents did not start working as a pre-registration house officer. Both were female.

Data from 1996 qualifiers shows that, of those surveyed five years after qualification, 2.4 per cent., of men and 4.2 per cent, of women were not working in medicine.

Data from 1988 qualifiers shows that of those surveyed 10 years after qualification, 0.9 per cent., of men and 5.3 per cent., of women were not working in medicine.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many and what percentage of those entering medical education who completed their studies and qualify to practise in the last year for which figures are available were *(a)* men and *(b)* women. [97582]

Jacqui Smith: The latest figures from the Higher Education Funding Council for England show that at 31 July 2002, the number obtaining the first registerable medical qualification in England was 3,280; 1,467, or 45 per cent., of whom were male and 1,813, or 55 per cent., were female.

Mental Health (Older People)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the provision of mental health services for older people for the treatment of manic depression. [96635]

Jacqui Smith: The national service framework (NSF) for older people has a standard, a service model and milestones to monitor progress against for the provision of health and social care services for older people with mental health problems.

Implementation of the NSF will ensure that older people with mental health problems, including those with manic depression, will receive the care and treatment they need.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have been diagnosed with pre-senile dementia in each of the last five years, broken down by age at diagnosis. [96637]

Jacqui Smith: The Department does not routinely collect such information.

Hospital Waiting Lists/Times

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in the Mid-Essex Hospital Services NHS Trust area were waiting for in-patient treatment on the latest available date. [97827]

Mr. Lammy: There were 9,527 patients waiting for in-patient treatment at Mid-Essex Hospital Services National Health Service Trust at the end of December 2002.

Source:

KH07 return.

Mark Tami: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the current average waiting time is in England for operations on children to remove tonsils. [97105]

Jacqui Smith: Inpatient waiting time data is collected by specialty. The average waiting time for ear, nose and throat is 3.3 months. There is no data available centrally at procedure level or by age group.

NHS Trusts (Financial Performance)

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether it is the Government's policy that strategic health authorities should *(a)* monitor the financial performance of trusts within their area and *(b)* collate estimates of the end-of-year financial outturn for each trust. [97945]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 13 February 2003]:* It is the Government's policy that strategic health authorities should monitor the financial performance of national health service trusts within their area and collate estimates of the full year financial outturn for each NHS trust.

Online Sales/Purchases

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what *(a)* products, *(b)* goods and *(c)* services were (i) bought and (ii) sold online by his Department in each of the last five years. [97443]

Mr. Lammy: The Department has ordered its catering requirements online since 1998 and its travel arrangements online starting this financial year using its own Intranet.

The Department also uses web-enabled systems to place the advertisements under the European Union purchasing regulations and has pilot tested online tendering systems in collaboration with the Office of Government Commerce. It also uses the Government Procurement Card for low value purchases.

The Department has not used the Internet for any sales activity.

This answer does not include the national health service.

Operations

Mr. Mark Simmonds: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* inpatients and *(b)* outpatient operations were cancelled in (i) Pilgrim hospital, Boston, Lincolnshire, (ii) Trent Regional Health Authority and (iii) England and Wales in 2002, expressed in a percentage of total operations and in numbers. [96582]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 11 February 2003]:* Quarterly data are collected on the number of operations cancelled by the hospital for non-clinical reasons, for example, at the last minute (that is, on the day patients are due to arrive or after arrival in hospital or on the day of their operation) and on the day of surgery.

These data are available in the Library and on the Department's website at www.doh.gov.uk/hospitalactivity/data_requests.htm.

Information about cancellations in Pilgrim Hospital, Trent Regional Health Authority and England are shown in the table. Currently, figures are available for the first nine months of 2002 only.

	Number of last minute cancellations for non-clinical reasons			*Number of cancellations as a percentage of elective admissions*		
	Q4 2001–02	Q1 2002–03	Q2 2002–03	Q4 2001–02	Q1 2002–03	Q2 2002–03
United Lincolnshire Hospitals NHS Trust[1]	159	170	179	1.1	1.2	1.2
Trent Strategic Health Authority[2]	n/a	607	568	n/a	1.0	0.9
England[3]	19,973	14,808	14,826	1.5	1.1	1.1

[1] Data is not published on the basis of individual hospitals. The figures are therefore provided for United Lincolnshire Hospitals NHS Trust, which manages the Pilgrim hospital.

[2] Trent Strategic Health Authority was created in April 2002. The former Trent Regional Office covered a different geographical area.

[3] For data on hospitals in Wales, please refer to the Welsh Assembly.

Data are not collected on the number of patients whose outpatient appointment has been cancelled by the hospital.

Overview and Scrutiny Committees

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the Department of Health will be publishing guidelines for the establishment of overview and scrutiny committees. [96721]

Mr. Lammy: The Department will be publishing guidance shortly for local authority overview and scrutiny committees to assist them in scrutinising the national health service. The guidance is also to enable the NHS to meet its duties under the NHS scrutiny arrangements.

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the final guidance from his Department for local authority scrutiny committees on health issues will be published; and if he will make a statement. [97607]

Mr. Lammy: The Department will shortly be publishing guidance to assist local authority overview and scrutiny committees in scrutinising health.

Patient Forums

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects the new patient forums to be established in all areas. [96722]

Mr. Lammy: The Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health is responsible for recruiting members, appointing staff and putting in place the infrastructure for patients' forums. This process will be well under way by the time Community Health Councils are abolished in September.

The Commission will be working towards the achievement of full coverage of forums by the end of the year.

Dr. Richard Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements he has made to cover the period between the abolition of community health councils and the formation of primary care trust patient forums. [96776]

Mr. Lammy: The Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health has said that it will be working towards achieving full coverage of patients' forums by the end of the year. Arrangements will be in place to ensure there is continuous support for patients through the transition.

The new system for patient and public involvement goes beyond patients' forums. For example, independent complaints advocacy support for patients wanting to complain against the national health service will be available, patient advice and liaison services in trusts and primary care trusts routinely feed up patients views to trust boards, overview and scrutiny committees (OSCs) have to be consulted where substantial variation and developments are planned and individuals or patient groups can approach their OSC directly where they have concerns.

In addition, the Commission will set up a national telephone help-line, which will help people access local support arrangements.

Community Pharmacies

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the impact of the deregulation of pharmacy contracts on smaller, non-supermarket pharmacies. [97399]

Mr. Lammy: We are considering the report from the Director General of Fair Trading and its findings and recommendation carefully.

Community pharmacists have an important part to play in our plans to drive up the quality of national health service services overall and to make the best use of skills of everybody working in the NHS. We are therefore considering the implications the report has for patients, for the profession and for the NHS as a whole.

We have invited views on the report and are meeting key interests to hear their reactions, in order to help inform the Government response, which my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, is co-ordinating.

Private Patient Debt

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the total debt of private patients to NHS hospitals was in 2001–02 in *(a)* London and *(b)* England. [97259]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 12 February 2003]:* National health service hospitals are encouraged to obtain deposits from private patients to lessen the risk that charges for treatment cannot be fully recovered.

The Department does not hold information centrally about the debt of private patients to NHS hospitals.

Procure 21

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans there are to bring Procure 21 into operation across the country; and if he will make a statement. [97597]

Mr. Lammy: Following interest from national health service trusts across the country, a selection process is underway to establish frameworks that will be available for all NHS organisations from summer 2003.

Public Appointments

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library a copy of the application pack for candidates for the post of Chair of the Commission for Public and Patient Involvement. [97244]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 12 February 2003]:* Copies of the application pack for candidates for the post of Chair of the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health will be placed in the Library by Friday 14 February 2003.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health where and when the Central Office for Research Ethics Committees advertised the posts of making public appointments when appointing *(a)* an adviser on training research ethics committees and *(b)* an adviser on accreditation of research ethics committees. [96549]

Mr. Lammy: All established, permanent positions at the Central Office for Research Ethics Committees (COREC) are filled following open advertisement and a rigorous selection process involving independent selectors. Additionally, fixed term contracts and secondments are used to involve individuals with particular expertise in specific time-limited projects.

The two positions are in the latter category, and are not public appointments. The recruitment of the particular individuals took into account their knowledge, experience, general personal abilities and standing in the field of research ethics committees, and took place with the knowledge of the Department.

Social Workers

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many cases of compensation have been awarded to former social workers in each of the last five years in the social services departments in *(a)* Haringey, *(b)* Ealing, *(c)* Brent and *(d)* Enfield; and for what amounts; [96105]

(2) how many social workers working with vulnerable children have been subject to disciplinary measures in each of the last five years in *(a)* Haringey Social Services, *(b)* Ealing Social Services, *(c)* Brent Social Services and *(d)* Enfield Social Services. [96041]

Jacqui Smith: It is the responsibility of the individual local authority, as the employer, to maintain records relating to their employment policies, procedures and actions in relation to disciplinary matters. The Department does not collect this data centrally.

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many vacancies he estimates there are for social workers in *(a)* London, broken down by borough and *(b)* the UK; and if he will make a statement. [97586]

Jacqui Smith: We do not hold central information on vacancies in each local authority social services department in England for social workers.

A survey undertaken by the Employers Organisation found that, across all local authority social services departments in England as at 30 September 2001, around 10 per cent. of all field social worker posts were vacant.

Speech and Language Therapy

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of shortages of speech therapists in Essex; and if he will make a statement. [97181]

Mr. Lammy: Speech and language therapists have been recognised at a national level as a key work force priority for work force planning and development. Speech therapists have been targeted, along with other allied health professionals, for recruitment and retention. Work force development confederations have been made aware of the need to commission additional training places for this target group.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he is taking to *(a)* train and *(b)* recruit more speech therapists. [97183]

Mr. Lammy: We are committed to increasing the numbers of speech and language therapists employed in the national health service. Between September 1997 and 2001, the number of speech and language therapists employed in the NHS has increased by over 800, or 17 per cent.

"Delivering the NHS Plan", published in April 2002, includes the latest forecasts for growth in the NHS Workforce. By 2008, we expect the NHS to have a net increase over the September 2001 staff census of at least 30,000 therapists and scientists, including speech therapists.

The "NHS Plan" stated that by 2004, there would be an extra 4,450 therapists, including speech therapists and other key health professionals being trained each year over 1999 levels. By 2001–02 the number of students entering training each year to become a speech therapist had increased by 96, or 21 per cent., from 457 to 553. Latest figures suggest a further increase, to 601, in the current financial year.

A range of recruitment, retention and returner initiatives are in place to facilitate the NHS meeting the challenging targets set out in the "NHS Plan" and "Delivering the NHS Plan". The Department is working very closely with the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapy and has set up a working group to draw up a recruitment and retention strategy.

Mid Essex Hospital Trust (Staff Vacancies)

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* nurse and *(b)* consultant vacancies there are at Broomfield hospital, Essex at the latest available date. [97825]

Mr. Lammy: The information requested is shown in the table. Vacancy information is not collected for specific hospitals; therefore, vacancy information is shown for Mid Essex Hospital Trust.

Department of Health Vacancies Survey, March 2002

Vacancies in NHS Trusts in England and Mid Essex Hospital Services NHS Trust, specified staff groups, three month vacancy rates, numbers and staff in post

	Three month vacancy rate (Percentage)	*Three month vacancy number*	*Staff in post (wte)*	*Staff in post Head count*
All consultants (excluding HA staff)				
March 2002				
England (excludes HA staff)	3.8	946	23,708	25,816
Mid Essex Hospital Services NHS Trust	3.4	3	86	98
All qualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff (excluding HA staff)				
March 2002				
England (excludes HA staff)	3.1	8,394	—	—
Mid Essex Hospital Services NHS Trust	2.2	19	—	—
September 2001				
England (excludes HA staff)	—	—	265,717	329,981
Mid Essex Hospital Services NHS Trust	—	—	881	1,171

Notes:

Three month vacancy:

1. Three month vacancy Information is as at 31 March 2002.
2. Three month vacancies are vacancies which Trusts are actively trying to fill, which had lasted for three months or more (whole-time equivalents).
3. Three month Vacancy Rates are three month vacancies expressed as a percentage of three month vacancies plus staff in post.
4. Three month Vacancy Rates for non-medical staff are calculated using staff in post from the Vacancy Survey, March 2002.
5. Three month Vacancy Rates for medical and dental staff are calculated using staff in post from the Consultant Census, March 2002.
6. Percentages are rounded to one decimal place.

Staff in post:

1. Staff in post data is from the Non-Medical Workforce Census, September 2001 and the Mini Consultant Census, March 2002
2. Staff in post data excludes staff employed by Health Authorities, as vacancy information was only collected from Trusts, PCTs and Special Health Authorities

General:

1. Vacancy and staff in post numbers are rounded to the nearest whole number
2. Calculating the vacancy rates using the above data may not equal the actual vacancy rates
3. Broomfield hospital is part of Mid Essex Hospital Services NHS Trust

Sources:

1. Department of Health Vacancies Survey March 2002
2. Department of Health Consultant Census March 2002
3. Department of Health Non-Medical Workforce Census September 2001

Surgeons

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many surgeons have *(a)* left and *(b)* started working in the NHS in each of the last five years. [96114]

Mr. Lammy: Workforce data is collected through the annual Department of Health medical workforce census. The census is a snapshot of data as of 30 September in the appropriate year.

The information shown in the table shows the net increases in the number of consultants in the surgery group in each of the last five years. We do not collect data on the number of leavers and joiners in the National Health Service.

At March 2002 there were 4,969 consultants in surgery, an increase of 875 or 21.4 per cent., over 1997.

Hospital Medical Consultants within the surgical group of specialties

Year	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
England[1]						
Surgery Group of which	*4,094*	*4,186*	*4,431*	*4,640*	*4,893*	*4,969*
Cardio-thoracic surgery	156	166	182	198	204	202
General surgery	1,178	1,197	1,257	1,331	1,389	1,412
Neurosurgery	127	130	136	139	152	154
Ophthalmology	580	598	628	651	683	687
Otolaryngology	425	415	432	448	459	458
Paediatric surgery	74	86	98	104	114	119
Plastic surgery	155	169	168	188	198	198
Trauma and orthopaedic surgery	1,056	1,067	1,142	1,199	1,267	1,303
Urology	343	358	388	382	427	236

Note:

[1] Data as at 30 September 1997 to 2001 and 31 March 2002

Source:

Department of Health medical and dental workforce census.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the *(a)* vacancy rates are and *(b)* rates 12 months ago were for surgeon positions in each hospital trust in England. [96115]

Mr. Lammy: Vacancy rates for 2001 and 2002 for the surgical specialties in each hospital trust in England have been placed in the Library.

Teenage Cancer Ward (Southend)

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has for the building of a teenage cancer trust ward in Southend-on-Sea or the surrounding area. [96868]

Mr. Lammy: The South Essex Cancer Network and Southend Hospital National Heath Service Trust have no plans at the present time to build a teenage cancer trust ward in Southend-on-Sea or the surrounding area.

Underspends

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of his Department's budget remains uncommitted for the current financial year. [96886]

Mr. Lammy: There are no planned under-spends in 2002–03.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Chemical and Biological Weapons Conventions

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the policy of the Government towards the chemical weapons and biological weapons conventions. [98069]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Government's policy towards the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC) is to work towards their universal adoption and universal compliance with their obligations.

The United Kingdom abandoned its offensive chemical and biological weapons programmes in the 1950s. Subsequently we have played a leading role in the negotiations both of the BWC of 1975, for which we are a depositary government, and the CWC which entered into force in 1997. We are fully compliant with our obligations under both Conventions and continue to press for their full and effective implementation. To this end, both nationally and with our EU partners, we have conducted a series of demarches world-wide, with particular attention to regions of tension such as the Middle East.

The United Kingdom was instrumental in securing a successful outcome to the BWC Review Conference in November 2002, which saw agreement on a three year work programme of practical measures to deal with the BW threat. At the forthcoming CWC Review Conference (28 April-9 May 2003) the UK will be presenting a number of important technical and scientific papers. The strength of our political support and commitment to both Conventions, as well as the technical expertise we contribute, are second to none.

Afghanistan (Moazzam Begg)

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the US Government to permit access by the Red Cross and by British diplomats to Moazzam Begg who is detained at Bagram Airbase in Afghanistan; when; and with what result. [97993]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has raised the case of Moazzam Begg with the US Secretary of State, Colin Powell, on a number of occasions, most recently on 23 January. Mr. Begg was transferred to Guantanamo Bay on 6 February. Officials have discussed access to Mr. Begg, most recently on 10 February, and expect to see him shortly.

We understand the Red Cross had access to Mr. Begg in Afghanistan. Previously they have had access to all the British detainees at Guantanamo Bay.

Africa

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the implementation of the policies on Africa announced by the Prime Minister in September 2001. [91268]

Mr. Rammell: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has made Africa a priority for this Government. Our aims in Africa are peace and security; ending inequality and poverty; social justice and human rights; and improved political and economic governance.

Last year at Kananaskis, the Prime Minister announced that the UK development programme for Africa will increase to 1 billion a year by 2006. Our development programme addresses the range of challenges faced by Africa and supports African governments' own efforts to achieve the internationally agreed Millennium Development Goals in Africa. For example, our work on health includes supporting the development of health systems, improving access to essential medicines and working towards eradicating polio. In education we are working with African governments to realise their aspirations of education for all.

The UK recognises that peace and security is a prerequisite for Africa's development. In April 2001, we established the Africa Conflict Prevention Pool, which brings together all relevant government ministries to identify ways to tackle violent conflict in Africa.

We continue to work with international financial institutions to ensure that the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative achieves its aim of freeing eligible African countries from unsustainable debt. In addition, the UK goes further than required under HIPC and gives 100 per cent. debt relief to countries once they qualify. For the 22 African countries that have reached 'decision point' all repayments on their debts (worth over £800 million) have ceased.

African commitment to progress is encapsulated in the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) where African governments have made commitments to improve political and economic governance, solve conflicts and to move forward development. The UK was one of the prime movers behind the formulation of the G8 Africa Action Plan launched at Kananaskis last year in support of NEPAD.

Capital Projects

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place the evaluations for Capital Modernisation Fund projects in his Department since 1998 in the Library; and if he will make a statement. [97034]

Mr. Rammell: The FCO has received Capital Modernisation Funds for three projects: The "Internet" project, "Entry Clearance Modernisation" and "e-procurement". The first two projects are still under way. The e-procurement project has been completed, and an evaluation is in progress. Consequently, no evaluation reports are yet available.

Laptops

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many laptop computers were used by *(a)* Ministers and special advisers and *(b)* officials in his Department in each year since 1995; how many were (i) lost and (ii) stolen; what their cost was; and if he will make a statement. [97497]

Mr. Rammell: We do not have a central record of the numbers of laptops issued as budgets have been devolved to overseas posts and UK directorates. This information therefore would be available only at disproportionate cost.

No laptops have been reported lost or stolen in the past two years. We do not have earlier records.

Domestic Violence

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to raise awareness of domestic violence, with particular reference to *(a)* supporting efforts to curb domestic violence and *(b)* providing services for those victims, in foreign countries and in the Commonwealth. [97750]

Mr. Rammell: The FCO is supporting a number of projects in, for example, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Uganda, China and Brazil, to counter domestic violence. The UK promotes women's enjoyments of their rights and freedoms more generally by negotiating resolutions and other documents in international fora, by funding human rights work in favour of women.

Foreign Postings

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many of his Department's officials have been posted abroad in each region in each year since 1997. [96305]

Mr. Straw: The number of Foreign and Commonwealth Office officials who have been posted abroad since 1997 is listed as follows:

Region	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
Africa	233	292	264	250	121	127
Americas	235	288	328	290	102	128
Asia Pacific	503	473	532	517	245	202
European Union	239	293	298	274	143	138
Wider Europe	245	350	377	300	129	148
Middle East	141	157	239	172	81	87
Temp	29	27	33	37	33	24
Other	130	146	168	186	206	54

Note:

1. The figures above do not give an accurate picture, they simply state how many people were posted to that region during that year. At present the FCO has over 2,000 officers based abroad.
2. "Temp" refers to those officers who provide temporary cover at posts so are not based in one specific region.
3. "Other" refers to commands who cover various regions. We are unable to separate this figure by region without incurring disproportionate costs.
4. Post tour lengths vary from one year to five years depending on region so the figures should not be used for comparison purposes between regions.

Kashmir

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Indian Government on human rights abuses in Kashmir. [98011]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary most recently raised human rights in Kashmir with Yashwant Sinha, the Indian Foreign Minister, during his visit to India on 18–20 July 2002. I more recently discussed a wide range of human rights issues, including Kashmir with ID Swami, Indian Minister of State for Home Affairs during my visit to India on 17 October.

Kyrgyzstan

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with non-governmental organisations and international aid organisations regarding building relationships with Kyrgyzstan; and if he will make a statement. [97163]

Mr. MacShane: Officials from the British Embassy in Kazakhstan, which is also responsible for relations with Kyrgyzstan, meet with Kyrgyz NGOs on a regular basis. The Department for International Development office in Bishkek liaises with international aid organisations in Kyrgyzstan and provides technical assistance to programmes funded by, among others, the World bank.

DfID targets assistance in areas such as rural livelihoods, health, sanitation and water supply, tariff policy and social development.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions the European Union has had regarding developing relations with Kyrgyzstan; and if he will make a statement. [97164]

Mr. MacShane: The framework for relations between the EU and Kyrgyzstan is the EU-Kyrgyzstan Partnership and Co-operation Agreement (PCA). Officials from EU member states and Kyrgyzstan meet annually at a Co-operation Council and a Co-operation Committee in Brussels to discuss progress in relations. The Co-operation Committee last met in November 2002. In the course of developing the dialogue between the parties, the EU occasionally makes representations locally, most recently in late January. It also regularly makes statements at the OSCE Permanent Council in Vienna on bilateral issues and issues of concern. For example, the EU welcomed the recent consultative process of constitutional reform in Kyrgyzstan, but later expressed reservations about it.

The fourth Co-operation Council met in July 2002. The fourth Co-operation Committee will meet in March 2003, and a broad ranging agenda will cover economic issues, justice and home affairs, foreign policy, regional co-operation, democracy and human rights. The most recent statement on Kyrgyzstan at the OSCE Permanent Council was on 6 February.

Nepal

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) in what measures the Government is involved to strengthen Nepal's *(a)* military and *(b)* police capacity; [96668]

(2) in what initiatives the Government is involved to create a lasting peace in Nepal. [96667]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Government welcomes the ceasefire agreed between the Government of Nepal and the Maoists on 29 January. We remain committed to working with the Nepalese, and our international partners, towards a lasting peace in Nepal and we continue to coordinate international efforts to help resolve the conflict in Nepal. This is largely being done through the International Support Group, a body formed as a result of the international conference hosted by the UK in London in June. Further to our £22 million bilateral development programme, we have a package of £6.7 million under our Global Conflict Prevention Pool. Projects funded from this pool are aimed at short-term development and reinforcing Nepal's development, military and police capacity.

An advisor from the Department for International Development is working with the Inspectorate General of Police in Nepal on reforms to modernise and enhance the professionalism of the police. This includes support to establish an Independent Police Service Commission, enhance police training and extend community policing.

For details of our military assistance to Nepal, I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 6 November 2003, *Official Report*, column 310W, to the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge).

Consular Prison Visits

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what guidelines he has issued on how often representatives from British high commissions or British embassies visit British nationals serving prison sentences in foreign countries to check their health and prison conditions; and to whom reports of these visits are made. [97537]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: In July 1992, the Consular Action Plan (CAP) was established to ensure the principles of the Citizen's Charter were introduced into consular work.

On prison visiting, the CAP sets the target time for the first contact to be made with the detainee within 24 hours of notification of arrest and the first visit within 48 hours of that notification. Thereafter, consular staff are advised to visit at "reasonable" intervals, depending on the circumstances and needs of the individual prisoner. In countries where prison conditions are harsh, efforts are made to ensure that detainees receive at least quarterly visits.

During consular visits, staff will:

ensure the person is not being subjected to degrading or inhumane treatment, or being discriminated against on grounds of nationality;

gain an impression of the person's state of health to enable appropriate follow-up action to be taken with the prison authorities;

give the person the opportunity to express any legitimate complaint about the conditions of imprisonment;

facilitate, if necessary, contact between the detainee and a lawyer;

if appropriate, discuss arrangements for the person's return to the UK on release.

Reports of every prison visit are sent to the Consular Division of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in London. We pass on information about the visits to the next of kin. Unless the detainee has requested that we do not.

Turkish-Cypriot Community

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met representatives of the Turkish-Cypriot community in the UK; and what issues were discussed. [97776]

Mr. MacShane: Foreign and Commonwealth Office officials are in regular contact with representatives and members of both Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot communities in the UK in order to discuss the full range of issues of interest to those communities.

The current UN talks process is naturally of particular concern. The Government continues to express its full support for the UN Secretary-General's 10 December proposals, which would provide for a settlement in the best interests of all Cypriots. We are urging all those involved to secure a settlement by

28 February, enabling referenda to be held on both sides of the island and a reunited Cyprus to sign the Treaty of Accession with the EU on 16 April.

I maintain a close interest in the settlement process and regularly meet interested parties in the UK. Most recently, I held a discussion with the Friends of Cyprus Group on the state of play in the settlement talks.

Western Sahara

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made concerning the referendum on the future of Western Sahara to *(a)* the Government of Morocco and *(b)* the United Nations; and if he will make a statement. [97509]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave her on 22 January, *Official Report*, column 358W.

The Secretary General (UNSG) reported to the United Nations Security Council on the situation concerning Western Sahara in advance of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) mandate renewal. His personal envoy (PE), James Baker has presented a proposal to the parties to the dispute for a political solution, as requested by Security Council Resolution 1429 of 30 July 2002. His proposals have not been published.

Our position remains that we fully support the UN process and the efforts of the UNSG and PE to find a political solution to this dispute that provides for self-determination of the people of Western Sahara (as UNSCR 1429 of 30 July 2002). We supported the extension of MINURSO's mandate until 31 March 2003 as requested by the UNSG to give the parties time to consider the latest proposals.

Zimbabwe

Mr. Simmonds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what special arrangements his Department is making to ensure that those teachers that hold British passports, and who are leaving Zimbabwe owing to political oppression, are categorised as skilled or semi-skilled workers rather than economic migrants when entering the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [97548]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: British citizens have the right of abode in the United Kingdom, and there is therefore no need for them to be categorised according to their skills. British passport-holders who have other categories of British nationality may enter the UK as visitors, but would need to seek prior entry clearance before coming to the UK for any other reason.

Mr. Simmonds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what special arrangements his Department is making to ensure that those pensioners that hold British passports, and who are leaving Zimbabwe owing to political oppression, are given priority in entering the UK; what arrangements are being made to ensure their financial needs are met; and if he will make a statement. [97549]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: No special arrangements have been made for British pensioners who choose to leave Zimbabwe and return to the UK.

Any British citizen arriving in the UK from abroad may make an immediate claim for income-support, housing benefit, council tax benefits and jobseeker's allowance (income-based) subject to meeting certain criteria, including demonstrating that they are habitually resident in the UK. These benefits are only paid to people with close ties to the UK and an intention to settle here.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Child Abuse

Vera Baird: To ask the Solicitor General how many children were *(a)* killed and *(b)* non-accidentally injured while in the care of their parents or carers in (i) 2001 and (ii) 2002. [97118]

Jacqui Smith: I have been asked to reply.

Information detailing the number of children who were killed or suffered non-accidental injury while in the care of their parents or carers in 2001 and 2002 is not held centrally.

However, by revamping its database of serious cases, the Department of Health has a record of serious case notifications from 1 April 2002. A serious case notification concerns the death of, or serious injury to, a child where abuse and/or neglect may have been a factor. As at 11 February 2003, there have been 133 recorded serious case notifications to the database. Of these notifications, 103 were of deaths and 30 were of serious injuries.

Information detailing the number of children under 16-years-old, who are currently recorded as being victims of homicide, a category which covers murder, manslaughter and infanticide, over the last 10 years, classified by relationship of victim to principal suspect, has been placed in the Library.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Archaeological Sites (Cornwall)

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to protect *(a)* underground, *(b)* overground and *(c)* underwater archaeological sites in Cornwall. [96584]

Dr. Howells: The remains of the past, whether above ground, underground or underwater are currently identified and protected by a framework of designation regimes. This includes the listing of buildings of special architectural and historic merit, the scheduling of ancient monuments and the designation of conservation areas and historic wreck sites. Separate systems also exist for the identification of historic parks, gardens and battlefields and for the inscription of World Heritage Sites.

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what action she has taken regarding archaeological sites in Cornwall in the last five years. [96822]

Howells: During the last five years nearly 200 sites in Cornwall have been designated as Scheduled Ancient Monuments, ranging from prehistoric burial mounds to 19th century mining remains associated with the tin industry. A Scheduled Monument comprises of one or more individual archaeological items, and in the case of these Cornwall monuments, 572 separate archaeological items have been protected.

English Heritage has additionally undertaken evaluation work to identify nationally important 20th century military sites, industrial monuments and bridges in Cornwall, as well as throughout England. This work has contributed to our understanding of such archaeological sites and has identified sites for statutory designation in Cornwall. There has also been increasing involvement in more recent years with the World Heritage Site bid for Cornish Mining and a programme to protect nationally important mining remains within the selected bid areas is under way.

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on her policy on the protection of underwater wrecks that are of archaeological interest. [96586]

Dr. Howells: The Department's responsibility for underwater archaeology primarily extends to administering the Protection of Wrecks Act 1973 in England and designating wrecks off English waters under the Act. It is the Department's policy to protect the best examples of our underwater heritage while encouraging greater access to it. To achieve this, we seek to work constructively with both the archaeological and diving communities, and to encourage co-operation between the two groups.

Licensing Bill

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what impact assessment she has made of the effect of the proposals in the Licensing Bill on not for profit sports clubs; [97405]

(2) what assessment she has made of the likely additional cost on the voluntary sports club sector of being required to *(a)* obtain licences for club entertainment and *(b)* comply with the annual inspection fees as proposed in the Licensing Bill; [97403]

(3) what plans she has to assist voluntary sports clubs to meet with the costs imposed by the proposals within the Licensing Bill; [97401]

(4) for what reasons she will require clubs to apply for licences for club entertainment under the proposed Licensing and Entertainment Bill; and how many clubs will be required to obtain such a licence. [97404]

Dr. Howells: Voluntary or not for profit sports clubs do not enjoy any special status under current alcohol or entertainment licensing law. They may, however, operate as registered clubs under the Licensing Act 1964 and therefore enjoy a different status to those operating under justices' licences. Under the Licensing Bill the separate system for authorisations for qualifying clubs will continue through the new club premises certificate. The Regulatory Impact Assessment that accompanies the Bill states that there are currently just over 22,000 registered clubs.

Registered clubs are not currently completely exempt from the need for permission to have live entertainment. They need a certificate of suitability from the local authority and a special hours certificate from the magistrates if they currently wish to provide entertainment for extended hours.

Qualifying clubs will be required to obtain authorisation to provide regulated entertainment under the Bill, this is to ensure that the activity is carried on in accordance with the requirements necessary to promote the licensing objectives: the prevention of crime and disorder; public safety; the prevention of public nuisance; and the protection of children from harm.

The Government estimate that under the provisions of the Licensing Bill an application for a club premises certificate would cost between £100 and £500 with an annual charge of between £50 and £150 to maintain a revenue stream and cover continuing inspection and enforcement. It will cost no more, in terms of time or money, to apply for a certificate permitting the sale of alcohol and the provision of regulated entertainment than it would to apply for one permitting the sale of alcohol only. The Licensing Bill will not, therefore, impose additional costs for clubs. No specific impact assessment was carried out on not for profit sports clubs. The Regulatory Impact Assessment that accompanies the Bill estimates that voluntary associations and other non-profit making bodies would save around £150 million over the first 10 years of operation.

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she intends to reply to the letter to her dated 20 December from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton, with regard to Mr. G. Davies. [94698]

Tessa Jowell: I wrote to my right hon. Friend on 10 February 2003.

EU Intercultural Understanding

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the programmes and schemes funded by her Department aimed at enhancing inter-cultural understanding among EU member states. [97897]

Mr. Caborn: The Department does not contribute directly to any EU-funded programme or scheme aimed at enhancing inter-cultural understanding or co-operation among EU member states. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer holds responsibility for the United Kingdom's contribution to the EC Budget, and from this budget the following programmes are funded:

Culture 2000, which aims to foster and fund cooperation between artistic and cultural organisations and projects within the European Union and the Candidate Countries;

Media Plus, the aim of which is to strengthen the competitiveness of the European audiovisual industry by training of professionals, development of production projects, and distribution and promotion of cinematographic works and audiovisual programmes throughout the EU and candidate countries.

Departmental Budgets

Mr. Roger Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what the combined allocated budgets are for her Department's non-departmental public bodies in *(a)* 2003–04, *(b)* 2004–05 and *(c)* 2005–06; [97527]

(2) what the allocated budgets are for each of her Department's executive agencies in *(a)* 2003–04, *(b)* 2004–05 and *(c)* 2005–06. [97525]

Dr. Howells: Details of allocated budgets up to 2005–06 will be published in the spring 2003 departmental report. The information will include how budgets are allocated to deliver the Department's functions and objectives.

Tourism Industry

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans are in place to compensate for the fall in foreign visitors to the UK since *(a)* 11 September 2001 and *(b)* the Bali terrorist attacks. [97927]

Dr. Howells: In April 2002, the British Tourist Authority launched 'Only in Britain, Only in 2002', a campaign to promote Britain in our seven biggest overseas markets. It was funded by £20 million from the Government and over £5 million in cash contributions from the industry, and featured extensive television, radio and press advertising. In addition, BTA offices around the world continue to undertake a full range of marketing and promotional activities, including consumer, travel trade and press liaison work.

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps have been taken to increase the numbers of North American tourists to the UK since September 2001. [97926]

Dr. Howells: In April 2002, the British Tourist Authority launched 'Only in Britain, Only in 2002', a campaign to promote Britain in our seven biggest overseas markets, including the USA and Canada. The BTA continues to build on positive campaign feedback in North America and undertakes a full range of marketing and promotional activities, including consumer, travel trade and press liaison work.

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of the effect military action in Iraq will have on the UK tourism industry. [97932]

Dr. Howells: No decision has been taken on military action and it is not possible to make accurate predictions of any impact on the tourism industry. Some overseas visitors might be more reluctant to travel, but more British people might choose to holiday in the UK. We are working closely with the British Tourist Authority and the tourism industry to share information and to ensure that clear and consistent messages are provided to our potential overseas visitors.

Lake Windermere

Kate Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of the likely impact on sport and recreation of the introduction of a 10 mile per hour speed limit on Lake Windermere. [98074]

Mr. Caborn: This Department has made no such assessment. Sport England gave evidence to the inquiry into the Lake Windermere byelaws, stating that in their view a speed reduction would affect water sports, specifically water skiing.

Kate Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how the increase in participation targets set out in the Government's Game Plan will be affected by the speed limit restrictions for Lake Windermere. [98075]

Mr. Caborn: We do not expect the speed limit restrictions for Lake Windermere to have any significant effect on the increase in participation targets set out in Game Plan.

Kate Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what alternative venues have been sought by Sport England to accommodate those affected by the introduction of the Navigation Bye Law 1992 at Lake Windermere. [98077]

Mr. Caborn: During the inquiry into the implementation of the Navigation Bye Laws at Lake Windermere, Sport England along with the British Water Ski Federation considered the issue of the displacement of motorised water sports from the Lake. Sport England and the British Water Ski Federation continue to work together with those affected by the Byelaws to negotiate access to suitable areas of water for the continuation of these sports.

Neither the Government nor Sport England would seek to impose specific alternative venues on those affected by the Navigation Byelaws on Lake Windermere. We believe it is for individuals to find convenient sites that will enable them to pursue water skiing and the other motorised water sports that will be affected by the Byelaws.

Olympic Bid

Joyce Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of the consequences for the existing planned levels of public expenditure on investment in *(a)* Greater London and *(b)* each English region of an Olympic bid. [98158]

Tessa Jowell: We do not expect planned levels of public investment region by region to be affected in the course of any Olympic bid, the outcome of which would be known by July 2005.

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what government funds have been spent on the proposed bid to hold the Olympics of 2012. [97929]

Tessa Jowell: In addition to normal running costs, my Department has incurred extra costs, currently forecast at £251,828 including VAT, relating to consideration of a bid to host the Olympic Games in London 2012.

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport whether the proposed increase in council tax to fund the 2012 Olympic bid and event will apply only to residents of London. [97931]

Tessa Jowell: There are no plans to fund the bidding or staging of the 2012 Olympic Games through an increase in council tax for residents outside London.

Public Entertainment Outlets

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what requirement is made of public entertainment outlets to ensure that first aid treatment is available during opening hours; and if she will make a statement. [98007]

Dr. Howells: Public entertainment licensing law provides that the local authority may impose any terms, conditions or restrictions that they consider necessary to ensure the safety of people at the premises. A requirement for there to be first aid equipment on the premises and members of staff trained in its use is therefore common. The application of licence conditions does not in any way replace or reduce the underlying statutory duty of employers or self-employed persons to comply with the requirements of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 and any associated regulations and codes of practice. Employers and self-employed persons are required to assess the risks to their workers and any others (e.g. members of the public) who may be affected by their business so as to identify what measures are needed to avoid or control the risks. Accordingly, the businesses would ideally need to provide first aid equipment on their premises, in working order, and at least one member of staff trained in its use.

Regional Newspapers

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations she has received on the impact of the Communications Bill on regional newspapers. [98063]

Dr. Howells: We have received a number of representations on this subject, many from editors of newspapers owned by Johnston Press plc. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has also discussed the subject with newspaper proprietors and the Newspaper Society.

Terrestrial Television

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what her policy is on whether terrestrial television stations should be protected from ownership by corporations with a substantial stake in the national newspaper market. [97867]

Dr. Howells: Our policy is to prevent joint ownership of a substantial share of the newspaper market and a substantial part of Channel 3, the only commercial public service broadcaster that currently has universal access to a mass audience. We believe this would represent an unacceptable concentration of influence.

The Communications Bill is therefore retaining restrictions on newspaper proprietors holding Channel 3 licences. The rules in the Bill are as follows:

No one controlling more than 20 per cent. of the national newspaper market may hold any licence for Channel 3;

No one who runs a national newspaper with more than a 20 per cent. share of the total national market share may hold more than a 20 per cent. stake in any Channel 3 company;

No Channel 3 licence holder may be a participant with more than a 20 per cent. interest in a body which runs a national newspaper controlling 20 per cent. of the national market;

A company in which such a newspaper proprietor holds more than a 20 per cent. share cannot itself hold more than a 20 per cent. share in such a service.

There is also a parallel local rule so that:

> No one may own a Channel 3 licence if he runs local newspapers which together have more than 20 per cent. of the local market share in the coverage area of the service.

We believe that these new rules will allow more freedoms for Channel 3 whilst at the same time safeguarding against substantial joint ownership of the newspaper market and Channel 3. We believe that there are less grounds for concern about the cross-ownership of Channel 5 by a large newspaper group, as it has a relatively small audience, does not reach the whole UK population and has fewer public service commitments than ITV. Were the nature of the service to change, however, and its audience share increase under new ownership, it will be possible to alter the public service obligations of the Channel 5 licence, and to introduce a nominated news provider system.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what her Department is doing to encourage a pluralistic media culture, with particular reference to terrestrial television channels. [97868]

Dr. Howells: The Communications Bill ensures that rules will be retained to safeguard democratic debate at national, regional and local level. In particular, there will be limits on the joint-ownership of newspapers and ITV. Newspapers are the most editorially influential mass medium, and television is people's most trusted source of information. Joint-ownership of a substantial share of the newspaper market and a substantial part of Channel 3, the only commercial public service broadcaster that currently has universal access to a mass audience, would represent an unacceptable concentration of influence. Therefore, no one owning a regional Channel 3 licence may own more than 20 per cent. of the local/regional newspaper market in the same region.

We believe that there are less grounds for concern about the cross-ownership of Channel 5 by a large newspaper group, as it has a relatively small audience, does not reach the whole UK population and has fewer public service commitments than ITV. Were the nature of the service to change, however, and its audience share increase under new ownership, it will be possible to alter the public service obligations of the Channel 5 licence, and to introduce a nominated news provider system.

The existence of the BBC and Channel 4 will ensure that there are at least three separately controlled free-to-air public service TV broadcasters, in addition to the expanding range of digital channels.

There will also be a scheme to protect the range of voices that exist in the local media. Newspaper and television owners will be subject to local ownership rules that will ensure the existence of at least three local or regional commercial media voices (in TV, radio and newspapers) in most areas.

MINISTER FOR WOMEN

Child Care

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Minister for Women what assessment she has made of access to child care for women. [97716]

Ms Hewitt: Various assessments have been made of access to child care for women. Access to child care was fully explored in the Repeat Study of Parents' Demand for Childcare, focusing on working mothers and non-working mothers (including single mothers). Aspects of access to child care investigated included the role of child care, child care arrangements and difficulties with child care. The issue of access to child care for parents, including mothers was investigated in the 'Fifth Survey of Parents of Three and Four Year Old Children and Their Use of Early Years Services'. The survey included the amount of information available to guide their choices, the quality of education provided by their main provider and the quality of nursery education and child care provided by local providers.

My Department has also included questions on child care in this year's Work-Life Balance surveys of employers and employees. We expect to have the findings this summer. The Women and Equality Unit have also commissioned research into women's decision-making about child care, in relation to participation in the labour market, involving minority ethnic women in particular. The findings of this research will also be available in the summer.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Broadband

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentage of broadband telecoms is controlled by BT outside cable franchise areas. [97235]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 11 February 2003]:* According to the Oftel Internet and Broadband Brief for January 2003, cable television services were available to 13.3 million homes (over 53 per cent. of households in UK) at the end of December 2002. Broadband services are also available over ADSL, fixed wireless and satellite. These were available respectively to 63 per cent., 12 per cent. and 100 per cent. of UK households. BT's share of the total retail broadband market is some 22 per cent. We have made no specific analysis of the UK market without areas covered by cable television networks.

Mr. David: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what regional boundaries are being used for the allocation of 3.4 GHz wireless broadband licences. [98168]

Mr. Timms: The Wireless Telegraphy (Public Fixed Wireless Access Licences), Regulations 2002 S.I. No. 1911, which came into force on 12 August 2002, provide for the award of 15 Public Fixed Wireless Access (PFWA) regional licences. There are seven metropolitan and seven provincial licence regions for Scotland Wales and England and one provincial licence for Northern Ireland.

The regions are:

Central Scotland (Metropolitan)
Greater London (Metropolitan)
Midlands (Metropolitan)
Northern (Metropolitan)
Severnside (Metropolitan)
South Coast (Metropolitan)
Tyne-Tees (Metropolitan)
Midlands and Mid Wales (Provincial)
Northern Ireland (Provincial)
North of England (Provincial)
North West, Yorkshire and North Wales (Provincial)
Scotland (Provincial)
South East (Provincial)
Southern (Provincial)
South West and South Wales (Provincial)

I have placed a copy of the map and the post code details of these in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. David: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what consultation has taken place with the National Assembly for Wales on the allocation of 3.4 GHz wireless broadband licences. [98169]

Mr. Timms: Consultation on the allocation of 3.4 GHz public fixed wireless access (PFWA) licences began on 19 December 2000, when the Radiocommunications Agency ("RA"), on behalf of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry ("SoS"), published a consultative document entitled 3.4 and 10 GHz: Scenarios for Spectrum Packaging and Delivery ("the December Consultation Document"). This Consultation Document presented a number of scenarios for packaging and delivering licences to establish and use stations and apparatus for wireless telegraphy in the 3.4 GHz and 10 GHz bands for the provision of Fixed Wireless Access services ("FWA") (referred to in this paper as "spectrum licences", "licences" or "FWA licences").

Following a detailed review of the responses to the December Consultation Document and the completion of further technical studies in the 3.4 GHz and 10 GHz bands a further consultation document, "PFWA: Proposal by the RA to package and deliver licences at 3.4GHz", published in April 2002, set out the proposal to award spectrum licences for the 3.4 GHz band.

Both consultations were carried out nationally and all Government Departments and devolved Administrations were invited, along with industry and the public, to be involved and comment on the proposals. Among the many comments received and meetings held, RA received input and held discussions with officials of the National Assembly for Wales on numerous occasions.

Burma

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which UK banks have provided loans to the *(a)* regime in and *(b)* state owned industries in Burma, in the past two financial years. [97266]

Ms Hewitt: HMG's policy is not to encourage UK companies to trade or invest in Burma in view of the current political and human rights situation there. HMG does not have access to comprehensive information kept by UK banks in their overseas dealings. However we are not aware of any UK bank offering banking services in Burma.

Capita

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry pursuant to his answer of 9 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 6W, on Capita, if he will give the *(a)* start and finish date, *(b)* value, *(c)* evaluation mechanism for successful delivery and *(d)* penalty charges for failure to deliver for each contract; whether penalty charges have been incurred; what the service level agreements were; what the contract numbers were; and if he will make a statement. [97338]

Ms Hewitt: This information is not held centrally and can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Coal Industry (Social Welfare Organisation)

Mr. David: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress is being made in providing funds for the Coal Industry Social Welfare Organisation to continue its work. [98167]

Mr. Wilson: The Department has offered to provide funding of £200,000 per year for three years for those of CISWO's activities which specifically relate to DTI responsibilities such as the management of Miners' Welfare trusts and an extensive property portfolio.

Computer Crime

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many cases of computer *(a)* hacking, *(b)* fraud and *(c)* theft her Department recorded in 2001–02; and on how many occasions computer systems have been illegally accessed by computer hackers (i) within and (ii) outside her Department. [97563]

Ms Hewitt: The number of cases of computer hacking detected was zero in Financial Year 2001–02 and there were no recorded instances of DTI computer systems being accessed illegally from within or outside for the same period.

There were no recorded cases of computer fraud during Financial Year 2001–02.

The number of cases of computer theft detected was 31 in Financial Year 2001–02. Of these, 28 were perpetrated by insiders and the remainder by persons outside the Department. Some of these 31 instances involved departmental assets but others related to assets owned by PFI partners, contractor staff or individuals.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what value for money assessment she has made of expenditure by her Department and its agencies; and if she will make a statement; [95807]

(2) what assessment she has made of the value for money of expenditure on *(a)* ACAS, *(b)* the Patent Office and *(c)* British Trade International; and if she will make a statement. [95810]

Ms Hewitt: Value for money assessment of expenditure is determined by whether the Department meets its Public Service Agreement targets alongside specific operational targets for the central Department, its agencies and ACAS, which is a non-departmental public body. Achievement against these targets is published annually in the Department's annual expenditure plans report (EPR) and in individual agency's own annual reports and accounts. The Department's EPR for 2003–04 to 2004–05 is due to be published in April 2003. British Trade International produces a separate EPR which is also due to be published in April 2003. Major new proposals for expenditure are subject to appraisal as well as monitoring and evaluation. Evaluations are published on the DTI's website at www.dti.gov.uk/about/evaluation/

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what her estimate is of her Department's direct financial support for the construction industry in each year from 1990–91 to 2004–05 (planned); and if she will make a statement; [95813]

(2) what her estimate is of the cost to her Department of the Strategic Forum for Construction in 2002–03; and if she will make a statement. [95814]

Mr. Wilson: Over the period 1990–91 to 2000–01, responsibility for the construction industry rested with the former Department of the Environment and then the former Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions. Expenditure over this period related to responsibilities which are now divided between the Department of Trade and Industry, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and British Trade International. The figures are:

Year	*£ million*
1990–91	20.0
1991–92	23.9
1992–93	25.3
1993–94	26.2
1994–95	26.9
1995–96	27.6
1996–97	27.5
1997–98	27.4
1998–99	28.3
1999–2000	25.4
2000–01	26.7

Figures for the following two years, covering the Department of Trade and Industry's expenditure only, are:

Year	*£ million*
2001–02	22.2
2002–03	21.5

Final allocations have not yet been made for 2003–04 or 2004–05; as the Secretary of State has announced, the Department is conducting a major review of all its business support, including that for the construction sector. However, we expect the budget for construction next year to be close to that for this year.

In addition to hosting and administering the meetings of the Strategic Forum for Construction during the development of its report, "Accelerating Change", the Department supported the Forum's work financially by funding the development, publication and launch of the report, the consultation process, which preceded it, and the dissemination of its conclusions. The Department's total expenditure in support of the Strategic Forum in 2002–03 is expected to be approximately £110,000.

Following the launch of "Accelerating Change" on 12 September 2002, day to day responsibility for the administration of the Strategic Forum passed from the Department to the construction industry. Officials and I in the Department continue to work closely with the Forum, its members and its new chairman, Peter Rogers. We will continue to identify areas where financial support from Government will allow the Forum to meet its aim of implementing the "Accelerating Change" proposals.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her estimate is of expenditure on ACAS in each year from 1990–91 to 2004–05 (planned); and if she will make a statement. [95823]

Ms Hewitt: Information covering expenditure on ACAS is available in DTI's and prior to 1995 the Employment Department's expenditure plans. All documents are available in the Libraries of the House. The estimate for 2004–05 will be published shortly in my Department's expenditure plans report for 2003–04 to 2004–05.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her estimate is of total spending on the Export Credits Guarantee Department in each year from 1990–91 to 2004–05 (planned); and if she will make a statement. [95829]

Ms Hewitt: The following table shows ECGD net operating income or expenditure (Column 1), voted payments or contributions on its trading operations (Column 2) and voted loan advances or income in respect of refinancing of loans underwritten (Column 3). Forecasts for 2004–05 have not been prepared at this stage.

£000

Year	*Net operating income (expenditure) Column 1*	*Trading operations—contribution to consolidated fund/ (voted payments) Column 2*	*Loan refinancing—(voted payments)/ repayments Column 3*
1990–91	(649,500)	(504,631)	0
1991–92	169,900	(413,755)	0
1992–93	570,100	(137,427)	0
1993–94	407,500	396,860	0
1994–95	208,200	149,612	0
1995–96	342,400	496,066	0
1996–97	1,032,300	565,985	0
1997–98	(514,300)	464,684	0
1998–99	136,900	416,429	(263,000)
1999–2000	19,029	228,976	(979,100)
2000–01	204,298	314,798	(1,345,356)
2001–02	132,113	72,323	(388,740)
2002–03[1]	(58,700)	148,315	(557,000)
2003–04[1]	101,000	105,736	405,000

[1] Estimate

Departmental Initiatives

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many *(a)* initiatives, *(b)* action programmes, *(c)* campaigns and *(d)* schemes are being run by her Department and its agencies; if she will list each of these with its annual cost; and if she will make a statement. [95816]

Ms Hewitt: The Department's annual expenditure plans report contains information on the Department's activities and expenditure, including summary information on the work of DTI's agencies. Last year's report was published in June 2002 (Cm 5416) and can be found in the Libraries of the House. Next year's, which will cover 2003–04 to 2005–06, is due to be published in April. In addition, each agency publishes more detailed information on its work in its own annual report and accounts.

Domestic Violence

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she is taking to raise awareness in the workplace of domestic violence. [97753]

Alan Johnson: Often the workplace can be a place of safety for women. They may confide in their colleagues about their experiences. It is a place where others can notice what is going on, and where there is an opportunity to help women to access the support they can so desperately need.

The TUC has recently published a workplace guide. This sets out guidance on how to provide a workplace policy on domestic violence, why it is an issue that matters in the workplace, and useful information contacts.

Women's Aid, in association with Opportunity Now, are launching a Good Practice Guide for Employers on Domestic Violence on 2 April 2003.

The Women and Equality Unit has been closely involved with both these initiatives.

Electricity (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many clauses were *(a)* fully, *(b)* partially and *(c)* not debated during the Committee Stage of the Electricity (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill. [97994]

Mr. Wilson: The proceedings in Committee on 6 February, *Official Report*, columns 468–529, allowed the House to debate a number of amendments tabled by the hon. Member and the hon. Members for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) and Hazel Grove (Mr. Stunell).

Power Station Emissions

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her assessment is of the effectiveness of emissions scrubbers in removing mercury pollutants from power station emissions. [97522]

Mr. Wilson: There are a number of factors which affect the effectiveness of scrubbers removing mercury emissions. Around 40–60 per cent. of the mercury produced during coal combustion is in the elemental vapour form and the type of wet scrubbers used on coal-fired plant (eg flue gas desulphurisation (FGD) used for sulphur dioxide control) are not effective in removing this form of mercury from the flue gas. Of the remaining mercury, which is in an oxidised form, wet emissions scrubbers have been shown to be effective. In summary, it is estimated that about 50 per cent. of mercury produced is removed by wet scrubbers. There is no information on dry scrubbers although there is research being carried out on this.

A study on the monitoring and control of trace elements from coal-fired power generation is about to be let within the DTI's Cleaner Coal Technology Programme and this will include mercury emissions, their measurement, and their effects, and will cover the emerging legislative and policy issues.

Fireworks Bill

Mr. Wood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the Government's policy is on the Fireworks Bill introduced by the hon. Member for Hamilton South. [97653]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I announced that the Government will be supporting my hon. Friend's Bill on fireworks as published on 13 February, which will provide new powers to control the misuse of fireworks.

Fraud and Theft

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much money has been lost by her Department and its agencies and non-departmental public bodies through *(a)* fraud and *(b)* theft for each year since 1996–97. [92473]

Ms Hewitt: The estimated cost of theft and fraud to the Department and its agencies is as follows.

Theft	*DTI (£)*	*Agencies (£)*
1998	11,267	[1]—
1999	10,985	[1]—
2000	5,870	[1]—
2001	18,782	[1]—
2002	65,131	23,133

[1] Not available

Information on thefts and losses in agencies is not normally held centrally in the DTI and it was not possible to identify costs for years before 2002 without incurring disproportionate cost. The DTI does not hold information on thefts in NDPBs.

Heritage Assets

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what sales of heritage assets and antique assets have been made by her Department since May 1997; and if she will list such assets; and if she will estimate the total sales proceeds. [92399]

Ms Hewitt: The Department of Trade and Industry has not disposed of any heritage assets or antique assets since May 1997.

Manufacturing (Portsmouth)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many and what percentage of the work force in Portsmouth *(a)* were employed in 1997 and *(b)* are employed in the manufacturing industry; and if she will make a statement. [98098]

Alan Johnson: In 1997 it was estimated that some 13,400 people, 13.6 per cent. of the work force were employed in the manufacturing sector in Portsmouth.

In 2001, the latest date for which figures are available it was estimated that some 11,300 people, 11.4 per cent. of the work force were employed in the manufacturing sector in Portsmouth.

Ofgem

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the qualifications of the Ofgem Board with responsibility for environmental matters. [86190]

Mr. Wilson: The Gas and Electricity Markets Authority—the "board" for the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets—shares collective responsibility for decisions. I hope to make an announcement shortly of the results of an open competition to find an additional non-executive member of the Authority with particular environmental expertise.

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry pursuant to her answer of 27 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 595W, if she will list the independent interview panel members, with their qualifications, for *(a)* recent appointments of non-executive members of the Ofgem Board and *(b)* the appointment of the Chair of Ofgem; and if she will list all the members of the interview panels for (i) the appointment of non-executive members of the Ofgem Board in each of the last three years and (ii) those members of the interview panel for the appointment of the Chair of Ofgem. [94528]

Mr. Wilson: The interview panels for the initial appointments of non-executive members to the Authority in 2000 comprised two senior civil servants, Anna Walker and Neil Hirst, and independent members John Shrigley (Civil Service Commissioner) and Philip Sellers (businessman and Chairman of the Audit Board for DTI). For subsequent non-executive appointments, Joan MacNaughton (Director General, Energy, DTI) replaced Anna Walker on the interview panel.

The 1998 interview panel for the post of Director General of Gas Supply and Director General of Electricity Supply (and Chairman-designate of the Gas and Electricity Markets Authority) comprised three senior civil servants, Jeffrey Preston, Anna Walker, and Paul Salvidge, and Sir Bryan Nicholson (Chairman of BUPA) and Don Cruickshank (then Director General of Telecommunications).

Online Sales/Purchases

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what *(a)* products, *(b)* goods and *(c)* services were (i) bought and (ii) sold online by her Department in each of the last five years. [97459]

Ms Hewitt: This information is not held centrally and can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Petrol Stations

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many retail petrol filling stations there are in the UK; and how many there were in *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* 1997. [98046]

Mr. Wilson: The Institute of Petroleum's (IP) annual "Retail Survey 2001" has provided the following data on the number of retail petrol filling stations in the UK.

Number of retail petrol stations in the UK

End of 1997	*End of 2000*	*End of 2002*
14,824	13,043	Yet to be published

Post Office Services

Kate Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has received about the ease of access to information about the Post Office bank account. [97961]

Mr. Timms: DTI Ministers and officials regularly receive representations from a wide range of people and organisations about universal banking service, including the Post Office card account.

There will be post office access to a range of bank accounts. This will enable all those who wish to do so to continue to be able to collect their benefits in cash at post offices.

Our aim is that people should be able to choose the option that suits them best. Information about all the options is being supplied to benefit, pension and tax credit customers by the Department for Work and Pensions and the Inland Revenue. Post Office Ltd. will also be making its own material available to customers.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the provision of banking services by sub-post offices in North Yorkshire from 1 April. [98058]

Mr. Timms: Good progress continues to be made on universal banking services in advance of the migration of benefit payments to ACT. Post Office Ltd. currently provides information to customers on banking arrangements at Post Office branches. There will be post office access to a range of bank accounts. This will enable all those who wish to do so to continue to be able to collect their benefits in cash at post offices.

The Government and Post Office Ltd. are working together to ensure that frontline staff have all the information they need to answer any questions from customers about banking facilities in Post Office branches.

Post Office Ltd. has now sent three pieces of communication to all Post Office branches: a leaflet entitled "Your essential guide to your customers' banking options" to explain to sub-postmasters all the options available to customers; a customer child benefit leaflet for issue to customers; and a Banking Information Pack.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what promotion her Department has undertaken of the *(a)* Post Office Card Account and *(b)* high street banking options for receipt of benefits, pension payments and tax credits; and what discussions she has had on such promotion with the other Departments involved in the services covered by these methods. [97866]

Mr. Timms: There will be post office access to a range of bank accounts. This will enable all those who wish to do so to continue to be able to collect their benefits in cash at post offices. Information about all the options is being supplied to benefit, pension and tax credit customers by the Department for Work and Pensions and the Inland Revenue. Post Office Ltd. will also be making its own material available to customers.

Ministers and officials have regular contact with all the Departments involved.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has had with the Post Office to ensure that they will be able to cope with the effect on income of recipients choosing to pick up their benefits from cash machines or through banks without closures. [97865]

Mr. Timms: Ministers and officials have regular contact with Post Office Ltd. The Post Office's strategy is to respond to the Direct Payment with a range of banking and other services. How the migration of benefit payments affects the revenue of post offices will depend on a number of factors, not least how benefit recipients and other post office customers respond to change. In the meantime the Government have made a firm commitment to prevent avoidable rural closures, in the first instance to 2006; and we are investing very substantial sums in supporting the network through the challenges ahead—some £2 billion in total over the next five years.

A carefully planned programme of reductions in the number of urban post offices commenced recently.

Departmental Buildings

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether a building research establishment environmental assessment method document has been prepared for the refurbishment of *(a)* Elizabeth House, *(b)* 1 Victoria Street and *(c)* 10 Victoria Street. [96414]

Ms Hewitt: A BREEAM assessment was undertaken as part of the 1995–96 major refurbishment project at 1 Victoria Street; it achieved a "very good" rating. The extent of works, at 10 Victoria Street in 1996, and at Elizabeth House in 2002, was not regarded as substantial refurbishment and a BREEAM assessment was not deemed appropriate.

In 1999 the Department's Estates and Facilities Management Directorate was accredited to International Standard for Environmental Management System (ISO 14001), which provides the framework within which all the Department's refurbishment projects, including that at Elizabeth House, are now carried out.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans there are for an extension of the Renewables Obligation to include Coal Mine Methane. [95438]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 6 February 2003]:* The Government consider that extending the Renewables Obligation to include Coal Mine Methane would not be consistent with the objectives of the Obligation, since Coal Mine Methane is, self-evidently, not a renewable.

However, we are very supportive of this industry and are keen to help it expand so that it can continue to reduce emissions throughout the UK. We have already demonstrated this support through our securing exemption from the Climate Change Levy for electricity generated from CMM in last year's budget, and this is currently being cleared with the European Commission.

Scottish Parliamentary Elections

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the estimated total cost is to the Post Office of providing free delivery of party election literature during the forthcoming Scottish Parliamentary elections. [95608]

Mr. Timms: Cost is a matter that falls within the day-to-day responsibility of Royal Mail Group plc and I have therefore asked the Chairman to reply direct to the hon. Member.

Selective Financial Assistance

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much selective financial assistance was given to companies outside the assisted areas in each year between 1989–90 and 2001–02; and what her estimate is for the current fiscal year *(a)* in cash terms and *(b)* at constant 2001–02 prices. [97242]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 12 February 2003]:* Details of the Department's financial assistance to companies outside the assisted areas can be obtained in the annual Industrial Development Act reports which are available in the House of Commons Library. A number of national programmes have assisted companies both within and outside assisted areas but a breakdown of this expenditure could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Data for Scotland and Wales can be obtained from the Scottish Executive and the National Assembly for Wales respectively.

Supermarkets

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps the Director General of Fair Trading has taken, and what arrangements the Director General has in place, to monitor the compliance with and effectiveness of the Supermarket Code of Practice; whether the arrangements for monitoring have changed since the publication of the Government's strategy for Sustainable Farming and Food; and if she will make a statement. [97588]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 12 February 2003]:* The Office of Fair Trading (OFT) visited relevant trade bodies to explain how the Code of Practice would work,

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and to encourage them to bring any problems to the attention of the OFT. The Code also provides for the independent dispute mediator to report annually to the Director General of Fair Trading (DGFT) on his or her activities, and to supply information requested by the DGFT concerning individual cases where he or she is considering taking action.

In the context of the Government's strategy on Sustainable Farming and Food, the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) has proposed that relevant trade bodies advise it at six-monthly intervals on the operation of the Code. The OFT will publish an annual report on how the Code has been working, particularly in relation to dispute resolution. The OFT will soon be beginning a review of the Code in preparation for its first annual report and will be contacting all interested trade bodies and the supermarkets to obtain views on the Code's operation.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether the Supermarket Code of Practice on Supermarkets' Dealings with Suppliers applies to the supermarkets' trading relationships with farmers and others who supply the supermarkets indirectly through an intermediary; and if she will make a statement. [97589]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 12 February 2003]:* The Code defines a supplier as any person actually or potentially carrying on business in the supply of groceries to any of the four supermarkets which have given statutory undertakings to abide by the Code, namely Asda, Tesco, Sainsburys and Safeway. This includes any supplier who acts as principal in providing groceries to supermarkets either direct or through an agent. However, this does not include suppliers that sell goods to an intermediary which then sells on to a supermarket.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) how many times the services of a mediator have been offered by supermarkets under paragraph 27 of the Code of Practice on Supermarkets' Dealings with Suppliers; and if she will make a statement; [97590]

(2) how many disputes the Director General of Fair Trading has been notified of under paragraph 28 of the Code of Practice on Supermarkets' Dealings with Suppliers; if she will place a copy of information that has been supplied to the Director General of Fair Trading in accordance with provisions of paragraphs 30*(a)* and 30*(b)* of the Code of Practice in the Library; and if she will make a statement. [97591]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answers 12 February 2003]:* The dispute resolution procedures, under paragraph 28 of the Code of Practice, have so far not been invoked. To date, the supermarkets have not been called upon to offer the services of a independent mediator.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many submissions were received by the Office of Fair Trading in connection with the Tesco acquisition of T&S; how many of these were from third parties raising concerns about the impact on their business as a result of the proposed acquisition; if she will place a copy of the submissions in the Library; and if she will make a statement. [97587]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 12 February 2003]:* The Office of Fair Trading (OFT) received 83 submissions in connection with the proposed acquisition by Tesco PLC of T&S Stores PLC, of which 72 were from third parties raising concerns about possible impacts on their business. It is strict OFT policy to observe confidentiality in all aspects of its operation and, as part of this, the identity of those third parties making representations is not made public. It would not, therefore, be appropriate to place a copy of the submissions in the Library.

The OFT, as an independent competition authority, conducted an inquiry into the proposed merger, focusing on the effects of the merger on competition. It recommended that the merger should not be referred to the Competition Commission for an in-depth inquiry. In line with the Government's policy of accepting the advice of the OFT on merger references in all bar exceptional circumstances, on 17 December 2002 I announced that I would not make a reference in this case.

United Kingdom Accreditation Service

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the legal status is of the Memorandum of Understanding between her and the United Kingdom Accreditation Service. [97201]

Ms Hewitt: Article 15 of the Memorandum of Understanding with the United Kingdom Accreditation Service clearly states that this memorandum does not create any rights, liabilities or obligations which would have binding effect in law.

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what she is doing to encourage conformity assessment bodies to seek accreditation from the United Kingdom Accreditation Service, pursuant to Article 2 of the Memorandum of Understanding between her and the United Kingdom Accreditation Service, including those upon whose services the Government relies for *(a)* procurement and *(b)* regulatory purposes. [97202]

Ms Hewitt: It is DTI policy to encourage all conformity assessment bodies to seek accreditation from the United Kingdom Accreditation Service wherever it is an option notwithstanding that accreditation is a voluntary and market driven activity. It does this: by ensuring that UKAS is operating effectively in accordance with its obligations in the DTI/UKAS Memorandum of Understanding; by helping UKAS to promote the benefits of UKAS accreditation through its Accreditation Awareness Campaign; and through regular contact with the conformity assessment community and other Government Departments. In their contacts with other Government Departments and other parts of DTI, whenever there is a requirement for conformity assessment, my officials encourage their colleagues to rely upon UKAS accredited conformity assessment.

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether the United Kingdom Accreditation Service is *(a)* a non-profit-distributing and *(b)* a non-profit making company. [97203]

Ms Hewitt: The United Kingdom Accreditation Service was established in 1995 as a private company limited by guarantee. While UKAS may make a profit, any that is made is not distributed but is channelled back into the company.

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps her Department takes to ensure that the United Kingdom Accreditation Service polices use of the national accreditation marks which feature the Royal Crown. [97204]

Ms Hewitt: The national accreditation marks are the property of my Department and are covered by a Licensing Agreement which licences the United Kingdom Accreditation Service to use the marks and to sub-licence them to accredited organisations. The Licensing Agreement requires UKAS to register the marks with the Trade Marks Registry and gives UKAS the responsibility for encouraging that the use of the national accreditation marks is in accordance with the requirements set down in the conditions for the use of national accreditation marks by UKAS and UKAS accredited organisations. UKAS assessors as part of the accreditation process ensure that the accredited bodies comply with the conditions and in turn, ensure that where such bodies confer the right to use the marks to their own customers, that the customers also comply. The obligations under the Licensing Agreement are also the subject of a periodic third-party audit. My officials are in regular contact with UKAS over a number of issues including the monitoring of the use of the marks as part of the oversight responsibilities of my Department.

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what financial support her Department provides to the United Kingdom Accreditation Service; and for what purpose. [97205]

Ms Hewitt: The United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS) is a private company and its core services are self-financed through the charging of fees to its direct customers. However, my Department has a three-year contract with UKAS to enable it to represent the United Kingdom in the international accreditation fora (European Co-operation for Accreditation, International Accreditation Forum and International Laboratory Accreditation Co-operation) so that it can play a major influencing role in the development of accreditation internationally. In addition, since November 2000, my Department has supported a UKAS Accreditation Awareness Campaign to help raise awareness to business and to other parts of government of the benefits of using UKAS accredited services. This campaign meets our own policy objective of encouraging businesses to use accredited conformity assessment wherever it is an option. DTI support covers 50 per cent. of the cost of certain elements of the campaign and is agreed on an annual basis.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Lake Windermere

Kate Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what implications the introduction of the Navigation By Law 1992 for Lake Windermere has for *(a)* other national parks and *(b)* access for sport and recreation. [98076]

Alun Michael: The byelaws deal with the particular circumstances applying on Lake Windermere. Government policy on recreation in national parks is set out in Circular 12/96, which enjoins national park authorities to promote the widest range of recreational opportunities while fully respecting the special qualities of the parks. The circular acknowledges that the intrusive nature of some recreational activities may unacceptably affect other people's enjoyment of these nationally important areas. No particular opportunities should be excluded from the parks as a matter of principle.

The byelaws are expected to cause fast power boating to cease on Lake Windermere, together with associated activities, of which waterskiing is the most popular. On the other hand more people may be attracted to engage in other water-based recreational pursuits when what has been seen as a fundamental problem of incompatibility between power boating and lower key activities has been solved.

Kate Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what consultations the Lake District National Park Authority has undertaken with *(a)* local recreational users, *(b)* businesses and *(c)* lake users from outside the national park on proposals to introduce a speed limit on Lake Windermere; [98079]

(2) what estimate she has made of *(a)* job losses and *(b)* loss of revenue at Lake Windermere arising from the application of the Navigation (Amendment) (No 2) Bylaw 1992 in 2005. [98078]

Alun Michael: Wide consultation and a careful examination of the implications was undertaken. The Lake District National Park Authority consulted over 50 organisations representing recreational and business interests both locally and nationally, before advertising proposals locally. The authority then considered all representations in response to the advertisement before making the byelaws that will introduce a speed limit.

The implications of the byelaws were examined in detail in 1996 at a public local inquiry held by an independent inspector. The issues examined included potential job losses and loss of revenue. The inspector concluded that the strong need for the speed limit had to be balanced against the possibility of some limited economic disruption. He found the overall balance clearly in favour of confirmation of the byelaws. In February 2000, after further views had been invited, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for the then Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions agreed with the inspector's conclusion. He observed that the tourist profile in the region might alter but that it was not clear whether this would result in a net economic loss or a gain.

The byelaws came into operation on 29 March 2000 and the Secretary of State has no role in their implementation. The five year lapse until the speed limit comes into effect in 2005 should allow businesses and people who engage in power boating and waterskiing to make alternative arrangements.

Sustainable Development

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will require Departments to produce *(a)* their own sustainable development strategies within a year and *(b)* annual reports showing what progress has been made in meeting sustainable development targets. [97270]

Mr. Meacher: Of the central Government Departments that report via the Sustainable Development in Government Initiative, three have formal sustainable strategies (Defra, DTI, DWP) 11 have policy statements or other arrangements to manage their sustainable development impacts (C&E, CO, CPS, DFID, DH, FCO, HMT, IR, LCD, MOD, ONS) four have strategies under development (DCMS, DFES, ECGD, HO). DfT and ODPM are considering their approaches in light of the Machinery of Government changes in May 2002. Where they are not doing so, we are encouraging them all to produce their own sustainable development strategies.

Progress by all Departments against cross-Government sustainable development targets is reported via the sustainable development in Government annual report. The first report was published in November 2002. Part A of the Framework for Sustainable Development on the Government Estate requires all Departments to identify their significant sustainable development impacts and review their public reporting arrangements. Departments are due to publish their revised reporting arrangements by April 2003.

Vehicle Emissions

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent estimate she has made of the impact on global warming of automotive emissions of one tonne to the atmosphere of *(a)* particulates, *(b)* fine particulates, *(c)* sulphur dioxide, *(d)* carbon dioxide, *(e)* benzene, *(f)* butadiene, *(g)* carbon monoxide and *(h)* oxides of nitrogen. [96834]

Mr. Meacher: The substances listed above all have some impact on global warming, but the effect is indirect in some cases. It is not possible to calculate the specific impact on global warming of one tonne of each of the above substances, as this amount is relatively small in comparison to emission values used for climate calculations.

(a) and *(b)* Large amounts of particles, known as aerosol, can either have a cooling effect on the climate by reflecting incoming solar radiation back out to space, or a warming effect, by absorbing radiation. Aerosols have a relatively short residence time in the atmosphere so their influence tends to be short-lived and regional in nature.

(c) Sulphur dioxide is an indirect greenhouse gas, as it takes part in atmospheric reactions that form products that effect the climate. These reactions include some that lead to the formation of sulphate aerosol, which tends to have a cooling effect on climate, and some leading to the formation of tropospheric ozone, which is a potent greenhouse gas.

(d) Carbon dioxide is the only direct greenhouse gas listed. It is the benchmark for determining the global warming potential (GWP) of other direct and indirect greenhouse gases and has a GWP of 1. Concentrations of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere are increasing at a rate unprecedented in at least the last 20,000 years.

(e) and *(f)* Benzene and butadiene are both Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs). They take part in atmospheric reactions related to the formation of tropospheric ozone, and act to increase levels of this greenhouse gas in the atmosphere.

(g) and *(h)* Nitrogen oxides (NOx) and carbon monoxide (CO) are indirect greenhouse gases. They take part in reactions that enhance the formation of tropospheric ozone and influence the lifetime of methane—the second most potent direct greenhouse gas—and other greenhouse gases.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the external costs of automotive emissions of one tonne to the atmosphere of *(a)* particulates, *(b)* fine particulates, *(c)* sulphur dioxide, *(d)* carbon dioxide, *(e)* benzene, *(f)* 1, 3 butadiene, *(g)* carbon monoxide and *(h)* oxides of nitrogen. [97250]

Mr. Meacher: Considerable research is in hand to improve the scientific and economic understanding of the health and environmental damages of air pollution. This work will provide important evidence on which policies will be further developed.

The Air Quality Strategy sets standards and objectives for particulates (PM10), sulphur dioxide, benzene, 1,3 butadiene, carbon monoxide and nitrogen dioxide to be reached between 2003 and 2010. The Government have not published formal estimates of the air quality external costs per tonne of automotive emissions. The external costs of a tonne of emission from a vehicle will vary according to the pollutant in question, the type of vehicle and fuel used, where the vehicle is emitting as well as many other factors.

A Government Economic Service working paper has suggested a range from £35/tC to £140/tC (with a best estimate of £70t/C) as illustrative of the global damage cost of carbon emissions. It also suggested that these figures should be raised in real terms by £1t/C per annum as the costs of climate change are likely to increase over time. These values are currently under review following recent advances in the academic literature, and general developments in the UK Government economic appraisal guidance (such as the new Treasury Green Book).

Agricultural Holdings

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent estimate she has made of the *(a)* minimum income, *(b)* minimum standard man day and *(c)* minimum whole time equivalents required to maintain a viable agricultural holding across all sectors. [96960]

Mr. Morley: No specific estimates of this type have been made as the level of income and labour required to maintain a viable agricultural holding is a matter for the individual farmer. An assessment was made of current and future business prospects for farming in analysis produced to accompany the launch of 'The Strategy for Sustainable Farming and Food'. This can be found at htto://www.defra.gov.uk/farm/sustain/newstrategy/econ/section1.pdf

Animal Welfare

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures have been introduced by the Government to improve the welfare of animals, with particular reference to enforcement measures. [97129]

Mr. Morley: The Government recognise the need to ensure that existing animal welfare legislation is effectively enforced to ensure compliance with the standards. Co-ordination of enforcement across the different enforcement agencies, such as the state veterinary service and local authorities is a priority task. We have for some time been investing resource to ensure development of closer working relationships between relevant bodies, through for example, regular liaison meetings.

The issue of animal welfare enforcement is one of the key issues under consideration in the new Animal Welfare Bill which will consolidate and modernise domestic and captive animal welfare legislation.

Bees

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans her Department has to increase funding for programmes aimed at preventing the spread of bee diseases. [97545]

Mr. Morley: The Department has no plans to increase its level of expenditure on the programme of measures that are undertaken to protect bee health in England.

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the health of the beekeeping industry in the UK. [97543]

Mr. Morley: Of the 44,000 beekeepers in the UK about 400 operate on a commercial basis. Since 1992, the greatest single challenge to beekeeping has been the need to control the parasitic mite, varroa, which was first detected in England in that year. With Government help, beekeepers generally have learned to apply good husbandry techniques to control this threat. The market for, and interest in, honey produced in the UK has received a boost as a result of the ban on imports of honey from China in early 2002.

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the environmental role played by honey bees in pollinating *(a)* orchards and *(b)* agricultural crops. [97544]

Mr. Morley: In July 2001, the Department received from ADAS Consulting Ltd. an independent economic policy evaluation of our bee health programme. The ADAS researchers noted in their findings the public good dimensions of bee health, in particular the benefits to society arising from pollination services, including commercial crops, domestic and wild plants. They estimated the value of pollination of commercial crops at around £120 million, with orchards accounting for £79 million and agricultural crops £21 million of this total respectively.

Biodiesel

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessments she has made on the impact of changes in duty for biodiesel on British agriculture. [97392]

Mr. Meacher: Biodiesel could offer an opportunity for diversification of agricultural activities and the development of new markets. Following the introduction of the reduction in duty by 20 pence per litre, compared to ultra-low sulphur diesel, in July 2002, we have yet to see biodiesel produced from British-grown oilseed rape. The duty cut is, however, already bringing forward production of biodiesel from used vegetable oil and over 60 forecourts in the UK are already retailing biodiesel. To develop biodiesel production from feedstocks from British agriculture, the return to farmers will need to be sufficient to compete with established food and animal feed markets which currently offer higher prices.

Capita

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to his answer of 9 January, *Official Report*, column 172W, on Capita, if he will list *(a)* each contract's number, *(b)* the value of each contract and *(c)* the length of each contract. [96756]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 11 February 2003]:* Detailed contract information in the format requested is not readily available and due to commercial confidentiality I am unable to give the value for each individual contract. However, I am able to provide a total value for contracts placed, together with the length of each contract. This information is provided in the table.

Contract	*Contract length*
Designing and Managing Building Projects	[1]5 years
Environment/Space Planning	2 Years
Criminal Records Bureau	10 years
HMP Blakenhurst Bid	1 year
Recruitment	1 year
IND Recruitment	1 year
Recruitment of General Managers	1 year
Conferences and Training	1 year
Provision of Human Resources Staff	[1]1 year
Finance related work	[1]1 year
Management Recruitment Scheme	6 months
Civil Service Short Answer Test	6 months
Multi-Disciplinary Term Commission Contract	3 years
Consultancy Support	1 year
Production of Purchase Manual	4 months
Efficiency Review	3 months
Quantum Project	1 year
Total value	£405,110,501

[1] Contract for which Capita was not the prime contractor.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs pursuant to her answer of 5 February, on Capita (ref 89967) if she will list for each of the contracts awarded by her Department to Capita since 1997 *(a)* the start and finish date of contract, *(b)* the value of contract, *(c)* the evaluation mechanism for successful delivery of contract, *(d)* the penalty charges for failure to deliver, *(e)* if penalty charges have been incurred, *(f)* the service level agreements and *(g)* the contract numbers; and if she will make a statement. [97473]

Alun Michael: Defra came into being on 8 June 2001. The information can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Foot and Mouth Disease

Diana Organ: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many carcases were disposed of at Cleeve Farm, Westbury-on-Severn, Gloucestershire in the last five years. [96231]

Mr. Morley: According to our records, 2,725 carcases were disposed of at Cleeve Farm, Westbury-on-Severn on a series of pyres. This figure comprises 337 carcases originating from Cleeve Farm and 2,388 carcases subsequently brought onto the site for disposal, from surrounding farms.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether the burning of carcases of cattle over five years old on the Hemscott Hill site precludes its use for animal grazing this year; and if she will publish the risk assessment carried out into the site by Dr. Kirkup, the Regional Director of Public Health. [95274]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 10 February 2003]:* Veterinary advice confirms that the burning of carcases of cattle over five years old at the Hemscott Hill mass pyre site does not preclude its use for animal grazing this year.

The ADAS environmental risk assessment and supporting material, together with a statement by the Regional Director of Public Health, North East, Dr. Kirkup, has been given to Castle Morpeth borough council, the Food Standards Agency and the local liaison committee. I am arranging for a copy of this material to be sent to the right hon. Member.

Cetaceans

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what plans the Government have to reduce the number of fishing nets which cause harm to dolphins; [96919]

(2) what steps the Government are taking to protect dolphins and porpoises in the British Isles. [96920]

Mr. Morley: Action to address the issue of dolphin and porpoise by-catch needs to be taken internationally, as fishing vessels from many countries are involved. We have been pressing for such action and have commissioned a programme of research and development to reinforce our arguments. Urgent action is needed in the pair trawl fishery for bass off South West England, in which the substantial bulk of vessels are from other member states. Our research programme identified a significant by-catch problem in this fishery and is now trialling a possible gear solution. This looks promising, and I am determined to achieve a solution by this or other means. The second urgent need is to deploy EU observers to identify and assess other problem fisheries. In recent weeks we have advanced the case for action by intervening at the January meeting of the Council of Agriculture and Fisheries Ministers, and I have since followed this up by writing to Commissioner Fischler. In addition, with the devolved Administrations, I will shortly be issuing a consultation document outlining a UK by-catch response strategy.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the use of fishing net-based detectors to prevent the accidental drowning of dolphins and porpoises. [96509]

Mr. Morley: The Sea Mammal Research Unit have undertaken trials on the use of detectors as part of their work on behalf of this Department into dolphin and porpoise by catch. To date, this research has demonstrated that detectors may have a role in monitoring the behaviour of dolphin and porpoises around fishing gear but that acoustic deterrent devices (known as pingers) and other gear adjustments have greater potential to prevent bycatch.

Computer Crime

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many cases of computer *(a)* hacking, *(b)* fraud and *(c)* theft her Department recorded in 2001–02; and on how many occasions computer systems have been illegally accessed by computer hackers (i) within and (ii) outside her Department. [97558]

Alun Michael: The Department was formed on 9 June 2001 so figures reflect the period 9 June 2001 to 31 December 2002. Figures are not available prior to this date.

(a) During this period there were no cases of computer hacking detected.

(b) During this period there were no cases of computer fraud detected.

(c) The number of cases of computer theft detected was 27. It is not possible to provide accurate figures for whether these thefts were perpetrated by insiders or by persons outside the Department because some internal and police investigations did not provide conclusive evidence.

Departmental Budgets

Mr. Roger Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what the allocated budgets are for each of the internal directorates for her Department in *(a)* 2003–04, *(b)* 2004–05 and *(c)* 2005–06; [97523]

(2) what the allocated budgets are for each of her Department's executive agencies for *(a)* 2003–04, *(b)* 2004–05 and *(c)* 2005–06; [97526]

(3) what the combined allocated budgets are for her Department's non-departmental public bodies in *(a)* 2003–04, *(b)* 2004–05 and *(c)* 2005–06. [97528]

Alun Michael: Details of allocated budgets up to 2005–06 will be published in the spring 2003 departmental report. The information will include how budgets are allocated to deliver the Department's functions and objectives.

Entertainment

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her estimate is of the total spending of her Department on entertainment in each year from 1994–95 to 2002–03; and if she will make a statement. [92389]

Alun Michael: The information for Defra is as follows:

2001–02: £239,000 (outturn)

2002–03: £384,000 (estimate)

It should be noted that Defra only came into being in 2001.

All expenditure on official entertainment is made in accordance with published departmental guidance on financial procedures and propriety, based on the principles set out in "Government Accounting".

Equine Welfare (Ragwort Control) Bill

Mr. Wood: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the Government's policy is on the Equine Welfare (Ragwort Control) Bill introduced by the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway). [97651]

Alun Michael: The Government will consider the Equine Welfare (Ragwort Control) Bill in accordance with the procedures established for dealing with Private Member's Bills. These procedures provide for a debate at the appropriate time and the Government's position will be made clear at that stage.

Defra is already taking steps to control the spread of Ragwort in accordance with the procedures set out in my response given to the hon. Member for Totnes (Mr. Steen) on 7 November 2002, *Official Report*, columns 685–86W.

European Environment Agency

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what direct relations she has with the European Environment Agency; and in what circumstances. [97896]

Mr. Meacher: My officials are in regular contact with the agency through membership of the management board and co-operating with the agency as active participants in the European Environment Information and Observation Network (EIONET) as established under the founding Council Regulation (EEC) No. 1210/90 as amended by Council Regulation (EC) No. 933/1999.

My officials are also working closely with the EEA in their production of a state of the environment report for the forthcoming Kiev Conference. I personally met the last executive director on a number of occasions and have visited the agency in Copenhagen.

Flooding

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had with the Environment Agency on new sources of income for flood defence from *(a)* councils and *(b)* households in flood-zone areas. [98067]

Mr. Morley: Discussions have been held with the Environment Agency on these and other issues raised in the current Flood and Coastal Defence Funding Review. I will make an announcement on the conclusions of the review as soon as possible.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much has been spent on flood defence work in Sussex in each of the last six years; and if she will list the location of the major projects. [97900]

Mr. Morley: Defra provides grant aid to the flood and coastal defence operating authorities—the Environment Agency (EA), local authorities and (in areas with special drainage needs) internal drainage boards. The EA is responsible for managing flood risk from designated main rivers and the sea and carries out the majority of publicly funded flood risk works. The table details EA expenditure on flood defence work in Sussex over the last six years:

£000

Financial year	*Capital expenditure*	*Non-capital expenditure*	*Total*
1996–97	4,289	1,175	5,464
1997–98	4,315	1,569	5,884
1998–99	3,856	1,185	5,041
1999–2000	3,456	2,021	5,477
2000–01	2,705	1,663	4,368
2001–02	4,134	2,242	6,376
2002–03[1]	9,532	2,094	11,626

[1] To December 2002

The major EA projects are as follows:

River Lavant Flood Alleviation Scheme (Chichester)

Bulverhythe Enhancement of Protection

Shoreham/Lancing Phase 2—Kingswalk

Felpham Sea Defences

Pevensey Bay Sea Defences

West Common Stream (Haywards Heath)

Seaford Beach Management

Shoreham/Lancing Phase 3

Medmerry continued maintenance

Storrington

Sovereign Harbour (Eastbourne)

Information on works promoted by the other operating authorities in the area is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which local authorities have no plans to hold flood emergency exercises in accordance with her Department's high level targets. [89612]

Margaret Beckett: One of our high level targets requires the Environment Agency to arrange a programme of emergency exercises in conjunction with local authorities, emergency services and other partners. A national exercise, and an exercise in each agency region and local area, should be conducted at not more than three-yearly intervals. We are not aware of any local authorities that are not prepared to co-operate.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs pursuant to her answer of 20 January, *Official Report*, column 10W, if she will provide a breakdown of expenditure in the years *(a)* 2000–01, *(b)* 2001–02 and *(c)* 2002–03 of the Environment Agency in England for managing flood risk from main rivers and the sea in respect of each project worth £1 million or more. [95082]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 3 February 2003]:* Defra provides grant aid as a percentage of eligible costs to the Environment Agency to assist with its capital works and related studies to manage flood risk. The agency does not maintain central records of expenditure in the form requested and therefore the information could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However a table showing agency capital projects costing in excess of £1 million on which grant has been claimed, has been placed in the Library of the House. This does not include expenditure ineligible for grant such as project management costs which can form between 15 per cent. and 25 per cent. of the total project cost. Nor does the list include projects pursued by the agency without Defra grant aid.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many letters *(a)* her Department and *(b)* the Environment Agency has received from (i) hon. Members and (ii) members of the public regarding the flooding in the Christmas 2002 and new year period 2003. [96124]

Mr. Morley: The Department has received 41 letters from hon. Members and 33 letters from members of the public. The Environment Agency has received 72 letters from hon. Members and 506 letters from members of the public.

Fly-tipping

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her Department's policy on fly-tipping on forest land is *(a)* generally and *(b)* where it is owned by the City of London Corporation; what her policy is in cases where it is her opinion that (i) a local authority and (ii) the Environment Agency should make greater efforts to remove fly-tipped rubbish from forest land; and if she will make a statement. [98163]

Mr. Meacher: Fly tipping is the same offence no matter where it occurs and the Government do not have different policies on clearing fly tipped waste from different types of land. Powers are provided to both local authorities and the Environment Agency under Section 59 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 to allow them to clear fly tipped waste and to recover the costs of doing so from either the perpetrators of the crime or the occupants of the land unless they can demonstrate that they did not knowingly allow or permit the fly tipping to take place.

The circumstances in which (i) the local authority and (ii) the Environment Agency should clear the waste are set out in the fly tipping protocol which has been agreed between the Local Government Association and the agency. Under the protocol, local authorities deal with fly tipping of non-special waste, and the agency deals with fly tipping of special/ hazardous waste.

The Government are keen to do more to empower both local authorities and the agency to deal with fly tipping on all forms of land, since we recognise that it is a growing anti-social problem. We are currently considering bringing forward changes to legislation in consultation with other Government Departments, the local government associations and the agency.

Heathrow (Emissions)

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the annual emission was of *(a)* NOx, *(b)* SOx, *(c)* particulates and *(d)* CO_2 at London Heathrow Airport in the last year for which figures are available. [98009]

Alun Michael: The following table shows estimated emissions of NOx, SOx, particulates (PM_{10}), and CO_2 for London Heathrow Airport in 2000 (the latest year for which figures are available).

Estimated emissions for Heathrow Airport in 2000

	Tonnes
NOX (nitrogen dioxide)	8,949
SOX (sulphur dioxide)	414
CO_2 (carbon dioxide)	1,397,770
Particles (as PM_{10})	102

Source:

National Environment Technology Centre. These cover emissions from aircraft and airside vehicles within the perimeter of the airport. Emissions are calculated from aircraft movement data for the airport in 2000 and aircraft emission factors used in the 1998 Heathrow Inventory study. Aircraft emissions during complete take off and landing cycle up to1,000 m are allocated to the airport. Consequently a proportion of the emissions are emitted at some height and horizontal distance from the boundaries of the airport.

Hunting Bill

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what discussions she has had about re-housing hunt workers of hunts which fail to achieve registration under the Hunting Bill; [96860]

(2) what estimate she has made of the housing consequences of the Hunting Bill. [96859]

Alun Michael: It is not possible to predict the precise impact of the Hunting Bill on housing.

Where the activity is banned absolutely, as in the case of deer hunting and hare coursing, it would be prudent of employers and employees affected to plan for that eventuality and to seek out the available assistance.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) if she will make a statement on the human rights implications of the prohibition of hunting where there are subsisting contracts for providing hunting facilities; [96870]

(2) whether she has identified obstacles to certifying that the Hunting Bill does not conflict with human rights; and if she will make a statement; [96918]

(3) what representations she has received about the human rights implications of the Hunting Bill. [96869]

Alun Michael: The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has signed a statement, under section 19(1)*(a)* of the Human Rights Act 1998, that in her view the provisions of the Hunting Bill are compatible with the Convention rights on the basis that she was satisfied no obstacles prevented her from so doing.

It is the Government's view that the requirements of the Hunting Bill would, for the purposes of Article 1 of Protocol 1 to the European Convention on Human Rights, amount to an interference with the use and enjoyment of property rather than a deprivation of property, and that accordingly no compensation should be payable for any economic losses that may be suffered as a consequence of the Bill by the persons concerned.

There are numerous occasions where new legislation interferes with existing contractual rights without the individuals being compensated. In this respect the Government consider that persons entering contracts in connection with hunting with dogs have no legitimate expectation that any or all types of this activity would continue to be lawful. The contracting parties will have been aware for a considerable period of time of the intention of the Government to legislate on hunting with dogs, and the present Bill is the result of an extensive and well-publicised process of consultation over a long period.

The detailed reasons for this view are set out in a memorandum submitted by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on 31 January 2003 in response to a letter from the Chair of the Joint Committee on Human Rights to the Minister for Rural Affairs of 21 January 2003. The Committee indicated that, subject to this point, their provisional opinion was that the present Hunting Bill is compatible with the relevant human rights obligations.

Representations on the Hunting Bill which relate to human rights issues have been couched in general terms and have included the suggestion that the continuation of traditional forms of hunting is or should be protected by the European Convention on Human Rights. There have also been references to the rights protected by the United Kingdom's international commitments under the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development 1992, in particular Principle 22 which refers to the role indigenous people and their communities play in relation to environmental management and development. Other representations have argued that there is no right to be cruel.

Landfill

Mr. Robert Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when and how the Government informed the European Commission of its intention to postpone the attainment of the targets set out in Article 5.2 of the Council Directive 1999/31/EC on the landfill of waste. [89274]

Mr. Meacher: Under the terms of the Landfill Directive, those member states who are to make use of the derogation to postpone the attainment of the reductions in the landfill of biodegradable municipal waste targets by a period not exceeding four years shall inform the Commission in advance. The final decision on whether we will make use of the derogation will be taken the year before each target year (2005 for target year 2006, 2008 for 2009 and 2015 for 2016). If the decision is to make use of the derogation for that target year, then the Commission will be informed accordingly.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether her Department is preparing to implement the Landfill Directive by 2016. [96469]

Mr. Meacher: Yes, preparations are in hand to support our aim of meeting the Landfill Directive's final biodegradable municipal waste reduction target by 2016.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether the operator for the Wortley tip at the Cabbage Hill site in the Leeds, West constituency has submitted a conditioning plan to the Environmental Agency; and whether it has applied to operate as a hazardous waste site. [96964]

Mr. Meacher: No; the operator has not submitted a conditioning plan for this site and has therefore not applied to operate as a hazardous waste site.

A list of all those landfill operators who have submitted a conditioning plan to the Environment Agency is available on the agency website at www.environment-aqency.gov.uk .

Radioactive Material

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her policy is on the free release of radioactive material; what thresholds apply to such releases; and what quantities have been released in each year since 1997. [97714]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 13 February 2003]:* Responsibility for the policy with respect to radioactivity in the environment rests with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

Under section 13 of the Radioactive Substances Act 1993 (RSA 93) the disposal of radioactive material requires authorization. The regulation of radioactive waste, under RSA 93, in England and Wales, is the responsibility of the Environment Agency and a system of "discharge authorizations" is used to control the nature and quantities of radioactive waste that may be discharged into the environment from any site. However, under the Radioactive Substances (Substances of Low Activity) Exemption Order 1986 solid radioactive waste that is substantially insoluble in water and that has activity of less than 0.4 Becquerel/gram is exempt from the controls under RSA 93, so-called "free release". As such waste is exempt from regulatory control, no centrally held records are kept of the quantities that have been released.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment has been conducted *(a)* by and *(b)* for her Department on the effectiveness of RIMNET 3; and if she will place copies of such research in the Library. [93273]

Mr. Meacher: The Radioactive Incident Monitoring Network (RIMNET) Phase 3 system is currently under development, as explained in my previous answer on 20 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 105W.

The specification for RIMNET 3 was based upon the proven functionality of the RIMNET Phase 2 system, which continues to meet maintenance contract targets in excess of 99 per cent. reliability. This is through in depth design features which provide the necessary levels of resilience, including backup facilities at a remote location. Remote in this sense, means far removed from the main facility, yet accessible to authorised users via modern electronic communications. Assessment of the effectiveness of the RIMNET 3 system will be undertaken during its development and the acceptance trials. RIMNET 3 is currently scheduled to come into full operation and take over from RIMNET 2 in early 2004.

Summaries of radiation monitoring data held on the RIMNET system are regularly sent to the House Library and are also published in departmental environmental statistical summaries.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the present discharge unit is for technetium-99; what the analysis of levels of discharge over the last 12 months shows; and what progress has been made in considering the Department's response to recommendations by the Environment Agency in respect of discharge limits. [96518]

Margaret Beckett: The present discharge limit for technetium-99 is 90 TBq/year. In the 12 month period to the end of November 2002, the most up-to-date information currently available, 84.3 TBq of technetium-99 were discharged.

On 11 December 2002 my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health and I (the two Ministers with joint responsibility under the Radioactive Substances Act 1993) announced that we saw no reason to direct the Environment Agency to take a different course to the one that the agency had identified in its proposed decision on technetium-99, published in September 2001. At the same time, I sought views on a proposal where I might direct the agency to consider the possibility of a moratorium on technetium-99 discharges pending introduction of TPP-based abatement technology. We are considering the representations received and hope to make a decision on the proposed direction shortly.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she expects the Government to publish national waste acceptance criteria. [96467]

Mr. Meacher: The Government will consult on the European Commission's obligatory waste acceptance criteria later this year as part of a wider consultation on amendments to the Landfill Regulations (England and Wales). (The waste acceptance criteria were introduced into the Landfill Directive by Decision C 20 E/171 of 28 January 2003 and must be transposed into UK legislation by 16 July 2004.) The amendments to the Landfill Regulations (England and Wales) introducing the waste acceptance criteria will be made following that consultation and before 16 July 2004.

Recycling

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the impact of recent changes to the Landfill Tax Credit Scheme on future waste awareness minimisation activities in England and Wales; and how this will impact on the UK's ability to meet the Landfill Directive targets. [97050]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 12 February 2003]:* Changes to the Landfill Tax Credit Scheme (LTCS), which will introduce a new public expenditure scheme to replace some elements of the current scheme, will allow the Government to target funding better as a means of achieving specific sustainable waste management objectives. Initially, the aim will be to deliver the short to medium term measures set out in the Strategy Unit's report "Waste Not Want Not", to increase waste minimisation; boost recycling; develop new technologies; and improve information and awareness, data and the research base. Increasing performance in these areas, through changes to the LTCS, should improve the UK's capacity to meet its Landfill Directive targets.

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the financial value of annual exports of materials for recycling, with particular reference to *(a)* green glass, *(b)* plastic, *(c)* steel and *(d)* short fibre from paper mills, was in each of the last three years; and what volume was exported in each case, broken down by destination of export. [96151]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 6 February 2003]:* The Department does not record information on the financial value of exported recyclable materials.

H M Customs and Excise are responsible for export statistics. However the comcodes (this is the level at which traders declarations are made) which cover the materials requested, are not specific enough to uniquely identify them.

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the recycling records of local authorities in Somerset. [96497]

Mr. Meacher: We have set all local authorities statutory performance standards (or targets) for recycling for 2003–04 and 2005–06. The latest performance information for authorities in Somerset is given as follows:

Percentage

Authority	Recycling and composting rate 1998–99	Recycling and composting rate 1999–2000	Recycling and composting rate 2001–02	Statutory Performance Standard 2003–04	Statutory Performance Standard 2005–06
Bath and North East Somerset Council	17	21	23	33	36
Mendip District Council	8	7	7	16	24
North Somerset Council	7	10	13	14	21
Sedgemoor District Council	6	6	6	12	18
Somerset County Council	14	13	16	28	36
South Somerset District Council	11	10	10	22	33
Taunton Deane Borough Council	12	10	13	24	36
West Somerset District Council	8	9	11	16	24

Government have provided extra funding to help authorities meet these standards through successive increases in the EPCS spending block, which includes waste services, and through the National Waste Minimisation and Recycling Challenge Fund under which the following Somerset authorities made successful bids.

Authority	Category
Round 1	
Somerset Waste Partnership	Partnership working between authorities
Bath and North East Somerset Council	Two bids under high performance, innovation and best practice
North Somerset Council	Help turn around low performance
Round 2	
North Somerset Council	Help turn around low performance
Sedgemoor District Council	Developing community initiatives
South Somerset District Council	Partnership working between authorities
Bath and North East Somerset Council	High performance, innovation and best practice

It is too soon to tell whether individual authorities in Somerset or elsewhere, will meet the standards. In September 2002 I wrote to the leaders of 141 councils asking them to let me know how they intend to meet their 2003–04 Statutory Performance Standard for recycling and composting of household waste of which the following four were in Somerset:

Mendip District Council

Sedgemoor District Council

South Somerset District Council

Taunton Deane Borough Council.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the recycling records of local authorities in *(a)* West Sussex and *(b)* London. [96008]

Mr. Meacher: We have set all local authorities statutory performance standards (or targets) for recycling for 2003–04 and 2005–06. The latest performance information for authorities in London and West Sussex is given as follows:

Percentage

Authority	Recycling and composting rate 1998–99	Recycling and composting rate 1999–2000	Recycling and composting rate 2001–02	Statutory Performance Standards 2003–04	Statutory Performance Standards 2005–06
London					
Barking and Dagenham LB	3	3	4	10	18
Barnet LB	9	8	8	18	27
Bexley LB	18	18	19	33	36
Brent LB	5	6	7	10	18
Bromley LB	7	13	13	14	21
Camden LB	11	13	16	22	33
Croydon LB	14	13	12	28	36
Ealing LB	10	12	12	20	30
East London Waste Authority	4	5	8	10	18
Enfield LB	9	9	9	18	27
Greenwich LB	4	4	6	10	18
Hackney LB	2	2	1	10	18
Hammersmith and Fulham LB	8	7	8	16	24
Haringey LB	5	5	6	10	18
Harrow LB	8	10	11	16	24
Havering LB	8	8	4	18	27
Hillingdon LB	7	11	13	14	21
Hounslow LB	14	14	13	28	36
Islington LB	3	2	5	10	18

Percentage

Authority	*Recycling and composting rate* 1998–99	1999–2000	2001–02	*Statutory Performance Standards* 2003–04	2005–06
Kingston-upon-Thames LB	15	18	20	30	36
Lambeth LB	7	8	9	14	21
Lewisham LB	4	4	5	10	18
London Borough of Kensington and Chelsea	11	13	13	22	33
London Corporation	0	0	0	10	18
Merton LB	9	11	18	18	27
Newham LB	2	3	2	10	18
North London Waste Authority	6	7	8	12	18
Redbridge LB	7	8	9	14	21
Richmond upon Thames LB	14	n/a	16	28	36
Southwark LB	3	3	3	10	18
Sutton LB	16	27	25	33	36
Tower Hamlets LB	3	2	3	10	18
Waltham Forest LB	6	9	8	12	18
Wandsworth LB	8	7	7	16	24
West London Waste Authority	9	9	12	18	27
Western Riverside Waste Authority	8	11	9	16	24
Westminster City Council	6	7	7	12	18
West Sussex					
Adur District Council	17	22	17	33	36
Arun District Council	14	14	14	28	36
Chichester District Council	12	14	12	24	36
Crawley Borough Council	10	11	10	20	30
Horsham District Council	13	13	13	26	36
Mid Sussex District Council	18	20	18	33	36
West Sussex County Council	12	16	17	24	36
Worthing Borough Council	12	12	12	24	36

Government have provided extra funding to help authorities meet these standards through successive increases in the EPCS spending block, which includes waste services, and through the National Waste Minimisation and Recycling Challenge Fund under which West Sussex made a successful bid for a project to raise the awareness of waste issues. A separate Capital Fund of £21.3 million was established for authorities across London.

West Sussex has also been successful in receiving approval for PFI funding for a recycling led waste project that aims to enable them to reach their target for 2005–06 of 36 per cent. and achieve long term recycling and composting levels comparable with the highest in Europe.

It is too soon to tell whether individual authorities in London and West Sussex or elsewhere, will meet the standards. In September 2002 I wrote to the leaders of 141 councils asking them to let me know how they intend to meet their 2003–04 Statutory Performance Standard for recycling and composting of household waste of which the following were in London and West Sussex:

London

London Borough of Barking and Dagenham

London Borough of Barnet

London Borough of Bexley

London Borough of Croydon

London Borough of Ealing

London Borough of Enfield

London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham

London Borough of Haringey

London Borough of Newham

London Borough of Redbridge

London Borough of Richmond upon Thames

London Borough of Southwark

London Borough of Tower Hamlets

Western Riverside Waste Authority

West Sussex

Adur District Council

Arun District Council

Horsham District Council

Mid Sussex District Council

Worthing Borough Council

Telephone Helplines

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many telephone helplines are sponsored by her Department; and which of these helplines are charged at *(a)* national rate, *(b)* premium rate and *(c)* local rate. [95710]

Alun Michael: Defra operates 13 helpline telephone numbers, of which two are free of charge, five are charged at local rate and the remainder are charged at national rate. Of these one is a central Defra helpline, seven are operated by Rural Payments Agency, one each by the British Cattle Movement Service, Pets Helpline, Animal Movements, Agricultural Wages Board and Environmental Impact Assessment.

A number of Defra telephone phone lines are published via the Department's website and in printed publications as contact points for enquiries on specific subjects. These services are not established or operated under the same criteria as the helplines referred to above.

Similar details for other agencies and non-departmental bodies sponsored by the Department could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Timber

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs pursuant to her answer of 27 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 564W, on timber, if she will list *(a)* the local authorities who were putting or considering putting policies on timber procurement in place, *(b)* the respondents that did not specifically stipulate that timber should be sourced from both legal and sustainably managed sources and *(c)* the local authorities using other strategies. [96517]

Mr. Meacher: The following local authorities in England indicated in October 2002 that they were putting or considering putting policies on timber procurement in place: Basingstoke and Deane, Blackpool, Bolton, Broadland, Bury, Calderdale, Chelmsford, Cotswold, Derbyshire, Eastleigh, Epping Forest, Fareham, Harlow,Harrow, Hart, Kensington and Chelsea, Lewes, Liverpool, Malvern Hills, Newcastle under Lyme, North Shropshire, North Somerset, North Yorkshire, Purbeck, Reading, Redcar and Cleveland, Rochdale, Shepway, St. Albans, St. Edmundsbury, Tonbridge and Malling, West Lindsey, Wolverhampton.

It was not clear from the following authorities' replies whether their policies did in fact specifically stipulate that timber should be from both legal sources and sustainable sources: Braintree, Copeland, East Cambridgeshire, East Sussex, Gateshead, Gloucester City, Gosport, Hampshire, Kent, Lincolnshire, Manchester, New Forest, North Devon, Richmondshire, South Oxfordshire, Staffordshire CC, Stockport, Swindon, Tandridge, Tendring, Tunbridge Wells, Westminster and Wyre Forest.

The six authorities that reported using other strategies were: Buckinghamshire, Huntingdonshire, Melton, Norfolk, Northumberland and South Ribble.

Waste Disposal

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what percentage of municipal waste recovered in *(a)* 2005, *(b)* 2010 and *(c)* 2015 she expects to be (i) recycled, (ii) composted and (iii) incinerated. [96475]

Mr. Meacher: The Government have set the following targets for recycling and composting of municipal waste as set out in Waste Strategy 2000:

To recycle or compost at least 25 per cent. of household waste by 2005;

To recycle or compost at least 30 per cent. of household waste by 2010;

To recycle or compost at least 33 per cent. of household waste by 2015.

We have not set targets for waste incineration. We have, however, set the following waste recovery targets:

To recover value from 40 per cent. of household waste by 2005;

To recover value from 45 per cent. of household waste by 2010;

To recover value from 67 per cent. of household waste by 2015.

Wildlife Trade

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans the Government have to ban the trade in birds and animals taken from the wild except for scientific and conservation reasons. [97124]

Mr. Morley: We have no current plans to ban the trade in all birds and animals taken from the wild. International trade in birds and animals is subject to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), which is implemented within the EU under Council Regulation (EC) No 338/97 and Commission Regulation (EC) No 1808/1. All commercial trade in those species listed as endangered is prohibited, while the trade in the other less vulnerable species is strictly regulated to ensure that it will not be detrimental to their wild populations.

Last month we began a public consultation exercise outlining proposals to strengthen the existing domestic controls over wildlife trade. This included increasing the penalties for certain offences to up to five years imprisonment, and strengthening the relevant powers of police officers and wildlife inspectors. Subject to the outcome of the consultation, we intend to introduce revised provisions as soon as possible thereafter.

Within Great Britain the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 prohibits the possession or control of any live or dead wild bird or animal listed on Schedule 5 of the Act, or any part of or anything derived from such a bird or animal. A licence can be issued derogating from this protection. The penalty for taking an animal or bird illegally is a maximum of £5,000 and/or six months custodial sentence.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Anti-social Behaviour

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* Anti-Social Behaviour Orders, *(b)* Parenting Orders and *(c)* Curfew Orders have been issued in the City of Portsmouth, South in the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [97278]

Mr. Denham: The table shows the number of notifications received by the Home Office of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) issued within the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Magistrates' Courts Committee (MCCs) area (in which the City of Portsmouth is situated) and by local government authority up to 30 September 2002 (latest available).

We are aware that the numbers of ASBOs made nationally have been consistently under-reported in returns made by magistrates' courts, and are considering how reporting can be improved.

Youth Justice Board figures indicate that between January 2001 and September 2002, a total of 262 Parenting Orders were imposed in the Youth Offending Team (YOT) area of Wessex, which includes the City of Portsmouth.

Figures from the electronic monitoring contractors indicate that 104 Curfew Orders with electronic monitoring were imposed within Portsmouth, South during the period 2000–02. Of this total of 104 Curfew Orders, 12 were imposed on juveniles aged 10 to 15 years.

No applications have yet been received to establish a local child curfew scheme under section 14 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. Some local authorities and police forces have considered the possibility, but concluded that other measures should be taken to tackle relevant local problems.

Table A: the number of ASBOs as notified to the Home Office, by Magistrates' Courts Committee and local authority area within England and Wales, April 1999 to September 2002

Magistrates' Courts Committee/local authority area	*Total issued*
Hampshire and Isle of Wight Magistrates' Courts Committee	
of which	12
from 1 April 1999 to 31 May 2000 by police force area	1
from 1 June 2000 to 30 September 2002 by local authority area	11
Fortsmouth CC	3
Southampton council	8

Note:

Between 1 April 1999 to 31 May 2000, data available by police force area (pfa) o[illegible]

Table B: the number of Curfew Orders imposed in Portsmouth, South on juveniles and adults for the years 2000 to 2002

	Number of orders
Juvenile Curfew Orders (aged 10 to 15)	
2000	0
2001	4
2002	8
Total	12
Adult Curfew Orders (aged 16+)	
2000	26
2001	21
2002	45
Total	92

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many anti-social behaviour orders have been made in respect of individuals in *(a)* Hertsmere, *(b)* Hertfordshire and *(c)* the United Kingdom in each year since the orders came into being. [97002]

Mr. Denham: Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) were introduced from 1 April 1999. From this date up to 30 September 2002 (latest available) the total number of ASBOs issued within England and Wales, as reported to the Home Office, is 706. The table shows the number of notifications of ASBOs issued within the Hertfordshire Magistrates' Courts Committee (MCC) area, which includes Hertsmere, by local government authority up to 30 September 2002.

We are aware that the numbers of ASBOs made nationally have been consistently under reported in returns made by magistrates' courts and are considering how reporting can be improved.

Information for matters related to Scotland and Northern Ireland are for the Scottish Executive and the Northern Ireland Assembly respectively.

Burglaries (West Yorkshire)

Jon Trickett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many burglaries were *(a)* reported and *(b)* solved in West Yorkshire in (i) 1997 and (ii) 2002. [96621]

Mr. Denham: Numbers of burglary offences recorded and associated detection rates in West Yorkshire are given in the table.

Year	*Offences recorded*	*Detection rate—percentage*
1997[1]	67,686	28
2001–02[2]	68,818	12

[1] Recorded on a calendar year basis

[2] Recorded on a financial year basis

There was a change in counting rules for recorded crime on 1 April 1998, which would have the tendency to increase the number of offences counted. Numbers of offences before and after this date are therefore not directly comparable.

There was also a change in counting rules for detections on 1 April 1999. The new instructions provide more precise and rigorous criteria for recording a detection, with the underlying emphasis on the successful result of a police investigation. Numbers of detections before and after this date are therefore not directly comparable.

Cannabis

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to receive advice on the medicinal benefits and side-effects of cannabis; and when he will make a decision as to whether, and when, how and to whom, it will be legally available for therapeutic purposes. [97174]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: GW Pharmaceuticals have completed their advanced clinical trials into the development of a medical preparation of a cannabis-based drug and are preparing to submit a dossier of their findings to the Medicines Control Agency (MCA), an agency of the Department of Health, for evaluation in the near future.

This assessment by the MCA is one which all prospective new medicines have to go through and is designed to protect public health.

If approval of the safety, quality and effectiveness of the product is forthcoming, the Government will seek Parliament's agreement to make the necessary changes to the Misuse of Drugs Regulations 2001 to enable the prescription of cannabis-based medicine by doctors to their patients at the earliest opportunity. We recognize how eagerly awaited these changes are and intend to press ahead with them as quickly as possible.

Child Pornography

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures he will take to require credit card companies to remove credit cards from those breaking their contract with such companies by viewing child pornography on the net. [97762]

Hilary Benn: Normally it will not be apparent from the information received by a card issuer that a transaction relates to illegal business. However, within the confines of banking law, where a card issuer is alerted to the fact that an offence has been committed by a cardholder, they will take appropriate action under the terms and conditions applying to the use of its card.

The Government do not at this time consider that removing all credit card, debit card, and other non card based forms of payment facilities from an individual convicted of such an offence is the most cost effective or practical way of combating illegal or child abuse images on line.

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures he will take to require internet service providers to monitor their services to prevent viewing of child pornography on the net. [97763]

Hilary Benn: Under European e-commerce legislation, Internet Service Providers (ISPs) may not be held liable for unlawful material that they unknowingly transmit, store or host on behalf of their customers. There is also a requirement not to place general monitoring obligations on intermediary service providers, and as such there will be no legislative requirement for United Kingdom ISP's to undertake monitoring of their services for child pornography.

However, if an ISP is warned of illegal material on a website that they host but fails to take the appropriate action by removing or disabling access to the material in question, they will be liable for prosecution.

With regards to sites which host child pornography, the Government supports the work of the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF), an industry funded body which allows anyone to report the presence of images of child abuse anywhere in the world. The Foundation determines whether the reported website carries potentially illegal material and takes steps to have access denied to the site. The Foundation passes details of illegal material to the relevant law enforcement agencies to initiate action against the originators. If the originators are abroad, the Foundation passes the report to sister hotlines abroad and to the National Criminal Intelligence Services (NCIS) who liaise with enforcement agencies of the countries concerned.

The Government continues to seek to revise and improve the mechanisms and processes for the reporting and removing of illegal material hosted on the web, for example through the work of the Home Secretary's Task Force on Child Protection on the Internet.

The taskforce, established in March 2001, involves a partnership of child welfare organisations, the internet industry, government, the police and others working towards finding solutions to make the internet a safer place for children, and in January 2003 launched good practice models and guidance for the internet industry on a range of services including web based services dealing with adult content.

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures he is taking to require internet service providers to end the use of privacy buttons on e-groups to enable better identification and prosecution of those using child pornography material on the Net. [97764]

Hilary Benn: E-Groups enable a great many people to communicate with others with similar interests conveniently and if necessary privately. It is true that this facility, like any other, can be misused, but to require that all e-groups be open would merely displace, not end, the exchange of indecent images of children, and lessen the scope for perfectly legitimate use.

The Government continues to seek to revise and improve the mechanisms and processes for the reporting and removing of illegal material hosted on the web, in particular through the work of the Home Secretary's Task Force on Child Protection on the Internet, which includes the police, the industry, child protection agencies, MPs and others.

Closed Circuit Television

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to his answer of 9 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 310W, on Crime Reduction Partnerships, if he will list the location of the public area CCTV schemes funded through the Crime Reduction Programme Closed Circuit Television, and the grant made to each scheme. [97262]

Mr. Denham: Under the Crime Reduction Programme CCTV Initiative around £170 million will be spent between 1998 and 2003 funding 684 CCTV schemes. More than 550 of these schemes are already fully operational, with further schemes coming on line weekly.

Lists of the schemes funded, including location and grants made to each scheme can be found on the Crime Reduction website at: www.crimereduction.gov.uk/cctvminisite1.htm.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to his answer of 9 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 310W, on crime reduction partnerships, how much money has been awarded to *(a)* each region and *(b)* each local authority area under the Crime Reduction Programme Closed Circuit Television Initiative. [97572]

Mr. Denham: Under the Crime Reduction Programme CCTV Initiative, around £170 million will be spent between 1998 and 2003 funding 684 CCTV schemes. More than 550 of these schemes are already fully operational, with further schemes coming on line weekly. The regional breakdown of funding is as follows:

East Midlands	17,169,228
London	35,410,898
North East	12,900,238
South East	15,328,266
South West	11,784,260

Wales	7,925,968
West Midlands	14,536,391
Yorkshire and Humberside	20,357,137
East	10,909,827
North West	22,804,606

Lists of the schemes funded, including location and grants made to each scheme and local authority, can be found on the Crime Reduction website at: www.crimereduction.gov.uk/cctvminisite1.htm

Community Support Officers

Mr. Bailey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the impact of community support officers on the level of crime in the pilot areas. [97005]

Mr. Denham: Twenty seven police forces in England and Wales made successful bids last year for a share of the £19 million fund for the introduction of Community Support Officers (CSOs). Training programmes in each force will see more than 1,000 CSOs patrolling the streets by the end of March this year.

The money given to each police force includes an element for evaluation and forces are due to give us initial findings by the end of September. At this stage, it is premature for any meaningful analysis of their effect although there are already early indications of decreased crime in the areas where CSOs have been deployed.

Coniston Hotel

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what permission was granted by NASS to Accommodata to move into the Coniston Hotel on 5 February to begin preparations to receive asylum seekers; [97003]

(2) whether Accommodata has been given permission by NASS to refurbish the Coniston Hotel. [97004]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 10 February 2003]*: The contract entered into between The National Asylum Support Service (NASS) and Accommodata is for 111 bedspaces at the hotel. Other accommodation at the hotel, including bedrooms which are not part of the NASS contract, will be available for use by the general public. The owner of the hotel does not need permission from NASS to refurbish his premises. Neither does Accommodata require permission from NASS to undertake work at the hotel.

Conviction Rates

Mark Tami: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the conviction rates were for each police force in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2001. [97108]

Mr. Denham: The information requested is contained in the table and relates to the number of defendants found guilty of all offences at all courts expressed as a proportion of defendants proceeded against at magistrates courts for all offences in each of the years, by police force area.

Conviction rates[1] for all offences, by police force area

England and Wales *Percentages*

Police force area	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Avon and Somerset	71	73	72
Bedfordshire	73	74	69
Cambridgeshire	78	80	79
Cheshire	79	80	81
Cleveland	72	75	76
Cumbria	80	81	79
Derbyshire	77	78	79
Devon and Cornwall	75	76	77
Dorset	77	75	74
Durham	73	74	77
Essex	81	78	78
Gloucestershire	73	74	72
Greater Manchester	76	77	72
Hampshire	77	78	77
Hertfordshire	76	74	74
Humberside	80	79	79
Kent	78	77	77
Lancashire	72	71	71
Leicestershire	76	76	74
Lincolnshire	79	79	79
London, City of	70	80	84
Merseyside	76	73	73
Metropolitan Police	77	76	74
Norfolk	91	83	75
Northamptonshire	71	72	72
Northumbria	74	76	76
North Yorkshire	75	76	73
Nottinghamshire	73	75	74
South Yorkshire	77	78	77
Staffordshire	78	74	71
Suffolk	77	74	69
Surrey	79	75	75
Sussex	73	73	72
Thames Valley	71	71	72
Warwickshire	80	81	80
West Mercia	75	76	75
West Midlands	66	66	67
West Yorkshire	70	68	64
Wiltshire	78	75	75
Dyfed Powys	73	73	73
Gwent	80	78	77
North Wales	78	79	77
South Wales	72	72	71
England and Wales	74.8	74.7	73.4

[1] Defendants found guilty of all offences at all courts as a percentage of persons proceeded against for all offences at magistrates' courts, as notified to the Home Office

Correspondence

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the hon. Member for Walthamstow will receive a reply to his letters to the Department of 14 February 2002, 21 May 2002, 29 August 2002 and 22 October 2002, regarding his constituents, Mr. and Mrs. Thankarajah (Home Office ref T1009737). [96562]

Beverley Hughes: I wrote to my hon. Friend on 14 February 2003.

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letters dated 20 November 2002 and 4 January from the honourable Member for Altrincham and Sale West regarding the case of Mr. Christopher Rowley. [96613]

Hilary Benn: I replied to the hon. Member on 6 February 2003.

County Durham Police

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of the budget of the County Durham Police was spent on pension funds in *(a)* 2000, *(b)* 2001 and *(c)* 2002 and is projected to be spent in 2003. [97159]

Mr. Denham: The Chief Constable informs me that the proportion of budget spent on police pensions and contributions towards civilian pensions is as follows:

(a) 14 per cent. in financial year 1999–2000; *(b)* 14 per cent. in 2000–01; *(c)* 15 per cent. in 2001–02; and 16 per cent. is estimated to be spent in 2002–03.

Credit Card Fraud

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent reports he has received about the trend in respect of credit card fraud; what he estimates its most recent annual level in the UK was; which new forms of such fraud are giving the authorities most cause for concern; what proposals and advice he is planning to help tackle the problem; and if he will make a statement. [97172]

Mr. Denham: The Government recognises that plastic card fraud in the UK has increased considerably over recent years. In the Home Office publication, "Crime in England and Wales, 2001–02: Supplementary Volume" published on 9 January 2003, it was shown that the police recorded 153,281 cheque and credit card offences in 2001–02. The Association for Payment Clearing Services (APACS) estimated the losses from cheque, debit and credit or charge card fraud in the 12 months to August 2002 at £429.4 million.

Skimming (electronically copying a card's magnetic stripe and using it to make an illegal copy of a genuine card) is a relatively new form of card fraud, which is giving the financial services sector and police cause for concern. Counterfeit card losses comprise over a third of total plastic card fraud losses.

The Government has committed £1.4 million over two years, in partnership with APACS, to piloting the Dedicated Cheque and Plastic Crime Unit (DCPCU). The Unit, which started work in April 2002, has enjoyed significant early success, recovering more than 3,000 cards and 468 cheques. This has led to 44 arrests and four convictions with potential savings of £5.3 million. A detailed evaluation of the DCPCU's performance will be used to inform decisions on the future of the Unit and to guide national policy for tackling organised and plastic card fraud.

The Home Office is also actively supporting the finance and retail industry in its implementation of the Chip and PIN programme. New technology will require UK credit and debit card transactions to be authorised by the customer keying in a four-digit PIN (personal identification number) rather than by signing a receipt. The banking industry expects that by 2005 the new technology will have eliminated over half of the predicted level of plastic card fraud. A public trial of the programme will take place in Northampton shortly and national roll-out will begin after the trial is complete.

The Government, working closely with stakeholders, launched its Safe Internet Shopping Campaign in 2001 to advise consumers on safe payment and give them directions to the Government's Consumer Gateway www.consumer.gov.uk which provides links to sources of detailed information.

The Government welcomes the involvement of the banking industry in actively seeking ways to prevent and detect crime such as plastic card fraud.

Crime (Humberside)

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many and what proportion of prisoners in *(a)* Haltemprice and Howden, *(b)* the East Riding of Yorkshire and *(c)* England and Wales tested positive for drugs in each of the past five years. [97720]

Hilary Benn: The following tables detail the number and proportion of prisoners in the constituency of Haltemprice and Howden, the County of the East Riding of Yorkshire and in England and Wales who tested positive for drugs under the Prison Service random mandatory drug testing programme in each of the past five years.

		1997–98		*1998–99*		*1999–2000*		*2000–01*		*2001–02*	
Geographical Area	*Prisons*	*No. Positive*	*Percentage Positive*	*No. Positive*	*Percentage Positive*	*No. Positive*	*Percentage Positive*	*No. Positive*	*Percentage Positive*	*No. Positive*	*Percentage Positive*
Haltemprice and	Everthorpe Wolds	108	27.1	168	29.8	61	22.3	71	25.1	61	13.9
Howden Constituency		86	18.0	88	17.8	58	11.9	39	7.9	16	3.3
County of the East	Full Suttori	38	6.4	45	6.8	39	5.8	29	4.2	43	6.0
Riding of Yorkshire	Everthorpe Wolds	108	27.1	168	29.8	61	22.3	71	25.1	61	13.9
		86	18.0	88	17.8	58	11.9	39	7.9	16	3.3
England and Wales	All	13,038	20.8	11,552	18.3	7,804	14.2	6,382	12.4	6,060	11.6

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many crimes were committed by juvenile offenders in *(a)* Haltemprice and Howden, *(b)* the East Riding of Yorkshire and *(c)* the Humberside Police Authority area in each quarter since 1997; and how many cautions were issued; [97724]

(2) how many children in the East Riding of Yorkshire *(a)* were convicted, *(b)* were in local authority care, *(c)* received a reprimand, *(d)* received a final warning and *(e)* were found guilty, in each year since 1997. [97730]

Hilary Benn: The information contained in the table gives the number of children convicted of all offences, those given cautions, reprimands and final warnings and those in care in Humberside, 1997 to 2001.

The information collected centrally does not enable cases in the Haltemprice and Howden constituency to be identified nor cautions in the East Riding of Yorkshire. Neither is it possible to give the number of crimes committed by juveniles, only the number of juveniles who are found guilty of all offences.

Figures on children looked after by local councils were supplied by the Department of Health.

Statistics for 2002 will be published in the autumn.

Number of children found guilty at all courts for all offences, number given cautions, reprimands and final warnings and the number in care, Humberside 1997 to 2001

	1997					*1998*				
	Qtr 1	*Qtr 2*	*Qtr 3*	*Qtr 4*	*Total*	*Qtr 1*	*Qtr 2*	*Qtr 3*	*Qtr 4*	*Total*
East Riding of Yorkshire										
Children aged 10–17 found guilty	87	102	83	90	362	105	101	99	97	402
Children aged 0–17 looked after at 31 March[1]	175	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	215	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
Children aged 10–17 receiving a reprimand	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
Children aged 10–17 receiving a final warning	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
Children aged 10–17 receiving a caution[3]	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
Humberside Police Force Area										
Children aged 10–17 found guilty	372	374	361	426	1,533	430	417	391	396	1,634
Children aged 0–17 looked after at 31 March[1]	1,365	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	1,460	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
Children aged 10–17 receiving a reprimand	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
Children aged 10–17 receiving a final warning	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
Children aged 10–17 receiving a caution[3]	536	447	500	468	1,951	574	568	609	626	2,377

	1999					*2000*				
	Qtr 1	*Qtr 2*	*Qtr 3*	*Qtr 4*	*Total*	*Qtr 1*	*Qtr 2*	*Qtr 3*	*Qtr 4*	*Total*
East Riding of Yorkshire										
Children aged 10–17 found guilty	107	100	128	138	473	104	107	93	101	405
Children aged 0–17 looked after at 31 March[1]	220	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	240	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
Children aged 10–17 receiving a reprimand	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
Children aged 10–17 receiving a final warning	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
Children aged 10–17 receiving a caution[3]	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
Humberside Police Force Area										
Children aged 10–17 found guilty	407	449	507	494	1,857	468	384	428	470	1,750
Children aged 0–17 looked after at 31 March[1]	1,385	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	1,350	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
Children aged 10–17 receiving a reprimand	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	75	320	291	686
Children aged 10–17 receiving a final warning	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	24	136	155	315
Children aged 10–17 receiving a caution[3]	486	507	395	521	1,909	330	519	[4]—	[4]—	849

	2001				
	Qtr 1	*Qtr 2*	*Qtr 3*	*Qtr 4*	*Total*
East Riding of Yorkshire					
Children aged 10–17 found guilty	143	84	112	93	432
Children aged 0–17 looked after at 31 March[1]	205	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
Children aged 10–17 receiving a reprimand	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
Children aged 10–17 receiving a final warning	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
Children aged 10–17 receiving a caution[3]	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
Humberside Police Force Area					
Children aged 10–17 found guilty	535	324	477	382	1,718
Children aged 0–17 looked after at 31 March[1]	1,230	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
Children aged 10–17 receiving a reprimand	354	329	247	186	1,116
Children aged 10–17 receiving a final warning	191	195	129	74	589
Children aged 10–17 receiving a caution[3]	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—

[1] Looked after by local councils—numbers exclude children looked after under a series of short term placements. (Information supplied by Department of Health—figures rounded to the nearest five).

[2] Not applicable.

[3] Cautions were replaced by reprimands and final warnings from June 2000.

[4] Not available.

Prisons (Drugs)

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to his answers of 28 January 2003, *Official Report*, columns 757–59W, what assessment he has made of *(a)* the adequacy of closed circuit television provision in visits areas of prisons and *(b)* their success in obstructing smuggling of drugs into prisons by visitors. [97995]

Hilary Benn: No specific research has been conducted by the Prison Service on the effectiveness of closed circuit television (CCTV). A CCTV good practice guide, drawing on the wider experience within the criminal justice system, has however been issued to prisons, against which individual establishments must review their procedures.

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to his answers of 28 January 2003, *Official Report*, columns 757–59W, what importance he attaches to each of the routes he has identified by which drugs enter prisons. [97996]

Hilary Benn: Drug smuggling is by nature a covert activity. It is extremely difficult to quantify the frequency with which different routes are used. Routes vary depending on the nature of the individuals or prisons concerned. The Prison Service, however, believes that one of the most frequent routes is through social visits.

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to his answers of 28 January 2003, *Official Report*, columns 757–59W, which measures to reduce the availability of drugs in prisons aim to disrupt attempts to smuggle drugs in by mail. [97997]

Hilary Benn: It would not be appropriate to disclose all the precise security measures in place to disrupt attempts to smuggle drugs. All social mail is opened and searched before being sent to the prisoner. X-ray machines and active drug dogs may be used in support of that process.

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to his answers of 28 January 003, *Official Report*, column 757–59W, by what means he will assess the effectiveness of measures to reduce the availability of drugs in prisons. [97998]

Hilary Benn: Random mandatory drug testing (MDT) provides the best available measure of the effectiveness of policies to reduce the availability of drugs in prisons. Since the introduction of MDT the figure has reduced from 24.4 per cent. in 1996–97 to 11.6 per cent. in 2001–02. A wide-ranging programme of research is also under way to assess the effectiveness of supply reduction measures.

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to his answers of 28 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 757–59W, how many attempts have been made to smuggle drugs into prisons by means of perimeter breach in the last year for which figures are available. [97999]

Hilary Benn: Any attempts to smuggle drugs into prisons are, by nature, covert activities which are extremely difficult to quantify. No such records are kept. Prisons take into account the geography of each site and adopt appropriate security measures to minimise the risk of smuggling via this route.

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of prison inmates in Britain are using drugs on a regular basis. [97595]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 12 February 2003]*: The random mandatory drug testing (MDT) programme represents the best available measure of overall drug misuse in prisons in England and Wales. The percentage figure for prisoners who tested positive in 2001–02 was 11.6 per cent.

Prison Statistics

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners over the age of 65 are *(a)* serving life sentences and *(b)* have special medical needs; and if he will make a statement. [97494]

Hilary Benn: The number of prisoners serving life sentences over the age of 65 on 30 November 2002 was 121.

A study of 203 sentenced male prisoners aged 60 and over in 15 establishments in England and Wales (about one-fifth of that total population) conducted in 1999–2000 reported that 85 per cent. had one or more major illnesses reported in their medical records and 83 per cent. reported at least one chronic illness or disability when interviewed. The most common illnesses were psychiatric, cardiovascular, musculoskeletal and respiratory. All prisons and their local national health service partners have completed joint prison health needs assessments, leading to the implementation of improvements to healthcare provision based on individual prison health plans.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list those prisons which cater for young offenders; and how many *(a)* young offenders and *(b)* other prisoners are held in each prison. [97038]

Hilary Benn: The information requested is shown in the table. The term young offenders has been taken to refer to any prisoner aged under 21 years of age held in an establishment, whether or not they have been convicted of an offence.

All prison service establishments holding young offenders (i.e. those aged under 21 years of age)

Establishment	*Number of young offenders*	*Number of adults*	*Total population*
Altcourse	78	882	960
Ashfield	228	0	228
Askham Grange	5	118	123
Aylesbury	346	0	346
Belmarsh	54	832	886
Birmingham	2	892	894
Blakenhurst	8	862	870
Brinsford	466	0	466
Bristol	22	584	606
Brixton	1	794	795
Brockhill	51	106	157
Bullingdon	3	856	859
Bullwood Hall	130	32	162
Cardiff	1	635	636
Castington	308	0	308
Chelmsford	174	368	542

All prison service establishments holding young offenders (i.e. those aged under 21 years of age)

Establishment	Number of young offenders	Number of adults	Total population
Cookham Wood	17	98	115
Deerbolt	427	0	427
Doncaster	303	778	1,081
Dorchester	24	182	206
Dover	26	168	194
Drake Hall	36	199	235
East Sutton Park	3	74	77
Eastwood Park	56	223	279
Elmley	57	906	963
Exeter	55	424	479
Feltham	634	0	634
Forest Bank	246	723	969
Glen Parva	713	0	713
Gloucester	24	290	314
Guys Marsh	125	409	534
Haslar	2	120	122
Highdown	96	627	723
Highpoint	5	828	833
Hindley	498	0	498
Holloway	54	430	484
Holme House	36	908	944
Hull	143	824	967
Huntercombe	341	0	341
Lancaster Farms	456	0	456
Leeds	1	1,198	1,199
Lewes	20	459	479
Lindholme	6	712	718
Liverpool	2	1,386	1,388
Low Newton	77	150	227
Manchester	1	1,249	1,250
Moorland	476	469	945
New Hall	106	202	308
Northallerton	137	0	137
Norwich	165	519	684
Onley	513	0	513
Parc	453	510	963
Portland	436	0	436
Reading	250	0	250
Rochester	157	0	157
Shrewsbury	1	278	279
Stoke Heath	614	0	614
Styal	52	329	381
Swinfen Hall	313	0	313
Thorn Cross	177	0	177
Wandsworth	2	1,426	1,428
Warren Hill	209	182	391
Werrington	118	0	118
Wetherby	321	0	321
Winchester	1	577	578
Woodhill	101	649	750
Total	10,963	25,467	36,430

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average weekly number of offenders was *(a)* entering the prison system and *(b)* released from the prison system in each year since 1995. [98139]

Hilary Benn: The information is given in the following table:

The average weekly number of prisoners initially received and discharged

Year	Receptions	Discharges
1995	2,420	1,600
1996	2,320	1,500
1997	2,410	1,500
1998	2,540	1,700
1999	2,600	1,800
2000	2,500	1,800
2001	2,720	1,700
2002	2,820	1,700

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the *(a)* total prison population and *(b)* number of people convicted of a criminal offence were in (i) 1980, (ii) 1985, (iii) 1990, (iv) 1995 and (v) 2000. [98140]

Hilary Benn: The information is given in the table:

	1980	*1985*	*1990*	*1995*	*2000*
Population in custody[1]	43,109	46,278	45,636	50,962	64,602
Number of people convicted for a criminal offence	2,182,635	1,878,287	1,493,936	1,343,227	1,413,449

[1] Average population in custody including fine defaulters.

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* fathers and *(b)* mothers are in prison who are aged (i) under 18, (ii) 18 to 21, (iii) 21 to 31, and (iv) 31 to 41. [97268]

Hilary Benn: There is no routinely collected data on the number and age of fathers and mothers in prison. However, a Home Office study of a large sample of imprisoned women and mothers, published in 1997, found that 60 per cent. of female prisoners, sentenced and unsentenced, had dependent children under the age of 18. Another smaller but more recent study of women prisoners and their work in custody, published in 2000, found broadly similar results (out of a sample of 567 sentenced women, 66 per cent. had dependent children under the age of 18).

Directly equivalent information for male prisoners is not available. However, the 1991 England and Wales prison survey showed that 32 per cent. of male prisoners had dependent children who had been living with them just before they were imprisoned; the corresponding figure for female prisoners was 47 per cent.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the *(a)* capacity and *(b)* occupancy is of each prison. [96770]

Hilary Benn: The information requested is shown in the following table. The table shows the population and operational capacity of all establishments in England and Wales. Operational capacity is the total number of prisoners that an establishment can hold taking into account control, security and the proper operation of the planned regime.

Population and operational capacity at all Prison Service establishments in England and Wales, as at 31 January 2003

Establishment	*Operational capacity*	*Population*
Acklington	802	791
Albany	446	435
Altcourse	1,010	982
Ashfield	400	214
Ashwell	536	534
Askham Grange	141	131
Aylesbury	352	342
Bedford	464	458
Belmarsh	869	880
Birmingham	930	938
Blakenhurst	880	869
Blantyre House	122	116
Blundeston	464	450
Brinsford	493	452
Bristol	606	607
Brixton	798	795
Brockhill	167	146
Blundeston	464	450
Buckley Hall	320	299
Bullingdon	963	893
Bullwood Hall	184	165
Camp Hill	545	538
Canterbury	304	302
Cardiff	671	658
Castington	410	281
Channings Wood	627	614
Chelmsford	576	579
Coldingley	390	385
Cookham Wood	115	112
Dartmoor	625	613
Deerbolt	479	397
Doncaster	1,120	1,112
Dorchester	263	225
Dovegate	860	736
Dover	316	263
Downview	228	214
Drake Hall	315	245
Durham	736	700
East Sutton Park	100	88
Eastwood Park	326	248
Elmley	985	990
Erlestoke	386	383
Everthorpe	378	371
Exeter	533	502
Featherstone	615	610
Feltham	713	641
Ford	541	426
Forest Bank	1,040	1,017
Foston Hall	235	228
Frankland	652	652
Full Sutton	607	601
Garth	667	648
Gartree	276	281
Glen Parva	808	742
Gloucester	330	302
Grendon	231	218
Guys Marsh	570	553
Haslar	160	142
Haverigg	564	499
Hewell Grange	178	174
Highdown	734	713
Highpoint North	231	201
Highpoint South	670	649
Hindley	557	497
Hollesley Bay	329	199
Holloway	483	453
Holme House	995	946
Hull	1,031	1,009
Huntercombe	368	333
Kingston	197	186
Kirkham	561	398
Kirklevington	183	179
Lancaster	244	243
Lancaster Farms	526	461
Latchmere House	196	190
Leeds	1,254	1,240
Leicester	371	351
Lewes	530	504
Leyhill	512	360
Lincoln	365	365
Lindholme	761	740
Littlehey	666	651
Liverpool	1,504	1,392
Long Lartin	441	426
Low Newton	296	253
Lowdham Grange	524	508
Maidstone	548	535
Manchester	1,281	1,253
Moorland	1,039	944
Morton Hall	356	292
Mount	760	748
New Hall	386	332
North Sea Camp	307	264
Northallerton	254	160
Norwich	772	725
Nottingham	550	549
Onley	580	536
Pare	1,028	986
Parkhurst	527	502
Pentonville	1,205	1,253
Portland	456	426
Prescoed	130	83
Preston	664	652
Ranby	778	716
Reading	289	248
Risley	1,053	974
Rochester	180	172
Rye Hill	664	646
Send	220	208
Shepton Mallet	189	191
Shrewsbury	350	310
Spring Hill	296	270
Stafford	640	627
Standford Hill	464	360
Stocken	582	579
Stoke Heath	688	603
Styal	463	427
Sudbury	519	488
Swaleside	777	756
Swansea	368	338
Swinfen Hall	320	316
Thorn Cross	316	176
Usk	242	224
Verne	587	572
Wakefield	581	566
Wandsworth	1,461	1,462
Warren Hill	220	196
Wayland	666	662
Wealstun	712	564
Weare	400	362
Wellingborough	526	523
Werrington	148	111
Wetherby	360	331
Whatton	320	318
Whitemoor	472	402
Winchester	637	606
Wolds	350	316
Woodhill	773	764
Wormwood Scrubs	1,229	1,242
Wymott	822	809
Total	75,456	70,909

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisons in England and Wales have been equipped with stair lifts to help elderly infirm people. [96019]

Hilary Benn: Prison Service establishments install stair lifts as operational needs dictate. Such installations are funded locally. This information is not therefore held centrally and could be collected at disproportionate cost.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many pregnant women are held in prisons in *(a)* England and *(b)* Wales. [96851]

Hilary Benn: Statistics on the number of pregnant women held in prisons in England and Wales are not collected routinely. However, a one-off survey was conducted on 13 November 2002 and has recently been collated. At that time, there were 75 pregnant women held within the female prison estate.

Firearms

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps the Government is taking to control the number of guns arriving in the UK from Eastern Europe and the Balkans. [96903]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The Government is aware of the risk of illegal weapons being imported from Eastern Europe and the Balkans. Law enforcement agencies are continuing to monitor the situation carefully and are already involved in efforts to reduce the flow of firearms to this country. Those firearms which are smuggled and intended for criminal use in the United Kingdom are often connected with smuggling of other commodities, including drugs and this is another angle that is currently being addressed.

A conference on organised crime in the Balkans was held in London last November at which the matter of firearms trafficking was discussed. The Government is currently considering follow-up actions relating to tighter border controls, increasing police capacity, encouraging intelligence-led policing and improving international co-operation, which will help restrict smuggling.

Lancashire Constabulary

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the ethnic composition of the Lancashire Constabulary is. [97512]

Mr. Denham: The following tables are for police officers and all police staff and have been produced from figures supplied by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC).

Police officers

As at 31 March 2002	*Number*
White	3,245
Mixed	0
Black/Black British	13
Asian/Asian British	32
Chinese or Other ethnic group	14
Unspecified	0

All police staff

As at 31 March 2002	*Number*
White	4,732
Mixed	0
Black/Black British	18
Asian/Asian British	45
Chinese or Other ethnic group	35
Unspecified	0

Misuse of Drugs Advisory Council

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to his answer of 5 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 973W, on the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs, what sub-committee meetings took place on *(a)* 1 November 2001 and *(b)* 15 January 2002; where each meeting took place; which members of the Council attended each meeting; which members of the Council attended the (i) meeting on 8 November 2001 and (ii) full meeting on 15 January 2002, and where they took place; which members of the Council were commissioned to produce the draft report on the classification of cannabis; and whether the Council took a vote on approving the draft report on the classification of cannabis. [96575]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Joint meetings of the technical sub-committee and the research sub-committee of the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs took place on 1 November 2001 and 15 January 2002. The meetings were held respectively at the main Home Office building, Queen Anne's Gate and St. Ermin's Hotel, Caxton street, London.

The members of the Council who attended the meetings are as listed.

The meetings of the Council which took place on 8 November 2001 and 15 January 2002 were held respectively in the main Home Office building, Queen Anne's Gate and St. Ermin's Hotel, Caxton street, London. The members of the Council who attended the meetings are as listed.

The report on the classification of cannabis was drafted by the chair of the Council, Professor Sir Michael Rawlins, with contributions from the chairs of the technical and research sub-committees, Professor David Nutt and Mrs. Kay Roberts. The report was approved by the full Council at its meeting on 15 January 2002. In accordance with normal Council procedures, no vote was taken.

Members who attended the joint sub-committee meeting on 1 November 2001:

Dr. Anthony Duxbury
Mr. Paul Hayes
Mr. Roger Howard
Professor Ronald Jones
Professor Otto Meth-Cohn
Professor David Nutt
Dr. Diana Patterson
Mrs. Kay Roberts
Dr. Sue Ruben

Membership of the sub-committees is supplemented with co-opted members from various areas of expertise.

Members who attended the Council meeting on 8 November 2001:

Professor Sir Michael Rawlins, Chairman of the Council
Mrs. Joy Barlow
Mr. Norman Bettison
Reverend Martin Blakeborough
Mr. Alexander Cameron
Dr. Michael Donmall
Ms Vivienne Evans
Dr. Laurence Gruer
Ms Kim Hager
Mr. Peter Hampson
Mr. Paul Hayes
Ms Lorraine Hewitt
Mr. Peter Housden
Mr. Roger Howard
Professor Ronald Jones
Professor Otto Meth-Cohn
Mr. Michael Narayn Singh
Professor David Nutt
Dr. Diana Patterson
Mrs. Kay Roberts
Dr. Roy Robertson
Dr. Sue Ruben
Mr. Ian Sherwood
Professor John Strang

Members who attended the joint sub-committee meeting on 15 January 2002:

Dr. Michael Donmall
Mr. Paul Hayes
Ms Lorraine Hewitt
Mr. Alan Hunter
Professor Ronald Jones
Professor Otto Meth-Cohn
Professor David Nutt
Dr. Diana Patterson
Mrs. Kay Roberts
Dr. Sue Ruben
Professor Dr John Strang

Members who attended the Council meeting on 15 January 2002:

Professor Sir Michael Rawlins, Chairman of the Council
Mrs. Joy Barlow
Mr. Norman Bettison
Reverend Martin Blakeborough
Mr. Raj Boyjoonauth
Mr. Alexander Cameron
Dr. Michael Donmall
Ms Vivienne Evans
Dr. Laurence Gruer
Ms Kim Hager
Mr. Peter Hampson
Mr. Paul Hayes
Dep. Assistant Commissioner Andy Hayman
Mr. Russell Hayton
Ms Lorraine Hewitt
Mr. Roger Howard
Mr. Alan Hunter
Professor Ronald Jones
Professor Otto Meth-Cohn
Mr. Michael Narayn Singh
Professor David Nutt
Dr. Diana Patterson
Mrs. Kay Roberts
Mrs. Patricia Roberts
Dr. Roy Robertson
Dr. Sue Ruben
Mr. Ian Sherwood
Professor John Strang

Police Cars

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his policy is on police cars displaying the Union Flag. [96661]

Mr. Denham: This is an operational matter for individual Chief Officers of police, although we are not aware of any force that has included the Union Flag as part of standard vehicle livery. There are no restrictions under the general law on the display of the Union Flag on land in England and Wales other than those imposed by the provisions of the Trade Descriptions Act 1968 and the Trade Marks Act 1994, which relate to the reproduction of flags in trade marks.

Prison Programmes

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on prison rehabilitation programmes. [98141]

Hilary Benn: One of the principal objectives of the Prison Service is to reduce crime by providing constructive regimes which address offending behaviour, improve educational and work skills and promote law abiding behaviour in custody and after release. The Prison Service increasingly draws upon "What Works" research to develop a more evidence based approach to tackling offending behaviour and the factors that contribute to re-offending. The What Works in Prison Strategy, launched last year, provides a clear direction for the further development of constructive regimes to reduce the risk of re-offending. The strategy encompasses accredited offending behaviour programmes, drug treatment programmes, increased education provision and a custody to work strategy to improve resettlement outcomes. The Prison and Probation Services have been set the challenging but achievable target of reducing the level of reconvictions by fiver per cent. by 2004 compared to the predicted rate.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the budgets were for *(a)* offending behaviour programmes, *(b)* drug treatment and *(c)* basic skills education in prisons in each year between 1995 and 2002; and if he will make a statement on future spending plans. [98142]

Hilary Benn: *(a)* Offending Behaviour Programmes (OBPs).

£ million

	1995–96	1996–97	1997–98	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01	2001–02	2002–03	2003–04
Comprehensive Spending Review	—	—	—	—	7.3	8.4	8.9	8.9	8.9
Crime Reduction Programme	—	—	—	—	0.7	1.1	1.5	—	—
Spending Review 2000	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	3.6	11.6

In addition, in each year there is an element of baseline funding for OBPs which cannot be accurately disaggregated from establishment budgets. Future spending plans are to maintain investment at 2003–04 levels.

(b) Drug Interventions: Between 1995–96 and 2003–04, the Prison Service has been allocated £143 million for drug interventions. The respective annual allocations are shown in the table.

£ million

	1995–96	1996–97	1997–98	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01	2001–02	2002–03	2003–04
Public Expenditure Survey	3	5	6	7	—	—	—	—	—
Comprehensive Spending Review	—	—	—	—	13.0	17.0	17.0	17.0	17.0
Spending Review 2000	—	—	—	—	—	—	10.0	17.0	14.0

The Government's 2002 Spending Review has made provision for significant, additional funding for drugs misuse. In particular, investment in aftercare and throughcare links will help ensure that the gains made while prisoners are in custody will not be lost on their release. Provision is included to boost drug treatment in prisons.

(c) Education:

£ million

Year	*Core funding*
1995–96	37.0
1996–97	34.5
1997–98	36.2
1998–99	39.0
1999–2000	47.4
2000–01	50.9
2001–02	57.0
2002–03	66.0
2003–04	85.0

From 2001–02, budgets for prison education have been ring-fenced and allocated by the Prisoners' Learning and Skills Unit, which reports to the Department for Education and the Home Office. The core budget rose from £57 million in 2001–02 to £66 million in 2002–03, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education (Charles Clarke) recently announced that it will rise to £85 million 2003–04, £110 million in 2004–05 and £125 million in 2005–06. Core funding buys teaching hours, induction and assessment sessions, Library services and education materials. While basic skills are a significant part of prisons' education provision, and each prison has basic skills targets, we cannot say exactly how much of overall education funding goes on basic skills.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many prisoners have participated in the Cognitive Self-Change Programme since its inception; and what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the programme; [98136]

(2) how many prisoners participated in the Enhanced Thinking Skills programme since its inception; and what plans there are to expand the programme. [98143]

Hilary Benn: One hundred and seventy-seven prisoners have participated in the Cognitive Self-Change programme since it was accredited in September 2000. Effectiveness is currently evaluated through reports on institutional behaviour, psychometric data, and risk assessments. Early provisional indications show reductions in hostility, aggression and impulsivity in prisoners undertaking the programme. Reconviction data will in due course also be used to evaluate effectiveness.

Since the inception of the Enhanced Thinking Skills (ETS) programme, 18,564 prisoners had participated up to 31 March 2002. This figures will increase by about 5,000 prisoners for 2002–03, and over 6,000 prisoners in subsequent years due to additional funding to increase delivery.

Annette Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staff he employs to conduct research into projects, schemes, programmes or courses run for the Prison Service. [98195]

Hilary Benn: There are currently 18 members of staff employed to conduct research into projects, schemes, programmes or courses run for the Prison Service.

However, research may form part of the duties to be performed by members of staff other than these core 18 personnel.

Annette Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average length of time required was to research, evaluate and accredit a project or scheme being run for the Prison Service in the last three years. [98201]

Hilary Benn: The average length of time required was two years to adapt or develop Prison Service programmes to accreditation standard in the last three years. Time scales will vary depending on the complexity of the programme, the availability of research data and resources, and competing priorities.

Prisoners (Drug Treatment)

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the effect on drug users of RAPt in the prisons at which RAPt runs programmes. [97683]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 13 February 2003]:* Initial research into reconviction rates of RAPt, Rehabilitation for Addicted Prisoners' Trust programme graduates is encouraging; it shows a 40 per cent. reconviction rate, compared to an expected 51 per cent.

Emerging findings suggest that, for graduates who receive secondary aftercare on release, reconviction rates can be as low as 30 per cent., compared to expected rate of 54 per cent.

Probation Service

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many probation staff left the Probation Service in England and Wales in each financial year since 1997–98, broken down by grade. [93301]

Hilary Benn: The information requested is as follows:

Number of leavers[1]—England and Wales

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*[2]2001–02*
Deputy chief officers	4	6	1	9	7
Assistant chief officers[3]	31	18	18	17	75
Senior probation officers	87	84	104	313	148
Probation officers[4]	485	465	612	593	417
Probation service officers[5]	169	210	233	290	[5]—
All other staff	760	729	596	429	1,266
Total	1,536	1,512	1,664	1,651	1,913

[1] Figures shown in headcount and were collected for calendar years only 1997–2000 inclusive.

[2] 1,200 staff moved to family court welfare in April 2001. Information on specific grades of these staff are unavailable and therefore have been taken from probation officers and all other staff.

[3] Includes area managers.

[4] Includes senior practitioners, trainee probation officers, temporary probation officers.

[5] PSOs included in other staff 2001–02 onwards.

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the forecast spending is on investment in the Probation Service from 2003 to 2008. [98188]

Hilary Benn: The summary budget for the National Probation Service is set out in the table.

£ million

	2002–03	*2003–04*
Probation Boards Revenue Grant	520.0	560.0
Hostels Revenue Grant	42.7	49.0
Probation Officer Training	42.0	53.0
Estates and Hostels Capital Programme	18.3	18.3
National Directorate Budgets	52.8	65.7
Total	675.8	746.0

The major items of capital investment are the £18.3 million on the commercial estate and hostels and investment in new information technology equipment.

Budgets for 2004–05 and 2005–06 have not yet been finalised. Budgets from 2005–06 onwards are subject to the next spending review.

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what forecast his Department has made of the number of probation officers required to manage the caseloads of non-custodial sentences; and if he will make a statement. [98189]

Hilary Benn: The most recent information regarding the current staff establishment of the National Probation Service is as follows:

	Number
Probation officers	7,506
Probation Services officers	3,566
Other staff	4,716

Source:

RDS Probation statistics 2001.

It is estimated that the provisions within the Criminal Justice Bill would require an additional 2,000 full-time equivalent probation officers and an additional 1,500 full-time equivalent Probation Services officers in the year of full implementation.

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many probation officers were employed by the National Probation Service in each year since 1990. [98191]

Hilary Benn: The information requested is as follows:

Numbers of probation officers[1,2]— England and Wales

	Probation officers	*Probation service officers*	*Total*
1990	6,909	1,791	8,700
1991	7,153	1,863	9,016
1992	7,484	1,881	9,365
1993	7,666	1,942	9,608
1994	7,776	1,971	9,747
1995	7,455	1,914	9,369
1996	7,312	1,895	9,207
1997	7,149	1,919	9,068
1998	7,193	2,027	9,220
1999	7,519	2,502	10,021
2000	7,571	2,869	10,440
2001	7,506	3,566	11,072

[1] Numbers shown as whole time equivalents

[2] Information shown taken at 31 December.

Although the question specifically asks for the number of probation officers, the information on probation service officers has also been provided. There has been an increasing growth in the use of probation service officers to support the work undertaken by probation officers. In particular, the use of accredited programme has seen a number of low/medium risk offenders supervised as part of a group rather than on an individual basis as has occurred in the past. Probation service officers, who receive specific training to enable them to manage these programmes and supervise the offenders participating, run these accredited programmes.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many departmental minutes issued by his Department were outstanding on 30 November 2002 that referred to public-private partnerships, as included in Table B14 of the Consolidated Fund and National Loans Fund Accounts; and what their value was. [89423]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 13 January 2003]:* The contingent liabilities associated with the Home Department's public-private partnerships at 30 November 2002 were as follows:

1. Her Majesty's Prison Service—The Crown acts as insurer of last resort in respect of contracts to design, construct, manage and finance new prisons. The liability runs for the construction period plus an operational period of 25 years in respect of each new prison. Amount: unquantifiable;

2. Police Information and Technology Unit—The Airwave Project with 02 (formerly the mobile communications arm of BT) for the Police Service. The estimated costs of termination range from £480 million to more than £700 million. There would also be additional costs associated with the introduction of an alternative to Airwave;

3. Home Office Pay and Pension Service—Covering the potential loss of Home Office funds transmitted using the contractor's equipment. The risk is small as the contract includes all the usual safeguards for the authorisation process required by the Bankers Automated Clearing System.

Potential, but unlikely, largest single risk £80 million; and

4. The Home Office contract with Sirius for providing computer services. The estimated costs of termination range from £14.14 million to £33.62 million.

Young Offenders

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what research his Department has undertaken to assess the impact on re-offending rates of offenders who have completed the National Grid Transco Foundation in Reading young offender institution; and if he will make a statement. [98193]

Hilary Benn: The National Grid Transco Foundation supports the delivery of gas groundwork engineering training and forklift truck driving training for prisoners at Reading young offender institution. None of the nine prisoners who have completed the gas groundwork engineering training, and only six of more than 90 prisoners who have completed the forklift truck driving training, are reported as having re-offended since their release. The Prison Service is now working with the National Grid Transco Foundation to introduce the training at other establishments.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) when he will answer the question of 15 January 2003 from the hon. Member for Woking, concerning restraining orders for serial offenders; [95070]

(2) when he will answer the question of 15 January 2003 from the hon. Member for Woking, concerning travel restriction orders. [95071]

Hilary Benn: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 31 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 398W. I apologise for the delay in responding.

Retail Industry Crime

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to his answer of 14 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 585W, on Retail Industry Crime, how many small retail businesses have *(a)* applied for and *(b)* received a grant from the Government to improve security on their property; and if he will list those consulted in the preparation of the new survey of crime affecting retail and manufacturing business. [97263]

Mr. Denham: Funding under the Small Retailers in Deprived Areas Initiative is allocated directly to regional Crime Reduction Directors, whose responsibility it is to distribute the money to Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs) covering the 10 per cent. most deprived wards in the region. Proposals invited from CDRPs have to meet the scheme's strict criteria, and are worked up in close conjunction with the regional Crime Reduction Director, who submits them to me for approval. All proposals submitted to me in the first two years of the initiative have been approved without exception.

Overall, in the first year of the initiative (2001–02), almost 3,000 small businesses benefited, while in the second year over 4,500 retailers and small businesses stand to benefit from this funding.

The Crime Against Business survey is funded jointly by the Home Office, Her Majesty's Treasury, and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's Neighbourhood Renewal Unit and the Small Business Service (an agency of the Department for Trade and Industry). The British Retail Consortium, British Chambers of Commerce, and the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) have also been consulted and closely involved in the survey. Representatives from all the above organisations, public and private, have participated from the outset as steering group members and tender panel representatives and have also had input into the survey methodology and questionnaire content.

The Association of Conveniences Stores, the Federation of Small Business and the British Shops and Stores Association have pledged their support for the survey.

Telephone interviews and postal questionnaires were piloted with members of the business community.

Road Traffic Offences

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many successful prosecutions there have been under the Road Traffic Act 1991 c40 section 3 in each year since 1991. [97168]

Hilary Benn: The information is given in the table.

The Government's response to the consultation exercise on road traffic penalties, setting out our final recommendations, was published on 24 July 2002. This report sets out our commitment to raising the penalty for causing death by dangerous driving and causing death by careless driving while under the influence of drink or drugs, from 10 years to 14 years imprisonment as soon as parliamentary timetable allows.

The Criminal Justice Bill will introduce new sentences for dangerous offenders that will ensure that offenders committing an offence under section 3 of the Road Traffic Act, who have also been assessed as dangerous, may remain in custody for as long as they are considered to pose a risk of harm to the public.

Proceedings and findings of guilt at all courts for the offence of causing death by careless driving while under influence of drink or drugs[1] in England and Wales 1991 to 2001

England and Wales — *Number of offences*

	Total proceedings for trial at magistrates courts	*Total findings of guilt at all courts[2]*
1991	[3]—	[3]—
1992	6	1
1993	63	29
1994	48	50
1995	51	53
1996	63	67
1997	78	67
1998	80	71
1999	63	49
2000	72	57
2001	66	32

[1] Section 3 of the Road Traffic Act 1991 (implemented on 25 July 1991) introduced the offence and inserted it into the Road Traffic Offenders Act 1988 as section 3A, triable on indictment with a maximum sentence of five years or a fine or both (extended to 10 years under the Criminal Justice Act 1993, section 67.

[2] Includes youth court cases sent for sentence, offence proceeding against in earlier years or for other offences.

[3] Not available.

Sally Clark

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to review the procedures carried out by Home Office pathologists into the deaths of infants in suspicious circumstances following the Court of Appeal judgment on Sally Clark. [95588]

Mr. Denham: I commissioned an independent review of Forensic Pathology Services in England and Wales last year.

The review report recommended that:

1. the decline in numbers of forensic pathologists should be reversed through a sustained training programme;
2. improved administrative arrangements should be put in place, monitoring service levels and ensuring that standards are maintained; and
3. steps should be taken to ensure that there are improved facilities for the conduct of post-mortem examinations.

Now that the review has been discussed by the Policy Advisory Board for Forensic Pathology, it is under consideration by the Government.

Sex Tourism

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps are being taken to tackle sex tourism by British people, with particular reference to those who are known paedophiles; and if he will make a statement. [98103]

Hilary Benn: The Government are committed to eradicating the sexual exploitation of children, including where United Kingdom citizens go abroad to abuse children. We have already put in place a number of measures to deal with this problem:

> The Sex Offenders Act 1997 enables courts in the United Kingdom to deal with UK citizens who commit sex offences against children abroad. This provision is being re-enacted in the Sexual Offences Bill;
>
> Since June 2001, 'registered' sex offenders are required to notify the police if they intend to travel abroad for eight days or more, The police can, and do, pass this information to other jurisdictions where they believe the offender may commit offences overseas;
>
> We are proposing, as part of the Sexual Offences Bill, a new order that would require those who have committed sex offences overseas to register if they come to the UK (which will mean they will have to notify the police if they intend to travel abroad);
>
> The Criminal Justice (Terrorism and Conspiracy) Act 1998 makes it an offence for a person to conspire to commit an offence outside the UK, including sexual offences against children.

As my right hon. Friends the Home Secretary, the Prime Minister and Lord Falconer have recently made clear, we are looking further at the issue of sex tourism, including the number of days a sex offender 'registered' in the United Kingdom can travel overseas before he is required to notify the police. We are determined to ensure that effective arrangements are put in place to tackle this issue and we will address this in the Sexual Offences Bill.

However, legislation is not the only way of dealing with this problem. Sex tourism is one part of a wider set of issues in which poor people—particularly young women and children—are vulnerable to the interests of the sex industry, national and international trafficking and associated illegal activities. It is an international problem which requires internationally coordinated action. We are working with Governments, law enforcement agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to tackle this problem head on wherever it occurs.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department for International Development support projects in many parts of the world aimed at combating those who commit offences against children. Much of the focus of such projects is on reducing the vulnerability of young people being recruited into this industry. Across Government, we are supporting the efforts of regional and international agencies to combat trafficking, strengthen law enforcement and improve the mechanisms for prosecution of those who commit sex offences abroad.

The Government are actively involved in a number of projects to combat sexual exploitation, particularly in South East Asia.

> Through the International Labour Organisation we are funding a major programme in South East Asia to raise awareness, help women and children escape from sexual exploitation, and reintegrate them into their own or new communities.
>
> We are working with World Vision in Cambodia to run an information programme on the dangers of sexual exploitation aimed at children at risk, local authorities and the tourism industry.
>
> We are funding projects to help train the Cambodian police to detect and disrupt paedophile activity and to raise awareness of the issue among street children.
>
> We have worked to improve child protection and support in Thailand by bringing over expert trainers from the Northumberland police and The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC).
>
> We have provided child protection equipment and training to the Thai Public Welfare Department.
>
> We have funded the translation and adaptation of End Child Prostitution Pornography and Trafficking (ECPAT's) "Guide to Protecting Children Online" for use in Thailand, Philippines, Indonesia and Japan.
>
> We have arranged for the National High Tech Crime Unit (NHTCU) to bring computer hardware and software to combat child abuse online and train officers from the Royal Thai police; and
>
> there is also close and regular collaboration between officials in Bangkok and their Thai counterparts on the movements and activities of known United Kingdom paedophiles.

Teenage Drug Use (Leeds)

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many teenagers he estimates have tried class A drugs in the *(a)* Leeds West constituency and *(b)* the city of Leeds in the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [96973]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Data on drug use by teenagers is not available at constituency or city level. The following table provides information about the percentage of 16–19 year olds who have ever tried a Class A drug in *(a)* Yorkshire and Humberside and *(b)* England and Wales reported as part of the British Crime Survey (BCS).

Percentage of 16–19 year olds who have ever tried a Class A drug

Percentage

	BCS 1998	*BCS 2000*	*BCS 2001–02*
Yorkshire and Humberside	27	17	10
England and Wales	16	14	11

It should not be concluded from any of these results that young people in Yorkshire and Humberside are any more or less likely to have ever tried a Class A drug. In 1998 and 2000 particularly the regional result is based on a very small sample (57 and 58 16–19 year olds respectively) which may not be representative of the population in this area.

For the same reason, the apparent dramatic decline in the percentage of 16–19 year olds having ever tried a Class A drug in the Yorkshire and Humberside region over the three surveys, should be treated with caution.

"The Drug use, smoking and drinking among young people in England in 2001 "survey estimates that 6 per cent. of school children aged between 11 and 15 years olds have tried a class A drug. No geographical breakdown is available for this age group.

Unsafe Convictions

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the inquiry chaired by Lord Steyn on the definition of unsafe conviction. [85439]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 9 December 2002]:* We have confirmed with Lord Steyn that he has not chaired such an inquiry.

Departmental Vehicles

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made with renewal of his Department's and its agencies' vehicle fleets on a lower emission basis, broken down by volume and percentage for each category of vehicle, type of power unit and type of fuel on an annual basis, over each of the past three years. [96587]

Hilary Benn: Home Office environmental policy on vehicle replacement states that wherever possible, vehicles purchased will encompass either dual fuel technology (for example Liquid Petroleum Gas (LPG)/petrol) or be high-pressure direct injection diesel with particulate filters. With the introduction of the new carbon dioxide (CO_2) based tax regime, CO_2 emissions are taken into consideration, particularly in cases where a diesel option cannot be specified, in the small car sector.

In 2000–01, 43 per cent. of new cars ordered were diesel powered. In 2001–02, 69 per cent. of all new cars ordered were either diesel or LPG fuelled, rising to 76 per cent. in 2002–03. The following table illustrates the trend towards the acquisition of more environmentally friendly vehicles during the last three years.

Numbers of vehicles procured by Her Majesty's Prison Service between 2002–03 and 2000–01

Type of vehicle	*Numbers of vehicles acquired*	*Diesel powered*	*Petrol*	*LPG/ petrol powered*	*Proportion of diesel and LPG/ Petrol (percentage)*
2002–03					
Cars	731	489	236	6	68
LCV[1]	432	413	19	—	96
HCV[2]	111	111	—	—	100
Total	1,274	1,013	255	6	80
2001–02					
Cars	814	536	271	6	66
LCV	466	438	28	—	94
HCV	113	113	—	—	100
Total	1,393	1,087	299	6	78

Numbers of vehicles procured by Her Majesty's Prison Service between 2002–03 and 2000–01

Type of vehicle	Numbers of vehicles acquired	Diesel powered	Petrol	LPG/ petrol powered	Proportion of diesel and LPG/ Petrol (percentage)
2000–01					
Cars	693	401	292	—	58
LCV	485	443	42	—	91
HCV	166	166	—	—	100
Total	1,344	1,010	334	—	75

[1] LCV—Light Commercial Vehicle up to 7.5 tonnes.

[2] HCV—Heavy Commercial Vehicle over 7.5 tonnes.

West Yorkshire Police

Jon Trickett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of the budget for West Yorkshire Police is spent on pension funds in 2002–03. [96622]

Mr. Denham: The Chief Constable informs me that the proportion of budget estimated to be spent on police pensions in 2002–03 is 15 per cent.

DEFENCE

Army (Gender and Culture Report)

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action is proposed as a result of the report "Gendered Bodies, Personnel Policies and the Culture of the British Army". [97343]

Angela Watkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a copy of the study undertaken for the Ministry of Defence to identify sexism in the army; who undertook the survey; what methodology was used; how many people were consulted and of what gender; and for what purpose the results of the survey will be used. [97175]

Dr. Moonie: The study into gender and culture in the contemporary British Army, "Gendered Bodies, Personnel Policies and the Culture of the British Army", is an independent report, completed at the University of Newcastle, into employment practices and policies within the Army.

The research was not commissioned by the Ministry of Defence, but was completed with the full co-operation of the Army and part-funded under the Joint Grant Scheme that encourages research relevant to the Department's long-term research programme.

To date, the Army and Ministry of Defence have examined a summary of the report. The full report will be examined closely in due course but there is no specific action intended as a result of this study at this time.

The Department certainly will not ignore the report's findings and, from what has been gleaned from the report summary so far, in many respects is moving in the direction suggested in the way women are recognised and treated.

The report's originators have agreed that I can place a copy of the report in the Library of the House.

Ammunition Exports

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what ammunition has been sent abroad for disposal under civilian contract since 1997; and to which countries they have been sent. [97287]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 10 February 2003]*: Since 1997, surplus (5.56mm, 7.62mm and 0.303mm) small arms ammunition has been sold overseas. The countries it was sold to are the United States, Netherlands, Australia, Finland, Philippines, Canada and Latvia. Additionally, in 1999, 10,000 Self Loading Rifles (SLRs) with 7.62mm ammunition were sold to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, which subsequently gifted them to the Government of Sierra Leone as part of a wider assistance package.

Anglo-French Collaboration

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the UK's military projects involving Anglo-French collaboration since 1980, and set out their current status. [97327]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Anti-rabies Testing

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what risk assessment was conducted before anti-rabies testing at Dundrennan Range; and what further assessment has since been made of the risks to *(a)* local people, *(b)* pets, and *(c)* other livestock arising from the testing. [88642]

Mr. Morley: I have been asked to reply.

The field trial was authorised by the ACP (Advisory Committee on Pesticides) who performed an independent evaluation of the risks of the trial, and stipulated certain conditions to further reduce such risks.

The Central Science Laboratory's (CSL) own risk assessment was that the risks to local people, pets and other livestock was extremely low. No poisoning incidents have occurred as a result of the trial, and the overall level of pesticide used at Dundrennan was between 10,000 and one million times less (per square kilometre) than the level used during certain agricultural practices.

Army Training

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which army initial training establishments were not visited in the context of the appraisal of initial training carried out by the Director of Operational Capability between 3rd October and 18th December 2002. [97903]

Mr. Ingram: The Director of Operational Capability did not visit the following Army non-officer initial training establishments:

Army Training Regiment—Winchester

Royal Military School of Music—Kneller Hall

Armour Centre—Bovington and Lulworth

Royal School of Military Engineering—Minley

Royal School of Signals—Blandford

School of Army Aviation—Middle Wallop

Defence Logistics Support Training Group—Deepcut, Kineton and Aldershot

Adjutant General's Corps Training Group—Worthy Down

Defence Animal Centre—Melton Mowbray

Royal Military Police Training School—Chichester

Capital Projects

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place the evaluations for Capital Modernisation Fund projects in his Department since 1998 in the Library; and if he will make a statement. [97033]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence has been involved in five Capital Modernisation Fund projects to date. Some are not yet complete. I will ensure that all evaluation reports, when completed, are placed in the Library of the House except where there are security or other confidentiality grounds for not doing so.

Civil Contingency Reaction Force

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects the Territorial Army to have the capacity to sustain a command structure for a full time headquarters for the new Civil Contingency Reaction Force. [95181]

Mr. Ingram: The 14 Civil Contingencies Reaction Forces (CCRFs) are not grouped in a single formation with a separate headquarters. They form force elements which may be called on, alongside regular units, by the established chain of command (Ministry of Defence, Land Command, Divisional HQs and Regional Brigades) in the event of a request for military assistance by the civil authorities.

New Volunteer Reserve posts have been established at Brigade and Divisional level to reinforce existing command and control arrangements for all military assistance operations, whether or not CCRFs are involved.

Each CCRF is parented by a Territorial Army infantry battalion. Additional posts have been established within these battalions to support CCRF staff and training activities.

Recruitment for these new posts is in progress, with the aim of filling all posts by 31 December 2003.

Civilian Staff (Northern Ireland)

Mr. Kevin McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the *(a)* numerical and *(b)* percentage breakdown by perceived community origin are of his civilian staff employed in Northern Ireland. [97692]

Dr. Moonie: The numerical and percentage breakdown of the civilian staff employed by the Ministry of Defence in Northern Ireland as at 1 January 2003 is set out in the table below.

	Male		*Female*		*Total*	
	Number	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*
Protestant	1,462	42.8	992	29.1	2,454	71.9
Roman Catholic	254	7.4	192	5.6	446	13.1
Others	344	10.1	170	5.0	514	15.0
Total	2,060	60.3	1,354	39.7	3,414	

Laptops

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many laptop computers were used by *(a)* Ministers and special advisers and *(b)* officials in his Department in each year since 1995; how many were (i) lost and (ii) stolen; what their cost was; and if he will make a statement. [97503]

Dr. Moonie: Information regarding the number of laptop computers used within the Ministry of Defence in any given year is not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost. The same applies to information regarding any items recorded as lost. With regard to the number of laptop computers suspected of being stolen, reported cases are recorded centrally on a summary basis only. Those records relate to items suspected of being stolen and so it cannot be assumed that theft actually applies in every case. Information regarding stolen laptop computers is only readily available from 1997–98 and is here related to cases where the value of suspected loss exceeds £1,000.

Year	*Total*	*(£)*
1997–98	18	38,010
1998–99	3	6,885
1999–00		
2000–01	4	7,748
2001–02	12	31,530

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many cases of computer *(a)* hacking, *(b)* fraud and *(c)* theft his Department recorded in 2001–02; and on how many occasions computer systems have been illegally accessed by computer hackers (i) within and (ii) outside his Department. [97556]

Dr. Moonie: The number of incidents affecting computer systems for the years 2001 and 2002 are summarised in the following table:

Incident Type	*2001*	*2002*
Computer Hacking Totals: of which:	12	7
Public website defacements	2	1
Internal incursions	10	6
Computer Fraud	4	0
Computer Theft	118	155

None of the instances of hacking had any operational impact, and despite widespread and frequent probes of Ministry of Defence firewalls connected to the Internet, there is no evidence of any successful incursion from an external source to any Departmental computer system.

In the case of computer fraud, all instances are cases where MOD computers have been used in support of fraudulent activities, rather than fraudulent use of a computer—based system.

Departmental Assets

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his estimate is of the total revenues from the disposal of defence assets from April 2001 to December 2002; and if he will make a statement. [95793]

Mr. Ingram: The total revenues from the disposal of defence assets from April 2001 to December 2002 is about £400 million. Information on asset disposals is published annually in the Consolidated Departmental Resource Accounts. The latest information (that for financial year 2001–02) is contained in HC 47 of 21 November 2002, copies of which are available in the Library of the House and on the Ministry of Defence website.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his estimate is of the value of the land and building assets of his Department in each year from 1990–91 to 2001–02; and if he will make a statement. [95796]

Dr. Moonie: We publish information on the value of Ministry of Defence land and building assets annually, and have done this since 1999–2000, in MOD's Consolidated Departmental Resource Accounts. These values are mainly based on the operational value of the estate to MOD and do not represent the market or sale value of the properties in question. For ease of reference, the figures are:

	£ billion
1999–2000	14.1
2000–01	14.4
2001–02	14.3

These are audited figures, which reflect the impact of indexation, additions, disposals and depreciation arising each year. Copies of the accounts have been placed in the Library of the House.

We also have (unaudited) estimates for:

	£ billion
1997–98[1]	13.4
1998–99	13.7

[1] The first year for which MOD-wide valuation information is available.

Departmental Consultations

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list consultations his Department has conducted since 1997; and when each consultation *(a)* opened and *(b)* closed. [97428]

Dr. Moonie: The Cabinet Office Code of Practice on Written Consultation applies to all formal national public consultation documents issued by Departments from 1 January 2001 and the information requested is not available before that date.

Since 1 January 2001, the following formal national public consultation documents have been issued by the Ministry of Defence:

	Consultation Period	
Formal National Public Consultation	*Date opened*	*Date closed*
Future of the Defence Diversification Agency	1 February 2001	23 March 2001
Proposed introduction of the voluntary screening programme following health concerns in respect of depleted uranium	13 February 2001	9 March 2001
The Military Maritime Graves and the Protection of Military Remains Act 1986	14 February 2001	14 May 2001
Armed Forces pension scheme review	1 March 2001	31 July 2001
Joint compensation review	1 March 2001	31 July 2001
The 2nd consultation document on the introduction of a voluntary screening programme for depleted uranium	11 April 2001	4 July 2001
Ministry of Defence police quinquennial review	26 April 2001	18 December 2001

Further information on these public consultations can be found on the internet under http: //www .mod.uk/consultations.

Domestic Violence

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he is taking to *(a)* increase awareness of domestic violence and *(b)* provide services and support for the victims of domestic violence within the families of members of the military services. [97746]

Dr. Moonie: Domestic violence is a significant social issue and we recognise the need to ensure that it is dealt with effectively within the Armed Forces' community. Domestic violence by Service personnel is not tolerated under any circumstances, not least because of the detrimental impact that such incidents can have on morale, discipline and operational efficiency.

A tri-Service policy on domestic violence was issued in February 2002. The policy, which has now been implemented by the Services, sets out the roles and responsibilities of the chain of command and the welfare agencies in detecting and dealing with incidents of domestic violence and in providing confidential advice and support. The Services are proactive in increasing awareness about domestic violence to those in command and in publicising (via leaflets, posters and web sites) the services available to possible victims. There are many agencies, both military and civilian, that exist to provide support to victims. The confidential support lines that are operated by the three Services are able to signpost callers to these support agencies. In cases where immediate or imminent harm is suspected the incident is reported to the most readily available police force; primacy rests with the local Home Department Police Force in United Kingdom whereas cases arising overseas are dealt with by the Service police.

E-mail Addresses

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence by what e-mail address members of the public may contact *(a)* him and *(b)* each of the Ministers in his Department; and for each e-mail address if he will state (i) the date it became active and (ii) the number of e-mails received in each month since activation. [97448]

Dr. Moonie: Members of the public can contact all Defence Ministers via public@ministers.mod.uk. This email address has been active since 1998.

The table below details the number of emails recorded as received via this address since July 2000, from when these statistics have been collected:

2000	*Number*
July	311
August	2,872
September	1,409
October	594
November	427
December	350
Total	6,477

2001	*Number*
January	241
February	585
March	394
April	209
May	476
June	533
July	148
August	202
September	1,374
October	891
November	627
December	384
Total:	6,064

2002	*Number*
January	764
February	322
March	480
April	2,280
May	873
June	700
July	1,891
August	1,506
September	562
October	474
November	539
December	140
Total:	10,801

2003	*Number*
January	675

Of the total number of e-mails set out above, over 85 per cent. are categorised as 'spam'; that is, offensive, or circulars, or otherwise not worthy of a response.

Experiments (Human Volunteers)

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many experiments sponsored by his Department have used human volunteers in each year since 1997; and if he will list them, broken down by recorded category. [93291]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 27 January 2003]*: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Firefighters' Dispute

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the total cost incurred by his Department as a result of the fire strikes has been. [97807]

Mr. Ingram: It is not yet possible to give a reliable estimate of the total cost incurred by the Ministry of Defence as a result of the fire strikes. Costs incurred for the recent strike periods are still being processed through MOD's cost reporting system.

Gulf Deployment (Rules of Engagement)

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which instruments of international law have been considered during the drafting of the rules of engagement for Her Majesty's Armed Forces deploying to the Gulf. [98165]

Mr. Ingram: All rules of engagement are informed by the need to act in full conformity with international law, including Treaty obligations and relevant United Nations Security Council Resolutions.

HPM Electro-magnetic Pulse Weapon

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he or his officials have had with the US Government on the development of the HPM electro-magnetic pulse weapon. [97231]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 11 February 2003]:* I am withholding the information requested under Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information which relates to national security.

Iraq

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps are being taken to protect UK troops against the potentially toxic environment of Iraq. [95914]

Dr. Moonie: Operational planning takes into account the risk of exposure of British troops to potentially toxic environments. Force protection measures include physical protection, medical countermeasures and dissemination of information on individual protective measures to be taken against specific identified threats.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he is planning to introduce the new chemical and biological weapon detection systems for possible operations in Iraq; and if he will make a statement. [97495]

Mr. Hoon: There are a number of new chemical and biological detection systems due to enter service soon and be available for possible military action in Iraq. I am withholding the details of these systems under Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information which relates to national security.

Mr. Wood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will take steps to establish the number of civilian casualties caused by British military action taken in enforcement of the Iraqi no-fly zones; and if he will make a statement. [97648]

Mr. Ingram: We conduct extensive analysis after every response made in self-defence by coalition aircraft patrolling the No Fly Zones.

Coalition aircrew only ever respond in self-defence against military targets. When attacks by Iraqi air defences force coalition aircraft to respond in this way we go to great lengths to ensure that the risk of civilian casualties is minimised. Targets are selected with extreme care and precision guided weapons are used.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans exist for the transport of military casualties back to the UK in the event of hostilities in Iraq; what aircraft will be used; and what the estimated journey time is. [97790]

Dr. Moonie: The transport of military casualties from theatres to the United Kingdom is a well planned and practised procedure. In the event of hostilities in Iraq, military casualties will be taken from Kuwait City International Airport to Cyprus in a military VC10 with a flight time of four hours. They will then be transferred from Cyprus to the United Kingdom by commercial aircraft again with a flight time of four hours.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on NATO policy in respect of Iraq. [98040]

Mr. Ingram: At the Prague Summit in November 2002, the NATO Allies committed themselves to take effective action to assist and support the efforts of the United Nations to ensure full and immediate compliance by Iraq, without conditions or restrictions, with UN Security Council Resolution 1441. This remains the NATO policy.

Land Sales (Ashford)

Matthew Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what land has been sold by his Department in the Ashford area in the last five years. [98172]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence has sold land in Ashford as follows:

A small part of Rowcroft Barracks was sold to Kent CC for the A20/A28 link road.

Parts of Rowcroft Barracks and Templer Barracks was sold for the Channel Tunnel Rail Link.

The remainder of Rowcroft and Templer Barracks was sold for development.

The former Oil Pipeline Agency site at Wye to the NE of Ashford was sold for development.

Merlin HC3 Helicopters

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence why his Department has not deployed Merlin HC3 Helicopters to the Gulf. [98180]

Mr. Ingram: The Merlin HC3 is yet to achieve the required level of operational capability for it to be deployed to the Gulf region.

Ministerial Travel

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many times since 2001 he has taken flights on departmental duties in the UK; how many of these were *(a)* charter flights, *(b)* first or club-class and *(c)* by helicopter; and who accompanied him on each trip. [95391]

Dr. Moonie: Since 2001, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has taken 25 flights on Ministry of Defence duties within the United Kingdom, which are broken down as follows:

seven by RAF aircraft—accompanied by relevant Ministry of Defence officials, and on one occasion by his Parliamentary Private Secretary;

one by club-class return civil flight—accompanied by a Private Secretary; and

17 by Service helicopter—accompanied by relevant Ministry of Defence officials.

All travel is undertaken fully in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code and Travel by Ministers, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

Operation Telic

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the LOA and LSSA as it applies to personnel serving on Operation Telic. [96940]

Mr. Ingram: Local Overseas Allowance (LOA) is not part of the military salary or a reward for overseas service, but a cost of living addition paid only in circumstances where personnel are likely to incur greater day-to-day expenditure overseas than they would in the United Kingdom. This is not generally the case for those deployed on operations.

Those personnel who are temporarily deployed away from their permanent, LOA earning, duty station, and no longer incurring the full range of additional costs associated with that station, still have on-going financial commitments overseas, and many have families who remain at the permanent duty station. Consequently, all Service personnel continue to receive the full LOA rate for the first 17 days of their deployment. Additionally, married accompanied personnel continue to receive their full LOA rate unless their accompanying spouse also leaves the permanent duty station for more than 17 days, at which point an abatement of approximately 35 per cent. is applied. Single or married unaccompanied personnel lose 20 per cent. of their full LOA rate after the first 17 days.

Personnel on Operation Telic who meet the eligibility criteria will receive Longer Separated Service Allowance (LSSA) or (for those serving in seagoing units) Longer Service at Sea Bonus (LSSB). These allowances compensate personnel, regardless of marital status, for the effects of separation from home life. They are paid at three rates dependent upon periods of accumulated separation. LSSA is paid for unbroken periods of separation of 10 days or more, while LSSB is paid continuously while in qualifying units. Bonuses are available for those who experience very high levels of accumulated separation and these will be increased to £1,250. In order to reduce the incidence of junior personnel experiencing more than one operational tour without compensation for separation, MOD will reduce the initial qualifying period for LSSA from 18 months' service to 12 months. We are also about to increase the higher rate of LSSB and to reduce the qualifying criteria for LSSB bonuses.

The decision to enhance these separation allowances reflects the Ministry of Defence's wish to target those on operations, particularly our most junior personnel. In view of the current operational deployment, it has been decided to introduce the changes with effect from 1 March 2003, following a recommendation by the Armed Forces' Pay Review Body.

Deepcut Barracks

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for how many days Private Steven MacNaughton was missing without leave from Deepcut Barracks from 7 November 2002; what disciplinary action was taken subsequently; and what reasons were given for his absence. [97831]

Dr. Moonie: The information requested is personal data protected by the Data Protection Act 1998, and cannot be released without the individual's consent. The information is also withheld in accordance with Exemption 12, privacy of an individual, of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

QinetiQ

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list, by site, his best current assessment of the land assets of QinetiQ. [98038]

Dr. Moonie: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 13 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 1165W, to the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) on the land assets of QinetiQ. Since that answer was given, an unconditional sale agreement has been exchanged for the Aquila site in Bromley, Kent and the sale is due to be completed on 17 March 2003. No other QinetiQ sites have been sold since the company was created in July 2001.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list each of the QinetiQ sites which have been sold since the creation of the company, indicating the value of the sale in each case. [98039]

Dr. Moonie: An unconditional sale agreement has been exchanged for the Aquila site in Bromley, Kent. The agreement is due to be completed on 17 March 2003. No other sites have been sold since the formation of QinetiQ. Details of the sale value of Aquila are currently considered commercially sensitive. I am therefore withholding that information under Exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Royal Navy (Chilean Visits)

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what Royal Navy vessels have been visited by Chilean Government officials or Chilean armed forces personnel in the past year. [97193]

Mr. Ingram: During the past 12 months, we are aware of the following Royal Naval vessels having been visited by Chilean Government officials or senior Chilean armed forces personnel in either British or Chilean ports: HMS Leeds Castle; HMS St. Albans; RFA Grey Rover; HMS Sheffield; HMS Boxer and HMS Brave. Information on any visits that may have been paid in locations other than British or Chilean ports is not held centrally.

Service Personnel (Gulf)

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what arrangements are in place for the accurate keeping of medical records of military personnel deployed to the middle east; and what progress has been made in introducing a Smart Military Dog-Tag. [93369]

Dr. Moonie: It is Ministry of Defence policy that all treatments and vaccinations given to armed forces personnel are to be recorded on their personal medical records. Service personnel are issued with form F Med 965, the Operational Medical Record, prior to deployment and any treatment or medication administered while they are deployed should be recorded on it. The information is transferred to their personal medical records on return to their home base. In addition, electronic medical record systems are used in theatre where practicable. Although the MOD continues to examine the possible use of "smart card" technology to store medical and other personal information, as yet there are no systems available that fully meet the requirements of the armed forces.

Munition Stocks

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the results of the Ministry of Defence's Stockpile Planning Guidance study. [97196]

Mr. Ingram: Specific information relating to planned munition stocks is withheld under Exemption 1 (Defence, Security and International Relations) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. However, I can confirm that the Ministry of Defence's stockpile planning guidance is subject to annual review, and the latest review was completed in September 2002.

Vaccine Schedule (Gulf Deployment)

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to obtain informed consent for vaccination for troops deploying to the Gulf. [95928]

Dr. Moonie: It is Ministry of Defence policy that vaccinations can only be administered after an individual is found fit and suitable to receive it, and has given informed consent. The administering officer is required to obtain informed verbal consent following an explanation of the vaccination procedure and the risks and benefits of accepting vaccination.

Wheeled Support Vehicles

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to award a contract for the Wheeled Support Vehicles programme; and what delays there have been to the originally forecast in-service date. [97188]

Mr. Ingram: An announcement on the award of a contract is planned for late 2003. There has been no delay to the approved in-service date.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

"Opportunity and Excellence" White Paper

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the cost is of printing and collating his Department's White Paper on 14–19 year olds "Opportunity and Excellence"; what that cost would have been if it had been produced as a single document; and what the cost was of printing "The Future of Higher Education". [95134]

Mr. Stephen Twigg *[holding answer 3 February 2003]*: The recently produced policy document 14–19: opportunity and excellence was not classified as a White Paper. It was published in two parts, a main document and separate annexes, in order to make the document accessible to the wide range of audiences with an interest in 14–19 education and training. This allows the wider audience, such as parents and employers, with a more general interest in 14–19 reform, to order only the smaller main document, while practitioners, for example, can order the detailed annexes in addition. To reflect anticipated demand, we were able to print fewer copies of the annexes.

The main document and annexes were printed at a cost of £36,100. Summary versions and young people's versions were also printed, tailored in style andpresentation to different target audiences, and folders to allow collation of the different versions as required. The cost of producing these elements was £29,400, and collation costs were around £2,200.

It is not possible to estimate accurately the cost of producing a single document to the same timescales as the two volumes produced. It is likely that the cost would have been less than those incurred producing two documents, but this is offset against accessibility considerations and the lower quantity of annexes produced. Printing a larger 120 page document also requires different, more expensive, binding techniques. Collation costs would also have been incurred as different combinations of main document, summary and young people's version would have had to be collated fordistribution.

The cost of printing the main and summary versions of "The Future of Higher Education" was £67,625.

Beacon Schools

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on plans to extend and develop the Beacon schools initiative. [97150]

Mr. Miliband: For secondary schools the Beacon school initiative will be replaced by the Leading Edge Programme, which aims to extend active collaboration and develop cutting edge innovation to raise standards across the school system.

There will be no further expansion of a centrally funded Beacon school programme for primary, nursery and special schools. This is in line with the general wish of head teachers to reduce the proportion of funding delivered through ring-fenced grants and to devolve more funding decisions to local communities. Schools and LEAs will be able to broker and fund collaborative partnerships from within the substantial overall increase in resources provided as a result of the 2002 Spending Review. We are encouraging LEAs to fund this activity. My Department intends to explore arrangements for endorsing local programmes through a Beacon recognition scheme.

Computer Fraud

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many laptop computers were used by *(a)* Ministers and special advisers and *(b)* officials in his Department in each year since 1995; how many were (i) lost and (ii) stolen; what their cost was; and if he will make a statement. [97496]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The number of laptop computers in use in the Department for Education and Skills since 1995 is shown in the table.

Financial year	*Ministers*	*Special advisors*	*Officials*
1995–96	—	—	11
1996–97	—	—	375
1997–98	—	—	690
1998–99	—	—	1,172
1999–2000	3	1	1,586
2000–01	3	2	1,940
2001–02	3	1	2,105
2002–03	3	1	1,861

The following tables detail the equipment stolen and lost from the Department for Education and Skills since 1 May 1997 along with the approximate value of the stolen equipment. Information is not available for earlier years.

Stolen

Financial year	*Number of laptops*	*Approximate value per item (£)*	*Total approximate value (£)*
1997–98	5	1,000	5,000
1998–99	7	1,000	7,000
1999–2000	5	1,000	5,000
2000–01	2	1,000	2,000
2001–02	3	1,000	3,000
2002–03	9	1,000	9,000

Lost

Financial year	*Number of laptops*	*Approximate value per item (£)*	*Total approximate value (£)*
1997–98	12	1,000	12,000
1998–99	11	1,000	11,000
1999–2000	11	1,000	11,000

	Lost		
Financial year	*Number of laptops*	*Approximate value per item (£)*	*Total approximate value (£)*
2000–01	10	1,000	10,000
2001–02	8	1,000	8,000
2002–03	53	1,000	53,000

Notes:

Electronic secutity tags are fitted to all portable IT equipment held in London. The tags raise an alarm at Reception if an unauthorised person attempts to remove the kit. The level of theft outside London is so low that it is not justified to extend tagging to the Darlington, Runcorn and Sheffield sites of the Department.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many cases of computer *(a)* hacking, *(b)* fraud and *(c)* theft his Department recorded in 2001–02; and on how many occasions computer systems have been illegally accessed by computer hackers (i) within and (ii) outside his Department. [97557]

Mr. Charles Clarke: During the financial year 2001–02 there have been:

(a) no detected cases of computer hacking, either by insiders or by persons outside of the Department;

(b) no cases of computer fraud; and

(c) three cases of theft of IT equipment by persons outside the Department for Education and Skills.

Degree Courses

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what research he has conducted into the factors determining the choice of degree course by students; and if he will place the results in the Library. [97109]

Margaret Hodge: The department and other organisations have published a number of research reports that have investigated students' choice of course among other issues. These include:

Connor, H. et al (2001) "Social Class and Higher Education: Issues Affecting Participation by Lower Social Class Groups" DfEE Research Report No. 246

UCAS (2002) "Paving the Way Project Report".

Davies, P. et al (2002) "For me or not for me—that is the question. A study of mature students' decision-making and higher education" DfES Research Report 297.

This research finds that most students choose their course because they are interested in the subject. The expected employment prospects associated with the course is also an important consideration to many students. The mode of delivery and timetabling of the course influences many mature students' choice.

The most important reason for choosing an institution is that it offers the right subject. The location of the institution is also important, often for financial reasons.

Departmental Consultations

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will list consultations his Department has conducted since it was established; and when each consultation *(a)* opened and *(b)* closed. [97430]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: A list of the public consultations undertaken by my Department since it was established on the 8 June 2001 is in the following table. Information includes the opening and closing dates of each consultation as requested.

Title of consultation	*Start date*	*End date*
Teachers' Professional Development—Standards Framework Consultation	11 June 2001	20 July 2001
Teachers' Professional Development Division—Development Portfolio Consultation	11 June 2001	20 July 2001
Consultation on Professional Duties of Advanced Skills Teachers	26 June 2001	21 August 2001
July European Commission Memorandum on Lifelong Learning	26 June 2001	28 September 2001
Education Development Plans from 2002—Consultation on draft guidance	27 June 2001	19 September 2001
Consultation on Extending the Use of Parenting Orders	9 July 2001	9 October 2001
Inspection of Local Education Authorities	11 July 2001	11 October 2001
Employment of Teachers who have successfully completed their course of teacher training but have not passed their skills test	24 July 2001	8 August 2001
Standards for the awards of qualified teacher status—initial teacher training 2002–03	26 July 2001	2 November 2001
Draft Regulations Under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 as Amended by the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001	30 July 2001	22 October 2001
The Way Forward—A Modernised Framework for School Governance	5 September 2001	7 November 2001
Better Beginnings—Improving quality and increasing provision in early years education and childcare	5 September 2001	7 November 2001
Consultation on School Admissions	5 September 2001	7 November 2001
Consultation on Exclusion Appeal Panels	5 September 2001	7 November 2001
Registration and Monitoring of Independent Schools	5 September 2001	9 November 2001
Schools Achieving Success	5 September 2001	7 November 2001
Improving Inspection, improving Schools	10 September 2001	10 November 2001
Consultation on targets for English and mathematics at Key Stage 2 in 2004	18 September 2001	14 December 2001
16–19 Organisation and Inspection: A consultation document	24 September 2001	7 November 2001
Expert support for the development of Foundation Stage Practice	5 October 2001	28 December 2001
City Academies: Arrangements for Pupils with SEN and Disabilities	8 October 2001	29 December 2001
Consultation on Proposals arising from the Treasury Review of teachers' Ill Health Retirement	2 November 2001	25 January 2002
Excellence Fellowship Awards	6 November 2001	14 December 2001
Teachers' Pay Reform—Performance Pay Progression Grant	23 November 2001	4 January 2002
Building a Strategy for Children and Young People	25 November 2001	1 March 2002
Consultation on Review of Learning Partnerships	17 December 2001	16 February 2002
Consultation on Review of Arts and Humanities Research Funding	18 December 2001	2 February 2002
Quinquennial Review of Investors in People UK	1 January 2002	28 February 2002
Consultation on Accessible Schools: Planning to increase access to schools for disabled pupils	14 January 2002	25 March 2002

Title of consultation	*Start date*	*End date*
Revised Guidance on Exclusion from School—Draft for Consultation	24 January 2002	19 April 2002
Consultation on Raising Standards—Training and Development for Leaders and Managers	4 February 2002	1 May 2002
14–19: Extending Opportunities, Raising Standards	12 February 2002	31 May 2002
National Centre for Excellence in Science Teaching	18 February 2002	8 May 2002
The Adult Common Basic Data Set	25 February 2002	17 May 2002
Early Years and Childcare Regulations	27 February 2002	24 May 2002
14–19: Extending Opportunities, Raising Standards: A Summary	1 March 2002	31 May 2002
Investors in Children Consultation Paper	14 March 2002	6 June 2002
Proposals to introduce a mandatory requirement for first-time headteachers to hold the (NPQH)	15 March 2002	28 June 2002
Consultation on Publication of School and College Performance Tables in 2002	19 March 2002	24 May 2002
Electronic Communications in Education: an Order under the Electronic Communications Act 2000	8 May 2002	31 July 2002
STRB report on teacher workload	8 May 2002	3 July 2002
Performance Pay Progression: Reconsultation on Revised Special Grant Report	14 May 2002	13 June 2002
Together From The Start—Practical guidance for professionals working with disabled children (birth to two) and their families	28 May 2002	23 September 2002
Developing Early Intervention/Support Services for Deaf Children and their families	28 May 2002	23 September 2002
Department for Education and Skills—Race Equality Scheme: Draft Consultation May 2002	31 May 2002	30 August 2002
Supporting the cost of home-based childcare	7 June 2002	30 August 2002
Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on the Recognition of Professional Qualifications	1 July 2002	30 September 2002
Investment to Support the Provision of New Pupil Places in Schools	5 August 2002	28 October 2002
Consultation on the Constitution of School Governing Bodies	9 August 2002	29 November 2002
Consultation on School Organisation Proposals by the Learning and Skills Council under the Education Act 2002	2 September 2002	29 November 2002
Teachers Pension Scheme: Amendments to the Teachers' Pensions Regulations 1997	3 September 2002	1 November 2002
Extending the National Curriculum for England to include the foundation stage	9 September 2002	1 November 2002
Consultation on Revised School Admissions and Admission Appeals Codes of Practice and Accompanying Regulations	16 September 2002	11 October 2002
Consultation on Acoustic Design of Schools	17 September 2002	10 December 2002
Consultation on Developing the Role of School Support Staff	22 October 2002	22 January 2003
Classification of Special Educational Needs	29 November 2002	6 March 2003
Draft Order for the Foundation Stage Part of the National Curriculum	2 December 2002	16 January 2003
Consultation on New Governing Body Procedures	9 December 2002	3 March 2003
Draft Regulations for Consistent Financial Reporting	16 December 2002	31 January 2003
Lottery Funding for Children's Play	16 December 2002	14 March 2003
Consultation on Adventure Activities Licensing Scheme: Second Triennial Review	31 January 2003	30 April 2003
Consultation on School Organisation, Planning and Decision Making	4 February 2003	11 April 2003

Departmental Projects

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will list the special units, task forces, and other permanent and temporary bodies appointed by the Secretary of State since 1997 to *(a)* administer and *(b)* advise on Departmental projects and functions; and if he will list the external appointees on these bodies, their annual remuneration and their declared political interest. [89310]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: A list of the special units, task forces, and other permanent and temporary bodies appointed by the Secretary of State that are currently in existence are shown in the following list:

Advisory Group on Music and Dance Scheme

Chief Education Officers Reference Group

Connexions Service: Education Welfare Group

Connexions Service: 14–19 Steering Group

Dance and Drama Awards Annual Review Group

Funders' Forum

Investors in Children Development Group

Literacy and Numeracy Reference Group

Local Education Authority New Models External Reference Group

MI Across Partners Working Group

National Education Research Forum

National Steering Group for SEN Regional Co-ordination Projects

School Libraries Working Group

The (School) Workforce Agreement Monitoring Group

The additional information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, officials in the Department for Education and Skills will collect information on appointees and remuneration in the future.

Deprivation (Funding)

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what mechanism he has established to ensure that funding for deprivation via local education authorities reaches children for whom it is intended. [96999]

Mr. Miliband: Local education authorities' funding formulae for maintained schools normally include a factor which allocates funding according to social deprivation. From 2003, the rules relating to this are being amended to ensure that such a factor always exists. The amount to be distributed is for local decision, but we are encouraging each authority to discuss this issue with its schools forum, with a view to aligning the amounts received by the LEA on the basis of social deprivation with the amounts distributed, and in ways which accurately reflect schools' needs.

Deprivation Indices

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will list the deprivation indices for shire counties. [96997]

Mr. Miliband: The table lists for all counties the deprivation indicators used in the formula for Education Formula Spending Share. The indicators are: proportion of children for whom English is an additional language (EAL); proportion of children in low achieving ethnic groups; proportion of children of families in receipt of working families tax credit (WFTC); and proportion of children of low birth weight.

	Primary EAL	*Secondary ethnicity*	*WFTC*	*Income support*	*Low birth weight*
Bedfordshire	0.0596	0.0630	0.1248	0.1268	0.0693
Buckinghamshire	0.0880	0.1335	0.1017	0.0930	0.0648
Cambridgeshire	0.0295	0.0357	0.1367	0.1035	0.0614
Cheshire	0.0093	0.0096	0.1720	0.1264	0.0620
Cornwall	0.0040	0.0041	0.2894	0.1689	0.0636
Cumbria	0.0049	0.0049	0.2075	0.1565	0.0656
Derbyshire	0.0051	0.0074	0.2074	0.1491	0.0707
Devon	0.0107	0.0065	0.2415	0.1329	0.0630
Dorset	0.0064	0.0103	0.1857	0.1091	0.0653
Durham	0.0072	0.0040	0.2474	0.2204	0.0770
East Sussex	0.0173	0.0194	0.1731	0.1584	0.0659
Essex	0.0159	0.0195	0.1336	0.1435	0.0631
Gloucestershire	0.0186	0.0285	0.1693	0.1187	0.0655
Hampshire	0.0123	0.0102	0.1393	0.1009	0.0642
Hertfordshire	0.0497	0.0624	0.1087	0.1132	0.0648
Kent	0.0243	0.0197	0.1549	0.1617	0.0651
Lancashire	0.0679	0.0499	0.2424	0.1794	0.0776
Leicestershire	0.0522	0.0399	0.1721	0.0918	0.0697
Lincolnshire	0.0128	0.0092	0.2335	0.1399	0.0711
Norfolk	0.0140	0.0095	0.2148	0.1578	0.0702
North Yorkshire	0.0058	0.0101	0.1897	0.1011	0.0611
Northamptonshire	0.0316	0.0470	0.1817	0.1396	0.0751
Northumberland	0.0065	0.0064	0.2283	0.1622	0.0678
Nottinghamshire	0.0153	0.0371	0.2179	0.1621	0.0735
Oxfordshire	0.0525	0.0718	0.1201	0.1024	0.0634
Shropshire	0.0066	0.0060	0.1946	0.1066	0.0604
Somerset	0.0053	0.0096	0.2093	0.1214	0.0639
Staffordshire	0.0189	0.0247	0.1962	0.1276	0.0739
Suffolk	0.0106	0.0257	0.1792	0.1316	0.0689
Surrey	0.0434	0.0372	0.0780	0.0814	0.0621
Warwickshire	0.0377	0.0159	0.1636	0.1170	0.0692
West Sussex	0.0341	0.0267	0.1424	0.1129	0.0669
Wiltshire	0.0088	0.0145	0.1620	0.0954	0.0640
Worcestershire	0.0209	0.0244	0.1880	0.1210	0.0717

Education/Commerce Links

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what initiatives are being undertaken by his Department to develop links between higher education colleges and commerce; and if he will make a statement. [96660]

Margaret Hodge: In order to improve our economic competitiveness, we need to create effective and sustained links between higher education institutions and business. The task for Government is to provide the framework for this to happen and for universities and higher education colleges, businesses and individuals to develop these opportunities. As set out in the recent White Paper, 'The future of higher education' the Government are taking a number of steps to build constructive links between higher education institutions and business.

The effective transfer of knowledge and skills is key to our future success. Through recent initiatives we have already helped institutions to improve knowledge transfer, and this has been shown in indicators such as the number of spin-off companies created, the number of patents filed and the proportion of universities employing specialised staff to support commercial work. We announced in "Investing in Innovation", the Government's strategy for science, engineering and technology, published in July 2002 that the Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF) would draw together support for reach out from HE to business and become a permanent third stream of funding worth £90 million a year in 2005–06. As announced in 'the future of higher education' we are providing additional HEIF funding to establish a network of up to 20 Knowledge Exchanges. These will exemplify collaboration with employers, be focused on serving the local and regional economy and form part of a wider network with the New Technology Institutes that will help local companies to use advanced technology.

The Foundation Degree which was introduced in 2001 gave employers a greater role in shaping vocational courses to meet their need for associate professional skills. A major expansion of this work focused degree announced in the HE strategy will further encourage partnership arrangements between employers and higher education institutions in course design, development and implementation. The emergence of new Sector Skills Councils will enable stronger alliances to develop between business in their sectors and the relevant departments in higher education institutions both to develop and market courses and involve employers in the delivery of learning.

However, we also need to ensure that all graduates have the skills to equip them to work in a fast changing work environment. We will continue to sponsor work already under way by HEFCE to integrate the skills and attributes which employers need, into higher education courses.

The Government have commissioned Richard Lambert to carry out an independent review of how, over the coming decade, business can better draw on universities to the mutual advantage of both sectors. We look forward to the findings of the review later this year.

Education Maintenance Allowance

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills which local education authorities are piloting the education maintenance allowance scheme. [95650]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 7 February 2003]*: The Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) scheme is currently being piloted in 56 local education authorities, covering approximately one third of the country. These pilot areas are:

Barking and Dagenham
Barnsley
Birmingham
Bolton
Bradford
Brent
Camden
Cornwall
Coventry
Doncaster
Ealing
East Lancashire[1]
Gateshead
Greenwich
Hackney
Halton
Hammersmith and Fulham
Haringey
Hartlepool
Islington
Kingston upon Hull
Knowsley
Lambeth
Leeds
Leicester City
Lewisham
Liverpool
Luton
Manchester
Middlesbrough
Newham
North East Lincolnshire
North Tyneside
Northumberland
Nottingham
Oldham
Salford
Sandwell
Sheffield
South Tyneside
Southampton
Southwark
St. Helens
Stoke on Trent
Suffolk
Sunderland
Tameside
Tower Hamlets
Wakefield
Walsall
Waltham Forest
Wandsworth
Wigan
Wirral
Wolverhampton
Worcestershire

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of education maintenance allowances is channelled through local education authorities. [96996]

Margaret Hodge: Under the current pilot scheme 100 per cent. of Education Maintenance Allowance is channelled through local education authorities.

Examination Marking

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on the *(a)* criterion-referenced examination marking procedure and *(b)* norm-referenced examination marking procedure. [97151]

Mr. Miliband: Mike Tomlinson's final report on the inquiry into A level standards found strong support for criterion referenced assessment. The most important thing for any system of examination and assessment is that it produces consistent and accurate grading over time.

Foreign Students

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate he has made of the number of non-UK, EU resident students who will apply to English universities in *(a)* 2006, *(b)* 2007, *(c)* 2008, *(d)* 2009 and *(e)* 2010. [97255]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 11 February 2003]*: Projections of applicants to English universities are not available centrally. The Department does, however, project the number of students, EU resident or otherwise, that attend English universities.

The projected number of non-UK, EU resident students attending English institutions from 2003–04 to 2005–06 is shown in the table. These are not very reliable figures because they are based on a number of assumptions, so should be treated with caution. Detailed projections for later years are not available.

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[1] Only covers part of the LEA area

Non-UK, EU resident students attending English universities

Thousand

	EU students
2003–04	71
2004–05	74
2005–06	77

[1] Numbers are on a headcount basis and include full and part-time students on undergraduate and postgraduate courses.

Source:

DfES student numbers projection model.

Further and Higher Education Colleges

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will list the colleges of further and higher education in England and Wales indicating the *(a)* capacity limit figures for each college and *(b)* actual numbers of (i) full-time and (ii) part-time students for each academic year since 1997–98. [96658]

Margaret Hodge: The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) does not collect capacity information in this form.

The LSC publication 'Summary Statistics' available on the LSC website (http://www.lscdata.gov.uk/data/summarystatistics.html) provides student numbers in further education colleges in England for the most recent year 1999–2000. Prior to the LSC, the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) published 'Performance Indicators' which provides student numbers in further education colleges in England for the years 1997–98 and 1998–99, this information is also available on the LSC website (http://www.lscdata.gov.uk/data/performanceindicators.html).

Further Education Colleges

Stephen Hesford: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans he has to increase the quality of tuition in further education colleges. [95897]

Margaret Hodge: A new Standards Unit within DfES was established in January 2003 to drive the Government's strategy for reforming further education and training—'Success for All'. The Unit will identify, develop and disseminate good practice to improve teaching standards in priority curriculum areas and develop associated teacher training and support. The Unit will also improve standards of teaching and learning and will improve further education teacher training, recruitment and retention and establish a new leadership college for the sector.

Stephen Hesford: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans he has to improve *(a)* teaching standards and *(b)* results in further education colleges. [95961]

Margaret Hodge: Our comprehensive invest and reform strategy for further education and training "Success for All" was published on 19 November. "Success for All" will dramatically improve teaching standards and results in colleges.

We will invest an additional £1.2 billion in colleges over the next three years. The Learning and Skills Council will undertake Strategic Area Reviews to improve the effectiveness of the network of post-16 provision and will introduce three year funding agreements for colleges based on tough new results targets.

A new Standards Unit within the Department for Education and Skills was set up in January 2003. The Standards Unit will improve standards of teaching and learning and will improve further education teacher training, recruitment and retention and establish a new Leadership College for the sector.

Government Offices for the Regions

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what funds his Department has allocated to the Government Offices for the Regions in *(a)* 2003–04, *(b)* 2004–05 and *(c)* 2005–06, (i) in cash terms and (ii) on a full resource budgeting basis. [96282]

Mr. Charles Clarke: In 2003–04 my Department has allocated £16.8 million to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister towards the funding of Government Offices. For 2004–05 and 2005–06 the funding for Government Offices is included in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's 2002 Spending Review settlement.

I have also agreed to provide an additional £1.4 million in 2003–04, £1.5 million in 2004–05, and £1.7 million in 2005–06 from my Department's 2002 Spending Review settlement, towards the central costs of the Regional Coordination Unit and Government Offices.

These figures are on a resource accounting basis; budgets are no longer allocated on a cash basis.

Graduate Debt

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what measures he is taking to reduce the burden of debt on graduates. [97413]

Margaret Hodge: The Government will continue to meet the costs of fees up to £1,100 for those students whose family income falls below £20,000, and a proportion of that for those whose family income is between £20,000 and £30,000. In addition, from 2004, we are introducing new grants of £1,000 a year, which we intend to go in full to around 30 per cent. of students.

From 2006, under the new Graduate Contribution Scheme, no student or parent will have to pay any fees up-front: students will make repayments after they graduate, and only once they are earning above a certain level. Moreover, from 2005 we are raising the repayment threshold from £10,000 to £15,000. That means that the burden of repayments will be eased, by £450 a year. Graduates will have the option of making extra payments, if they wish to pay off their debt more quickly.

Graduate Earnings

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate he has made of the average gross earnings per year of students *(a)* immediately following graduation, *(b)* five years after graduation, *(c)* 10 years after graduation, *(d)* 20 years after graduation and *(e)* 25 years after graduation for each university and higher education institution. [94701]

Margaret Hodge: Information on annual graduate earnings over a lifetime is not available in the requested format, and estimated lifetime profiles at particular points in time are constrained by limitations of existing datasets.

Annual earnings by age are estimated using gross weekly earnings from the Labour Force Survey (LFS). Estimating annual from weekly earnings is not ideal but the LFS allows us to provide the best available estimate of annual earnings by qualification. Earnings at particular ages are the best proxy we have of what young graduates might earn after various periods in the labour market, assuming that labour market conditions remain stable over time. The estimates should therefore be treated with caution. The table shows the estimated annual average earnings of graduates at various ages. The figures relate to graduates whose highest qualification is a first degree.

Table 1: Estimated annual average earnings of first degree graduates by age band

Age band	*Estimated annual earnings (£)*
21–24	18,200
25–29	24,440
30–39	33,280
40–49	36,400
50–59	34,320

Notes:

1. Estimates are based on gross weekly earnings in main job, for graduates who are in full-time employment.
2. Annual earnings are derived by multiplying weekly earnings, rounded to the nearest £10, by 52 weeks, and may therefore be upwardly biased.
3. A few individuals who graduated at the age of 20 will be included in the 21–24 age band.

Source:

Labour Force Survey, spring 2002, GB

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the relative distribution of the earnings of graduates is, broken down into multiples of £5,000. [94785]

Margaret Hodge: The information is not available directly in the requested format so has been estimated from available data. Annual earnings are estimated using gross weekly earnings from the Labour Force Survey (LFS). Estimating annual from weekly earnings is not ideal but the LFS allows us to provide the best available estimate of annual earnings by qualification. The derived distribution of annual earnings should therefore be treated with caution. The table shows the distribution of estimated annual earnings for all individuals whose highest qualification is a first-degree.

Table 1 Estimated distribution of annual earnings of first degree graduates

Estimated annual earnings (£)	*Percentage of graduates*
Up to 9,999	2.3
10,000–14,999	9.9
15,000–19,999	18.6
20,000–24,999	17.7
25,000–29,999	14.4
30,000–34,999	10.8
35,000–39,999	7.4
40,000–44,999	6.0
45,000–49,999	3.8
50,000–54,999	1.9
55,000+	7.1
Total	100.0

Note:

Estimates are based on gross weekly earnings in main job, for graduates who are in full-time

The figures are derived from the distribution of weekly equivalent earnings associated with the annual earnings bands, on the assumption that individuals work 52 weeks per year.

Source:

Labour Force Survey, Spring 2002, GB

Greater London Assembly

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what financial assistance his Department gave to the Greater London Assembly in 2002; and for what projects. [95852]

Mr. Charles Clarke: No financial assistance was given directly to the London Assembly by central government departments in 2002–03.

The London Assembly is part of the Greater London Authority. It is responsible for scrutinising and reviewing the Mayor's exercise of his statutory functions. It has particular power to investigate, and prepare reports on actions and decisions taken by the Mayor or any member of the Greater London Authority. The London Assembly's specific costs are part of the overall Greater London Authority budget which is proposed each year by the mayor and is subject to the Assembly's agreement.

The GLA grants from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in 2002/03 as reported on the RA02 form are as follows:

Revenue Support Grant £659.641 million

Redistributed Non-Domestic Rate £267.654 million

General GLA Grant £27.950 million

Health and Safety

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills which senior officials within his Department and its agencies take responsibility for health and safety at board or equivalent level; and where their names are publicised. [89503]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: My Department is currently preparing a revised and updated Departmental policy which will incorporate all the best practice recommendations for procedures from the Revitalising H&S initiative. This will be formally offered to our Permanent Secretary for endorsement in the next few weeks. Similarly to many other Departments, this will propose that our Permanent Secretary continues to take overall responsibility for H&S in DfES. At Board level, it will further propose that the Director General for Corporate Services and Development takes specific responsibility for implementation of the Departmental policy and briefing Board colleagues on developments.

Higher Education

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on his plans to raise the proportion of young people in higher education to 50 per cent.; and by when he estimates this target will have been achieved. [93749]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 29 January 2003]:* Our long-term vision for strengthening universities and increasing access to higher education was recently announced in our White Paper, "The Future of Higher Education".

The case for expanding higher education is strong, both to meet the economy's need for higher level skills and to realise the potential of individuals. The measures set out in the White Paper will enable us to deliver our Public Service Agreement target of increasing participation in higher education towards 50 per cent. of those aged 18 to 30 by 2010. This will be mainly achieved through expansion of the work focused foundation degree, which is designed to attract many people who do not currently enter higher education.

Progress towards the participation rate is measured by the Initial Entry Rate which sums the percentage of the age group who enter higher education for the first time in each year of age between 18 and 30. Participation is currently 43 per cent.

Our programmes to raise achievement levels in schools and to improve studying on rates in full-time education has and the age of 16 coupled with our programmes to encourage ambition and higher aspirations among more young people will contribute towards meeting our target.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment he has made of the impact of the Government's proposals for higher education on *(a)* women, *(b)* ethnic minorities, *(c)* single parents, *(d)* mature students and *(e)* under-represented groups. [96278]

Margaret Hodge: All the policies set out in the White Paper "The Future of Higher Education" were given careful consideration to ensure that they would create the best higher education system possible, while ensuring equality of opportunity for all groups within society.

We will of course continue to consider the potential impact on the groups that the hon. Gentleman mentioned as we plan the detailed implementation of these policies, and in the light of responses received during the period for comment on the White Paper proposals, which runs until 30 April.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the Government's expenditure plans are for higher education in *(a)* 2002–03, *(b)* 2003–04, *(c)* 2004–05 and *(d)* 2005–06, (i) in cash terms and (ii) on a full resource budgeting basis. [96279]

Margaret Hodge: The Government's expenditure plans for higher education in England are shown in the table.

	£ million
2002–03	7,596
2003–04	8,309
2004–05	9,057
2005–06	9,918

These figures are taken from the table on page 19 of the White Paper, "The Future of Higher Education" (Cm 5735), and include estimates of funding from the Office of Science and Technology.

The amount of cash that the Department will require to support this resource expenditure is set on a year-by-year basis. The main differences between the resource-based figures above and the in-year cash requirement will relate to the cost of capital and depreciation charges on the administrative capital of the Student Loans Company and the Higher Education Funding Council for England, and to the treatment of student loans. Under resource accounting and budgeting, the costs of issuing such loans takes account of the economic value of all future loan repayments, whereas the cash total will be the payments issued in year (which in 2002–03 amounted to just over £2 billion) without any reflection of the repayments to be received in the future.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on the differences between the Summary of the Spending Review Settlement for Higher Education Funding grand total, as announced in the Higher Education White Paper (Command Paper 5735, p19), and total 'publicly planned funding for higher education in England' as stated in his letter to HEFCE detailing Higher Education funding and delivery to 2005–06, dated 22 January 2003. [96285]

Margaret Hodge: The table on page 19 of the White Paper 'The Future of Higher Education' shows the total expenditure on higher education in England. The total publicly planned funding shown in the grant letter to the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) is the expenditure that is paid by the HEFCE to higher education institutions in England and the estimated fee income for home and EU students that those institutions will receive from public and private sources. The main differences between the two totals relate to student support expenditure; funding for research and knowledge transfer from the Office of Science and Technology, estimates of which are included in the totals in the White Paper; and the private contributions towards the costs of tuition which are included in the publicly planned funding total but not in the expenditure table in the White Paper.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what research he has conducted on the proportion of appropriately qualified students who proceed to higher education by social class; and if he will place the results in the Library. [97110]

Margaret Hodge: The Youth Cohort Study (YCS) shows that young people from higher socio-economic groups (SEGs) are twice as likely as those from lower SEGs to enter HE at 18. Participation rates of higher and lower SEGs are not significantly different after A-level attainment is taken into account (see following table).

Percentage

	Participation rates in higher education at 18	
	Higher SEGs	*Lower SEGs*
A-level point score		
1–12	36	32
13–24	63	60
25+	74	76
All	35	15

Source:
Youth Cohort Survey—cohort 9 2000

Attainment at A-level is affected by people's aspirations. Aspirations are often formed at a young age and are shaped by a range of cultural, social, institutional and education influences.

In 2001 the Department published "Social Class and Higher Education: Issues Affecting Participation by Lower Social Class groups" by Connor, H. and Dewson, S. with Tyers, C. Eccles, J. Regan, J. and Aston, J. (DfEE Research Report No. 246). This found that for a small sample of qualified non-entrants from lower social classes the main reasons for not entering HE were:

they wanted to get a job and earn some money;

cost issues;

they wanted to take a break from studying; and

uncertainties about their ability or commitment to complete a degree course.

In 2002 the Department published "Potential mature student recruitment to HE" by Ross, A. Archer, L. Hutchings, M. Gilchrist, and R. Thomson, D. with John, C. and Akantziliotou, K. (DfES Research Report 385). This found that, among a sample of 16–30 year olds from lower middle and working class backgrounds the propensity to enter HE depends upon qualifications, but is independent of their social class.

Both of the above reports are held on the Department's research publications website, www.dfes.gov.uk/research.

It is important to note that people without A-levels or other formal qualifications may be appropriately qualified to enter higher education on the basis of other experience and abilities that they demonstrate.

Higher Education (Hampshire)

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the rate of participation in higher education of young people in Hampshire was by social class in each year between 1996 and 2002. [94902]

Margaret Hodge: The requested participation rates by social class are not available.

The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) can provide numbers of young people by social class from Hampshire accepted to full-time undergraduate courses. However, the corresponding Hampshire population breakdowns are not available and participation rates by social class cannot be calculated without them.

Higher Education (Student Costs)

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will list the average cost per student place in higher education for each university and higher education institution for *(a)* undergraduate students and *(b)* post-graduate students in each year since 1980. [94707]

Margaret Hodge: The information requested is not held centrally. The Government allocates funding for higher education in England to the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). The HEFCE provide teaching grants on the basis that similar courses are funded at similar rates irrespective of the institution providing the education. The detailed allocations are calculated according to the numbers and types of students in the institutions, and the courses they are taking. Different courses are weighted at different levels to reflect, for example, the higher costs of providing laboratory-based and medical courses. There are also adjustments made to the calculations to reflect London weighting, the additional costs of teaching students from disadvantaged backgrounds and mature and part-time students. Average funding per student in institutions will therefore reflect these weightings and adjustments.

Funding for post-graduate research students is also provided through the HEFCE's research funding allocation. The Council allocate funding for research selectively to institutions according to their relative strength in research as measured through the periodic Research Assessment Exercise. The amount of research funding therefore varies widely between institutions.

Institutions receive their teaching and research funding as a block grant and are able to decide how it should be spent.

Hull University

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of students at Hull University he estimates will be eligible for maintenance grant under "The Future of Higher Education White Paper." [94306]

Margaret Hodge: The information requested is not available.

We have not made estimates of the proportion of students who will be eligible for the higher education grant at individual universities. That proportion will depend on the background of applicants to each university. Our intention is that nationally around 30 per cent. of students will benefit from the full grant.

Judicial Review

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills which decisions by his Department were challenged by judicial review in each session since 1997; and in how many cases the *(a)* Department's decision was upheld by the court, *(b)* court found for the applicant, *(c)* Department submitted to the judgment and *(d)* Department appealed successfully against the decision. [96664]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The information requested is contained in a table, copies of which have been placed in the Libraries.

Key Stage 3

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how many schools in Key Stage 3 pilot local authorities administered the new Year 7 progress tests in English and mathematics that were trialled in 2002; [97765]

(2) what percentage of Year 7 pupils who had achieved level 3 at Key Stage 2 in 2001 achieved level 4 or above in the English and mathematics Year 7 progress tests that were trialled in 2002; [97766]

(3) how many pupils took the new Year 7 progress tests in *(a)* English and *(b)* mathematics that were trialled in 2002; [97767]

(4) what was the cost of *(a)* developing, *(b)* printing and distributing and *(c)* marking the Year 7 progress tests in English and mathematics that were trialled in 2002. [97768]

Mr. Miliband: There were 58 schools in Key Stage 3 pilot local authorities who administered the new Year 7 progress tests in English and mathematics that were trialled in 2002.

Level thresholds are not set at this stage of test development. Schools who took part in the trial have only been given an indication of the levels achieved by their pupils. The final level thresholds will not be set for the new progress tests until August 2003.

The trial of the 2003 tests that took place in 2002 was based on 52 schools for mathematics producing an entry of approximately 2400 pupils and 44 schools in English producing an entry of approximately 2100 pupils.

The overall cost of the 2002 trial of the 2003 year 7 progress tests was 21600. These costs include:

Project Management costs of £8950

Printing Costs of £2500

Packaging and distribution costs of 2750

Marking costs of £7400

Development costs are not included as the tests trialled in 2002 did not have a separate or discrete development that can be costed. The costs are therefore part of the overall development costs for the 2003 Year 7 progress tests.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of pupils attained *(a)* Level 5 and above and *(b)* Level 6 and above in Key Stage 3 Science in each year from 1999–2001. [97157]

Mr. Miliband: The percentage of pupils who achieved *(a)* level 5 or above and *(b)* level 6 or above in Key Stage 3 science in each year from 1999–2001 is shown in the table.

Pupil achievement in Key Stage 3 science

Percentage

	Key Stage 3 science test		*Key Stage 3 science teacher assessment*	
	(a) Level 5 or above	*(b) Level 6 or above*	*(a) Level 5 or above*	*(b) Level 6 or above*
1999	55	24	60	29
2000	59	29	62	30
2001	66	34	64	32

Note:

Figures cover all schools in England.

Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent assessment he has made of the work of the Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts. [97088]

Margaret Hodge: The Secretary of State has made no assessment of the Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts, which is not designated to receive funding directly from the Higher Education Funding Council for England. However, the Institute is exploring whether it can be so designated. To this end the Funding Council and the Quality Assurance Agency are working with the Institute to assess its progress towards meeting the criteria for direct funding.

Ministerial Travel

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many times since 2001 he has taken flights on departmental duties in the UK; how many of these were *(a)* charter flights, *(b)* first or club class and *(c)* by helicopter; and who accompanied him on each trip. [95396]

Mr. Charles Clarke: I have taken one flight to Manchester, one flight to Norwich and a flight to Glasgow; all of these were commercial flights. I was accompanied on the flights to Manchester and Glasgow by one official. My predecessor Estelle Morris did not take any flights in the UK.

All travel is undertaken in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code and Travel by Ministers which are available in the Libraries of the House.

National Curriculum (Support Staff)

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on the effectiveness of support staff in National Curriculum teaching. [97153]

Mr Miliband: The Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) published an evaluation report in April 2002 on the quality and impact of the work of teaching assistants in primary schools. The report reinforced the Government's view that well-trained and well-managed teaching assistants have the potential to help schools raise standards by showing that the quality of teaching in lessons with teaching assistants is better than in lessons without them.

In a survey of headteachers (July 2002) relating to the implementation of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies, 89 per cent. said that teaching assistants made a positive contribution to the quality of literacy teaching and the same percentage said that teaching assistants contributed to improving the teaching of mathematics.

OECD PISA Survey

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on the position in which the United Kingdom came in the OECD PISA 2001 survey in mathematics. [97001]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The performance of young people from the United Kingdom in the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2000, published in December 2001, was encouraging. Out of the 32 countries participating in the study, the United Kingdom came eighth on the mathematical literacy scale and was only significantly outperformed by Japan and Korea.

Pre-School Provision

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will list for each year since 1997 the percentage of rural parishes with *(a)* no nursery, *(b)* no parent and toddler group and *(c)* no pre-school play group. [91985]

Maria Eagle: The information is not available in the form requested.

Figures on Day Care Facilities in England were published by the DfES in Statistical Bulletin 08/01 "Children's Day Care facilities at 31 March 2001" in October 2001, a copy of which is available from the Library. An electronic copy of this publication is also available on the DfES' web-site: http://www.dfes.gov.uk/statistics

Statistics were collected at top-tier local authority level, not split between urban and rural areas. Local authorities are responsible for ensuring full coverage of both urban and rural areas within their areas.

£22 million has been allocated for a pilot project to develop 50 Mini Sure Start local programmes in areas with pockets of deprivation either in rural areas or in towns and cities that have small numbers of families living in poverty. Managed through local authorities, these Mini Sure Start local programmes are building on new Neighbourhood Nurseries and existing childcare facilities to deliver outreach, family support and additional health services. Of the 50 Mini Sure Start pilots, 29 are in rural areas.

Pupil Funding

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the funding per pupil was for *(a)* primary, *(b)* infant, *(c)* junior and *(d)* secondary schools in (i) the London borough of Havering, (ii) other London boroughs and (iii) other local education authorities in England in (A) 2001–02 and (B) 2002–03; and if he will make a statement. [97700]

Mr. Miliband: The available information is contained in the following table. The Government does not fund pupils in primary, infant and junior schools separately.

Recurrent unit funding—Total funding (£ per pupil)

	Pupils aged 5 to 10		*Pupils aged 11 to 15*	
	Total 2001–02	*Total 2002–03*	*Total 2001–02*	*Total 2002–03*
Havering	3,000	3,180	3,660	3,860
London				
Barking and Dagenham	3,420	3,670	4,260	4,520
Barnet	3,230	3,440	3,870	4,110
Bexley	3,040	3,230	3,680	3,870
Brent	3,690	3,950	4,600	4,900
Bromley	3,050	3,220	3,630	3,820
Camden	4,450	4,770	5,080	5,370
City of London	4,050	4,600	46,730	17,190
Croydon	3,250	3,460	4,100	4,330
Ealing	3,530	3,710	4,420	4,620
Enfield	3,380	3,630	4,050	4,330
Greenwich	4,110	4,340	5,010	5,260
Hackney	4,430	4,750	5,770	6,140
Hammersmith and Fulham	4,340	4,750	5,180	5,550
Haringey	3,950	4,220	4,950	5,210
Harrow	3,110	3,330.	3,890	4,120
Hillingdon	3,140	3,350	3,840	4,080
Hounslow	3,450	3,750	4,100	4,370
Islington	4,430	4,680	5,640	5,950
Kensington and Chelsea	4,420	4,940	5,180	5,770
Kingston upon Thames	3,110	3,290	3,680	3,890
Lambeth	4,390	4,700	6,010	6,410
Lewisham	4,170	4,440	5,210	5,590
Merton	3,320	3,460	4,000	4,160
Newham	3,960	4,180	4,840	5,060
Redbridge	3,210	3,390	3,920	4,120
Richmond upon Thames	2,990	3,140	3,580	3,790
Southwark	4,270	4,570	5,410	5,760
Sutton	3,080	3,260	3,620	3,810
Tower Hamlets	4,640	4,990	5,630	6,020
Waltham Forest	3,660	3,880	4,500	4,760
Wandsworth	3,980	4,160	4,840	5,050
Westminster	4,210	4,600	4,760	5,110
Metropolitan				
Barnsley	2,960	3,140	3,570	3,770
Birmingham	3,320	3,490	4,040	4,230
Bolton	2,920	3,100	3,470	3,680
Bradford	3,240	3,370	3,890	4,050
Bury	2,810	2,980	3,320	3,510
Calderdale	2,950	3,120	3,520	3,700
Coventry	3,030	3,200	3,640	3,810
Doncaster	3,000	3,190	3,620	3,810
Dudley	2,720	2,900	3,300	3,490
Gateshead	3,100	3,260	3,720	3,890
Kirklees	2,970	3,140	3,580	3,760
Knowsley	3,550	3,730	4,350	4,560
Leeds	3,040	3,230	3,600	3,800
Liverpool	3,500	3,700	4,160	4,370
Manchester	3,610	3,810	4,390	4,620
Newcastle upon Tyne	3,280	3,450	3,920	4,110
North Tyneside	2,940	3,140	3,590	3,790
Oldham	3,010	3,270	3,570	3,830
Rochdale	3,070	3,320	3,680	3,920
Rotherham	3,080	3,230	3,560	3,710
Salford	3,260	3,410	3,920	4,090
Sandwell	3,080	3,290	3,720	3,950
Sefton	2,990	3,180	3,520	3,700
Sheffield	3,100	3,280	3,700	3,890
Solihull	2,770	2,920	3,260	3,420
South Tyneside	3,190	3,350	3,740	3,910
St Helens	3,010	3,180	3,610	3,790
Stockport	2,760	2,910	3,320	3,460
Sunderland	3,060	3,230	3,650	3,840
Tameside	2,920	3,090	3,470	3,640
Trafford	2,860	2,980	3,410	3,540
Wakefield	2,870	3,030	3,410	3,570
Walsall	2,940	3,110	3,500	3,680
Wigan	2,850	2,990	3,350	3,510
Wirral	3,070	3,270	3,690	3,880
Wolverhampton	3,100	3,380	3,760	4,040
Unitaries				
Bath and North East Somerset	2,760	2,890	3,220	3,360
	—	—	—	—
Blackburn	3,230	3,400	3,820	4,040
Blackpool	2,900	3,110	3,570	3,770
Bournemouth	2,840	2,980	3,400	3,560

Recurrent unit funding—Total funding (£ per pupil)

	Pupils aged 5 to 10		*Pupils aged 11 to 15*	
	Total 2001–02	*Total 2002–03*	*Total 2001–02*	*Total 2002–03*
Bracknell Forest	2,910	3,100	3,620	3,820
Brighton and Hove	3,140	3,300	3,770	3,960
City of Bristol	3,000	3,200	3,690	3,930
City of Kingston-upon-Hull	3,150	3,340	3,800	4,000
Darlington	2,930	3,070	3,530	3,680
Derby	2,970	3,170	3,580	3,790
East Riding of Yorkshire	2,820	2,960	3,340	3,500
Halton	3,160	3,340	3,760	3,980
Hartlepool	3,050	3,230	3,650	3,840
Herefordshire	2,900	3,080	3,510	3,690
Isle of Wight Council	3,070	3,250	3,840	4,030
Leicester	3,170	3,400	3,830	4,060
Luton	3,150	3,390	3,840	4,100
Medway	2,930	3,100	3,570	3,750
Middlesbrough	3,250	3,460	3,990	4,240
Milton Keynes	2,990	3,200	3,630	3,860
North East Lincolnshire	3,010	3,180	3,600	3,770
North Lincolnshire	2,930	3,070	3,510	3,670
North Somerset	2,770	2,930	3,320	3,480
Nottingham City	3,290	3,530	4,080	4,350
Peterborough	2,970	3,170	3,590	3,820
Plymouth	2,900	3,070	3,450	3,630
Poole	2,690	2,840	3,260	3,420
Portsmouth	3,050	3,230	3,680	3,880
Reading	3,060	3,320	3,870	4,150
Redcar and Cleveland	3,110	3,280	3,640	3,820
Rutland	2,900	3,060	3,240	3,380
Slough	3,450	3,730	4,360	4,660
South Gloucestershire	2,660	2,780	3,210	3,370
Southampton	3,070	3,230	3,770	3,950
Southend	3,060	3,230	3,690	3,870
Stockton-on-Tees	3,100	3,290	3,660	3,850
Stoke on Trent	3,050	3,280	3,630	3,840
Swindon	2,760	2,910	3,330	3,500
The Wrekin	2,960	3,080	3,570	3,720
Thurrock	3,100	3,320	3,840	4,070
Torbay	2,880	3,020	3,460	3,620
Warrington	2,730	2,870	3,270	3,430
West Berkshire	2,910	3,060	3,420	3,590
Windsor and Maidenhead	3,000	3,180	3,560	3,750
Wokingham	2,710	2,860	3,290	3,460
York	2,800	2,920	3,370	3,520
Upper Tier				
Bedfordshire	2,930	3,100	3,620	3,810
Buckinghamshire	2,930	3,120	3,550	3,740
Cambridgeshire	2,790	2,940	3,350	3,520
Cheshire	2,760	2,900	3,290	3,440
Cornwall	2,920	3,080	3,480	3,650
Cumbria	2,930	3,090	3,500	3,670
Derbyshire	2,800	2,960	3,340	3,510
Devon	2,840	3,000	3,420	3,580
Dorset	2,780	2,930	3,340	3,500
Durham	3,050	3,180	3,610	3,770
East Sussex	2,990	3,150	3,630	3,830
Essex	2,960	3,130	3,580	3,760
Gloucestershire	2,810	2,950	3,350	3,500
Hampshire	2,810	2,970	3,430	3,610
Hertfordshire	2,990	3,150	3,620	3,800
Isles of Scilly	5,700	7,410	6,720	8,550
Kent	2,950	3,120	3,610	3,790
Lancashire	2,890	3,050	3,470	3,640
Leicestershire	2,660	2,800	3,250	3,390
Lincolnshire	2,870	3,050	3,470	3,640
Norfolk	2,940	3,120	3,490	3,660
North Yorkshire	2,880	3,040	3,400	3,570
Northamptonshire	2,790	2,940	3,400	3,560
Northumberland	2,920	3,050	3,600	3,750
Nottinghamshire	2,790	2,940	3,340	3,500
Oxfordshire	2,900	3,080	3,540	3,730
Shropshire	2,830	3,000	3,380	3,550
Somerset	2,810	2,970	3,410	3,570
Staffordshire	2,710	2,860	3,290	3,440
Suffolk	2,760	2,920	3,410	3,580
Surrey	2,920	3,080	3,550	3,740
Warwickshire	2,770	2,930	3,310	3,480
West Sussex	2,850	3,030	3,460	3,640
Wiltshire	2,780	2,930	3,380	3,530
Worcestershire	2,740	2,890	3,350	3,500

Pupil Mobility Grant

Mr. [illegible]ardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when he will introduce a targeted local government grant for pupil mobility. [94635]

Mr. Miliband: When we were developing the new LEA funding formula, we looked at whether we should introduce a targeted grant for LEAs with high mobility. However, we found that the problem was surprisingly widespread and it did not therefore seem sensible to introduce a targeted grant which would give a little funding to many authorities. We intend to look further at the question of pupil mobility in the light of data from the Pupil Level Annual Schools Census, with the aim of considering the possible introduction of a relevant factor when the formula freeze on Education Formula Spending ends in 2006–07.

Pupil:Teacher Ratios

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills *(a)* how many pupils there were on school rolls and *(b)* what the pupil-teacher ratio was in (i) primary and (ii) secondary schools in each local authority area in England and Wales in each academic year from 1997–98. [96627]

Mr. Miliband: The information requested has been placed in the House of Commons library.

For information on Wales I refer the hon. Gentleman to the Welsh Assembly.

School Playing Fields

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many school playing fields disposals have *(a)* satisfied and *(b)* have not satisfied the criterion of a net gain for sport. [98114]

Mr. Miliband: Applications to dispose of school playing fields are assessed against three main criteria. These are:

(i) *schools' needs*: that playing field provision and curriculum requirements at the school making the disposal, and at other schools in the local area, will be met;

(ii) *community needs*: that community use of school playing fields is taken into account, with alternative facilities made available if necessary; and

(iii) *finance*: that any sale proceeds are re-invested to provide new or improved sports facilities at schools, or are used otherwise to help raise standards by providing better educational facilities.

The criteria are set out in the Department's Guidance 0580/2001: The Protection of School Playing Fields and Land for City Academies. The School Playing Fields Advisory Panel provides independent advice on the extent to which applications meet the published criteria. Over the past four years the Secretary of State has approved 118 applications to dispose, or change the use, of an area of school playing field larger than a sports pitch (i.e. 2,000 m^2). Of these, 48 were in respect of closed or closing schools and, of the remainder, 45 helped fund improved sports facilities at schools. No application has been approved that did not fully meet all of the criteria.

School Safety

Mr. Burnett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what improvements have taken place within the system of safety inspections of schools since Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools' statement in December 2001. [94384]

Mr. Miliband: School inspectors are required to consider whether the school monitors health and safety and are expected to report on any hazards that they encounter. They are not, however, health and safety inspectors and do not audit possible health hazards such as the presence of asbestos. The responsibility rests with the head and governing body, and (for community and voluntary controlled schools) the local education authority. While it is impracticable for school inspectors to conduct rigorous health and safety inspections, they are required in every inspection to make a judgment about the extent to which pupils work in a healthy and safe environment.

School Staff

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how many local authorities have exempted schools from the job evaluation schemes linked to the recent single status agreement for local government staff; [97685]

(2) what estimate he has made of the number of schools who use the form of employment contract recommended by the local education authority for the employment of teaching assistants; [97686]

(3) what estimate he has made of the number of *(a)* men and *(b)* women who are employed on term-time contracts in schools; [97688]

(4) what estimate he has made of the number of people employed on term-time contracts in schools whose hourly pay over the year places them below the lower earnings limit for national insurance contributions. [97689]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 13 February 2003]:* The pay and conditions of school support staff are a matter for local determination. The information requested is not collected centrally.

Schools (Job Evaluation Schemes)

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps he is taking to review the type and amount of data collected by his Department on term-time working in education; and if he will make a statement. [97687]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 13 February 2003]:* National Statistics Strategic Review of school workforce statistics began this month. This review is intended to ensure that official statistics are fit for purpose, of appropriate quality and are valuable. Major stakeholders will be invited to take part in the review and a consultation process will enable other users to provide input. The possibility of collecting data on term-time working will be considered.

Further details about National Statistics Reviews can be found on the National Statistics website at:

http://www.nationalstatistics.gov.uk/methods_quality/quality_review/quality_review.asp

Sickness Absence

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the rate of staff *(a)* absenteeism and *(b)* sickness was in his Department, its predecessors and each of its agencies and non-departmental public bodies in each year from 1990–91 to 2002–03; what the target set is for his Department; and if he will make a statement. [93501]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: My Department is committed to managing sickness absence effectively and is reviewing the way sickness absence is managed across the Department.

The target for DfES as set out in the Service Delivery Agreement is to reduce sickness absence to 6.0 days per staff year by 2003. The overall sickness absence rate in theDepartment for Education and Skills (DfES) for 2001 was 8.4 days per staff year.

The overall sickness absence rate per staff year in the former Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) and its agency, the Employment Service (ES), for each of the years from 2000 to 1995 was:

Calendar Year	*DfEE (excluding ES) (Days)*	*ES (Days)*	*DfEE (including ES) (Days)*
2000	7.7	11. 8	11. 3
1999	7.6	11.5	11.0
1998	8.9	11. 9	11 .6
1997	9.8	13.0	12.6
1996	10.3	12.1	11.8
1995	10.3	12.4	11.9

The overall sickness absence rate per staff year for the former Employment Department (ED) in 1994 was 10.2 days and for ES, 11.3 days; the rate for the ED Group, which also comprised the Health and Safety Executive and the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service, was 11.0 days. The overall sickness absence rate per staff year for the former Department of Education in 1994 was 8.2 days.

The information is taken from the report "Analysis of Sickness Absence in the Civil Service", which is published annually by Cabinet Office. The figures for 2002 will be announced in due course; figures prior to 1994 are no longer readily available.

Non- Departmental Public Bodies

The overall sickness absence rates per staff year in the years in question for each of the non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs) attached to DfES, where they are applicable and available, are set out in tables 1 and 2 following.

Calendar Year	*Construction Industry Training Board (Days)*	*Engineering Construction Industry Training Board (Days)*	*National College for School Leadership (Days)*	*Higher Education Funding Council for England (Days)*	*Investors in People UK (Days)*
2002	10.5	7.7	4.9	1.8	3.5
2001	8.6	6.5	2.1	3.5	6.0
2000	6.5			2.1	4.3
1999	6.2			2.1	2.0
1998	6.1			6.3	
1997				8.4	
1996				8.2	
1995				5.1	
1994				6.1	
1993				6.1	

Financial Year	*Adult Learning Inspectorate (Days)*	*Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (Days)*	*Student Loans Company (Days)*	*Teacher Training Agency (Days)*	*British Educational Communication on and Technology Agency (Days)*	*Learning and Skills Council (Days)*
2001/02	6.5	7.4	11.2	7.4	5.6	7.0
2000/01		8.4	12.0	5.4	4.8	
1999/00		7.4	10.8	6.7	10.3	
1998/99		7.4	12.2		4.3	
1997/98		6.0	10.8		5.8	
1996/97			8.1		10.6	
1995/96			7.7		10.0	
1994/95					8.5	

The information in tables 1 and 2 has been provided by the NDPBs. Information on absenteeism is not held centrally and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Standard Spending Assessment

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the education SSA per head is in secondary schools in *(a)* Bournemouth, *(b)* Poole, *(c)* Southampton, *(d)* Brighton, *(e)* Hampshire, *(f)* Dorset, *(g)* Wiltshire and *(h)* Sussex. [97786]

Mr. Miliband: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) on 8 January, *Official Report*, columns. 231–33W.

Student Debt

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what provision will be made under his proposals for higher education funding, regarding students who are unable to realise a working income sufficient to pay off the debt incurred as part of study fees because of *(a)* medical incapacity and *(b)* other reasons; and if he will make a statement. [93630]

Margaret Hodge: There are already appropriate arrangements in place under the current income-contingent repayment scheme. Repayment of a student's loan will be cancelled: when they reach the age of 65; if they are unable to work due to permanent disability; or when they die. Any graduate with a loan whose income is below the threshold at which repayments begin, currently £10,000 but rising to £15,000 in April 2005, will not be required to make repayments. This approach is both fair and equitable, and will continue when loans for deferred tuition fees are introduced in 2006–07.

Teachers

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teachers retired in 2001–02. [96743]

Mr. Miliband: In 2001–02 financial year, 9,950 teachers retired from the maintained schools sector in England. Further details can be found in the recently published 2002 edition of "Statistics of Education: Schools Workforce in England". This is available now in the statistical section of the DfES website and will soon be placed in the House Library.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* secondary and *(b)* primary school teachers were newly employed by each local education authority in England and Wales on (i) permanent and (ii) short-term temporary contracts in each academic year since 1997–98. [96699]

Mr. Miliband: Information is not available in the form requested. The table showing new entrants[1] to full-time or part-time[2] teaching in the maintained schools sector, in England by local education authority has been placed in the Library. Teachers providing short-term supply cover are not included.

The National Assembly for Wales is responsible for the supply of teachers in Wales.

[1] Those in service at the end of the period shown who had no known service in the maintained schools sector before that period. Includes newly qualified entrants and those who deferred entry.

[2] Around 10 to 20 per cent. of part-timers may not be included.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teachers are affected by the cancellation of the early retirement option broken down by age and LEA; and if he will make a statement. [93786]

Mr. Miliband: Early retirement continues to be available to teachers over the age of 50 where their employment has been terminated by their employer and their employer has agreed to meet the associated additional pension costs. In addition, teachers over the age of 55 are able to retire voluntarily with pension benefits that have been actuarially reduced to take account of their early payment. In 2001–02, for example, some 3,500 teachers retired early through these routes.

Teacher (Suffolk)

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teacher vacancies there were in Suffolk in each year since 1997. [97387]

Mr. Miliband: The information is shown in the following table.

January	*Teachers*[1]	*Vacancies*[2]	*Vacancy rate*[3] *(percentage)*
1997	4,790	36	0.8
1998	4,860	25	0.5
1999	4,880	38	0.8
2000	4,870	23	0.5
2001	4,840	89	1.8
2002	4,850	84	1.7

[1] Full-time teachers in post in the maintained schools sector.

[2] Advertised vacancies for full-time permanent appointments (or appointments of at least one term's duration) in maintained nursery, primary, secondary and special schools. Includes vacancies being filled on a temporary basis.

[3] Vacancies as a percentage of teachers in post.

Source:

DfES annual 618G survey.

Teachers (East Riding)

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teachers entered into *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time service in maintained schools in the East Riding of Yorkshire in each year since 1997. [97739]

Mr. Miliband: The information is given in the following table.

	1 April 1997 to 31 March 1998		*1 April 1998 to 31 March 1999*		*1 April 1999 to 31 March 2000*[1]	
	Full-time	*Part-time*[2]	*Full-time*	*Part-time*[2]	*Full-time*	*Part-time*[2]
New entrants[3]	*15*	15	*20*	10	*15*	10
Returner to maintained sector[4]	*10*	15	*20*	20	*20*	25
Moved from other LEA in England[5]	—	5	—	—	*5*	0

[1] The most recent data available at LEA level.

[2] The database of teacher records is maintained for pension purposes. Some part-time non-pensionable service is not recorded, as a result around 10 per cent. to 20 per cent. of part-timers may not be included.

[3] Those in service at the end of the period shown who had no known service in the maintained schools sector before that period. Includes newly qualified entrants and those who deferred entry.

[4] Teacher has returned to service in the maintained schools sector.

[5] Teacher has moved from service in the maintained schools sector elsewhere in England.

Top-up Fees

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what representations his Department has received from *(a)* higher education institutions and *(b)* student bodies (i) in favour and (ii) against the introduction of top up fees. [96701]

Margaret Hodge: The Department has received a number of representations from a variety of sources on the question of university fees. Representations before the publication of the White Paper were not, of course, set in the context of our full proposals, including the ability of students to defer fees rather than pay them up front, the continuation of fee remission grant, the introduction of a new additional grant, and the role of the Access Regulator.

Following the launch of the White Paper—"The Future of Higher Education"—we are engaging in a wide-ranging dialogue with those who provide higher education and those who benefit from it. The period for comment will run until 30 April 2003. Following the conclusion of this period, we shall make available a summary of comments on the Department for Education and Skills website.

Tuition Fees

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what he estimates the annual costs of deferred tuition fees will be to his Department, once they are introduced in 2006. [96276]

Margaret Hodge: The costs of offering students the option to defer their tuition fees will depend on the proportion of those students who decide to defer payment of fees, which institutions decide to charge variable fees, at what level and for which courses, and the number of students taking those courses.

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what mechanisms his Department will put in place to recover debt from non-UK EU-resident students under the post-2006 university tuitions fee arrangements; and if he will make a statement; [97253]

(2) what estimate he has made of the likely default rate on tuition fee payments from non-UK, EU-resident students from 2006 onwards; and if he will make a statement. [97254]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 11 February 2003]:* Non-UK EU students are not eligible for maintenance loans. Mechanisms are in place to recover loans from

UK students who live abroad after graduation, and who are outside the UK tax system, through direct payments to the Student Loans Company. The arrangements for collecting varied fees from EU graduates will be based on these arrangements.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate he has made of the cost to Government of abolishing tuition fees in higher education. [93911]

Margaret Hodge: For 2002–03, the standard tuition fee contribution for full-time home and EU students of £1,100 is estimated to raise around £853 million for English institutions and around £57 million for Welsh institutions. The contribution made from public and private resources towards these totals is as follows.

£ millions

2002–03 estimate	*England*	*Wales*
Public contributions to fees	447	30
Private contributions towards the cost of tuition	406	27
Total	853	57

Note:

Private contributions to tuition fees have been estimated from 2000–01 LEA income assessment data and assumed growth rates in annual earnings.

Estimates are based on projections of student numbers derived from actual data for academic year 2000–01. The figures for Wales exclude initial teacher training.

If the Government were to abolish tuition fees, the extra cost to the public purse would be the loss of private contribution towards the cost of tuition.

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent estimate he has made of the cost of providing all students with free tuition at university. [94752]

Margaret Hodge: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Llew Smith) on 20 February 2003.

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what level of support students receive in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* other EU countries. [94756]

Margaret Hodge: Financial support for students in Scotland is the responsibility of the First Minister for Scotland. Financial support for students in Wales is broadly the same as in England, except that the Welsh Assembly has introduced additional Assembly Learning Grants of up to £1,500 for Welsh-domiciled students on low incomes. About a quarter of Welsh HE students are expected to qualify for some or all of this grant.

The Department does not have up to date information about arrangements in all EU countries. However, the level of public spending on financial support for students in the UK as a percentage of total public expenditure on higher education is the highest in the OECD, including many EU countries.

University Applications

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimates he has made of the number of students applying to attend university in each of the next three years. [97412]

Margaret Hodge: Estimates of the number of students applying to attend university are not available centrally. However, the Department does make estimates of the number of students likely to attend English universities.

The projected number of UK and EU domiciled students attending English universities from 2003–04 to 2005–06, as set out in the Secretary of State's Grant Letter to the Higher Education Funding Council for England, is as follows.

Fundable full-time equivalents (FTEs) in English institutions[1]

Financial year	*FTEs (000s)*
2003–04	1,115
2004–05	1,134
2005–06	1,157

[1] DfES fundable higher education students on prescribed courses in institutions of further and higher education.

Source:

DfES student numbers projection model

University Grants

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment he has made of the number of students able to claim grants for university in *(a)* Lancashire and *(b)* Chorley for the next three years. [97409]

Margaret Hodge: My Department collects data from local education authorities (LEAs) on the number of students domiciled in their area, studying in the UK and claiming grants by means of an annual and retrospective survey. Information is not available below LEA level or for future years at present and it will not be available for future years.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans he has to increase the threshold on eligibility to apply for university grants. [97410]

Margaret Hodge: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Lynne Jones) on 6 February 2003, *Official Report,* column 358W

University Redundancies

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many staff have been made redundant at each university in the UK since January 2002. [96579]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 7 February 2003]:* The requested information is not held centrally.

Vehicle Fleets

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the annual rate is at which his Department has renewed its vehicle fleet, by *(a)* volume and *(b)* percentage for each (i) category of vehicle, (ii) type of power unit and (iii) type of fuel over the last three years. [96453]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: My Department has a vehicle fleet of approximately 58 vehicles but information in the format requested is currently not available.

TREASURY

Bank of Credit and Commerce International

Harry Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will reassess with a view to publication, the parts of the Official Report into the affairs of BCCI that were excluded from public disclosure, with particular reference to information linking BCCI with organisations now known to conduct terrorism. [97082]

Ruth Kelly: Paragraph 2.538 of the Bingham Inquiry's report (Inquiry into the Supervision of The Bank of Credit and Commerce International, House of Commons Paper 198, 22 October 1992) says

> "Having made detailed enquiry of all the intelligence agencies, the Inquiry has found no evidence to suggest that the management of BCCI at any level above that of branch manager knowingly held or handled accounts of the Abu Nidal organisation or its front companies or any other terrorist organisation at any time."

We have no plans to publish further material from the Bingham Inquiry.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he has had access to *(a)* all intelligence reports relevant to the official report on BCCI and *(b)* those intelligence reports that were supplementary to the BCCI report at around the time of its official publication; whether he has availed himself of that access; and if he will make a statement. [98160]

Ruth Kelly: It would not be appropriate to provide this information about access to intelligence material, as provided for under exemption 1(a) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Wages

Helen Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information his Department collects on wage rates in each parliamentary constituency or borough; and from what sources such information is collected. [97657]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Helen Jones, dated 18 February 2003:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your question about information collected on wage rates in each parliamentary constituency, and the sources of such information (97657).

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) obtains average earnings data for paliamentary constituencies from the New Earnings Survey (NES).

The NES is an annual enquiry sent to employers. It asks for information about the earnings and hours of a sample of employees, selected by National Insurance number. Data for parliamentary constituencies are published on the ONS website. The link below will take you to the latest data.

http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme-labour/NES2002-Analyses-By-Region/NES2002-Analyses-by-region.pdf.

Helen Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the number of individuals in Warrington, North who earn *(a)* up to £10,000 per annum, *(b)* between £10,000 and £20,000 per annum and *(c)* between £20,000 and £30,000 per annum. [97658]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Helen Jones, dated 18 February 2003:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question on earnings in Warrington North. (97658)

The New Earnings Survey for April 2002 provides an estimate of the percentage of full-time adult employees in employment who were in the same job as in April 2001, whose gross annual pay in the tax year ending April 2002 was within the specified bands. This information is given in the table below.

Percentage of employees in employment[1] in Warrington North[2] earning a specified amount in April 2002

Gross annual earnings	*Percentage[3]*
Less than £10,000	4
£10,000 to £20,000	63
More than £20,000	32

Notes:

Full-time adult employees who were in the same job a year previously.

Based on the work-place post-code of the employee.

The figures in the table do not sum to 100, as a result of rounding.

Source:

ONS New Earnings Survey 2002

Card Transactions

Brian Cotter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent estimate he has made of the cost of bank charges to retailers for credit and debit card transactions. [96651]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 10 February 2003]*: The Cruickshank report on Competition in UK Banking (published in March 2000) examined, among other things, issues relating to payment systems—including the cost of bank charges to retailers for credit and debit card transactions. The Government has not made any recent estimates of such charges. However, it is closely monitoring developments in payment systems and remains committed to introducing legislation to give the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) new powers to promote effective competition in payment systems—and will do so as soon as parliamentary time allows.

To promote its understanding of how payment systems operate, and to help pave the way for its prospective powers, the OFT announced on 27 November that it would conduct an empirical study into recent payment system developments. The terms of reference of this study were published on 31 January 2003—and include issues related to pricing in the credit and debit card markets. The OFT has undertaken to publish a report outlining its assessment and conclusions in spring 2003.

Computer Fraud

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many cases of computer *(a)* hacking, *(b)* fraud and *(c)* theft his Department recorded in 2001–02; and on how many occasions computer systems have been illegally accessed by computer hackers (i) within and (ii) outside his Department. [97566]

Ruth Kelly: Recorded cases for each type were as follows:

Type	*HMT*	*IR*	*C&E*	*Total*
External hacking	1	0	0	1
Internal hacking	0	0	0	0
Fraud	0	2	0	2
Theft	3	75	34	112

All the above incidents were investigated and reported to the Government's Unified Incident Reporting and Alert Scheme (UNIRAS).

Corporate Reporting

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what discussions officials from his Department have had with representatives of *(a)* the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants, *(b)* the European Federation of Accountants and Auditors and *(c)* the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales concerning proposals for quarterly corporate reporting; [96396]

(2) what recent discussions officials from his Department have had with officials from the European Union on proposals for quarterly corporate reporting. [96425]

Ruth Kelly: Treasury officials have raised the issue of quarterly reporting with European Commission officials in the context of a draft proposal for a directive on the transparency obligations of companies with securities traded on regulated markets in the European Union.

Treasury officials have informally consulted a wide range of representatives of the business community on this draft proposal for a directive, and will continue to do so. These discussions have not involved the three organisations to which the question refers, although it is intended that consultation will be broadened to include, for example, representatives of the accountancy and auditing professions.

Corporation Tax

Adam Price: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of all taxes on income paid by households and business was accounted for by corporation tax in 1998. [97249]

Mr. Boateng: Figures for corporation tax and taxes on income and wealth for 1998 are available in the National Statistics publication Financial Statistics, in Table 2.1C and Table 14.6B respectively.

Data Access Powers

Harry Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether *(a)* the Inland Revenue and *(b)* Customs and Excise may gain access to communications data using powers other than those specified in the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2002 and the Interception of Communications Act 1985. [95615]

Dawn Primarolo: The Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) 2000 repealed the Interception of Communications Act 1985.

(a) It is anticipated that regulations to be laid by the Home Office later this year under the RIPA 2000 will give the Inland Revenue access to some communications data covered by the Act. Thereafter, it is expected that any access to communications data from communications service providers will be through the powers specified. The Inland Revenue have more general powers to require the production of information under the Taxes Management Act 1970.

(b) It would be normal for HM Customs and Excise to use the provisions specified in the RIPA 2000 to access communications data in all cases whenever and wherever appropriate. However, in certain cases, normally arrest situations, they will use other primary legislation—PCEA, DTA and VAT Act—to access stored data such as voice mail but this would only be in a very small number of cases and in accordance with Section 1 (5)(c) of the RIPA Part 1, Chapter 1.

E-mail Addresses

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by what e-mail address members of the public may contact *(a)* him and *(b)* each of the Ministers in his Department; and for each e-mail address if he will state (i) the date it became active and (ii) the number of e-mails received in each month since activation. [97468]

Dawn Primarolo: Members of the public may e-mail Treasury Ministers at: ministers@hm-treasury.gov.uk The address was set up in 1999. Information on the number of e-mails received is available only from October 2002, and is as follows:

Month	*Number of e-mails received*
October 2002	792
November 2002	366
December 2002	266
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Greater London Assembly

Mr. Cox: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what financial assistance his Department gave to the Greater London Assembly in 2002; and for what projects. [95848]

Mr. Boateng: No financial assistance was given directly to the London Assembly by central Government Departments in 2002–03.

Income Tax

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to his answer of 22 January, *Official Report*, column 412W, on income tax, if he will provide comparable figures on the amount of income tax paid according to *(a)* gender and *(b)* 10-year age bands for each year from 1992–93 to 1999–2000. [96785]

Dawn Primarolo: Amounts of income tax liabilities broken down by gender and 10-year age bands in 1994–95 to 1999–2000 are in the tables. Reliable estimates for the earlier years could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

£ million

Age band	Male	Total Tax Female	All
1994–1995			
Under 20	110	80	190
20–29	5,970	3,510	9,480
30–39	14,000	4,980	19,000
40–49	14,700	4,200	18,900
50–59	9,890	2,730	12,600
60–69	4,180	1,590	5,770
70 or over	2,080	1,320	3,400
All	50,900	18,400	69,400
1995–96			
Under 20	230	120	350
20–29	6,300	3,600	9,900
30–39	14,500	5,120	19,600
40–49	16,100	4,840	21,000
50–59	11,000	3,080	14,100
60–69	4,350	1,470	5,820
70 or over	2,300	1,380	3,680
All	54,800	19,600	74,400
1996–97			
Under 20	180	100	270
20–29	5,710	3,500	9,210
30–39	14,700	5,270	20,000
40–49	16,900	4,970	21,900
50–59	12,000	3,140	15,100
60–69	4,450	1,360	5,820
70 or over	2,100	1,470	3,570
All	56,000	19,800	75,800
1997–98			
Under 20	170	100	270
20–29	5,680	3,490	9,170
30–39	15,300	5,630	21,000
40–49	16,500	5,120	21,600
50–59	13,300	3,630	16,900
60–69	4,930	1,540	6,480
70 or over	2,430	1,640	4,080
All	58,400	21,200	79,500
1998–99			
Under 20	220	130	350
20–29	6,160	3,610	9,770
30–39	17,000	6,330	23,300
40–49	18,700	5,620	24,300
50–59	14,500	3,920	18,400
60–69	5,400	1,840	7,240
70 or over	2,820	1,780	4,610
All	64,800	23,200	88,000
1999–2000			
Under 20	210	120	330
20–29	6,210	3,720	9,930
30–39	18,100	6,510	24,600
40–49	19,300	5,950	25,300
50–59	15,800	4,170	19,900
60–69	5,640	1,720	7,360
70 or over	2,870	1,620	4,490
All	68,200	23,800	92,000

All estimates are based on the Survey of Personal Incomes.

Investment Ombudsman

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many complaints have been received in the past year by the Investment Ombudsman; how many have been upheld; and what the terms of reference are of the Ombudsman. [98006]

Ruth Kelly: The Office of the Investment Ombudsman became a part of the Financial Ombudsman Service on 1 December 2001. The Financial Ombudsman Service replaced the eight separate complaint-handling schemes that existed before for financial services disputes.

Page 14 of the Annual Report by the Financial Ombudsman Service for the year 2001–02, published in June 2002, gives an analysis of the different categories of complaints received by them. Page 16 gives an analysis of the outcomes of cases considered by them in 2002–02.

The Financial Ombudsman Service's terms of reference form a part of the Complaints Sourcebook, contained in the Financial Service Authority's Handbook of rules and guidance. Chapter 2 sets out the Ombudsman's jurisdiction, Chapter 3 sets out the Ombudsman's complaint handling procedures and Chapter 4 contains the standard terms for the Ombudsman's voluntary jurisdiction. The Complaints Sourcebook is available in HTML format on FSA's website at the following address: http://www.fsa.gov.uk/vhb/html/disp/DISPtoc.html

Iraq

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to initiate research into the cost of a possible conflict with Iraq; and if he will make a statement. [91196]

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what provision he has made for financing an attack on Iraq. [92976]

Mr. Boateng: No decision on military action in Iraq has been taken. We still await the outcome of the weapon inspection process under UN Security Council Resolution 1441.

However, the Chancellor announced a contingency reserve of £1 billion in the Pre-Budget Report to help meet our international defence responsibilities. The Ministry of Defence has been drawing down this amount to meet the cost of preparation. The Chancellor has now announced an additional three-quarters of a billion to be made available in this financial year for further commitments should this prove necessary.

Money Laundering

Harry Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he has received the French parliamentary report The City of London, Gibraltar and the Crown Dependencies: offshore centres, sanctuaries for dirty money; and if he will make a statement. [97081]

Mr. Boateng: The 'Montebourg Report' of October 1991 made a number of unfounded allegations without supporting evidence about terrorist money laundering in the City of London, Gibraltar and the Crown Dependencies. These claims were refuted at the time of publication by the UK Government and by the authorities of Gibraltar and the Crown Dependencies. The UK has stringent laws to combat money laundering and the financing of terrorism. The Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 further enhances controls and the Financial Services Authority takes vigorous action to enforce these controls. It is also the policy of Gibraltar and the Crown Dependencies to take the firmest measures to combat money laundering and terrorist financing.

Online Trading

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what *(a)* products, *(b)* goods and *(c)* services were (i) bought and (ii) sold online by his Department in each of the last five years. [97469]

Ruth Kelly: The information is as follows:

Office of Government Commerce

The following goods and services are bought on-line:

Books

Journals

Training equipment/materials

IT hardware

IT software

IT accessories

Mobile phones

Stationery

Electrical goods

Audio/visual equipment

Subscriptions (professional fees)

Training courses

Hotels/conferences

Consultancy

Travel.

The following goods and services are sold online:

Property and construction publications and training.

OGC buying solutions

The following goods and services are bought online :

IT hardware

IT software

IT consumables

Stationery

First-aid supplies

Safety signs

Paper cups

Artwork

Publications and journals

Travel

Hotels

Fruit, vegetables and flowers.

HM Customs and Excise

The following goods and services are bought online:

Stationery

Paper

Business reply envelopes

Car hire[1]

Photocopiers

Body armour

IS consultancy

Publications

Departmental printing

Security printing

Temporary agency staff

IS consumables

Tools

First-aid supplies.

[1] Ceased in November 2002.

No goods and services are sold online.

HM Treasury

The following goods and services are bought online:

Stationery

Computer consumables.

No goods and services are sold online.

Partnerships UK

Norman Lamb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the nature is of the employment arrangements of John Yard and John Gray in respect of their work for PUK; whether John Yard and John Gray remain employed by the Inland Revenue; what work John Yard and John Gray are undertaking within PUK; and what the financial arrangements are between PUK and the Inland Revenue with regard to the work of John Yard and John Gray. [95088]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 3 February 2003]*: John Yard and John Gray are both employees of the Inland Revenue. John Yard is Director of Business Services. He has never worked for Partnerships UK. John Gray is on secondment to Partnerships UK until April 2004.

In accordance with the normal Civil Service rules governing such secondments, Partnerships UK reimburses the Inland Revenue for the full cost of John Gray's salary, NIC and superannuation costs. Under these arrangements, secondees remain contractually subject both to the Official Secrets Act, and the special obligation imposed on officers of the Inland Revenue to safeguard the confidentiality of information. Section 6 Taxes Management Act 1970, and Section 182 Finance Act 1989.

Statistics

Ms Buck: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the official statistics published in the past five years by the Office for National Statistics which have been amended, stating the reasons in each case. [97197]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Ms Karen Buck dated 18 February 2003:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question on official statistics published by the Office for National Statistics.

Official statistics are revised on a frequent and widespread basis, and for a variety of reasons including more complete and/or better source information, seasonal adjustment changes, rebasing and changes to the underlying administrative system. To catalogue every instance in the past five years would incur disproportionate costs.

National Statistics policy on revisions will be made available n the Protocol on Revisions which will shortly be published for public consultation.

Student Fees

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by what amount it would be necessary to increase the standard rate of income tax *(a)* if student fees were paid out of general taxation and *(b)* if all fees and maintenance were paid out of general taxation. [94013]

Dawn Primarolo: Estimates of student and public contributions to fees in the financial year 2002–03 can be found on the HEFCE website at: www.hefce.ac.uk/news/hefce/2003/paper. DFES expect to pay £2.3 billion to the Student Loans Company to support student loans and hardship loans. Estimates of the effects of illustrative changes in taxation, including income tax, can be found in table 4 of the "Tax ready reckoner and tax reliefs", published in November 2002, which is available in the Library.

Terrorism

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much money has been *(a)* seized and *(b)* frozen under anti-terrorist legislation since 11 September 2001. [96423]

Ruth Kelly: Assets seized under anti-terrorist legislation are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary.

Following 11 September 2001, £10,230,810 was frozen under Orders applying United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1267 and 1333 which froze accounts to prevent use by, inter alia, the then Taliban Government of Afghanistan. Subsequently, the Al-Qaeda and Taliban (United Nations Measures) Order 2002 implemented United Nations Security Council Resolution 1390 and, as well as allowing for the release of funds belonging to the legitimate Afghan Government, provided for the continued freezing of accounts belonging to Al-Qaeda.

Amounts totalling £346,382 remain frozen under the Orders implementing United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1373 and 1390.

Unpaid Tax

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to his answer of 22 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 422W, on unpaid tax, if he will estimate the total unpaid tax, broken down by each major category, for 2000–01; and if he will make a statement. [94615]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 3 February 2003]*: The Inland Revenue's accounting year for tax runs to the end of October each year. Over the last eight years, the amounts of tax unpaid at that date have approximately halved as a proportion of the tax collected during the year.

The figures for October 2001 were:

Inland Revenue	*£ million*
Income Tax other than PAYE	2,348.7
Corporation Tax[1]	566.6
Other (Capital Gains Tax and Petroleum Revenue Tax)	33.6
Total	2,948.9

[1] This figure includes an estimate for the amount of unpaid self assessed corporation tax

These figures for uncollected tax represent net tax charged but not paid as at the accounting date, and are a snapshot of the position at the date of the account. Most of the tax uncollected at the balance of each account is subsequently collected, and most of the amount outstanding attracts an interest charge.

Working Families Tax Credit

Caroline Flint: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to allow parents to claim under working families tax credit for extra costs to child care when the extra costs run for less than four consecutive weeks. [95864]

Dawn Primarolo: The child care tax credit within the working families tax credit provides support to families for the costs of registered or approved child care. Once an award of working families tax credit is made, it cannot be adjusted to reflect changes in the claimant's child care costs. However, from April 2003, working families tax credit is replaced by the new child tax credit and working tax credit. The working tax credit includes a child care element which provides more flexible support for the costs of child care. In particular, the child care element of working tax credit can be adjusted to reflect significant changes in average weekly child care costs.

In response to concerns raised with me by parents paying child care costs weekly, who may have short increases in child care costs during the school holidays, we will shortly bring forward regulations making a minor change to the system to allow parents to take account of changes in costs lasting less than four weeks. This will allow parents with fluctuating child care costs to have their tax credit based on their average child care costs, including any short-term fluctuations. It is our intention to produce this addition to the rules in good time for the start of the new tax credits system in April 2003. The Inland Revenue will issue clear guidance for parents and child care providers on how the system will work from April 2003.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 24 February 2003

WORK AND PENSIONS

Pension Provision (Women)

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment she has made of the adequacy of pension provision for women. [97718]

Mr. McCartney: The Green Paper takes a comprehensive look at the issue of women, work and pensions.

It recognises that it is often harder for women to build up state and private pensions rights than it is for men. This is because of a combination of factors including shorter working lives, lower pay and lower occupational pensions coverage among part-time workers. The Green Paper also recognises that the current generation of female pensioners are over represented in those groups of pensioners with low incomes.

We have already taken action to address these issues.

The introduction of the State Second Pension, from April 2002 provides extra help to those on low or moderate earnings, to certain carers and to certain people with long-term illness and disability.

The Government have enabled some low paid workers to get national insurance benefits without paying contributions. From April 2000, the start point of national insurance contributions was separated from the lower earnings limit (LEL) for employees and aligned with the personal allowance for income tax. From April 2002–03, national insurance contributions only become payable on earnings from £89 a week whereas entitlement to national insurance benefits start accruing at £75 a week. This has benefited around half a million women.

The Government have also already taken action to support the labour market position of women through, for example, the introduction of the national minimum wage and additional investment in child care.

And many current female pensioners should benefit from the introduction of the pension credit in October 2003. Just over half of those entitled to the pension credit are single women. Two-thirds of those entitled to the pension credit will be women, and half of these women will be aged 75 or over.

Finally, we are engaging in a wide-ranging consultation on proposals made within the Green Paper. In this document, we state our commitment to providing pensions information for everyone, but we recognise that this is particularly important for women.

Pensioners

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the combined deduction of taxation and pensions credit for an extra £1 of income to a pensioner paying tax and receiving pensions credit. [90660]

Mr. McCartney: The combined deduction of taxation and pension credit for an extra £1 of income will depend on the individual characteristics of the person, such as age, family status, eligibility for additional amounts and income level.

The table shows an example of the deductions for a single person receiving pension credit and paying income tax, according to their gross income and age, assuming no additional amounts in payment.

Deduction of tax and pension credit for a single person paying tax and receiving Pension Credit [with no additional amounts].

Age	*Gross income (£ per week)*	*Deduction per £1*	*Net increase in income per £1*	*Description*
60–64	88.75–103.60	1.00	0.00	Pension credit [guarantee only] + 10 per cent. tax
65–74	127.10–140.40	0.46	0.54	Pension credit [savings credit]+ 10 per cent. tax
75+	129.25–140.20	0.46	0.54	Pension credit [savings credit] + 10 per cent. tax

Notes:

Calculations are for 2003–04 benefit and tax rates.

The personal tax allowances are consistent with announcements made in the Pre-Budget Report 2002. Income tax bands have not yet been announced. For the purposes of this PQ they have been assumed to increase in line with normal indexation.

Gross Income bands are defined using a 52-week year and then rounded to the nearest 5 pence.

Taxation is defined as income tax only and excludes National Insurance contributions, which people below state pension age may pay.

The effect of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit is not included.

The deductions and gross income bands may vary for people with entitlement to additional amounts in Pension Credit.

Pension Credit entitlement is calculated according to post tax income.

The guarantee within pension credit will be £102.10 for a single person in 2003–04 in net income terms.

For single people, only those in the above income bands and age groups will be eligible for pension credit and be liable to pay income tax.

Benefit Payment

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners collect benefits from post offices in *(a)* Haltemprice and Howden and *(b)* the East Riding of Yorkshire. [96707]

Malcolm Wicks: The number of pensioners as at 28 December 2002 in the constituency of Haltemprice and Howden and the East Riding of Yorkshire receiving their benefits by a method of payment collectable at a post office is shown in the table. Included in these figures are customers paid by giro cheque. Giro cheques are encashable either at a post office, or they can be paid into a bank or building society account.

	Number of pensioners
Haltemprice and Howden	9,107
East Riding of Yorkshire	37,916

Some customers who are paid direct into an account can also collect their benefit in cash at post offices through network banking arrangements at the Post Office. There is no data available on the number of benefit claims collected in this way.

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners have migrated from over-the-counter benefit payments to direct bank transfer in *(a)* Haltemprice and Howden and *(b)* the East Riding of Yorkshire. [96708]

Malcolm Wicks: The number of pensioners receiving DWP benefits (including War Pensions) who have migrated from payments collectable at the post office to payments direct into a bank or building society account is 43 in Haltemprice and Howden, and 159 in the East Riding of Yorkshire. The figures are as at 28 December 2002 compared with the same records from four weeks earlier.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his estimate is of the cost of the minimum income guarantee and pension credit for each year from 1997–98 to 2004–05 (planned). [97365]

Mr. McCartney: The information is shown in the table below:

	Cash terms £ million	Real Terms (02/03 prices) £ million
1997/98 out turn	3,773	4,249
1998/99 out turn	3,619	3,967
1999/00 out turn	3,781	4,046
2000/01 out turn	4,095	4,288
2001/02 estimated out turn[1]	4,486	4,598
2002/03 plans	4,470	4,470
2003/04 plans[2]	5,287	5,171
2004/05 plans	6,231	5,945

Notes:

All estimates are consistent with the PBR2002 forecasts

[1] Expenditure for 2001/02 reflects the latest estimate of out turn for the year and not the amounts voted by Parliament.

[2] Pension Credit is introduced in October 2003.

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what percentage of pensioners collected benefits from post offices in the parliamentary constituency of Bury St. Edmunds. [97390]

Malcolm Wicks: The percentage of pensioners receiving DWP benefits (including war pensions) collectable at post offices in the Bury St. Edmunds constituency was 48 per cent. of all pensioners as at 28 December 2002. This figure includes benefits paid by giro cheque which can also be paid into a bank or building society account.

Benefit Take-up

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many pensioners in the London Borough of Southwark claim *(a)* the minimum income guarantee and *(b)* attendance allowance; and if he will make a statement; [96844]

(2) what the average take-up rate is of *(a)* the minimum income guarantee and *(b)* attendance allowance, expressed as a percentage; and if he will make a statement; [96845]

(3) what arrangements are in place between his Department and partner organisations to increase take-up of *(a)* the minimum income guarantee and *(b)* attendance allowance in the London Borough of Southwark; and if he will make a statement. [96847]

Mr. McCartney: In August 2002, there were approximately 7,900 customers receiving the minimum income guarantee in the London Borough of Southwark and approximately 3,200 receiving attendance allowance.

The information regarding the average take-up rate of minimum income guarantee for 1999–2000, the latest financial year for which estimates are available, can be found in the DWP publication, "Income Related Benefits Estimates of Take-Up in 1999–2000". A copy is placed in the Library.

The next edition of the report containing estimates for 2000–01 will be released on 27 March 2003.

Our fundamental priority is to put money in the pockets of pensioners who need it. The MIG take up campaign has put an average £20 a week extra in the pockets of 144,000 elderly people who would not have received it otherwise. These people would have lost out so the campaign undoubtedly achieved value for money.

Because the MIG is more generous and the limits on capital have been increased, there has been a natural increase in the number of people who could claim. Our overall policy is, and will continue to be, that we will get as many eligible pensioners as possible to claim their entitlement to the MIG.

Pension credit will be introduced in October 2003 and we have developed a strategy to ensure maximum take-up.

First, we will transfer existing MIG recipients to pension credit ready for payments to be made from October 2003;

Second, we will run mass advertising (TV and Press) from September 2003 to launch pension credit and advise pensioners and their friends and family of how The Pension Service and partner organisations can support them to consider and take-up entitlement;

Third, we will write to all pensioners not already receiving MIG over the take-on period (through to October 2004) to help them consider any entitlement to pension credit and encourage those likely to be eligible to apply; and

Fourth, we will work with local partners to help support the communications to pensioners, and tailor marketing and communications activity accordingly.

We will review the take-up position during autumn 2004 and take any further action that may be necessary.

The DWP set up the Partnerships against Poverty Forum for England and Wales as a working group in 2001 with the Local Government Association and voluntary organisations to develop joint working to improve take-up of minimum income guarantee.

The group has, on a national basis, identified and developed a number of initiatives to improve access to entitlements and for the take-up of MIG by older people. The group has been instrumental in helping to develop products such as the shorter minimum income guarantee (MIG) claim form, the new MIG leaflet and the "At a Glance" and "Good Practice Guides", which all support the take-up of benefit entitlements. It also regularly reviews new and revised leaflets and has provided invaluable feedback into the training packages developed by The Pension Service local service.

The Partnership Against Poverty members quickly recognised that the issues that adversely impact the take-up of entitlements by black and minority ethnic (BME) elders needed to be addressed separately. To support this, a sub-group was established.

One of the first tasks of the group was to commission research into the barriers to look specifically at the problems faced by black and minority ethnic elder communities. The research will be qualitative and based around seven case studies looking at different groups. One of these is looking at the black African communities in Southwark.

Take-up is encouraged through local services via their drop-in surgeries in Southwark. These take place frequently in partnership with local groups and organisations. These are Peckham One Stop, Black Elderly Group of Southwark, South Asian Elderly Organisation, Blackfriars Settlement and at the Surrey Quays Shopping Centre.

In terms of attendance allowance, it is not possible to be precise about the number of pensioners who might be entitled if they claimed it. This is because entitlement to AA is determined on the customer's specific circumstances, which can only be determined after a claim has been made. Up-to-date estimates of the take up of AA and disability living allowance are not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Sutton Disability Benefits Centre undertakes a number of targeted local activities to promote awareness of AA in the area it serves, which includes the London Borough of Southwark. This includes training and awareness sessions for Pension Service staff and external organisations.

Notes on the minimum income guarantee figure:

1. Based on a 5 per cent. sample, therefore subject to sampling variation.

2. Figures have been rounded to the nearest hundred and are expressed in thousands.

3. MIG claimants are defined as any live income support benefit unit where the claimant and/or partner are aged 60 and over.

4. Local authority is assigned by matching postcodes against the relevant ONS postcode directory.

Source:

Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiry, August 2002.

Note on the attendance allowance figure:

Figures are in thousands and rounded to the nearest hundred.

Source:

IAD Information Centre, data taken from 5 per cent. sample.

Benefit Uprating

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions for what reason benefits are uprated by *(a)* RPI and *(b)* the Rossi index. [97681]

Mr. McCartney [*holding answer 13 February 2003*]: The levels of all benefits and their components are reviewed annually. Contributory benefits and non-contributory benefits are uprated by the Retail Prices Index to meet the statutory requirement to increase them in relation to the general level of prices. Income-related benefits are uprated by the Rossi index which is based on the Retail Prices Index less housing costs. This index most clearly reflects the cost of living increases for recipients of income-related benefits since housing costs are separately provided for, for example by Housing Benefit for rent. Uprating benefits in line with prices maintains their value in real terms.

Child Support Agency

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many CSA cases were referred to the Independent Case Examiner in *(a)* Haltemprice and Howden and *(b)* the East Riding of Yorkshire in each year since 1997; what the average time taken to determine each case was; and how many complaints were upheld. [96706]

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many CSA cases were referred to the Independent Case Examiner in Portsmouth, South in each year since 1997; what the average time taken to determine each case was; how many complaints were upheld; and if he will make a statement. [97279]

Malcolm Wicks: The information is not available.

Council Tax Benefit

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate he has made of the change in the level of expenditure on council tax benefit if the average level of council tax *(a)* rose by £100 and *(b)* fell by £100; and if he will make a statement. [97021]

Malcolm Wicks: An increase of £100 a year in the average level of council tax would result in an estimated annual increase of up to £600 million in council tax benefit expenditure. This figure includes the cost of increased payments to people already receiving council tax benefit as well as people who would become eligible for the benefit because of the council tax increase. An equivalent decrease would reduce expenditure by an estimated £500 million a year.

Note:

Figures are rounded to the nearest £50 million.

Source:

Figures are derived from the Department's policy simulation model, and are based on the 2000–01 Family Resources Survey, uprated to 2003–04 prices, benefit rates and caseloads and earnings levels.

Departmental Equipment (Theft)

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what equipment was stolen from his Department in 2002; what the approximate value of each item was; and if he will list items valued at more than £50 stolen or lost from his Department in 2002. [88509]

Malcolm Wicks: The DWP employs over 130,000 staff operating from 1,500 different locations and deals with over one million customers per day. Losses from theft are low.

In total there have been 708 items of equipment recorded as stolen from the Department during 2002, with an approximate total value of £556,674.

The 708 items are made up of:

5 Official Vehicles
103 Personal Computers
469 System Base Units
8 Printers
16 Flat Screen Monitors
60 Portable Computers
47 Miscellaneous Items

A list of those items valued at more than £50 has been placed in the Library.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what his estimate is of the real growth of planned total expenditure by his Department for each year from 2002–03 to 2005–06; and if he will make a statement; [97351]

(2) what estimate he has made of the change in real spending on total administration costs for gross controlled areas for each year from 1998–99 to 2003–04 (planned); and if he will make a statement. [97347]

Mr. McCartney: The Department for Work and Pensions came into being on 1 April 2001. Consequently there are no comparable figures prior to this date. The final provision for 2002–03 has yet to receive parliamentary approval and therefore a comparison with actual expenditure for 2001–02 or planned expenditure for 2003–04 cannot be made. The current expenditure plans of the Department for Work and Pensions are contained in Tables 1–11 of the departmental report: The Government expenditure plans 2002–03 to 2003–04, Command 5424.

Departmental Finance

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his estimate is of his Department's total budget as a share of total public spending in each year from 1979–80 to 2003–04, planned. [96813]

Mr. McCartney: The Department for Work and Pensions came into being on 1 April 2001. Consequently there are no comparable figures prior to this date. The final provision for 2002–03 has yet to receive Parliamentary approval and therefore a comparison with expenditure for 2001–02 or planned expenditure for 2003–04 cannot be made. The current expenditure plans for the Department are contained in Tables 1–11 of the Departmental Report: The Government expenditure plans 2002–03 to 2003–04, Cm 5424.

Departmental Staff Numbers

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many staff were employed in each of the last four years for which figures are available by *(a)* his Department and its predecessor and *(b)* local authorities in connection with the administration of (i) housing and (ii) council tax benefit. [94006]

Malcolm Wicks: The overall strategy of our wide-ranging package of reforms for housing benefit (HB) announced on 17 October 2002, is to improve administration, promote choice and responsibility, enhance work incentives and reduce levels of fraud and error in the system. We provide help, guidance and support to local authorities to assist them in achieving these goals.

The number of people currently employed by the Department identified as working exclusively on various aspects of housing benefit and/or council tax benefit (CTB) is 340. These figures are liable to fluctuation throughout the year as particular aspects of work expand and contract. In addition there are a number of officials whose cross cutting responsibilities include these benefits to a greater or lesser extent. Figures for earlier years are not available.

Local authorities have responsibility for the day to day administration of HB and CTB. The number of full-time staff or full-time equivalents employed by local authorities in Great Britain to administer HB and CTB in the last four years for which figures are available is in the table.

	Annual average number of full-time staff or full-time equivalents employed on HB/CTB administration
1998–99	16,000
1999–2000	16,000
2000–01	17,000
2001–02	17,000

Notes:

1. Figures have been rounded to the nearest thousand.
2. Figures for any non-responding authorities have been estimated.
3. Separate figures are not available for HB and CTB.

Source:

Housing Benefit Management Information System Quarterly Administration Returns April 1998 to March 2002

EU Pension Policies

Mr. David: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what studies he has made of the evolution of pension policies in other European Union countries; and what steps he has taken to reflect the findings of these studies in his policy on pensions provision. [98329]

Mr. McCartney: The United Kingdom has contributed to the voluntary exchange of information and good practice by EU Member States within a framework of common objectives on pensions covering adequacy, financial sustainability and modernisation agreed during the Swedish Presidency of the EU.

As part of this process the European Commission published a draft joint report on adequate and sustainable pensions in December 2002 based on national contributions.The draft report recognises that Member States have pension systems that have developed in very different ways and do not conform to one single model of provision. A major theme in the draft report is the need for urgent reform in many public pension systems to ensure they are financially sustainable in the future. This concurs with the UK's position that financial sustainability is a prerequisite for the adequacy of public pension provision. The UK public pension system is one of those found to be financially sustainable in the long term.

The draft report concludes that the major challenge for the UK system is ensuring that there is increased access to occupational and personal pension provision and people are encouraged to save enough to meet their expectations in retirement. These same issues are addressed by the proposals set out in the Green Paper published in December 2002 on which we are currently consulting.

Free TV Licences

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners there are in Nottingham, North; how many qualify for a free TV licence; and how many get the minimum income guarantee. [98323]

Mr. McCartney: The information is not available in the format requested. However such information as is available shows that in the parliamentary constituency of Nottingham, North:

The number of recipients of state pension for September 2002 was 14.9 thousand.

The number of pensioners over the age of 75 and therefore eligible to qualify for a free TV licence as at May 2002 was 6.5 thousand; and

In November 2002, there were 4.2 thousand minimum income guarantee claimants.

Notes:

1. Figures are based on a 5 per cent. sample and are therefore subject to sampling variation.
2. Figures have been rounded to the nearest hundred and are expressed in thousands.
3. MIG claimants are defined as any live income support benefit unit where the claimant and/or partner are aged 60 and over.
4. Parliamentary constituency is assigned by matching postcodes against the relevant ONS postcode directory.

Sources:

1. Pension Strategy Computer System as at 30 September 2002.
2. Client Group analysis of the population over state pension age May 2002.
3. Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiry, November 2002.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what action the Department is taking to co-ordinate housing benefit anti-fraud work with the Inland Revenue's work on tax credit fraud; whether a working group has been established to consider this; and how many joint local authority and Inland Revenue fraud prosecutions have occurred. [91969]

Malcolm Wicks: A working group, whose members include representatives from the Inland Revenue and local authority associations, has been meeting to consider all the implications for local authorities of the introduction of new tax credits.

Information is not available on the number of joint local authority and Inland Revenue fraud prosecutions that have occurred.

Income-related Benefits

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he intends to publish Income Related Benefits: Estimates of Take-Up 2000–01; and for what reason it has been delayed. [92154]

Malcolm Wicks: Income Related Benefits Estimates of Take-up 2000–01 will be published on 27 March 2003. This has been pre-announced in Updates—the ONS diary of statistical releases. The forthcoming statistics will incorporate findings from research commissioned to improve the precision and accuracy of MIG take-up estimates; this addition has extended the production process.

Minimum Income Guarantee

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the cost per claimant of administering the minimum income guarantee. [96505]

Mr McCartney: Information is not currently available in the format requested. The Department now accounts for its administration and benefit expenditure by Strategic Objective, as set out in its Public Service Agreements (PSA), and by individual Requests for Resources (RfRs), as set out in the Departmental Estimates and Accounts.

Pension Credit

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether all pensioners newly entitled to the pension credit will be able to claim the money in October. [99068]

Mr. McCartney: Yes

Pension Payments

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners draw their retirement pensions at *(a)* post offices, *(b)* banks and *(c)* building societies in the Portsmouth, South constituency; and if he will make a statement. [98099]

Malcolm Wicks: The number of pensioners in receipt of Retirement Pensions collectable at Post Office in the Portsmouth, South constituency was 7,886 at 28 December 2002. This figure includes payments by giro cheque, which can also be paid into a bank or building society account. The number of pensioners in receipt of Retirement Pension paid directly into a bank or building society was 6,373 as at 28 December 2002. Information to differentiate between payments into bank and building society accounts is not available.

Some customers who are paid direct into an account can also collect their benefit in cash at post offices through network banking arrangements at the Post Office. There is no data available on the number of benefit claims collected in this way.

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners draw their retirement pensions at *(a)* post offices, *(b)* banks and *(c)* at building societies in the Easington constituency. [97158]

Malcolm Wicks: The number of pensioners in receipt of retirement pension collectable at post offices in the Easington constituency was 9,939 at 28 December 2002. This figure includes payments by giro cheque, which can also be paid into a bank or building society account. The number of pensioners in receipt of retirement pension paid directly into a bank or building society was 2,853 as at 28 December 2002. Information to differentiate between payments into bank and building society accounts is not available.

Some customers who are paid direct into an account can also collect their benefit in cash at post offices through network banking arrangements at the Post Office. There are no data available on the number of benefit claims collected in this way.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners have migrated from over-the-counter benefit payments to direct bank transfer in Portsmouth, South; and if he will make a statement. [97274]

Malcolm Wicks: The number of pensioners in Portsmouth, South constituency that have migrated from payments collectable at post offices to payment into a bank or building society account is 50 as at 28 December 2002, compared with the same records from data available four weeks earlier.

Some customers who are paid direct into an account can also collect their benefit in cash at post offices through network banking arrangements at the Post Office. There are no data available on the number of benefit claims collected in this way.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners collect benefits from post offices in Portsmouth, South; and if he will make a statement. [97277]

Malcolm Wicks: The number of pensioners receiving DWP benefits (including war pensions) collectable from post offices in Portsmouth South is 10,034 as at 28 December 2002. This figure includes benefits paid by giro cheque, which can also be paid into a bank or building society account.

Some customers who are paid direct into an account can also collect their benefit in cash at post offices through network banking arrangements at the Post Office. There are no data available on the number of benefit claims collected in this way.

Pension Schemes

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many defined benefit schemes are *(a)* open, *(b)* closed to new members and *(c)* closed to further contributions from existing members, giving for each type of scheme the estimated number of members, in each of the past five years. [90827]

Mr. McCartney: The information requested is not available. However, the Pensions Scheme Registry that is administered by the Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority contains some relevant data that are shown in the table.

Defined Benefit Occupational Pension schemes, 1998–99 to 2002–03

New registrations/change of scheme status

	Open		*Closed*		*Frozen*	
	Number of schemes	*Number of members at registration date (thousand)*	*Number of schemes*	*Number of members at effective date of status change (thousand)*	*Number of schemes*	*Number of members at effective date of status change (thousand)*
1 April 1998–31 March 1999	111	25	103	180	41	11
1 April 1999–31 March 2000	86	16	115	54	52	8
1 April 2000–31 March 2001	97	59	161	94	87	113
1 April 2001–31 March 2002	78	32	263	560	65	45
1 April 2002–31 March 2003	22	19	198	146	65	41

There a[illegible]ome important points to note with regard to the data in the table:

'Open' schemes are those that had a registerable date on to the Pensions Scheme Registry during the year in question, and were also recorded as being open on 10 February 2003. This does not represent the total number of schemes that were open in the year in question. Figures in the table refer to the 'flow' of new open schemes in each particular year, rather than the 'stock' of all open schemes. Because of the way scheme-status changes are recorded on the Registry, it is not possible to identify the stock of all those schemes that were open at a particular point in time prior to the current date. Furthermore, scheme trustees have 12 months to notify OPRA of any change to the status of an open scheme, and so some schemes currently included in the table as open may since have changed status.

'Closed' schemes are those that have become closed to new members during the year in question and remain closed as at 10 February 2003. Existing members in these schemes can continue to accrue additional pension rights. 'Frozen' schemes are those that have become closed to new accruals during the year in question and remain frozen as at 10 February 2003. The dates used for closed and frozen scheme figures relate to the effective date of change as notified by schemes and recorded by the Registry. In some cases, schemes do not supply an effective date and where this has occurred the date of inputting the change onto the Registry database has been used.

Data for closed and frozen schemes refer only to the number becoming closed or frozen in the year in question, and do not represent the stock of the total number of schemes that were closed (previously closed plus newly closed in that year).

The table updates previous information used to answer earlier PQs. As referred to above, the Registry system holds information on the most recent change in scheme status and the effective date of the change. Because of the way the data are held a later change will overwrite an earlier change, so data for earlier years become increasingly inaccurate. Trustees are required to report changes within 12 months so there could be a lag between the closure or freeze of a scheme and trustees informing the Registry that the scheme has actually closed or frozen. The table reflects the most up to date data available.

Scheme members are those individuals that have accrued pension benefits and do not include those receiving pensions in payment. An individual may have pension benefits accrued in, and therefore may be a member of, more than one scheme.

Membership figures for open schemes are given at the date of registration. Membership figures for closed or frozen schemes are given at the effective date of change of status.

This information relates only to those schemes recorded on the Registry database as Defined Benefit. It does not include schemes where the benefit type is unknown or those offering a mixture of salary related and money purchase benefits.

Pension Service

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what specialist training is given to those working in Pension Service call centres. [98107]

Mr. McCartney: Training for staff in the new Pension Service Pension Centres is designed to ensure that they have the knowledge and skills needed to provide a high-quality service to Pension Service customers. The training covers various themes, depending on each individual member of staff's role, including: customer service, IT/telephony, business procedures and management.

State Pensions

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his estimate is of the cost of increasing the basic state pension by *(a)* £5 per week, *(b)* £10 per week, *(c)* £15 per week, *(d)* £20 per week, and *(e)* to £100 per week, for (i) all pensioners, (ii) pensioners of age 75 and over, and (iii) pensioners of age 80 and over. [97366]

Mr. McCartney: The information requested is set out in the tables.

Cost of increasing the maximum rate payable of the basic state pension by £5, £10, £15 and £20 per week in 2003–04

£

	£5 per week	*£10 per week*	*£15 per week*	*£20 per week*
All pensioners	1.5 billion	3 billion	4.6 billion	6.2 billion
Pensioners aged 75 and over	800 million	1.5 billion	2.3 billion	3 billion
Pensioners aged 80 and over	400 million	800 million	1.2 billion	1.6 billion

Notes:

1. Estimates are in cash terms for Great Britain and are rounded to the nearest £100 million.
2. The estimates take account of offsetting savings in income related benefits. Income related benefit offsets are calculated using the Department for Work and Pensions Policy Simulation Model for 2003–04.
3. Calculations assume the maximum rate payable of the basic state pension is increased by the amounts specified and all other payments proportionately.
4. For modelling purposes, pension credit is assumed to be in place throughout 2003–04. In fact, pension credit will begin in October 2003.

Cost of increasing the maximum rate payable of the basic state pension to £100 per week in 2003–04

	£ billion
All pensioners	7
Pensioners aged 75 and over	3.4
Pensioners aged 80 and over	1.9

Notes:

1. Estimates are in cash terms for Great Britain and are rounded to the nearest £100 million.

2. The estimates take account of offsetting savings in income related benefits. Income related benefit offsets are calculated using the Department for Work and Pensions Policy Simulation Model for 2003–04.

3. Calculations assume the maximum rate payable of the basic state pension is increased by the amounts specified and all other payments proportionately.

4. For modelling purposes, pension credit is assumed to be in place throughout 2003–04. In fact, Pension credit will begin in October 2003.

Pensions Green Paper

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will set out the basis for the calculation of page 5 of the Green Paper "Simplicity, Security and Choice", that the simplification proposals in the Green Paper could save employers £150-£200 million per year. [90825]

Mr. McCartney: The basis for the calculation can be found on page 129 of the green paper "Simplicity Security and Choice: Working and Saving for Retirement."

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will set out the basis of the calculation given in the Green Paper on pensions "Simplicity, Security and Choice: Working and Saving for Retirement", that there has been a 40 per cent. increase in pension contributions since 1997. [90826]

Mr. McCartney: The increase in pension contributions since 1997 was calculated using the estimated value of contributions to private pension schemes from the Office for National Statistics, and deflating by the Retail Prices Index (RPI).

The data used for the calculation are set out in the table.

	Estimated contributions to private pension schemes[1]	*RPIX index (13 January 1987 equals 100.0)*	*Estimated contributions to private pension schemes*[2]
1997	33.1	157.5	36.4
1998	37.3	162.9	39.7
1999	42.3	165.4	44.3
2000	47.5	170.3	48.3
2001	49.9[3]	173.3	49.9[3]

[1] £ billion, current prices.

[2] £ billion, 2001 prices.

[3] Provisional.

Contributions to private pension schemes have been calculated using the methodology outlined in the letter from the National Statistician to the right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) on 29 October 2002, PQ 77826, *Official Report*, column 689W.

The estimates are consistent with those published in both Annexe B table 1 of the Review of Pension Contributions Statistics and the ONS Blue Book for 2002. The Review of Pension Contribution Statistics suggested that until the full implementation of the recommendations of the review, these are the best estimates for pension contributions statistics.

Personal Pension Plans

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the guidance which he gives on funding for personal pension plans. [98061]

Mr. McCartney: As the Green Paper 'Simplicity, security and choice: working and saving for retirement' (CM 5677) states that the decisions over how much pension an individual should have depends on their individual preferences and circumstances. Therefore, it is not appropriate for the Government to seek to stipulate the level of income that any particular person will need in retirement, and consequently the additional saving any one individual should make.

We are committed, however, to actively encouraging people to consider their pension saving options early so that they have as clear a view as possible of their own pension funding needs. The Green Paper, sets out the Government's proposals to work with employers and the financial services industry to provide:

A simple framework to help people understand their choices; Financial education and awareness to navigate the system, including access to generic financial advice for the mass market; Personalised information tailored to individual circumstances, so people can make informed choices; and a choice of suitable products.

We are already running a pension education publicity campaign to make people aware of the importance of saving for retirement. The campaign is supported by a range of guides that provides information on pensions options. The current phase of activity started on 8 February 2003. In time, we plan to move the campaign forward from awareness so that it is more focused on taking action.

In addition, we have already introduced measures to inform individuals of the level of pension they can expect when they save in a personal pension. New regulations that come into force in April require money purchase pension schemes (occupational, personal and stakeholder) to give members an annual illustration of what their pension might be when they require. This will give them important information about how theirpension plan is progressing.

The Green Paper, therefore, sets out proposals for building on work that has already been done, as well as identifying new initiatives, in order to provide a coherent education and information effort. This will enable individuals to make choices as to the level of funding for their personal pensions.

Benefit Fraud

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what recent assessment he has made of benefit fraud in the East Riding of Yorkshire. [96711]

Malcolm Wicks: Our most recent estimate is that £2 billion is lost annually through benefit fraud in Great Britain. This estimate cannot be broken down for individual areas.

Post Office Card Accounts

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the issue of personal invitation documents to benefits customers in respect of Post Office card accounts; why the issue of personal invitation documents was delayed from 5 January 2003 until 24 March; and what estimate he has made of the likely impact of the delay on the number of benefits claimants signing up to card accounts in time for the launch on 1April. [97373]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 11 February 2003]:* The Government has made clear that we will only accept the Post Office card account service once further testing and proving has shown that the Post Office can provide a reliable and robust system delivering high levels of customer service. We have been continually reviewing and refining our plans to issue Personal Invitation Documents, and will gradually start to issue them once we are sure the Post Office can deliver the required level of service.

None of this affects people's choices. Customers will choose the account that best meets their needs and circumstances. The arrangements for issuing Personal Invitation Documents will not affect this choice—customers opting for a card account will simply be kept on their current method of payment (order book or giro) until they have been issued a Personal Invitation Document and then successfully opened a card account.

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of how housebound pensioners and others will be able to use a Post Office card account without giving their PIN to a carer. [97669]

Malcolm Wicks: Customers with a Post Office card account can, if they wish, nominate someone else to have permanent access to their account and collect their money for them. In these cases a second card with a separate PIN will be issued for use by the person nominated by the customer. The Post Office card account is not the only option available. Some housebound pensioners may find that a bank account, which may offer services such as phone or Internet banking, may be better to meet their personal needs.

Retirement Age

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his policy is on allowing civil servants to retire at the age of 65. [90029]

Mr. McCartney: The Government has already begun to address the social and economic consequences of demographic change in its role as employer. One of the recommendations of Winning the Generation Game was that public sector employers should review their retirement ages and examine the case for allowing those who want to work on to age 65 to do so. Already 75 per cent. of civil servants now have the option to retire at 65 and the numbers able to serve beyond 60 are expected to increase.

All staff in the Department for Work and Pensions, below the Senior Civil Service, are able to choose to remain in employment beyond the age of 60 for any period of time up to the age of 65.

> "Staff in the Senior Civil Service normally retire at the age of 60 but the Head of the Department and Agency Chief Executives have flexibility to retain members of the Senior Civil Service beyond age 60 if they judge it in the public interest and they are satisfied about the fitness and efficiency of the individual to carry out his or her duties. The most senior posts require written approval from the Head of the Home Civil Service to be retained for longer than three months beyond their 60th birthday."

This is based on an extract from the Civil Service Management Code.

Most public service pension schemes, however, still allow a normal pension to be taken at 60 or under. The Government is seeking views on the proposal that the rules of public service pension schemes should be changed and applied to all new members during the next few years to make an unreduced pension payable from age 65 rather than 60. Such a change would reflect improved longevity, modern working patterns and the practice in the majority of private sector pension schemes.

Senior Civil Servants (IT Qualifications)

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what IT qualifications each of the senior civil servants within his Department possesses. [98109]

Mr. McCartney: Information on IT qualifications held by each senior civil servant is not held centrally. Senior civil servants are encouraged to gain IT skills through a range of internal and external training.

War Pensions

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what mechanism exists to co-ordinate benefit awarded by his Department and those paid by the War Pensions Agency. [96952]

Malcolm Wicks: It has been a long-standing principle of the benefits system that it should not provide more than one benefit to cover the same contingency. While income from a War Pension is often disregarded for benefit purposes, there are certain circumstances where the award or cessation of a War Pension or supplementary allowance will necessitate an adjustment to the amount of benefit in payment.

We have measures in place to ensure that benefits paid by this Department are co-ordinated with those paid by the Veterans Agency (formerly the War Pensions Agency), and that any appropriate adjustments to benefit claims are made in the normal course of events.

Prior to the award of a Social Security benefit, a person must make a declaration of their circumstances, including details of the benefits they receive or have claimed. Once benefit is in payment, the recipient is advised to report any changes in their circumstances, including for example, the award or cessation of another benefit. Claims are also reviewed periodically by the Department to ensure their accuracy.

In addition, all claims to benefit are recorded on a computer system to which our agencies and the Veterans Agency have access, enabling the relevant agencies to share information where appropriate.

Winter Fuel Payments

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pursuant to his answer of 22 January 2003, ref: 90125, what the reasons are for the assumption in the Green Paper on Pensions that spending on winter fuel payments will remain at their current level of £200 up until 2051–52; and, on the basis of the projections of spending given in the Green Paper, what the value of the winter fuel allowance will be in real terms in *(a)* 2011–12, *(b)* 2021–22 and *(c)* 2051–52. [93940]

Mr. McCartney: The current amount of the Winter Fuel Payment of £200 will continue to be paid to each eligible household for the rest of this parliament. The rate will be kept under review. However, for the purposes of the projections in Annexe 3 of the Green Paper 'Simplicity, security and choice' (Cm 5677), it was necessary to make a modelling assumption about the value of winter fuel payments. Modelling assumptions should not be interpreted as statements of policy. It will be for future Governments to decide what the rate of Winter Fuel Payments should be for future years.

The following table shows the projected future value of the winter fuel payment in 2002–03 prices on the assumption that it remains at its current cash value of £200 and that inflation remains constant at 2.5 per cent.

WFP values in selected years

£

	Cash amount	2001–02 prices
2011–12	200	155
2021–22	200	121
2051–52	200	58

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners received winter fuel payments in the financial year 2001–02 in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* Wales, *(c)* England and *(d)* Northern Ireland; and what the total payment was in each. [97265]

Mr. McCartney: Most people aged 60 and over, who normally live in Great Britain are entitled to a Winter Fuel Payment. There is no need to be in receipt of a State Pension. Information based on the number of people who received a payment is given in the table below.

Benefits in Northern Ireland are normally the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Social Security Agency (NISSA). However, the following figures are available as this Department processes Winter Fuel Payment's on behalf of NISSA. In winter 2001/2, 269,289 payments were made, totalling £42,152,400

Total number of recipients of a Winter Fuel Payment for Winter 2001/2002.

	Thousands Total number of recipients	Millions Total amount paid
Great Britain	11,201.9	1,680.6
England	9,585.8	1,435.9
Scotland	996.4	151.9
Wales	619.7	92.8

Notes:

1. Figures are in thousands and have been rounded to the nearest hundred.

2. Figures are in millions and have been rounded to the nearest hundred thousand.

Source:

Matching Intelligence Data Analysis Service Winter Fuels Payment 2001/2002 exercise.2.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his estimate is of the amount of unclaimed winter heating allowance for each year from 1999–2000 to 2003–04; and if he will make a statement. [97357]

Mr. McCartney: Most eligible people receive their winter fuel payment automatically, without the need to claim. Over 11 million payments have been made this winter.

We are unable to provide any reliable estimate of the amount of unclaimed Winter Fuel Payments because some people aged 60 and over are excluded, others may choose not to claim and payments are based on household composition.

Where a person needs to claim, it is up to them whether they do so, and we publicise the availability of these payments.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his estimate is of the change in real spending on the winter heating allowance between 2000–01 and 2003–04 (planned); and if he will make a statement. [97358]

Mr. McCartney: In 2002–3 price terms, expenditure of winter fuel payments was £1.83 billion in 2000/1 and it is estimated it will be £1.68 billion in 2003/4. These figures are based on the standard winter fuel payment being 200 for each year.

TREASURY

Burmese Narcotics

Vera Baird: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what percentage of illegal narcotics on UK streets he estimates originated from Burma in 2002; [97224]

(2) what *(a)* percentage and *(b)* types of intercepted illegal narcotics were believed to have originated from Burma in 2002. [97222]

John Healey: Burma is known to be a source of two of the narcotics that would be considered illegal if trafficked into the UK—heroin and methamphetamine. However there was no evidence in 2002, either from Customs and Excise intelligence or from analysis of samples of seized drugs, that any of these narcotics on the UK streets could be traced back to Burma.

Aggregates Tax

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how much aggregates tax revenue has been collected in Northern Ireland to date against that which would have been expected; and what is the estimated cost to date of implementing the tax in Northern Ireland; [97014]

(2) what research Customs and Excise have carried out into the amount of illegally imported aggregate from the Republic of Ireland; [97007]

(3) how he proposes to remove the incentive for people *(a)* to import aggregate from the Republic of Ireland, *(b)* to open up unauthorised extraction operations and *(c)* to sell aggregate without paying aggregate tax; [97010]

(4) how many tonnes of imported aggregate have been declared in tax returns to date; [97006]

(5) how many *(a)* detections of evasion of payment of aggregates tax and *(b)* prosecutions there have been; [97008]

(6) what mechanism is used by Customs and Excise to ensure that companies pay aggregates tax on stone. [97015]

John Healey: The Government has designed the aggregates levy to protect the international competitiveness of aggregates businesses by applying the levy to the commercial exploitation of all virgin aggregate used in the UK and by exempting exports. The Government has also recognised the unique position of the Northern Ireland processed products sector, those producing concrete, mortar and asphalt, by introducing a transitional relief scheme.

This scheme allows the sector more time to adapt to the new market conditions by, for example, making increased use of levy-free alternatives to virgin aggregate.

Customs and Excise assure aggregates levy in the same way that they assure other taxes and duties for which they are responsible. Assurance resources are allocated according to risk. Additionally, in the first year of its operation Customs are undertaking education and assurance visits to all companies registered for the levy. The resources allocated to administering the levy in Northern Ireland take account of issues associated with the land boundary, and this resourcing is subject to regular review.

The levy is due at the point of first commercial exploitation in the UK and not at the point of import. Consequently aggregates can be imported without levy immediately being due and therefore the question of illegal imports does not arise. Where it cannot be demonstrated that commercially exploited aggregate is from a levy-paid source, Customs will use their powers to recover the revenue due and impose penalties, where appropriate.

Similarly, figures for the total weight of aggregate imported into the UK are not available. Aggregates levy returns record the weight of aggregate which is commercially exploited in the UK and do not differentiate between domestically produced and imported aggregate.

Data for revenue collected under the levy are recorded for the UK as a whole and are not available by devolved region; therefore, figures for levy revenue raised in Northern Ireland are not available. Equally, the cost of implementing the levy is estimated for the UK as a whole and not by devolved region.

There have been no prosecutions for evasion of the levy. Customs' approach in the first year of the tax has been to ensure that those who should be registered are registered, and that the correct liability is established and paid.

Burglary

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the cost of burglary offences to the British insurance industry each year between 1995 and 2002. [98137]

Mr. Denham: I have been asked to reply.

The Government do not make any estimates of the cost of burglary offences to the insurance industry. The Association of British Insurers (ABI) publish annual information in their "Insurance Statistics Yearbook" on total UK claims for property damage due to theft.

The Home Office has published estimates of the economic and social costs of crime (Home Office Research Study 217). This study includes the cost of "insurance administration", that is the resources used in administering and processing premiums and claims, based on information in the ABI "Yearbook". The study estimates the total cost to society of insurance administration in England and Wales in 1999–2000 was £140 million for burglary in a dwelling and £50 million for burglary not in a dwelling.

Cancer Statistics

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he is taking to *(a)* improve, *(b)* extend and *(c)* update statistics for five year survival rates for common cancers; and what programme of development work in such health statistics is under way. [99099]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Jim Cousins, dated 24 February 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question concerning what steps are being taken to improve, extend and update statistics for five year survival rates for common cancers; and what programme of development work in such health statistics is underway. (99099)

The Office for National Statistics is currently collaborating with the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine to produce survival statistics for adult patients diagnosed with the 20 commonest cancers in England and Wales during 1991–1999 and followed up to the end of 2001. These account for almost 90% of adult cancers. The work will include estimates of the socio-economic gradients in cancer survival.

Survival analyses based on complete follow up of patients for five years from diagnosis will be possible for those diagnosed up to 1996. As follow up is not yet available beyond 2001, a recently developed statistical method, "period" survival, will be used to estimate the five-year survival for patients diagnosed up to 1999.

The results, which will be published later this year, will provide robust and up-to-date evidence on changes in survival during the 1990s.

Capita

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many meetings *(a)* he and his Ministers, *(b)* Treasury special advisers and *(c)* Treasury officials have had with Capita employees and members of the Capita Board since May 2001; what the purpose of each meeting was; and if he will make a statement. [98570]

Ruth Kelly: As with previous Administrations, and in line with Exemption 7 of the "Code of Practice on Access to Government Information", it is not this Government's normal practice to release details of specific meetings or their content, as some of these discussions may have taken place on a confidential basis. All such contacts are conducted in accordance with the rules set out in the "Ministerial Code", the "Civil Service Code", and "Guidance for Civil Servants: Contacts with Lobbyists". Copies of these documents are available in the Libraries of the House.

Child Tax Credit

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the total budgetary provision is for the introduction of the new Child Tax Credit in each of the first three years of its operation, broken down by *(a)* the budgetary provision for payment of the estimated sums due to recipients, *(b)* the promotional and advertising costs associated with the Child Tax Credit and *(c)* the publishing costs of documentation sent to potential applicants. [97915]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 13 February 2003]:* The answer is as follows.

(a) The budgetary provision for payments for the Child Tax Credit is £8.3 billion in 2003–04, £11.7 billion in 2004–05 and £13.1 billion in 2005–06.

(b) The promotional and advertising costs associated with the Child Tax Credit cannot be separated from the costs for the Working Tax Credit. For promotional and advertising costs for both credits, I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) on 15 October 2002, column 603W. Since the question was answered, further spending on promoting and advertising the new tax credits means that current expenditure stands at about £9.75 million.

(c) The current cost of sending out claim packs to potential applicants is approximately £400,000.

Crown Estate

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to review the tax regime pertaining to the Crown Estate. [97904]

Dawn Primarolo: There are no plans to change these arrangements.

Debt Relief

John Robertson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with developing countries on *(a)* the future of debt relief and *(b)* the proposed international finance facility. [98259]

John Healey: The UK remains at the forefront of the international debate on debt relief and continues to promote the implementation of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative. The Chancellor discusses debt relief issues in a wide range of international meetings with representatives of developing countries. For example, on 24–26 September 2002 the UK hosted the Commonwealth Finance Ministers meeting that included a Commonwealth HIPC ministerial forum. Debt relief and the HIPC initiative will also be discussed at the forthcoming spring meetings of the IMF and World Bank.

On 27 November 2002 the Chancellor announced in his pre-budget report that he had written as Chairman of the International Monetary and Finance Committee to all fellow Finance Ministers, and to the World Bank and United Nations about the international finance facility.

On 23 January 2003 the Chancellor and the Secretary of State for International Development published a document on the UK's proposal for the international finance facility. The Chancellor and Secretary of State have written to their counterparts in developing countries enclosing a copy of the proposal document.

Departmental Annual Reports

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it compulsory for departmental annual reports to include a full statement of accounts. [98123]

Mr. Boateng: Under the Government Resource and Accounts Act 2000, the Treasury must lay departmental resource accounts before the House of Commons no later than 31 January of the financial year following that to which they relate. Departments are currently required to publish their accounts either on the day their accounts are laid or as shortly as possible thereafter. There are no plans to reproduce the accounts in the spring departmental reports.

Departmental Computer Systems

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which computer systems within his Department use XML. [98112]

Ruth Kelly: The following live computer systems make use of XML:

In HM Treasury

a) The departmental finance and purchasing system (name of system is ABACUS)

b) The main Treasury website.

In the Office for National Statistics

c) The Business Surveys sub-system that handles faxed replies from contributors.

d) The system which supplies information to the TSO for the government wide 'Information Asset Register'

e) The English Housing Conditions Survey system.

In the Inland Revenue

For external (customer) and Inter-governmental communications in these systems :

f) New Tax Credits

g) Corporation Tax

h) PAYE

i) Self Assessment

j) Government Gateway Authentication and Communication

k) NIRS

And for internal communication and storage in:

l) Self Assessment

m) New Tax Credits

n) NIRS

o) Software Frameworks

p) Call Centre Programme

q) GovRules

r) IR Intranet

In the HMCE

For communication with the Government Gateway in the following systems

s) Trader Registration

t) New Export System and in the following other systems:

u) e-aggregates

v) Climate Change levy

w) CHIEF printing

x) New Computerised Transit System

Diesel

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proposals have been made by the European Commission to harmonise the taxation of diesel fuel for transport by all modes; whether that includes marine use at sea, in estuaries, on rivers and canals, for both commercial and leisure use; what consultations have taken place with interested persons or bodies; what reports have been published by the Government; and whether a decision in the Council of Ministers is by two-thirds majority vote. [98476]

John Healey: The only European Commission proposal for full harmonisation of duty rates for diesel fuel used in transport relates to diesel fuel used by lorries over 16 tonnes, buses and coaches. The proposal is that member states should bring their duty rates for such diesel closer together to reach a harmonised rate by 2010 of €350 per 1,000 litres, although that rate would be uprated in line with inflation. The Government have submitted an Explanatory Memorandum on this proposal (reference 11571/02 dated 26 September 2002), which set out our opposition to it. That opposition is shared by nearly all member states, so the directive cannot be adopted in its present form, as any decisions taken by the Council of Ministers on matters of taxation have to be unanimous.

The only European Commission proposal relating to duty on diesel fuel for marine use is the proposed directive on taxation of energy products. This would generally continue the existing duty treatment of diesel fuel for marine use in the mineral oils structures directive. It provides for a compulsory exemption for diesel fuel used for navigation in Community waters (although it would allow member states to limit the exemption to international and intra-Community transport) and for an optional exemption for diesel fuel used for navigation in inland waterways. In both cases, private pleasure craft are excluded from these exemptions, but the United Kingdom's derogation from the existing directive, allowing the United Kingdom to exempt fuel for private pleasure craft until 31 December 2006, will be unaffected. The Government have submitted a supplementary Memorandum on the latest version of the proposal (reference 13422/02, FISC 266, dated 26 November 2002). This directive will support efforts to deal with the significant environmental problems arising from global warming, which requires cross-border action. This proposal also cannot be adopted in its present form without unanimous agreement by the Council of Ministers.

Duty Diversion Fraud

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many customs officials have been *(a)* investigated and *(b)* interviewed regarding their participation in duty diversion fraud for each year from 1994 to 2002. [97367]

John Healey: The Internal Investigation Division [IID] is responsible within HM Customs and Excise for staff irregularity matters. The division was created in the autumn of 2000. From that date the IID has held all central records relating to investigations of staff irregularity matters. Prior to the establishment of the IID, no central records were held.

As at 11 February 2003, its records show no customs officials as having been investigated and/or interviewed, by the police or internally, regarding their participation in duty diversion fraud.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to introduce enhanced capital allowances to encourage the purchase of *(a)* the most efficient domestic central heating systems and *(b)* energy saving products by (i) registered social landlords and (ii) energy service companies. [98667]

John Healey: Budget 2001 introduced 100 per cent first-year enhanced capital allowances (ECAs) for designated energy-saving plant and machinery. The ECA scheme enables businesses to write-off the whole cost of their investment in designated energy-saving equipment against the taxable profits of the period during which the investment is made.

Registered Social Landlords are non profit-making organisations and as such will not be able to claim capital allowances.

In the commercial sector, energy service companies can claim ECAs on their spending on qualifying equipment and special rules enable them to claim allowances where, as part of a comprehensive energy services agreement, they provide equipment that becomes a fixture on another person's land in which they have no interest.

The Government's Affordable Warmth Programme supports the installation of modern energy efficient central heating systems in low-income homes, including registered social landlord homes. The equipment is leased to the landlord and where the equipment is designated energy-saving equipment, special rules enable the lessor to claim the enhanced capital allowances. The benefit can be passed on in the form of lower rentals.

The Government consulted on economic instruments to improve household energy efficiency during 2002 and a summary of responses has been published on the HMT website. PBR 2002 stated that the Government would consult further on specific measures to promote greater energy efficiency by households, once the responses to the initial consultation have been fully considered.

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how the price in real terms paid by the domestic consumer has changed since 1997 for the purchase of *(a)* domestic electricity and gas, *(b)* insulation materials, *(c)* high efficiency boilers, *(d)* draught-proofing, *(e)* double glazing and *(f)* low energy light-bulbs. [98666]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. David Chaytor, dated 24 February 2003:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question asking for the change in price in real terms since 1997 of *(a)* domestic electricity and gas, *(b)* insulation materials, *(c)* high efficiency boilers, *(d)* draught-proofing, *(e)* double glazing and *(f)* low energy light-bulbs. (98666)

The Office for National Statistics publishes separate sub-indices of the Retail Prices Index for domestic electricity and gas, but not for any of the other items to which you refer.

The following table gives the index numbers relating to the relevant sub-indices for domestic electricity and gas and for the All Items RPI. The figures are for the annual average for 1997 and for January 2003 (the most recently published), together with the corresponding percentage change.

	Average 1997 index	January 2003 index	Percentage change
All items RPI	157.5	178.4	+13.%
Electricity	140.0	128.9	-7.9%
Gas	123.1	126.4	+2.7%

Between the 1997 average and January 2003 the electricity index fell by 7.9% whilst the gas index rose by 2.7%. In contrast the All Items RPI increased by 13.3%.

Euro

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the answer of 30 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 991W, on the euro, whether the issue of single European currency has been discussed during meetings between Government officials and representatives of Gibraltar; which Government officials are responsible for liaison with officials from Guernsey; what issues have been discussed by Government officials with representatives of Jersey; and when the most recent discussion between Government officials and representatives of the Isle of Man was. [98482]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Member to my answer to him on 30 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 991W.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many investigations his Department is undertaking into the five tests for the euro. [98898]

Ruth Kelly: The 6 September 2002 Paper for the Treasury Committee set out that a number of supporting studies will be published alongside the assessment of the five tests. On 12 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 884, the Chancellor of the Exchequer made clear that an additional four studies will be published.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the meetings he has had with the Prime Minister *(a)* in the last month and *(b)* regarding the UK's entry into the Euro currency zone in the last month. [99024]

Ruth Kelly: The Chancellor meets regularly with the Prime Minister to discuss a wide range of issues.

Fair Trade Fortnight

Mr. Drew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps his Department is taking to promote Fair Trade Fortnight. [98900]

Ruth Kelly: My right hon. Friend strongly supports the work of the Fair Trade Foundation in helping the poorest people in developing countries to benefit more from trade. The range of fair trade beverages already on offer in the Treasury's Restaurant and Coffee Shop will be extended during Fair Trade Fortnight, and fair trade confectionery products will also be available.

Gibraltar

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether minutes of meetings between his Department's officials and representatives from Gibraltar are published. [99109]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given by the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 11 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 114–15W.

Gross Domestic Product

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 10 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 607W, on gross domestic product, if he will publish the research used to make the assumption that trend output growth is ¼ percentage point lower than the Government's neutral view. [99125]

Ruth Kelly: The Treasury's analysis of the rate of trend growth in output is set out in "Trend Growth: Recent Developments and Prospects" (HM Treasury, April 2002), which is available online at www.hm-treasury.gov.uk.

For the purposes of the public finances projections the Government adopt a deliberately cautious assumption for trend growth that is ¼ percentage point below its neutral view. In the interests of stability and robust, medium-term fiscal planning, this strikes the right balance between being a reasonable and a cautious assumption.

As set out in paragraph B20 of the 2002 pre-Budget report, over the period to 2006–07 this gives rise to an assumed rate of 2½ per cent: the Comptroller and Auditor General has audited this assumption and concluded that it is "reasonable and cautious".

Health Cash Plans

Mr. Amess: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether Ministers in his Department have met non-profit distributing health cash plan providers to discuss the recent decision of the Inland Revenue to change the tax treatment of health cash plan providers; what changes in the constitutional governance and trading practices of such providers gave rise to the change in their assessed status; and when those changes arose. [96778]

John Healey: Ministers have had no meetings to discuss the tax treatment of health cash plan providers.

The Inland Revenue's inquiries into the tax returns of non-profit distributing health cash plan providers concluded that they were not meeting all the conditions for mutual trading and their mutual status for tax purposes was not justified. However, the Inland Revenue did not consider any changes of the sort described.

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of how many individuals make contributions to health cash plans operated by non-profit-distributing organisations; and what assessment he has made of the impact on the charitable giving policies of such funds of recent changes in their tax treatment. [97606]

John Healey: Inquiries by the Inland Revenue discovered that health cash plan providers were not meeting all the conditions for mutual trading and their mutual status for tax purposes was not justified.

No estimate has been made of the number of contributors.

No assessment has been made of the impact of these changes which depend largely on decisions taken by individual health cash plan providers.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will make a statement on the impact on NHS projects that have previously received donations from not-for-profit providers of health cash plans of the changes resulting from the proposed introduction of corporation tax on operating surpluses; [98605]

(2) if he will make a statement on what assessment he has made of the impact on those individuals who are contributing towards health cash plans of the proposals of the Treasury to impose corporation tax on operating surpluses. [98606]

John Healey: Health cash plan providers were exempt from corporation tax as they were regarded formally as trading mutually.

Following a review in 2000, the Inland Revenue concluded that these organisations did not meet all the conditions for mutual trading and their exemption was therefore withdrawn for the future. However, individual providers had the option of changing their rules so that they could continue to benefit from the tax exemption. Where organisations have taken this option, the Revenue has accepted them as being mutual throughout.

No assessment has been made of the impact of these changes.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on why the Treasury launched a review of the tax treatment of health cash plans; and how he estimates this will impact on *(a)* policy holders and *(b)* recipients of charitable donations from those plans. [98607]

John Healey: The Inland Revenue has a right to inquire into any Self Assessment return, including those of health cash plan providers.

An inquiry into one of these organisations discovered that the conditions of mutual trading were not being met and therefore their mutual status was not legally valid and had to be withdrawn for tax purposes.

Further inquiries were subsequently carried out into the tax returns of other such organisations by the Inland Revenue. The Treasury conducted no review.

The Inland Revenue has to apply the law as it stands to ensure that organisations do not have favoured treatment to which they are strictly not entitled.

No assessment has been made of the impact of these changes, which depend largely on decisions taken by individual health cash plan providers.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether representatives from the Treasury met representatives of the health cash plan industry to discuss the impact of proposed changes in health cash plans which will involve the introduction of corporation tax on their operating surpluses. [98603]

John Healey: Neither Ministers nor officials from the Treasury have held such a meeting. However, Inland Revenue officials have met with the British Health Care Association.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the NHS projects that have received donations from not-for-profit providers of health cash plans in the latest year for which figures are available. [98604]

John Healey: The information requested is not available.

Income Tax (Nottingham)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many low earning income tax payers in Nottingham have benefited from the 10 per cent. starting rate of income tax. [98253]

Dawn Primarolo: In Nottingham, it is estimated that 15,000 taxpayers now pay tax at the starting rate of 10 pence. However all income tax payers with taxable earnings will have benefited from the 10 per cent. band.

Independent Financial Advisers

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what research he has commissioned into professional indemnity insurance requirements of independent financial advisers beyond 2003; and if he will make a statement; [99027]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 10 February, *Official Report*, column 602W, on independent financial advisers, if he will make a statement concerning the professional indemnity insurance requirements of independent financial advisers. [998129]

Ruth Kelly: The Financial Services Authority tell me that they are continuing to monitor the market for professional indemnity insurance for independent financial advisers.

The results of the FSA work to date are set out in their Consultation Paper 169, "Professional Indemnity Insurance for personal investment firms—consultation on rule changes; and discussion of other policy options", which they issued on 3 February 2003.

Practitioners, and others with views, should respond to the FSA consultation.

Iraq

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions his Department has had with the Ministry of Defence on *(a)* the duration of a possible war in the Middle East and *(b)* its effects on (i) the performance of the UK economy and (ii) the public sector finances. [94401]

Mr. Boateng: The information is as follows:

(a) My Department is in continuous discussion with MOD on a range of issues. These include discussions on military contingency planning. Such planning for events in the Middle East includes the means to avert conflict through the credible threat of force in support of UNSCR 1441 and the weapons inspection process.

(b) The Treasury monitors global developments that affect UK economic performance. An updated assessment of economic prospects, including public finances, will be published in the Budget.

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what financial provision he has made for the costs of UK participation in military action against Iraq. [98955]

Mr Boateng: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Eddisbury (Mr. O'Brien) and my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) on 20 February.

IT Contracts

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many and by how much Government Departments have overspent on their IT contracts since 1997. [98124]

Mr. Boateng: The information requested is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list IT contracts in his Department above £50 million in each of the last 10 years; what the inception date for each system was; when it became fully functional; when it became fully debugged; and what the cost of over-runs has been. [99005]

Ruth Kelly: Of the Chancellor's Departments, only the following have let IT contracts above £50 million in the last 10 years.

1. Inland Revenue

IR currently has major contracts with two strategic technology partners, EDS and Accenture, to provide its IT systems and support, including development and maintenance. It also has a framework contract with Computacenter for the supply of IT equipment and software.

(i) The IT services contract was let to EDS in 1994 for 10 years and is worth £2.4 billion over its lifetime, with an estimated £300 million to £400 million annual expenditure. The contract is input based (i.e. time and materials, not system specific). Its complex charging and price capping mechanism means that details of systems delivered through this contract could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

(ii) The NIRS 2 contract for operational services was awarded to Andersen Consulting (now Accenture) in May 1995 with an initial scheduled implementation in February 1997. The third phase of the project, introduced in July 1998, was not signed off as fully functional until April 2000. Compensation of £4.1 million was paid by the supplier for this delay. Significant Government and legislative changes resulted in the NIRS 2 contract being extended in April 2000 and the contract now runs to 2004.

2. HM Customs and Excise

HM Customs and Excise (HMCE) has let only one IT Contract in excess of £50 million in the past 10 years. The contract was awarded to Fujitsu C&E Services Ltd. under the Private Finance Initiative in 1999. The contract is for the provision of an outsourced IT and telephony infrastructure. The inception date was 25 August 1999 (the date the contract was signed). The date when it became fully functional is deemed as 'Transfer of Undertaking', 1 April 2000, when the infrastructure and associated staff were transferred to Fujitsu Customs and Excise Services Ltd. As this is an IT Infrastructure service there was no debugging element and the Transfer of Undertaking date was achieved to target without any overrun.

Lisbon and Stockholm Objectives

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to his answer of 10 February 2003, *Official Report*, columns 611–13W, on Lisbon and Stockholm objectives, whether officials in his Department expressed an opinion on proposals for reforms of listing rules in such discussions; and if he will make a statement. [99130]

Ruth Kelly: The Financial Services Authority (FSA), in its role as United Kingdom Listings Authority, has sole responsibility for setting the listing rules under the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000. The FSA are currently conducting a review of the listings rules. To help with this process, it has established a consultative committee, made up of representatives of companies and City bodies and institutions. The Treasury is represented on this committee with observer status.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to his answer of 10 February 2003, *Official Report*, columns 609–11W, on Lisbon and Stockholm objectives, whether he will include in the next progress report on developments in European economic reform a section listing the progress made in meeting the Lisbon and Stockholm objectives. [99131]

Ruth Kelly: The progress report on European economic reform, 'Meeting the Challenge; Economic Reform in Europe', was published on 17 February 2003, and describes progress made in meeting the Lisbon and Stockholm objectives.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to his answer of 10 February, *Official Report*, columns 609–11W, on Lisbon and Stockholm Objectives, when he will publish a progress report on developments in European economic reform. [99132]

Ruth Kelly: The progress report on European economic reform, 'Meeting the Challenge; Economic Reform in Europe', was published on 17 February 2003. Copies are available in the Vote Office and the Library of the House.

Meetings

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) whether minutes of meetings between his Department's officials and representatives from the Isle of Man are published; [98219]

(2) whether meetings between officials for his Department and representatives of Jersey are held on Jersey; [98217]

(3) how often Treasury officials meet representatives from Gibraltar; and whether meetings are held purely when deemed necessary; [98215]

(4) what his Department's policy is regarding consultation with representatives of Guernsey on economic decisions that could potentially affect Guernsey. [98216]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given by the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 11 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 114–15W.

Minimum Wage (Nottingham)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people in Nottingham, North are on the minimum wage. [98322]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Graham Allen dated 24 February 2003:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question about the number of individuals in the Nottingham North parliamentary constituency on the National Minimum Wage (NMW). (98322)

Estimates for Parliamentary Constituencies are not available.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) calculates estimates of the number of jobs paid less than NMW rates for the United Kingdom and Government Office Regions. A guide to measuring low pay and associated articles and data can be found on the National Statistics website at:

http://www.statistics.gov.uk/CCI/nugget.asp?ID = 188&Pos = 44&ColRank = l&Rank = 208.

Mobile Phones

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many mobile phones have been used and at what cost by *(a)* himself and Ministers in his Department, *(b)* Special Advisers in his Department and *(c)* his departmental officials in each year since 1997; [98577]

(2) how many mobile phones used by *(a)* himself, his Ministers of State, and Parliamentary Under-Secretaries of State, *(b)* his Department's Special Advisers and *(c)* his Department officials have been listed as lost or stolen on an annual basis since 1997. [98579]

Ruth Kelly: Comprehensive information about mobile phone costs is not available in the form requested.

Information on thefts of mobile phones is not disaggregated, although the global costs to the Treasury of theft and fraud for the last five years were given in my answers of 21 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 651W and 27 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 611W.

Money Laundering

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to his answer of 11 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 651W, whether discussions with the Law Society about the new money laundering regulation, and the EU second money laundering directive, have taken full account of the matters raised in the solicitors tribunal hearing in the matter of Sir Gerrard Anthony Neale on October 2002. [98410]

Ruth Kelly: The Treasury have been in consultation with the Law Society about the form of the proposed money laundering regulations 2003, which will implement the second EU directive on money laundering. The Treasury understand that the Society has already issued interim guidance to solicitors and is in the process of preparing detailed guidance on the application of the new regime to solicitors.

This case did not feature in the Law Society submissions or discussions.

Secondments

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many individuals are loaned to HM Treasury from private accounting firms; how long the secondment is of each one; and what their responsibilities are. [99026]

Ruth Kelly: There are currently three people seconded into HM Treasury from private accounting firms.

Date	*Duties*
2 January 2002 to 30 June 2003 (18 months)	Finance Regulation and Industry Directorate—Head of Public Enterprise Partnership Team
24 September 2001 to 23 September 2003 (2 Years)	Budget and Public Finance Directorate—Advice on Tax policy
22 July 2002 to 21 July 2004 (2 years)	Financial Management, Reporting and Audit Directorate—Central Accountancy

Special Purpose Vehicles

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will impose a special tax on special purpose vehicles sold by tax advisers for tax avoidance purposes. [98427]

John Healey: The Government have demonstrated their strong commitment to combating tax avoidance by countering it with legislation on over 40 separate occasions since 1997. They continue to keep the tax system under review and have already announced their intention to legislate to counter a number of tax avoidance schemes in the forthcoming Finance Bill.

Spending Review

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will update Table 1.3, page 16, of the 2002 Spending Review (Cm. 5570) to show changes to budgets and expenditure allocations made since the publication of this document; and if he will make a statement. [98431]

Mr. Boateng: Table B15 in the pre-budget report shows equivalent information. An updated table B15 will be published in this year's financial statement and budget report.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will announce the results of the next spending review; which years that will cover; and if he will make a statement. [98432]

Mr. Boateng: Spending plans for the financial years 2003–4 to 2005–6 were set out in the July 2002 Spending Review White Paper. Spending reviews are normally held every two years.

Student Work Placements

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many university students his Department and associated agencies have supported or sponsored with a work placement in the last year; what his policy is on work placements; what plans he has to develop such schemes; and what his policy is on paying their university fees. [98537]

Ruth Kelly: A total of 104 university students undertook a work or training placement in one of the Chancellor's Departments and agencies in the last year[1].

Under the Civil Service Commissioners Code, policies and plans on recruitment and work placements are delegated to individual departments and agencies. For example, these range from a plan by HM Treasury to continue to provide 'sandwich' work placements for students studying for economics or IT degrees, and to offer two summer development training placements in 2003; to plans by the Inland Revenue to offer up to 40 summer development training placements, four Windsor Fellowship placements, two placements for disabled students, and 10 internship placements this summer.

The Chancellor's departments and agencies do not contribute towards university fees, but provide paid work placements instead.

[1] The answer includes figures from HM Treasury, Inland Revenue, Customs and Excise, Office of Government Commerce, Debt Management Office, Valuation Office, Government Actuary's Department, Department of National Savings and Investments, and the Office of National Statistics, for students who began their placements during the period February 2002 to February 2003.

Tax Revenue Forecasts

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to his answer of 10 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 607W, what plans he has to make forecasts of total tax revenues associated with GDP growth rates which fall outside his Department's GDP growth forecasts made in the pre-Budget report. [99126]

Ruth Kelly: In accordance with the requirements of the Code for Fiscal Stability, an interim forecast update, including projections for current revenues, was presented in the 2002 pre-Budget report. Projections will also be published in the forthcoming Budget.

There are no plans to make forecasts for total tax revenues associated with GDP growth rates that fall outside the forecast range. However, as set out in paragraph B17 of the 2002 pre-Budget report, if GDP growth were one percentage point higher than assumed over the coming year, public sector net borrowing might be approximately 0.5 percentage points lower in the current year and a further 0.2 percentage points lower in the following year.

Telephone Call Prices

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the potential loss in tax revenue resulting from lower telephone call prices following the Competition Commission Report on mobile termination charges. [94393]

John Healey: It is not possible to estimate the impact for the Exchequer as this will depend on the commercial decisions of the companies affected.

Unemployment (Nottingham)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what change there has been in the unemployed totals in Nottingham, North since June 1997. [98320]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Graham Allen dated 24 February 2003:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question about unemployment in Nottingham North. (98320)

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) compiles unemployment statistics from the Labour Force Survey following the internationally standard International LabourOrganisation definition. For Parliamentary Constituencies, information about unemployment rates, but not levels, is available. This information is available on a yearly basis, but not for calendar months. The unemployment rate for the Nottingham North Constituency decreased by 7.6 percentage points from 15.6 per cent in the twelve months ending February 1998 down to 8.0 per cent in the twelve month period ending February 2002.

ONS also compiles statistics of claimants of unemployment-related benefits. The number of people in the Nottingham North Constituency claiming Jobseeker's Allowance decreased by 1,349 from 3,947 in June 1997 down to 2,598 in January 2003.

Working Families Tax Credit

Ann Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people in the Dewsbury area *(a)* are eligible for the working family tax credit and *(b)* have benefited from the working family tax credit in the last year for which figures are available. [98319]

Ruth Kelly: Information about the numbers eligible for working families tax credit (WFTC) is not available by constituency or by local authority.

The number of recipients of WFTC and disabled person's tax credit in each local authority and in each constituency are shown in "Working Families' and Disabled Person's Tax Credit Statistics. Geographical analyses" for each quarter. Copies are on the Inland Revenue website, www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* families and *(b)* individuals in Nottingham benefit from the working families tax credit. [98255]

Dawn Primarolo: The number of families with children in each local authority receiving Working Families Tax Credit or Disabled Person's Tax Credit in each quarter is shown in "Working Families' and Disabled Person's Tax Credit Statistics: Geographical analyses", which is available on the web site www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk. This also shows how many of these families are headed by lone parents, the rest being headed by couples, and the number of dependent children in the families.

NORTHERN IRELAND

A2

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what priority is being given to upgrading the A2 between Carrickfergus and Jordanstown, Co Antrim; and if he will make a statement. [98817]

Angela Smith: I have asked the Chief Executive of Roads Service to write to the hon. Gentleman in response to this question. A copy of the letter is attached and will be placed in the Library.

Airport Police

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland pursuant to the answer of 11 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 681W, on airport police, if he has taken into account his powers under Article 19 of the Airports (Northern Ireland) Order 1994 in relation to the Government's consideration of the contents and recommendations of Sir John Wheeler's report into policing at UK airports. [98622]

Jane Kennedy: Sir John's report acknowledges the powers that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has in terms of authorising an airport operator to appoint constables at an airport, and cites Belfast International Airport as an example of this. We await the initiatives that emerge from the outworking of Sir John's findings and recommendations.

Employment Discrimination

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what research the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland plans to fund concerning the causes and appropriate policy response to the employment and unemployment differential between Catholics and Protestants. [98212]

Mr. Browne: The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland plans to fund research in 2003–04 into economic activity given the evidence in the Labour Force Survey of differential rates of activity of Protestants and Roman Catholics in Northern Ireland.

The commission plans to utilise the results of the 2001 Population Census to review the comparative labour market position of Protestants and Roman Catholics in terms of:

employment/unemployment/economic inactivity

occupation and

industrial sector.

This research will be carried out following release of cross tabulations of Census data by the Department of Finance and Personnel. Release of the census data is expected by March 2003 (approximately) and the review will be completed by March 2004.

The Equality Commission has also been encouraging employers to make use of the facility provided by the Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 to recruit from those not in employment.

Fair Employment and Treatment Order

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what research the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland is funding concerning the effectiveness of the Fair Employment and Treatment Order 1998; and what proportion this represents of the total research budget of the commission for 2002–03. [98209]

Mr. Browne: The commission is currently undertaking research which will consider:

patterns and trends in employment;

effectiveness of the affirmative action provisions in the Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998; and

the contextual framework e.g. feminisation of workforce, increased flexible working arrangements and changing educational outcomes.

These research findings will be published in June 2004.

The costs of this project, including publication of the results, will be spread across 2002–03, 2003–04 and 2004–05. A significant element of the research has or will be undertaken without charge to Equality Commission for Northern Ireland. Therefore, reflecting the proportion of the commission's research budget invested in the project is not appropriate.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many investigations the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland is undertaking that concern compliance with the Fair Employment and Treatment Order 1998; and what proportion this represents of the total investigations budget of the Commission for 2002–3. [98210]

Mr. Browne: The Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 enables the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland to conduct investigations for the purpose of assisting it to promote equality of opportunity. The Commission is not at present conducting any investigations under the Order.

The Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 places duties on employers with regard to registration and the monitoring and review of employment composition and practices. There is a high level of employer compliance with these duties.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many cases concerning an alleged breach of the Fair Employment and Treatment Order 1998 the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland is supporting financially; how many it supported in each year since 1999; and what proportion this represents of the total 2002–03 budget for supporting discrimination claims on all grounds. [98211]

Mr. Browne: In the 2002–03 financial year (up to 14 February 2003) the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland has approved support for 249 cases alleging a breach of the Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998.

Since April 1999 the Equality Commission has supported the following number of cases alleging a breach of the Fair Employment and Treatment Order 1998:

	Number
April 1999-March 2000	123
April 2000-March 2001	149
April 2001-March 2002	291
April 2002-February 2003	249

Claims alleging a breach of the Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 for which invoices have been received during the first 10 months of the financial year 2002–03 account for 33 per cent. of the overall legal programme spend on supporting discrimination claims on all grounds. Invoices received and paid in 2002–03 will include costs associated with previous years' approvals.

Firearms (Security Personnel)

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on which occasions Belfast International Airport officers have undergone the procedures to re-classify in relation to the carrying and use of firearms since the privatisation of the airport in 1994; and if he will make a statement. [98569]

Jane Kennedy: The dates on which officers from Belfast International Airport have received firearms/reclassification training since privatisation in 1994 are:

1995

February 2, 6, 7 and 9

November 13, 15, 16 and 20

1996

April 24, 25, 29 and 30

November 11, 13, 14 and 18

1997

Nil

1998

June 2, 9, 16 and 23

1999

Nil

2000

March 16, 28 and 30

2001

May 23 and 30

June 6 and 13

2002

May and July

2003

To be arranged.

Hospitality Association of Northern Ireland

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much public funding, including European grant aid was allocated to the Hospitality Association of Northern Ireland between 1995 and 1999; and which agencies allocated the funding. [98418]

Jane Kennedy: *(a)* Hospitality Association of Northern Ireland (HANI) received European funding from the Tourism and Hospitality Training Council (THTC) acting as an agent for the Training and Employment Agency (now Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) as follows:

Project	*£*
1. Training Resource Library	4,850.00
2. Multiskilling Programme	73,936.17
3. Multiskilling Programme 2	84,337.88
4. International Culinary Olympics, Berlin 1996	12,129.66
5. SELECT	220,935.04

(b) HANI received the following European funding from the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) (which is part of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment) under the NITB Marketing Support Scheme:

NITB Marketing Support Scheme £36,418.82

(c) HANI received funding from Department for Employment and Learning for sectoral training courses as follows:

Hospitality and Catering Management Projects £179,830.

(d) HANI received contractual payments as a provider to the Jobskills programme:

Jobskills £251,052.45.

Independent International Commission Decommissioning

Mr. Gregory Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much public funding has been provided for the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning, broken down by *(a)* categories of expenses, *(b)* salaries for members, *(c)* expenses and salaries for staff, *(d)* accommodation, *(e)* other payments made to those acting on behalf of the Commission and *(f)* payments made to those meeting the Commission. [95258]

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how much money has been spent in respect of the remuneration of each of the members of the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning in each year since its formation; [83100]

(2) how much expenditure has been incurred by Her Majesty's Government in respect of travel by each member of the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning in each year since its formation. [83101]

Jane Kennedy: The Government does not hold the information in the form requested. However, the Commission has agreed to make available copies of its audited accounts. Copies of these have been placed in the Library.

Local Government Finance

David Burnside: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what consultation took place with local government representatives on the implications of the new formulae for distributing financial support to local councils through the general grant. [98366]

Angela Smith: Consultation on proposals for a new formula for the distribution of the resources element of general grant to district councils took place with a wide range of interests including local government representatives between 1 September and 13 November 2000, to consider initial suggestions, and, subsequently, on more detailed proposals, between 21 September and 17 December 2001. This was followed by consultation on the draft primary legislation between 10 and 23 May 2002 and between 19 September and 21 October 2002 on the draft regulations which give effect to the new formula.

During consultation on the proposals the Department of the Environment arranged a workshop for members of the Association of Local Government Finance Officers. Presentations were also made to the Northern Ireland Assembly's Environment Committee; individual MLAs; the National Association of Councillors, and to individual district councils, as requested. Members of the Department of the Environment's Finance Working Group, which includes representatives of the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives, the Association of Local Government Finance Officers and Local Government Audit, were regularly informed about developments relating to the new formula.

David Burnside: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the level of the reduction to the general grant was notified to the affected local councils. [98367]

Angela Smith: All 26 district councils were advised on 23 December 2002 of their allocations of general grant for 2003–04 under the new statutory formula for calculating the resources element of general grant. The new formula applies from 1 April 2003.

David Burnside: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the change of the general grant proposed for 2003–04 is as a proportion of the budget of the councils affected for 2002–03. [98368]

Angela Smith: General grant has two elements—a resources element and a derating element. The proposed changes in the resources element of general grant for 2003–04 are expressed as a percentage of district councils' estimated expenditure for 2002–03, in the table. Complete information on the proposed changes in the derating element in 2003–04 will not be available until the end of March 2003.

District council	*Percentage change from 2002–03 to 2003–04*
Antrim Borough Council	No grant
Ards Borough Council	-0.43
Armagh City and District Council	-4.41
Ballymena Borough Council	No grant
Ballymoney Borough Council	+ 0.40
Banbridge District Council	-1.53
Belfast City Council	No grant
Carrickfergus Borough Council	-11.08
Castlereagh Borough Council	No grant
Coleraine Borough Council	No grant
Cookstown District Council	+ 7.76
Craigavon Borough Council	-0.45
Derry City Council	+ 2.90
Down District Council	-3.49
Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council	+ 5.90
Fermanagh District Council	+ 9.30
Larne Borough Council	+ 2.48
Limavady Borough Council	+ 5.22
Lisburn City Council	No grant
Magherafelt District Council	+ 5.33
Moyle District Council	+ 1.43
Newry and Mourne District Council	-7.45
Newtownabbey Borough Council	No grant
North Down Borough Council	No grant
Omagh District Council	+ 7.00
Strabane District Council	+ 2.81

David Burnside: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will be introducing transitional arrangements for the changes to the general grant. [98369]

Angela Smith: Yes. I intend to make available financial support to assist with the transition to the new statutory formula for calculating the resources element of general grant amounting to some £3 million over the next two financial years.

Plastic Bags

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will take steps to introduce a levy on the use of plastic bags; and if he will make a statement. [96390]

Angela Smith: There are currently no plans to introduce a plastic bags tax. Instead, as the Chancellor said in his pre-Budget statement, the Government will be considering how the use of economic instruments can be extended to provide a more comprehensive and coherent framework for waste management more generally, as well as the scope for using other policies to tackle packaging and encourage producer responsibility. However, in both Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom generally, a number of positive steps are being taken to encourage a significant reduction in the use of plastic bags in order to protect the environment, decrease the amount of visible litter and reduce the volume of plastic bags going to landfill.

A key element in achieving these results is to change consumer behaviour. In Northern Ireland, I am pleased to confirm that, following negotiations with representatives of the major supermarket chains, a Retail Charter was introduced in October last year. This charter takes a pro-active approach to educating both retailers and consumers in the application of sustainable environmental policies to their shopping habits, a message which has again been promoted in recent months, in the Department of the Environment's intensive 'Wake up to Waste' and 'Reduce, Reuse, Recycle' advertising campaigns.

A further key step in changing a culture of indiscriminate use and disposal of plastic bags will be the forthcoming review of litter legislation, which will identify and address any shortcomings in the existing body of litter legislation in Northern Ireland.

Police Service

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many Roman Catholic applicants entered each recruitment competition since the formation of the Police Service of Northern Ireland. [98314]

Jane Kennedy: The numbers of Catholic applicants entering each recruitment competition for the Police Service of Northern Ireland to date are as follows:

	Number
Competition 1	2,815
Competition 2	1,891
Competition 3	1,640
Competition 4	1,480

These numbers consistently represent some 35 per cent. of the total applications in each of the four competitions.

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland pursuant to his answer of 11 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 683W, whether *(a)* the Special Branch Portal Unit and *(b)* the response unit from Strandtown PSNI station provided the initial presence at the arrest for drugs by Customs and Excise referred to in his reply; what the response time was; and if he will make a statement. [98623]

Jane Kennedy: On 19 January 2003, personnel from the Special Branch Portal Unit were in attendance at the scene along with Customs and Excise personnel when the drugs arrest was made at Belfast City Airport. No assistance was required from PSNI at Strandtown.

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland pursuant to his answer of 11 February, *Official Report*, column 683W, on Belfast City Airport, whether *(a)* the Special Branch Portal Unit and *(b)* the response unit from Strandtown PSNI station provided the initial presence following the complaints of (i) the alleged assault in flight, (ii) three disruptive passengers and (iii) one drunk person; what the response time was in each case; and if he will make a statement. [98624]

Jane Kennedy: In relation to each of these complaints the following action was taken:

(i) Alleged assault in flight—Report of disturbance on BMI airbus, in-bound on 9 October 2002. PSNI Strandtown were contacted at 1305 hrs. Two tactical support group call signs and a PSNI Strandtown call sign were in attendance at the scene upon arrival of the flight at 1316hrs. Response time 11 minutes.

(ii) Three disruptive passengers—On 12 July 2002, a person was reported drunk on board an in-bound FLYBE flight from Gatwick. Response requested from PSNI Strandtown at 1045 hrs and arrived at 1057 hrs, before the arrival of the flight. Response time 12 minutes.

(iii) Drunk person—On 24 December 2002 there was a report of a drunken person in the terminal foyer. A PSNI Strandtown call sign was tasked at 2000 hrs and arrived at the scene at 2011 hrs. Response time 11 minutes.

Personnel from Special Branch Portal Unit, Belfast City Airport, were also in attendance at the scene of these complaints prior to the arrival of police from PSNI Strandtown.

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what procedures, tests, and exercises constitute the process by which PSNI officers reclassify in relation to use of firearms; and if he will make a statement. [98394]

Jane Kennedy: The training comprises an introductory Health and Safety input, a refresher handling class, a live fire qualification shoot and an interactive lesson on Human Rights and Police Use of Firearms.

Pollution Directive

David Burnside: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the impact on Northern Ireland of the UK's non-implementation of the EU Directive on integrated pollution prevention and control rules; what representations he has made; what fines will be imposed; and what steps are being taken to rectify the situation. [98370]

Angela Smith: At present the Industrial Pollution Control (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 provides for an integrated approach to the control of pollution from industrial processes. This provides for a strong and effective system of control and has been successful in providing a better and cleaner environment.

However, the United Kingdom also has an obligation to comply with EC Directive 96/91 on integrated pollution prevention and control, which provides for a similar system. The delay in the introduction of the transposing legislation in Northern Ireland has meant that the United Kingdom has been unable to meet fully its obligations. The Commission has therefore brought infraction proceedings against the UK.

The necessary legislation has now been introduced in Northern Ireland with the introduction of the Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002 and the Pollution Prevention and Control Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003. The United Kingdom now takes the view that it has met fully its obligations to comply with the Directive.

Translink

David Burnside: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proportion of Translink's increased customer base, as set out in the latest edition of the Northern Ireland Road and Rail Transport Statistics Quarterly Bulletin, is accounted for by *(a)* paying customers, *(b)* those entitled to free travel, *(c)* new business and *(d)* ticket price increases. [98265]

Angela Smith: Translink has introduced a new integrated ticketing system on Citybus from 1 October 2001 and on Ulsterbus from 1 April 2002. The new system has not yet been implemented in Northern Ireland Railway hence information is not available to answer questions *(a)*, nor is any information available which would identify new customers (question *(c)*).

For question *(b)* it is estimated that the increase in patronage on Citybus is mostly attributable to over 65-year-olds who are entitled to free travel, while less than half of the increase on Ulsterbus resulted from the senior citizen market. It is not thought that there has been any increase in usage of the railways by the elderly sector who are entitled to free travel.

For question *(d)* there was a 4.5 per cent. fares increase in public transport. Overall receipts increased by £0.9 million which was an increase of 6.6 per cent. over the period. Therefore 68 per cent. of the increase in receipts was due to ticket price increases.

Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on Northern Ireland's compliance with the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive. [98336]

Angela Smith: The number of works complying with the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive in Northern Ireland for the years 1999 to 2001 is:

1999—8 out of a total of 15 complied—which gives a compliance rate of 53 per cent.

2000—8 out of a total of 15 complied—which gives a compliance rate of 53 per cent.

2001—13 out of a total of 37 complied—which gives a compliance rate of 35 per cent.

The apparent fall in the rate of compliance between 2000 and 2001 reflects the phased introduction of targets under the UWWT Directive bringing more waste-water treatment works within its scope. For the year 2002, a total of 35 works have been assessed with the results still needing to be confirmed. However, the initial indication is that compliance is in the region of 50 per cent.—similar to 1999 and 2000.

There is a legacy of under-funding of Northern Ireland's infrastructure. However, the upgrading of Northern Ireland's water and sewerage services to meet EU regulations is a high priority. Over £250 million will be invested on the waste-water infrastructure over the next three years. This increased level of investment has been made possible by the allocation of an additional £180 million for the wider water and sewerage services over the next three years, as was announced in the Budget statement in December 2002. In addition, DRD is actively considering with the Strategic Investment Board the potential for delivering a sizeable Public Private Partnership (PPP) programme which could include a number of wastewater treatment works, as part of the Strategic Investment Programme.

This major increase in investment will deliver significant progress towards full compliance with the Directive.

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will reintroduce the moratorium on planning applications for developments that would *(a)* cause and *(b)* be likely to cause a breach of the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive. [98337]

Angela Smith: Last year planning applications in a number of areas in Northern Ireland were held on a temporary basis, as a precautionary measure, as a result of concerns expressed by the Department of the Environment's Environment and Heritage Service about the environmental compliance and pollution implications of further development. There was no moratorium on the determination of planning applications.

Discussions took place between Environment and Heritage Service, Planning Service and Water Service and, as a result, Environment and Heritage Service and Water Service agreed an expanded and reprioritised Capital Works Programme to carry out the improvement works to the sewage treatment and sewerage systems necessary in order to ensure compliance with EU Directives and national standards. On the basis of the agreed programme, the Executive Committee of the Northern Ireland Assembly decided that planning applications that had been held on a precautionary basis and future planning applications in the locations affected would be processed to a conclusion. Dermot Nesbitt MLA announced the Executive Committee's decision in a statement to the Northern Ireland Assembly on 7 October 2002.

It was agreed that the Department of the Environment and the Department for Regional Development would monitor the implementation of the capital works programme and compliance with the relevant environmental standards in order to allow the agreed approach to be reviewed, if necessary.

There are no grounds for altering the policy approach agreed by the Executive Committee at this stage.

Water Service

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on whether Crown immunity is to continue for the Water Service of Northern Ireland. [98335]

Angela Smith: Water Service currently enjoys Crown Immunity from prosecution because it is an Executive Agency of a Central Government Department, the Department for Regional Development.

On 11 December 2002, the Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley, South (Mr. Pearson) announced our intention to introduce self-financing arrangements for Water Service, which will require the introduction of domestic water and sewerage charges. I wish to ensure that water and sewerage services are delivered as efficiently and effectively as possible to ensure that future household charges are fair and affordable. This will require reform of the arrangements for the delivery of these services, and may require a change in the organisational status of Water Service.

No decision has been taken on this issue yet, and I intend to engage in full and inclusive consultation on any proposals for change. However, should a decision be taken to move responsibility for the delivery of water and sewerage services outside Central Government, Crown Immunity would not continue for Water Service.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Cultural Identity

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she last discussed with other EU Ministers for Culture the strengthening of a common cultural identity; and what measures are being taken for this purpose. [97895]

Mr. Caborn: The Treaty establishing the European Community does not provide for strengthening a common cultural identity, but does encourage bringing the common cultural heritage to the fore while respecting regional and national diversity within the Member States. In order to achieve this the Council of Culture Ministers agreed the Council Resolution of 25 June 2002 on a new work plan on European co-operation in the field of culture. My right hon and noble Friend the Minister for the Arts attended the culture and audiovisual session of the Education, Youth and Culture Council in Brussels on 11 November 2002, accompanied by Dr Elaine Murray, Deputy Minister for Culture, Tourism and Sport in the Scottish Executive. They discussed with other European Union Culture Ministers progress on the new work plan and agreed further resolutions, e.g. on mobility of persons and circulation of works in the cultural sector (Report in *Official Report*, 20 November 2002, column 143W). Future meetings of European Union Ministers for Culture will discuss further progress on the new work plan.

Free Television Licences

Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many pensioners have claimed free television licences in Dewsbury in each year since 1997. [98220]

Mr. Caborn: Free television licences for the over-75s were introduced in November 2000; no free licences were available prior to that date. TV Licensing, who administer the concession as agents for the BBC, are not able to provide geographical breakdowns of the number of free licences issued. However, estimates based on the 1991 Census indicate that there were approximately 5,100 people aged 75 or over living in the Dewsbury constituency.

Gulf War Rally

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what mechanisms she will use to ensure that the numbers attending the anti-Gulf War rally in Hyde Park on 15 February will be accurately counted. [97957]

Mr. Caborn: I understand that the Metropolitan Police will make their own estimate of the numbers attending, as they usually do at these events. Our main concern, and that of the Royal Parks, is to ensure as far as possible that the rally takes place safely for all those taking part.

National Lottery

Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what Lottery money has been allocated to projects in the Dewsbury area in each of the last five years. [98362]

Mr. Caborn: The following table sets out the awards that have been made in the Dewsbury constituency since 1998 to date and is broken down by calendar year.

£

Year	*Value of awards made to projects within the constituency of Dewsbury*
1998	538,261
1999	33,915
2000	69,448
2001	743,757
2002	303,499

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

E-mail

Mr. Tyler: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for North Cornwall on 27 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 584W, on e-mail, what steps have been taken to meet hon. Members' concerns that legitimate communications are not being blocked; what filters are in place to block unsolicited spam messages; and if he will make a statement. [98208]

Sir Archy Kirkwood: As I indicated in my answer to the hon. Member on 27 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 584W, the sender of any e-mail that is blocked will be notified and invited to contact the intended recipient, who, by contacting the Parliamentary Communications Directorate (PCD) Helpdesk, can arrange for the e-mail to be swiftly unblocked. This prevents legitimate e-mails being lost.

PCD are monitoring the system, which can be easily modified in response to feedback from hon. Members and staff. For example, seven legitimate e-mails about the Sexual Offences Bill were inadvertently blocked: the filter has now been adjusted so that this does not happen. I am aware of concerns that legitimate e-mails might be blocked because they are written in Welsh; this is certainly not the case either for Welsh or for any other language.

During the first three weeks that the filter was in place, it blocked 3,465 of the 555,000 e-mails received, or about one in every 160 e-mails. The PCD Helpdesk received only 29 unblocking requests, which is less than one per cent. of the e-mails blocked. These figures suggest that the proportion of e-mails which have been incorrectly delayed as a result of the e-mail filter is around one in every 20,000 received.

Only inappropriate incoming e-mails are filtered. No filters are currently in place to block other spam. After further consultation with the relevant domestic committees to determine the views and needs of

Members, PCD plan to introduce a new service to help users of the Parliamentary Network identify and manage this additional nuisance.

CABINET OFFICE

Capital Projects

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will place the evaluations for Capital Modernisation Fund projects undertaken by the Cabinet Office since 1998 in the Library; and if he will make a statement. [97019]

Mr. Alexander: The Cabinet Office has secured funds for two projects from the Capital Modernisation Fund: the development of an e-infrastructure to support the delivery of public services online and e-government (including the Knowledge Network); and a secure Business Change Programme for the intelligence community enabled through modern technology. These projects are ongoing and evaluations have not yet been undertaken.

Civil Defence

Gregory Barker: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what steps he is taking in terms of civil defence planning in *(a)* London, *(b)* the South East, *(c)* England and *(d)* the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [96251]

Mr. Alexander: The Civil Contingencies Secretariat, Cabinet Office, is responsible for emergency planning in England and Wales. It co-ordinates the development of civil protection arrangements involving Government Ministers, Government Departments, emergency services, local authorities, voluntary organisations and others. It works closely with the Devolved Administrations, which have responsibility for these matters, to ensure coherence of arrangements across the UK.

Much of the response to emergencies is based on multi-agency local emergency arrangements, developed within the clear guidelines set out by the Home Office. However, further measures have been taken to improve the regional planning capability:

The London Resilience Team was set up following the tragic events of 11 September 2001 to ensure that London has the best contingency plans possible. It works in support of the Minister of State for Local Government and the Regions and the Mayor of London to co-ordinate the emergency planning work of the London Boroughs, transport operators, emergency services, London health authorities and other civil authorities in London.

Regional Resilience Teams are being established, including for the South East of England, to improve the capability for regional emergency planning. These teams will assist in co-ordinating emergency planning within and across regions through the creation of Regional Resilience Forums.

E-Envoy

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what the measures of success are for the performance of the Government's e-envoy; and whether these have been achieved. [97592]

Mr. Alexander: The Office of the E-Envoy has three core Objectives: to develop the UK as a World Leader for electronic Business; to make all government services available electronically by 2005 with key services achieving high level of use; to ensure that everyone who wants it has access to the internet by 2005. Each month the E-Minister my hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and the E-envoy (Andrew Pinder) provide a joint report to the PM. These reports set out the progress on the UK Online Strategy. These are available through the e-envoy web site on www.e-envoy.gov.uk

In November 2002 the Office of the E-Envoy published the results of independent research measuring performance against the Government's target to make the UK the best environment in the world for e-commerce by 2002. The UK was found to rank second only to the USA in the benchmarked group of leading nations. The most recent survey of online government services showed that last summer 54 per cent. of services were enabled.

UK Online Centres are an integral part of the Government's aim to ensure that everyone who wants it has access to the internet by 2005. The initial target for the introduction of UK Online Centres has been met and exceeded with the delivery of over 6,000 UK online centres at the end of 2002.

Senior Civil Service

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what proportion of vacancies in the Senior Civil Service were filled through after completion; and if he will make a statement. [99097]

Mr. Alexander: The 2001/2 Annual Report of the Civil Service Commissioners states that 200 candidates were approved for appointment to the Senior Civil Service (SCS) that year following Open Competition. This represents 56% of all SCS entrants in 2001/2.

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many Senior Civil Servants have spent time working in *(a)* local government, *(b)* the health service, *(c)* the voluntary sector and *(d)* the private sector (i) before they joined the Senior Civil Service and (ii) through exchange programmes; and if he will make a statement. [99098]

Mr. Alexander: From information held centrally on the experience of senior civil servants as at 1st April 2002:

(i) Prior to the Civil Service:

Experienced in Private Sector: 673 known out of 3507

Experienced in Voluntary Sector: 67 known out of 3507

Experienced in Public Sector: 392 known out of 3507

(information on local government experience and experience in the Health Service is not collected separately)

(ii) No experience prior to the Civil Service, but through exchange programmes:

Experienced in Private Sector: 67 known out of 3507

Experienced in Voluntary Sector: 7 known out of 3507

Experienced in Public Sector: 63 known out of 3507.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Arms Exports (Israel)

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what types of arms were exported to Israel in each of the last five years; and if she will make a statement. [98361]

Nigel Griffiths: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) on 18 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 54W.

Benefit Payments

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the effect on post offices in Derbyshire of the change in payment of benefits from over-the-counter to direct bank transfer. [98893]

Mr. Timms: No such assessment has been made by the Department. The migration of benefit payment to ACT begins this year and the Post Office's strategy is to respond to that challenge with a range of banking and other services. How the migration of benefit payments affects the revenue of post offices will depend on a number of factors, not least how benefit recipients and other post office customers respond to change. The income from the various contracts Post Office Ltd. has with the spending Departments and various financial institutions, and the remuneration of sub-postmasters for banking services, is a commercial matter between the parties.

Climate Change Levy

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has had with EU colleagues regarding EU approval for the exemption from the Climate Change Levy of the coal mine methane industry; and if she will make a statement. [98508]

Mr. Wilson: The use of coal mine methane directly as a fuel in industrial processes is already exempt from the Climate Change Levy. The Department of Trade and Industry have submitted a State Aid Application to the European Commission for exemption from the Climate Change Levy for electricity produced from coal mine methane. The commission has opened an investigation under Article 88(2) of the Treaty to determine whether the proposed aid is approvable. They will be inviting comments from member states and interested parties. We have received the formal notification of this decision from the commission and DTI officials are currently preparing an initial response and considering what other action will be necessary to secure the State Aid Approval.

Coal Miners' Compensation

Jeff Ennis: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry for what reasons a second medical examination to assess the services proportion of coal industry vibration white finger claims is required; what additional *(a)* resources and *(b)* expenditure have been set aside for this purpose; and when he expects all claims to be settled. [97968]

Mr. Wilson: In addition to the general damages paid to those suffering from vibration white finger (VWF) my Department is responsible for compensation to certain claimants who are prevented from carrying out everyday tasks such as DIY and gardening because of the severity of their VWF. Therefore, in accordance with common law it is necessary to identify to what extent VWF itself has caused these difficulties. The second medical examination is designed to identify any other conditions, or co-morbidities, that may impact upon a claimant's ability to undertake the task claimed for. The existing medical examination for VWF was not designed to identify such conditions, which is why a second medical in these circumstances is necessary.

Resources for this second medical, or Services MAP, are already being put in place. The Department announced on 6 February 2003 that Aon Health Solutions (AHS) has been appointed as the new medical provider for this process. We are now involved actively with all our contract partners towards starting medical assessments by the end of April this year. Currently there are 60 adjusters at IRISC preparing claims for the Services MAP. Resources at AHS will be updated over time in line with the volumes of claims passing through to the medical stage of the process.

It is not possible to make firm financial estimates of the cost of Services claims until the numbers of those making claims is clearer. But this is a legal liability and the Department will meet whatever it costs. As well as having financial implications, the final numbers will also impact on the time scale involved. It is hoped to have the majority of claims through the Services MAP by the end of 2005; however, this is significantly dependent on the full cooperation of solicitors in getting claims documentation to our claims handlers.

Coalmine Methane

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether the Renewables Obligation will be extended to cover coal mine methane. [98509]

Mr. Wilson: The Government consider that extending the Renewables Obligation to include coal mine methane would not be consistent with the objectives of the Obligation; coal mine methane is, by definition not a renewable.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the *(a)* role of coal mine methane and *(b)* its importance in the security of UK future energy requirements. [98562]

Mr. Wilson: Although coal mine methane currently contributes some 30MW to the total 74,000MW generating capacity in the UK, the Government recognise and value the environmental benefits the industry provides by tapping the methane emissions and putting them to good use. We are very supportive of this industry and are keen to help it expand so that it can continue to reduce these emissions throughout the UK. We have already demonstrated this support through our securing exemption from the climate change levy for electricity generated from CMM in last year's budget, and this is currently being cleared with the European Commission.

The Government's conclusions on the role of CMM in the security of UK future energy supply will be made public when the White Paper is published shortly.

Cruickshank Report

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what steps have been taken to implement the Cruickshank report recommendations for regulating the charges on small businesses for credit and debit card transactions; [96650]

(2) what plans she has to establish a payments regulator within the Office of Fair Trading. [96649]

Ruth Kelly: I have been asked to reply.

The Cruickshank report on Competition in UK Banking concluded that there was a profound lack of competition in the provision of payment services and recommended the setting up of a regulator to bring about improved competition in this sector. In his March 2000 Budget speech, the Chancellor announced that the Government would legislate to ensure the payments system is open to new competition. The Government remain committed to introducing legislation to give the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) new powers to promote effective competition in payment systems—and will do so as soon as parliamentary time allows.

Progress has already been made through, for example, reforms to the governance structures of the main UK payment systems. The Government welcome these moves by payment system participants to address the competition issues identified by the Cruickshank report and urges the industry to continue with these reforms.

The Cruickshank report did not specifically recommend regulating the charges on small businesses for credit and debit card transactions. What it did recommend, however, was that wholesale prices—such as interchange fees—should generally be derived through a process that is transparent to final users, and that prices should be based on legitimate costs and should anticipate achievable cost reductions. It is envisaged that the Government's proposed legislation will include provisions designed to promote efficient wholesale pricing. This might reasonably be expected to bring about benefits to all end-users of payment services, including small businesses.

To promote its understanding of how payment systems operate, and to help pave the way for its prospective powers, the OFT announced on 27 November that it would conduct an empirical study into recent payment system developments. The terms of reference of this study were published on 31 January 2003—and include issues related to pricing in the credit and debit card markets. The OFT has undertaken to publish a report outlining its assessment and conclusions in spring 2003.

Icelandic Trawlermen

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many former Icelandic trawlermen had their claims for compensation rejected because of breaks in service in each of the four main distant water fishing ports. [98477]

Nigel Griffiths: I regret that this information could be compiled only at disproportionate cost.

Trawlermen

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much has been paid out to how many trawlermen, and how many claims have been *(a)* rejected and *(b)* reduced because of breaks in service for each of the main distant water ports, under her compensation scheme for former Icelandic trawlermen. [98478]

Nigel Griffiths: At mid-February 2003, £40.2 million in compensation had been paid to 4,653 former Icelandic water trawlermen. About 2,900 claimants had been assessed as not qualifying for compensation. I regret that there are no figures about how many claims have been rejected and reduced because of gaps in service in each of the main distant water ports. This information could be produced only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the reasons underlying the treatment of *(a)* compulsory periods of service on North Sea fishing boats and *(b)* periods spent in prison in calculating service for the purposes of her compensation scheme for Icelandic trawlermen; and how *(a)* and *(b)* are treated under redundancy legislation. [98479]

Nigel Griffiths: The continuity of service rules under the Government's compensation scheme were extremely generous to claimants. In general, service was regarded as continuous regardless how many gaps a trawlerman had had between voyages on Icelandic water vessels, or how long those gaps had been, or what the reasons for them had been.

The only exception was where, during a gap of longer than 12 weeks, the former trawlerman had done other work—which included, for these purposes, other fishing work on vessels that had never made voyages to Icelandic waters. The rationale for this was that if a former trawlerman had done other work during a lengthy gap between voyages on Icelandic water vessels, it would not have been right to have regarded him as having remained dependent upon the industry during that period.

One consequence of the generosity of this aspect of the scheme rules was that time spent in prison did not break continuity, provided the former trawlerman's most recent work before going into prison had been on an Icelandic water vessel, and that he had resumed work on such a vessel after his release, having done no other work in between.

The continuity of service rules under the statutory redundancy payments scheme are different, and much stricter. In particular, there is a requirement for continuous service with the same employer (or an associated employer), whereas under the compensation scheme there was no such requirement.

Motor Transport Fuels

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will set out her policy for the adequate supply and distribution of motor transport fuels for the public service in all areas of the UK; and if she will make a statement. [98043]

Mr. Wilson: The public services are responsible for making their own provisions for obtaining transport fuels. However, the Department is responsible for contingency planning for any national emergency resulting in severe fuel shortages. These plans include measures for the supply and allocation of fuel to essential priority uses, including transport fuels for essential public services throughout the UK.

Nuclear Industry

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of how much radioactive material will enter the Irish Sea if *(a)* all spent nuclear fuel from British Energy's advanced gas-cooled reactors is stored and *(b)* the current reprocessing contracts continue for the remainder of the projected life of each of British Energy's advanced gas-cooled reactors. [91924]

Mr. Meacher: I have been asked to reply.

The amounts of low-level radioactivity that would need to be discharged into the Irish Sea over the long term under either of these scenarios cannot at present be quantified.

Ofgem

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the members of the Board of Ofgem and the companies they have worked for. [86189]

Mr. Wilson: The Gas and Electricity Markets Authority comprises the following members. Biographical details areas are drawn from Ofgem publications.

Callum McCarthy, Chairman of the Authority and Chief Executive of Ofgem. Former senior civil servant at the Department of Trade and Industry; subsequently Director of Corporate Finance at Kleinwort Benson; Managing Director and Deputy Head of Corporate Finance at BZW; Chief Executive Officer of Barclays Bank group operations in Japan before moving to head the Bank's businesses in North America.

Gill Whittington, Chief Operating Officer. Former Chief Executive of the media divisions of Booker plc and subsequently of Booker Services; then Director of Strategy at Guy's and St. Thomas' NHS Trust.

John Neilson, Managing Director, Customers and Supply. Senior civil servant. Dr. Eileen Marshall CBE, Managing Director, Competition and Trading Arrangements. A former stockbroker and university lecturer, Dr. Marshall has held position in the office of Electricity Regulation and the Office of Gas Supply.

Richard Ramsay, Managing Director, Regulation and Financial Affairs. Formerly with Hill Samuel; BZW; and Ivory and Sime.

Sir Keith Stuart (non-executive). Formerly Director, then Chairman, of Seeboard.

Richard Farrant (non-executive). Non-executive Chairman of the Banking Code Standard Board. Formerly Chief Executive of the Securities and Futures Authority, then Chief Operating Officer and Managing Director of the Financial Services Authority.

Professor Leonard Waverman (non-executive). Professor of Economics at London Business School. Former part-time member of the Ontario Energy Board.

James Starchan (non-executive). Chief Executive of the Royal National Institute for Deaf People. Formerly a Managing Director of Merrill Lynch.

Margaret Ford (non-executive). Chief executive officer of Good Practice Limited. Chairman of English Partnerships.

John Belcher (non-executive). Chief Executive of Anchor Trust.

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will set out the term and salary of each member of the Ofgem Board. [86194]

Mr. Wilson: The Chair was appointed for a period of five years (including his previous terms as Director General of Gas Supply and Director General of Electricity Supply) to 31 October 2003. Other executive members are appointed on an ex-officio basis for renewable periods of two years. The latest annual report of the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets (2001–02) shows the salaries of executive members as follows:

£000

Executive member	*Salary*
Callum McCarthy	160–165
Dr. Eileen Marshall	120–125
John Neilson	95–100
Richard Ramsay	140–145
Gill Whittington	110–115

During the same period, non-executive members each received remuneration of £12,000 per annum, and are appointed for periods ranging from one to three years to facilitate continuity.

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the recruitment consultants used in the appointment of the Director General of Ofgem cost; and if she will make a statement. [86202]

Mr. Wilson: Fees and expenses of £45,373.80 were paid to the recruitment consultants in 1998.

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry pursuant to her answer of 27 January, ref.86201, if she will name *(a)* the firm of recruitment consultants retained by the Department under a call-off contract which assisted with the process of appointment of the combined post of Director General of Gas Supply and Director General of Electricity Supply and Chairman-designate of the Gas and Electricity Markets Authority and *(b)* the other appointments with which the firm assists. [94537]

Mr Wilson: PriceWaterhouseCoopers assisted the Department in this recruitment under the call-off contract. In 1998 no central records are held on other appointments on which the firm may have assisted.

Post Offices

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many post offices there were in *(a)* the Edinburgh, West parliamentary constituency, *(b)* the City of Edinburgh local authority area and *(c)* Scotland, in each year since 1992. [87166]

Mr. Timms: I am informed by Post Office Ltd. that historic data in the forms requested are not available as the company does not require these data for operational reasons.

However, in 1999, the Post Office undertook a special exercise to determine the number of post offices in each parliamentary constituency in response to the then hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington on 29 November 1999, *Official Report*, column 22W. I further understand from Post Office Ltd. that it compiled a list of post offices by parliamentary constituency as of 20 April 2002 showing their classification as urban or rural offices. At the time this list was compiled, 21 post offices were listed for Edinburgh West constituency. A copy of the full list is held in the Libraries of the House.

Post Office Ltd. further informs me that data by country before 1998 is not available. However the numbers of post offices operating in Scotland over the last five financial years are as follows:

End March	*Number operating*
1998	2,051
1999	2,026
2000	1,999
2001	1,936
2002	1,907

I am also informed by Post Office Ltd. that revision of data has affected individual country totals.

Science Research Investment Fund

Ms Dari Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what formula was used to determine allocations to universities of the Science Research Investment Fund for 2004 to 2006; and what factors underlay the allocation made to *(a)* the University of Teesside and *(b)* other universities in the North East. [98809]

Ms Hewitt: Science Research Investment Fund (SRIF) allocations to 123 higher education institutions in England, including the University of Teesside and other universities in the north-east, were made using a formula based on institutions' research income.

South West RDA

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many staff work in each department of the South West RDA. [98302]

Alan Johnson: In the South West Regional Development Agency there are in each department the following:

Development: 94 staff (including two student surveyors)
Enterprise and Innovation: 71 staff
Corporate Services: 29 staff
Strategy and Communications: 36 staff

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many projects were started by the South West RDA in *(a)* 2000–01, *(b)* 2001–02 and *(c)* 2002–03. [98303]

Alan Johnson: Since the advent of single pot funding, i.e. from 1 April 2002—end January 2003, 219 projects have been started by, that is, received funding approval from, the South West Regional Development Agency.

The information is not available for earlier years.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Bank Accounts (Inspections)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will consult the authorities in *(a)* Jersey, *(b)* Guernsey and *(c)* the Isle of Man about the extension of the clauses relating to the inspection of bank accounts in the Crime (International Co-operation) Bill to them. [98428]

Ms Rosie Winterton: No, we have not consulted the Islands about extending the Bill to them as they customarily enact their own legislation in the area of criminal justice—for example, in the Criminal Justice (International Co-operation) (Jersey) Law 2001, the Criminal Justice (International Co-operation) (Bailiwick of Guernsey) Law 2001 and the Criminal Justice Act 1991 (of Tynwald).

The clauses referred to implement the 2001 Protocol to the Mutual Legal Assistance Convention 2000. To opt in to this Convention, and the protocol, the Islands would first need to join the 1959 Council of Europe Convention on Mutual Assistance. They have passed the necessary legislation and any subsequent decision on whether to apply further agreements is a matter for them.

A copy of the Bill will be sent to the Insular Authorities once it receives Royal Assent and becomes an Act. Then it will be a matter for the Islands' discretion as to whether they wish to introduce any similar provisions into their own legislation. I would refer my hon. Friend to the *Official Report* of the Grand Committee on the Bill in the other place, columns GC42-GC46 (3 February 2003).

Child Abduction

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what steps her Department takes to discharge its obligations in relation to rights of access under Article 21 of the 1980 Hague Convention on International Child Abduction in the circumstances where the left-behind parent is in the UK and the abducted child is with its other parent in a state that has ratified the Hague Convention. [98250]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Article 21 of the Hague Convention allows applications via the designated Central Authorities to make arrangements for organising or securing the effective exercise of rights of access. Any parent resident in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, whose child is resident in another Hague Convention country, may apply to the Child Abduction Unit (which discharges the Lord Chancellor's functions as Central Authority under the 1980 Hague Convention). The unit will transmit the application to its counterpart in the other country, monitor the case, liaise with all interested parties and assist as necessary, for example with applications for legal aid.

Freedom of Information

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will make a statement on progress towards Government targets for the implementation of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. [98064]

Yvette Cooper: Pursuant to section 87(5) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 a full report on the progress being made on implementation of the Act was laid before both Houses on 28 November 2002 (HC6). In line with this requirement a further report will be laid before the House before the end of November this year. In the meantime, the Act continues to be implemented according to the timetable announced by my noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor on 13 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 457.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Diego Garcia

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what stocks of landmines were held in *(a)* 2001 and *(b)* 2002 on Diego Garcia; what stocks are held there now; whose authority they are under; and if he will make a statement. [96389]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We have received assurances from the US authorities that no anti-personnel landmines were stored on Diego Garcia during 2001 or 2002. In contrast to anti-personnel landmines, anti-tank mines are not banned weapons under international law and are not subject to ban under international treaties. No anti-tank mines were stored on Diego Garcia by the British authorities in 2001 or 2002. The storing of such mines by the US authorities would be a matter for them under the various international agreements regulating their defence facility on the island.

Capita

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many meetings *(a)* he and his Ministers of State, and Parliamentary Under-Secretaries of State, *(b)* Foreign and Commonwealth Special Advisers and *(c)* Foreign and Commonwealth officials have had with Capita employees and members of the Capita board since May 2001; what the purpose was of each meeting; and if he will make a statement. [98573]

Mr. Rammell: As with previous Administrations, and in line with exemption 7 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, it is not this Government's normal practice to release details of specific meetings or their content, as some of these discussions may have taken place on a confidential basis. All such contacts are conducted in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code, the Civil Service Code, and Guidance for Civil Servants: Contacts with Lobbyists. Copies of these documents are available in the Libraries of the House.

Departmental Properties

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans there are to sell the San Francisco Consulate's residence; and if he will make a statement. [98125]

Mr. Rammell: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave him on 25 November 2002 (*Official Report*, column 79W). Officials will visit San Francisco again in March to assess the market and survey possible properties for purchase.

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many ambassadorial and consular offices and houses have been sold since 1997; and where these were. [98126]

Mr. Rammell: In the financial years from 1996–97 to 2002–03 the FCO has sold seven overseas offices, 13 head of mission/post residences, one combined office/residence and 222 staff houses and flats, as follows:

	Number
Sales completed in financial year 1996–97	
Offices	
Dublin	
Total	1
Residences	
Abidjan	
Kuala Lumpur	
Total	2
Staff housing	
Buenos Aires	2 flats
Canberra	2 houses
Cape Town	1 house
Helsinki	1 house
Johannesburg	6 houses
Lilongwe	5 houses
Madrid	2 flats
Mbabane	4 houses
Paris	4 flats
Reykjavik	1 house

	Number
Santiago	1 house
Wellington	3 houses
Windhoek	1 house
Total	33
Sales completed in financial year 1997–98	
Offices	
Nil	
Total	0
Residences	
Paris OECD	
Zurich	
Total	2
Staff housing	
Bogota	1 flat
Buenos Aires	1 flat
Canberra	1 house
Cape Town	1 house
Geneva	1 house
George Town	1 house
Harare	1 house
Helsinki	3 flats
Johannesburg	1 house
Lusaka	4 houses
Madrid	1 flat
Maputo	1 house
Maseru	2 houses
Paris	7 flats
Pretoria	1 house
The Hague	2 flats
Tirana	1 house
Wellington	1 house
Windhoek	1 house
Total	32
Sales completed in financial year 1998–99	
Offices	
Bogota	
Casablanca	
Total	2
Residences	
Lille	
Marseilles	
Total	2
Staff housing	
Copenhagen	2 flats
Dublin	1 house
Geneva	4 flats
Honiara	1 house
Johannesburg	2 flats
Mbabane	1 house
Oslo	1 house
Ottawa	2 houses
Paris	2 flats
Port of Spain	1 house
Pretoria	12 flats
The Hague	1 flat
Total	30
Sales completed in FY 1999–2000	
Offices	
Bonn	
Total	1
Residences	
Dublin	
Cleveland	
Total	2
Staff housing	
Bogota	1 flat
Bonn	1 house
Bridgetown	1 house
Budapest	1 house
Geneva	2 flats
Johannesburg	1 flat
Kuala Lumpur	1 flat
Madrid	1 house
Mbabane	1 house
Paris	2 flats
Port Moresby	2 flats
Santiago	1 house
Stockholm	2 flats
Sydney	1 house
Tel Aviv	1 house
Total	19
Sales completed in FY 2000–01	
Offices	
Malaga	
Seville	
Total	2
Residences	
Bonn	
Total	1
Staff housing	
Bonn	1 house
Cairo	2 houses
Capetown	1 house
Dar es Salaam	6 flats
Dublin	2 houses
Geneva	1 flat
Helsinki	1 house
Jakarta	1 house
Kuala Lumpur	1 flat and 1 house
Lagos	6 flats
Lisbon	1 house
Madrid	1 house
Nairobi	1 house
Nassau	1 house
Ottawa	3 flats
Singapore	1 house
Total	31
Sales completed in FY 2001–02	
Offices	
Mbabane	
Total	1
Office and residence	
Naples	
Total	1
Office and residences	
Munich	
St. John's	
Total	2
Staff Housing	
Athens	3 flats
Bogota	3 flats
Buenos Aires	2 houses
Cairo	1 house
Capetown	3 houses
Dar es Salaam	1 house
Dublin	1 house

	Number
Geneva	1 flat
Helsinki	1 house and 1 flat
Jakarta	1 house
Kingston	1 house
Kuala Lumpur	1 house
Lagos	2 houses
Lusaka	1 house
Montevideo	1 flat
New York	2 flats
Ottawa	1 house
Paris	9 flats
Port of Spain	1 house and 1 flat
Santiago	1 flat
Stanley	1 house
Sydney	1 house
Tel Aviv	4 houses
The Hague	2 flats
Valletta	1 house
Washington	1 house and 6 flats
Total	55
Sales completed in FY 2002–03	
Offices	
Nil	
Total	0
Residences	
Lyon	
Strasbourg	
Total	2
Staff housing	
Canberra	2 houses
Durban	1 house
Pretoria	1 house
Muscat	2 houses
Paris	2 flats
Reykjavik	1 flat
Dakar	1 house
Lagos	1 house
Lusaka	1 house
Tel Aviv	2 houses
Dublin	2 houses
Bridgetown	3 houses
Washington	1 house and 2 flats
Total	22

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much his Department spent on maintaining embassies and consulates in *(a)* EU countries and *(b)* the USA in the last 12 months. [98127]

Mr. Rammell: In financial year 2001/2002 the cost of maintaining the FCO's accommodation in European Union countries and the USA was £4,107,918 and £1,850,847 respectively.

Gibraltar

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if it is his policy to separate the sovereignty over military interests in Gibraltar from the sovereignty of Gibraltar as a whole. [98203]

Mr. MacShane: I refer the hon. Member to the statement made by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary in this House on 12 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 1165.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if it is his policy to withdraw the proposals for shared sovereignty of Gibraltar that he set out in his statement of 12 July 2002. [98204]

Mr. MacShane: The Government's position remains that set out by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary in his statement of 12 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 1165. As we have consistently made clear, any proposals that would affect the sovereignty of Gibraltar would be put to its people in a referendum and they would decide.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Spanish Government about Gibraltar since 7 November 2002; and if he will list the topics discussed. [98205]

Mr. MacShane: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has had several discussions with his Spanish counterpart on a range of issues since 7 November 2002. None of these concentrated on Gibraltar. I met the Spanish Minister for Europe on 10 February. We discussed a number of issues, including Gibraltar.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy that change to the sovereignty of Gibraltar will only be agreed by the Government after the majority of the people of Gibraltar have consented to the proposed change. [98206]

Mr. MacShane: I refer the hon. Member to the answers given on this matter by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 6 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 279.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to uprate the value of pensions payable to Spanish pensioners who worked in Gibraltar prior to 1969. [98420]

Mr. MacShane: Under an agreement between the British and Spanish Governments in 1996, payments to all previous Gibraltar Social Insurance Fund contributors were fixed at 100% of accrued rights at 1988 levels and HMG assumed responsibility for payments to those not resident in Gibraltar. There are no plans to change this agreement.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the responsibilities of Gibraltar Community Care Limited in offering charitable assistance to elderly people resident in Gibraltar. [98421]

Mr. MacShane: Community Care was established in 1989 as a private charitable organisation with the objective of performing a range of charitable functions for elderly people living in Gibraltar, including assistance in meeting household costs which are particularly high in Gibraltar. Community Care has received substantial funding from the Government of Gibraltar.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his assessment of relations with the Government of Spain; what representations he has received from the

Government of Spain since 7th November 2002; and when he plans to discuss with the Government of Spain the issue of *(a)* border queues, *(b)* access to air travel and *(c)* improved communications in Gibraltar. [98422]

Mr. MacShane: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has had several discussions with his Spanish counterpart on a range of issues since 7 November. None of these concentrated on Gibraltar. I met the Spanish Minister for Europe on 10 February. We discussed a number of issues, including Gibraltar. Our relations with the Government of Spain remain close.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the five economic tests for determining whether there is a clear and unambiguous case for UK entry into the eurozone will be applied separately to the economies of overseas territories, with particular reference to Gibraltar. [98833]

Ruth Kelly: I have been asked to reply.

The Government has made clear that a comprehensive and rigorous assessment of the five economic tests will be made within two years of the start of this Parliament.

International Criminal Court

Tony Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what countries, other than the United States, have approached him with a view to negotiating a bilateral Article 98 treaty relating to the International Criminal Court; and what his policy is regarding this. [98214]

Mr. Rammell: The United States is alone in having approached us for such an Agreement. Should we receive further requests, our response would be guided by the ICC Statute and the Principles agreed by EU Foreign Ministers on 30 September 2002.

Iraq

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to pursue the claims of UK shareholders in respect of the 1974 nationalisation of the Iraqi oil industry. [98105]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I understand that we have no record of any recent approaches on this subject from British companies which held shares in the former Iraq Petroleum company prior to its nationalisation.

Indonesia

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Indonesia about the holding of the Reverend Rinaldy Damanik in prison; and if he will make a statement. [98360]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Reverend Damanik has been charged with firearms offences which need to be investigated thoroughly and fully. It is essential that the legal process take its full course and the Indonesian courts hear all the evidence. Under international law we are prohibited from intervening in individual cases before the courts in another sovereign country. However, we continue to stress to the Indonesian Government the importance of a fair and transparent judicial system, and of applying the law in an even-handed way to all who break it. We have also offered human rights training for a number of Indonesian Supreme Court Judges. The Indonesians welcomed this training, and are keen for it to go ahead.

Saudi Arabia

Dr. Pugh: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what advice his Department is giving to British subjects in Saudi Arabia about the motives for recent bombings against non-Saudi nationals. [96366]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 31 January, *Official Report*, column 1090W.

Dr. Pugh: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions his Department has had with the Saudi Government regarding the human rights of Sandy Mitchell, Les Walker, James Lee and James Cottel, imprisoned in Saudi Arabia. [96367]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 6 February, *Official Report*, column 386W.

Dr. Pugh: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps his Department has taken to investigate claims that British nationals imprisoned in Saudi Arabia for bombings have been subjected to long periods of solitary confinement and sleep deprivation. [96368]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 3 February, *Official Report* column 9W.

Dr. Pugh: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Saudi authorities about *(a)* compliance with the human and legal rights conventions Saudi Arabia has signed to and *(b)* the case of the detainees Sandy Mitchell, Les Walker, James Lee and James Cottel. [93699]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: My right hon. Friend, the Foreign Secretary—and Ministerial colleagues—have raised the cases of the British men detained in Saudi Arabia at the highest levels with the Saudi authorities. We remain deeply concerned about these cases. The men's welfare is our paramount concern. We continue to work hard to resolve the cases. We are in close contact with the Saudi authorities and the men's lawyers.

Saudi Arabia is a signatory to a number of international human rights conventions including the Geneva Convention on Human Rights; and the Convention Against Torture. HMG raises human rights issues regularly at all levels with the Saudi government, both bilaterally and with our EU partners.

Sudan

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the government of Sudan regarding *(a)* the special courts and human rights violations and *(b)* fighting between the Baggara and the Fur Marralit tribes in Darfur. [98003]

Mr. Rammell: We are concerned about the extensive use of the death penalty in Sudan, in particular the lack of legal representation and the use of special courts. We have made representations to the Sudanese Government, most recently to the Minister of Justice on 18 January. Following the executions of 3 men on 8 January, the EU Presidency issued a statement of condemnation on 10 January and raised the case with the Under-Secretary at the Ministry of Justice on 11 January.

We are also concerned about reports of clashes between camel herders from the north and the Fur in Jebel Marra. We raised this issue most recently with General Ibrahim Suleiman, Wali of North Darfur and Head of the Darfur Taskforce, on 23 January.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to participants in the peace process in Sudan regarding the situation in Darfur. [98004]

Mr. Rammell: We have made regular representations on the situation in Darfur to the Government of Sudan in Khartoum, most recently on 18 and 23 January.

PRIME MINISTER

Anglo-French Summit

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the proposal outlined at the recent Anglo-French summit for an inter-governmental defence capabilities development and acquisition agency; and when he anticipates the agency coming into operation. [98522]

The Prime Minister: In the Defence Working Group of the Convention on the Future of Europe, the United Kingdom proposed that an intergovernmental EU agency should be established to help improve European military capabilities.

At the Le Touquet summit, France and the United Kingdom agreed to promote a co-ordinated approach to capability development through the establishment of a European defence capabilities development and acquisition agency. A copy of the Summit Communique, which outlines the envisaged functions of the agency, has been placed in the Library of the House.

The agency's efforts would complement and reinforce NATO capability improvement work, and should generate better targeted, and more cost-effective capabilities for European Security and Defence Policy.

If the proposal is agreed, the new treaty which is currently being drawn up for consideration at the Intergovernmental Conference in late 2003 or early 2004 would include an article providing for the establishment of such an agency. The new treaty will be subject to ratification before coming into force although some elements might be put in place beforehand.

Computer Crime

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Prime Minister how many cases of computer *(a)* hacking, *(b)* fraud and *(c)* theft his Department recorded in 2001–02; and on how many occasions computer systems have been illegally accessed by computer hackers (i) within and (ii) outside his Department. [97568]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Cabinet Office on 14 February, *Official Report*.

Gulf Forces

Harry Cohen: To ask the Prime Minister whether forces deploying to the Gulf have adopted uniform rules of engagement. [98164]

The Prime Minister: Details of rules of engagement are not routinely disclosed because they could give a potential enemy information about the permissions and restrictions imposed on our forces. As we have said many times, the Government are committed to acting in full conformity with International Law. Our rules of engagement will reflect this.

Iraq

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Prime Minister which minister gave final approval for the publication of the UK dossier on Iraq of September 2002. [98371]

The Prime Minister: This was a Government document cleared in the normal way.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Prime Minister what provisional plan he has made for the care of children in Iraq in the event of armed conflict. [98442]

The Prime Minister: Children in Iraq are already vulnerable. In the centre and south of Iraq, under-five mortality rates are 131 per 1,000 live births—worse than the Democratic Republic of the Congo or Mozambique. The situation is particularly bad in the centre and south of Iraq where conditions have been deteriorating since the 1980s. The situation in the North, which is subject to UN sanctions but not ruled by Saddam Hussein, is less serious with the under-five mortality rate of 72 per 1000 live births.

The United Kingdom has been at the forefront of the efforts of the international community to improve the humanitarian situation in Iraq. Aside from our role in the UN, UK assistance to Iraq continues both bilaterally and through the EC. Since 1991 the UK has provided over £100 million for humanitarian work. The Department for International Development's ongoing programme expects to spend £8 million this financial year.

We are holding regular discussions with the UN, US and others about ways to minimise the suffering of the Iraqi people, including in the possible event of military action. One key priority will be to re-establish the Oil For Food distribution network as quickly as possible if it is disrupted. In addition to DFID's ongoing programme we are also providing £3.5 million funding for humanitarian contingency planning and prepositioning of basic supplies by UN agencies, including UNICEF and UNHCR.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Prime Minister if he will cite the references for statements which are not obtained directly from intelligence sources in his dossiers of evidence of Iraq's involvement in terror and weapons of mass destruction. [98861]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave my hon. Friend (Llew Smith) Member for Blaenau Gwent on Monday 10 February, *Official Report*, column 583W.

Iraq

Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on matters discussed and decisions taken during his meeting with the heads of the UNMOVIC and IAEA inspection teams on 6 February. [98498]

The Prime Minister: We had a general discussion about the progress of weapon inspections in Iraq.

Online Sales/Purchases

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Prime Minister what *(a)* products, *(b)* goods and *(c)* services were (i) bought online and (ii) sold by his Department in each of the last five years. [97475]

The Prime Minister: My Office does not have any online buying arrangements at present.

Security and Intelligence Agencies

Harry Cohen: To ask the Prime Minister what weaknesses of control in 2001–02 were identified in the security and intelligence agencies in those areas which do not comply fully with generally accepted accounting practice or the requirements of the Resource Accounting Manual; what the consequences were, including in terms of financial loss; what is being done in 2002–03 to address these weaknesses; and if he will make a statement. [98161]

The Prime Minister: It is a long-standing Government policy not to make public information relating to the accounts of the individual security and intelligence agencies. Such information is outside the scope of the "Code of Practice on Access to Government Information" (paragraph 6 of part 1). The full details of individual Agency accounts and the Comptroller and Auditor General's opinions on them are available to the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee and to the Intelligence and Security Committee, who are able to scrutinise the detailed accounts on Parliament's behalf.

Parliament has already been informed that the Comptroller and Auditor General qualified his opinion on 2001–02 resource accounts of the Government Communications Headquarters, saying that he was "unable to obtain all the information and explanations that [he] considered necessary regarding the valuation of certain fixed assets, prepayments and related figures in the accounts" (HC368 of 30 January 2003, page 6). This is not a new problem and was addressed in the Intelligence and Security Committee's last Annual Report (Cm 5542) and the Government's response (Cm 5543). The Government continues to take this problem seriously, and the Director of GCHQ and Sir David Omand are taking steps to improve the situation. This shortcoming in the accounts has not had any impact on GCHQ's operations. There is no evidence that this problem, has led to any material financial loss.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Prime Minister what weaknesses of control in 2001–02 were identified in the security and intelligence agencies in the areas of *(a)* asset management, *(b)* management of consultants, *(c)* suspense accounts, *(d)* records management, *(e)* management information and *(f)* contract management; what the consequences were, with particular regard to financial loss; what is being done in 2002–03 to address these weaknesses; and if he will make a statement. [98162]

The Prime Minister: It is long-standing Government policy not to make public information relating to the accounts of the individual security and intelligence Agencies. Such information is outside the scope of the "Code of Practice on Access to Government Information" (paragraph 6 of part 1). The six areas identified here, which have been made public (in HC368 of 30 January 2003, page 5) are drawn from the Agencies' individual statements of internal control, the full details of which are available to the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee and to the Intelligence and Security Committee. On the matter of the shortcomings in GCHQ's management of assets and the Government's determination to correct these, I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave him today. Weaknesses in the other areas mentioned were of a smaller scale and steps have already been taken to improve control in these areas. There is no evidence that any of these weaknesses have led to material financial loss and there has been no impact on the Agencies' operational effectiveness.

Thames Gateway

Jon Cruddas: To ask the Prime Minister what the *(a)* terms of reference for and *(b)* members of the new cabinet sub-committee on the Thames Gateway are; and if he will make a statement. [98613]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the written ministerial statement I made on 6 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 19WMS.

Work Placements

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister how many university students his Department supported or sponsored with a work placement in the last year; what his policy is on work placements; what plans he has to develop such schemes; and what his policy is on paying their university fees. [98496]

The Prime Minister: My Office does not run work placements scheme for university students.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Contingency Planning

Angela Watkinson: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what discussions he has had with the London Fire Brigade and the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority in forming contingency plans for a major emergency in the capital. [98983]

Mr. Raynsford: The London Fire Brigade (LFB), and the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA) and its predecessors, have long been closely involved in contingency planning for a major emergency in the capital. Following the events of 11 September 2001, it was recognised that an enhanced emergency planning capability involving LFB, LFEPA and other key agencies was needed to deal with the new kind of threat. In May 2002, a new strategic planning regime was set up under the London Resilience Forum, chaired by myself with the Mayor as my deputy. LFB and LFEPA are represented at a senior level on the London Resilience Forum, and secondees from LFB and LFEPA are attached to the London Resilience Team, an inter-agency team based in the Government Office for London which reports to me and which is driving forward a programme of action to increase London's preparedness against a major terrorist attack. As part of this programme, LFB, LFEPA and other key agencies have been closely involved in drawing up a new command and control structure for ensuring a co-ordinated response from the emergency services, the Government and other key players in the event of a catastrophic incident.

Angela Watkinson: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what arrangements have been made to co-ordinate the activities of the emergency services in responding to a major incident. [98984]

Mr. Alexander: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) on 19 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 893W.

Departmental Consultations

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list consultations his Department has conducted since it was established; and when each consultation *(a)* opened and *(b)* closed. [97420]

Mr. Leslie: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister was established on 29 May 2002 and a list of the consultations which have been conducted is listed in the table:

	Start	*Finish*
Housing and Regeneration		
Allocation of accommodation—Code of Guidance for Local Authorities	31 May 2002	27 August 2002
Timing of rent increases for assured periodic tenancies in England and Wales—proposals to change rules	21 June 2002	13 September 2002
New Financial Framework for Local Authority Housing: Resource Accounting in the Housing Revenue Account	26 June 2002	9 September 2002
Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities	8 July 2002	31 October 2002
Housing Renewal Guidance—Consultative Document	22 July 2002	10 October 2002
Proposal to change delegation of Housing Management for Local Housing Authorities	31 July 2002	27 September 2002
Housing Capital Finance—Way Forward	2 August 2002	18 October 2002
Removal of requirement for Local Authorities to obtain consent to run a Cash Incentive Scheme	16 August 2002	18 October 2002
Home Ownership: Revised procedures for consulting service charge payers about service charges	20 August 2002	30 November 2002
Memorandum and Articles for Right to Manage/Right to Enfranchise Companies as proposed in the Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Act 2002	13 September 2002	31 December 2002
Home Improvement Agencies— Development and Reform	30 September 2002	31 December 2002
Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Act 2002—Restrictions on the use of forfeiture for long residential leases	18 October 2002	31 December 2002
Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Act 2002—Prescribed Content and Form of Notices associated with acquiring the Right to Manage	25 October 2002	31 December 2002
Housing Revenue Account (item 8) and Subsidy Determinations (Draft) 2003–04	14 November 2002	12 December 2002
Proposal to give Local Authorities financial freedom to build new social housing in HRA Private Finance Initiative schemes	29 January 2003	26 February 2003
Delivering Adaptations—Desk Guide, Overview and Check List	10 February 2003	2 May 2003
'Updating the English Indices of Deprivation 2000'	22 November 2002	15 January 2003
Neighbourhood Renewal Unit— Research Strategy consultation	1 June 2002	31 August 2002
Tenancy Money—Probity and protection'	28 October 2002	28 February 2003
Local Government		
Local Government Finance: Review Support Grant for 2003–04	5 December 2002	14 January 2003
Local Government Finance: Revenue Support Grant 2001–02—Proposed Amending Report	5 December 2002	14 January 2003
Local Government Finance: Formula Grant Distribution	8 July 2002	30 September 2002
Draft Local Government Bill	12 June 2002	23 August 2002
Accounting for Retirement Benefits	9 January 2003	14 February 2003
Revised guidance on rate relief for charities and other non-profit making organisations	1 May 2002	30 August 2002
Rating of food processing and packaging plants currently exempt from non-domestic rates	1 May 2002	31 July 2002
Rating of meters—Non Domestic Rates: Gas, Electricity, Water Meters	13 June 2002	31 July 2002
Conduct of Councillors: Local Investigation and Determination of Misconduct Allegations.	20 May 2002	1 July 2002

	Start	*Finish*
Access to Local Government Pension Scheme by means of an Admission Agreement.	31 July 2002	16 September 2002
Access to Information in Local Government: Current and future framework for Local Authorities	2 September 2002	2 December 2002
Local Government Pension Scheme: Retirement Benefits Package:	9 September 2002	17 April 2003
Combining English Local Authority, Greater London Authority and European Parliament Elections in 2004	28 October 2002	31 January 2003
Local Government Pension Scheme: Simplification	29 October 2002	17 March 2003
Local Government Pension Scheme: (Management and Investment of Funds) Regulations 1998: Prudential Benchmarks	27 November 2002	21 January 2003
Draft guidance for issue to the Boundary Committee for England about local government reviews.	2 December 2002	3 March 2003
Local Government Pension Scheme (England and Wales) (Local Authority Members in England): Regulations 2003	23 December 2002	21 January 2003
Draft Regulations—Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003	14 January 2003	25 February 2003
New Council Constitutions—Guidance on Consolidated Regulations for Local Authority Allowances	14 January 2003	25 February 2003
Planning and Regions		
Revised Circular on Compulsory Purchase orders—Planning Consultation draft	26 July 2002	31 October 2002
Compulsory Purchase Policy—review of home loss payments under Local Government Act 1973	27 September 2002	6 January 2003
Review of planning enforcement system in England	22 September 2002	31 December 2002
Revision of Planning Policy Guidance Note 23 (PPG23): Planning and Pollution Control. Consultation Draft	12 July 2002	9 October 2002
Draft National and Regional Guidelines for Aggregate Provision in England: 2001–2016	5 August 2002	4 November 2002
Proposed Changes for Regional Planning Guidance 13 (North West region)	1 May 2002	31 August 2002
Your Region, Your Choice (CMD 5511): involvement of stakeholders in future of elected regional assemblies	9 May 2002	31 August 2002
Fire		
Reform of Fire Safety Legislation—consultation	30 July 2002	22 November 2002
Building Regulations		
Amendments to Building Regulations (Part M)—Access to and use of buildings	28 August 2002	29 November 2002
Amendments to Building Regulations (Part C)—Site preparation and resistance to contaminants and moisture	10 December 2002	10 March 2003

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Matthew Green: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the Departmental Expenditure Limit for housing was in each year since 2000–03. [98000]

Mr. McNulty: The Departmental Expenditure Limit for housing in each year 2000–01, 2001–02 and 2002–03 is set out in the table.

£ million

Financial year	*DEL*	*MRA*	*Total*
2000–01	3,599	—	3,599
2001–02	2,592	1,589	4,181
2002–03	2,961	1,561	4,522

Development (South-east)

Matthew Green: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what studies have been conducted for his Department into potential growth in the *(a)* Thames Gateway, *(b)* Ashford, *(c)* Milton Keynes and *(d)* London-Stansted-Cambridge areas. [98170]

Mr. McNulty: The East Thames Corridor Study in 1994 set out the development capacity and potential of the Thames Gateway area. This was followed by Regional Planning Guidance 9a, which defined the Gateway and set out a Planning Framework to guide future development. A further study in 2000 recommended extension of the area to include south Essex, which now forms part of the Gateway.

For the other growth areas, the following are the most recent studies that have been completed:

> a study into potential growth in the Ashford area by the Halcrow Group Ltd. was published in December 2002. The study was commissioned by Ashford borough council, in partnership with the Government Office for the South East (GOSE), South East England Regional Assembly (SEERA), South East England Development Agency (SEEDA), English Partnerships, Housing Corporation, Kent county council and Kent and Medway Learning and Skills Council;
>
> the study by Roger Tym and Partners covering the Milton Keynes and South Midlands area was published in September 2002. It was jointly commissioned by SEERA, GOSE, Government Office for the East of England (GO-East), Government Office for the East Midlands, East of England Local Government Conference, East Midlands Regional Local Government Association, SEEDA, East of England Development Agency (EEDA), East Midlands Development Agency, English Partnerships, Buckinghamshire, Bedfordshire and Northamptonshire county councils, Milton Keynes council, and Luton borough council; and the Sub Regional Study by ECOTEC Research and Consulting Ltd., covering the London-Stansted-Cambridge area, was published in July 2002. It was jointly commissioned by Essex, Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire county councils, East of England Regional Planning Body, GO-East, Government Office for London, Greater London Authority, EEDA and London Development Agency.

Election Arrangements

Mr. Cash: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many submissions have been received to the Lord Chancellor's Department/ODPM consultation paper, Combining English Local Authority, Greater London Authority and European Parliament Elections in 2004; and how many of the submissions support the proposals to move the date of the May 2004 elections. [97757]

Mr. Leslie: By the close of consultation on 31 January 2003 a total of 364 responses had been received. Of those responses expressing a view, 172 support the proposal to move the date of the May 2004 local and Greater London Authority elections and 138 are against.

Mr. Cash: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the Lord Chancellor's Department have had discussions with representatives from *(a)* the National Assembly for Wales, *(b)* electoral administrators, *(c)* the Greater London Authority, *(d)* the European Parliament and Commission, *(e)* local government representatives and *(f)* the Electoral Commission concerning the proposals to combine English local authority, Greater London Authority and European Parliament elections in 2004, (i) prior to the publication of the Government consultation paper on that topic and (ii) subsequent to the publication. [97759]

Mr. Leslie: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Lord Chancellor's Department, as part of their ongoing contact with bodies interested in electoral matters, have had discussions with representatives of the National Assembly for Wales, electoral administrators, the Greater London Authority, local government representatives and the Electoral Commission about the idea of combining local council, Greater London and European Parliamentary elections. These have taken place both prior and subsequent to the publication in October 2002 of the consultation paper: "Combining English Local Authority, Greater London Authority and European Parliament Elections in 2004". The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Lord Chancellor's Department has not held discussions about this proposal with either the European Parliament or the European Commission.

Fire Dispute

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the total cost incurred by his Department as a result of the fire strikes has been. [97806]

Mr. Raynsford: The estimated cost to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister to the end of January of providing emergency cover for the fire dispute is approximately £70 million. Each extra day the military remains ready to provide cover costs up to about £1 million. The figures are necessarily approximate estimates and will remain so until invoices are received and audited.

IT Contracts

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list IT contracts in his Department and its predecessors above £50 million in each of the last 10 years; what the inception date for each system was; when it became fully functional; when it became fully debugged; and what the cost of over-runs has been. [99009]

Mr. Leslie: No IT contracts have been let by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister or his predecessors over the last 10 years with a value over £50 million.

Landfill Tax Credit Scheme

Helen Jones: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what estimate he has made of the change in revenue to Warrington Borough Council as a result of the proposed changes to the Landfill Tax Credit Scheme. [98527]

Mr. Meacher: I have been asked to reply.

There should be no loss of revenue to Warrington Borough Council as a result of the changes to the Landfill Tax Credit Scheme because local authorities are prohibited from benefiting directly from that scheme.

Local Government Ombudsman

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many complaints about the clarity of literature published by the Local Government Ombudsman he has received in each of the last five years. [97939]

Mr. Leslie: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is not aware of any such complaints about publications by the Commission for Local Administration in England, two of which have in the last two years received the 'crystal mark' award for their clarity.

Looked-After Children

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when the Social Exclusion Unit will publish its report into looked-after children. [98595]

Mrs. Roche: The Social Exclusion Unit will publish its report on raising the educational attainment of children in care in the spring 2003.

Market Renewal Pathfinders

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether the status of market renewal pathfinders was conferred by application; what consultations were held in advance with the local authorities; how many applied; and why *(a)* nine and *(b)* seven were accepted. [99062]

Mr. McNulty: Low demand pathfinder projects have been established in nine areas of the country at the invitation of the Government. The nine areas are those most acutely affected by the problem of low demand housing. Informal discussions about the low demand situation generally as opposed to the establishment of pathfinder projects were held with some, but not all, of the local authorities participating in the low demand pathfinder projects.

Minimum Wage

Pete Wishart: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will estimate the impact of increasing the minimum wage *(a)* in line with average earnings, *(b)* to £4.17 per hour, *(c)* to £4.87 per hour, *(d)* to £5.00 per hour and *(e)* to £5.30 per hour, on the cost of salaries of departmental employees (i) in total and (ii) for each nation of the United Kingdom in the next financial year. [90601]

Mr. Leslie: Increasing the minimum wage in the manner described would have no impact on the cost of salaries for employees of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

New Deal for Communities

Matthew Green: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much funding the New Deal for Communities has budgeted for each Government office of the region in *(a)* 1999–2000, *(b)* 2000–01, *(c)* 2001–02 and *(d)* 2002–03. [97810]

Mrs. Roche: The following table is New Deal for Communities provision for each government region.

Round 1 partnerships started their implementation phase in 2000–01 and Round 2 partnerships in 2001–02. Prior to this, expenditure was limited to setting up the partnerships, preparing a delivery plan and a small number of 'quick win' projects.

NDC provision budgeted for each Government Office Region

£ million

	1999–2000	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
London	2.6	13.7	28.6	37.6
South East	0.4	2.4	4.7	7.0
South West	0.3	2.6	6.1	7.6
East	0.2	4.2	9.5	13.2
East Midlands	0.5	0.0	15.6	15.7
West Midlands	1.0	8.9	17.9	22.4
Yorkshire and Humber	0.8	7.0	14.6	17.7
North East	0.8	5.3	15.7	18.8
North West	1.0	4.7	14.1	31.0
Total	7.5	48.8	126.8	170.9

Regional Government

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what level of support the Regional Assembly will be given in relation to the planning of the SWAMMS report. [98304]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

In addition to the £689,000 previously announced for expenditure by the South West Regional Assembly on regional planning purposes in 2003–04, my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Planning and Regeneration, announced on 10 February that a further £324,000 is being provided to the Assembly in the form of Planning Delivery Grant to carry out this function. This means in all some £1,013,000 is available which will include work arising from SWARMMS.

Sangatte

Mr. Cox: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many people allowed into the UK from the Sangatte refugee camp have found *(a)* employment and *(b)* housing; and if he will make a statement. [97534]

Beverley Hughes: I have been asked to reply.

All those admitted from Sangatte were offered temporary accommodation, provided by the Home Office, on their arrival in the United Kingdom. Jobcentre Plus officials have made assessments of their skills and are referring them to job opportunities. Home Office officials are working closely with local authorities to advise on longer-term accommodation.

Sustainable Communities

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) on what statistical basis councils were chosen as Market Renewal Pathfinders, as described in the White Paper Sustainable Communities; who chose them; and what changes have been made since the Pathfinder status was announced last year. [99057]

Mr. McNulty: The then Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions chose the areas to be invited to establish low demand pathfinder projects by reference to two primary data sources:

(i) the statistical returns compiled by local authorities as part of the Housing Investment Programme; and, where available,

(ii) local housing market studies undertaken by the Centre for Urban and Regional Studies (Birmingham University) and others. On the basis of this data, the Department looked at the scale of the low demand problem across sub-regional housing markets, as well as individual local authorities. It sought to identify the most acute problems of low demand in terms of scale and intensity of the problem.

Since pathfinder projects were established last year, we have added Rossendale Borough Council to the East Lancashire project.

Sustainable Communities (East London)

Jon Cruddas: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will define the area East London as referred to in his plan for a new style urban development corporation in the Sustainable Communities Plan; and what discussions he has had in relation to the best approach for a new style urban development corporation in East London. [98617]

Mr. McNulty: The exact boundary of the East London Urban Development Corporation (UDC) will be the subject of consultation and confirmation by Parliament, but will focus on three broad locations in the London Thames Gateway: the Lower Lea Valley, Barking and Havering Riverside and Thamesmead, Belvedere and Erith. This focus has been agreed in principle with Thames Gateway London partners including the GLA, Thames Gateway London Partnership, the Mayor and the LDA.

Jon Cruddas: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister on what basis the £446 million announced in the Sustainable Communities Plan will be allocated to the Thames Gateway area; and how local authorities and other organisations operating in the Thames Gateway will access the funding. [98614]

Mr. McNulty: Following the announcement of the Sustainable Communities Plan and the allocation of £446 million for the Thames Gateway area, we are currently working up the detailed arrangements for how this money will be accessed and on what basis it will be spent.

Jon Cruddas: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he will announce further details regarding the setting up of a new style urban development corporation for East London. [98616]

Mr. McNulty: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is consulting widely with our partners in the Thames Gateway in order to fully work up proposals for the setting up of an Urban Development Corporation in East London, as signalled in the Sustainable Communities Plan announcement. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister will be announcing further details soon.

Thames Gateway

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister pursuant to his answer of 6 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 422W, on new developments in the Thames Gateway, if he will place the Environment Agency's constraint flood maps for each zone of change within the Thames Gateway in the Library. [97849]

Mr. McNulty: The most up-to-date map of the indicative flood plain within the Thames Gateway's zone of change is available on the Environment Agency's website.

Unfair Terms Regulations

Ms Bridget Prentice: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) how council tenants and council leaseholders will be able to receive independent advice on the implications of the Unfair Terms in Consumer Contracts Regulations for the consultation procedures involved in any housing stock transfer; [96566]

(2) what advice has been given by his Department to local authorities and housing associations regarding the implications of the Unfair Terms in Consumer Contracts Regulations 1999 for the housing stock transfer process. [96568]

Mr. McNulty: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister expects tenants and council leaseholders involved in a housing stock transfer to have access to independent advice through an Independent Tenant Adviser (ITA), whose role is to provide information and impartial advice on all the implications of the transfer, including the application of the Unfair Terms in Consumer Contracts Regulations in respect of tenancy agreements.

A reference to the Regulations is included in the revised version of the Housing Transfer Manual which will be published shortly; and the Housing Corporation has issued a circular to registered social landlords about this matter.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Beef Assurance Scheme

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make an assessment of the viability of rearing an organic grass-fed herd of South Devon cattle under the Beef Assurance Scheme in the West Country; and if she will make a statement. [98358]

Mr. Meacher: It is for individuals to assess the viability of rearing organic South Devon cattle under the Beef Assurance Scheme in the circumstances particular to their enterprise. However, we are committed to a successful long-term future for organic farming in England. As announced in the Action Plan to develop organic food and farming in England published last July, this year we will be introducing additional financial support under the Organic Farming Scheme.

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures the Government are taking to ensure that they meet their pledge to reduce national carbon dioxide emissions to 20 per cent. below 1990 levels by 2010. [98825]

Mr. Meacher: The UK Climate Change Programme (CCP), published in November 2000, sets out the policies and measures that the Government and the devolved administrations have introduced, or are planning to introduce, to reduce carbon dioxide emissions to move towards the domestic goal of a 20 per cent. reduction in the UK's emissions below 1990 levels by 2010.

Emissions reductions will come from a range of policies and measures, covering all sectors of the economy. Key policies introduced so far include the climate change levy package; the UK greenhouse gas emissions trading scheme; a target for the renewables obligation that 10 per cent. of sales from licensed electricity suppliers should be generated from renewable sources; the target to at least double the capacity of combined heat and power by 2010; European-level agreements with car manufacturers to improve the fuel efficiency of new cars; the 10-Year Plan for Transport; better energy efficiency in the residential sector; and, improving performance standards in the Building Regulations.

Coal Mine Methane

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of how many communities have suffered environmental damage or housing problems due to coal mine methane. [95441]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 6 February 2003]:* In 1996 DOE published a report "Methane and other gases from disused coal mines: The Planning Response" which discussed the problems posed by gases, including methane, from disused coal mines, in the context of town and country planning. It provided factual information for those involved with land and property such as planners, developers, owners and insurers, and is relevant to both new and existing development. The report mentions that between 1945 and 1994 there were about 75 surface gas emissions recorded, of which 70 per cent. involved methane, and in 35 per cent. of these cases the gas ignited. Half (nine) involved residential property. A copy of the report is in the House Library.

Since 1995 the Coal Authority (CA) has been recording incidents of water, gas and major collapses involving non-operational coal mines. The CA's Surface Hazard call-out system, which aims to attend a call within two hours and make safe within six hours, recorded 68 incidents of surface mine gas between 1995 and 2002 of which four were in the West Midlands. These incidents include both methane and other oxygen-deficient gases such as carbon-dioxide. Incidents are tackled urgently to avoid damage or other problems.

External Consultancy

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much *(a)* her Department and *(b)* each agency and non-departmental public body spent on external consultancy in each year from 1995–96 to 2002–03 (planned); and if she will make a statement. [92250]

Alun Michael: The information, which represents the cost of bought-in services, is as follows:

£000

	2001–02	*2002–03*
Core-Defra	40,682	21,968
Agencies:		
Rural Payments Agency	2,656	1,030
Central Science Laboratory	239	152
Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science	70	70
Pesticides Safety Directorate	127	137
Veterinary Laboratories Agency	637	725
Veterinary Medicines Directorate	136	147
Non-Departmental Public Bodies:		
Apple and Pear Research Council	20	20
Countryside Agency	332	275
English Nature	237	305
Environment Agency	47,886	51,810
Home-Grown Cereals Authority	79	50
Horticulture Research International	134	72
Joint Nature Conservation Committee	65	42
Meat and Livestock Commission	2,510	1,610
Milk Development Council	2,000	Not available
National Forest Company	52	45
Regional Flood Defence Committees	0	0
Royal Botanic Gardens	66	389
Wine Standards Board	0	14

Equivalent information for 1995–96 to 2000–01 could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The figure for 2002–03 is an estimate.

Management Consultants

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much her Department has spent on management consultants since its creation. [93678]

Alun Michael: The information requested, which represents the cost of bought-in services for the Department and its agencies, is as follows:

2001–02: £45 million

2002–03: £24 million (estimate)

The reduction from 2001–02 to 2002–03 is mainly a consequence of the reduction in expenditure associated with the outbreak of foot and mouth disease.

Producer Responsibility (Free Newspapers)

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she is taking to apply the producer responsibility principle to the publishers of free newspapers. [97098]

Mr. Meacher: Our producer responsibility agreement made in April 2000 with the Newspaper Publishers Association set targets for the recycled content of all UK newspapers. The first target for 2001 was exceeded and recycled paper now makes up 63.5 per cent. of our newspapers.

Radioactive Waste

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to reduce the radioactive source terms at Sellafield. [95264]

Mr. Meacher: At the request of Ministers, the Environment Agency has carried out a review of the radioactive discharges from the Sellafield site. The Agency published its proposed decision in August of last year. Among the key elements it proposed are reductions to eight out of 10 of the aerial and half of the liquid discharge limits for the Sellafield site.

My right hon. Friends, the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Secretary of State for Health—the responsible Ministers under the Radioactive Substances Act 1993—are currently considering the Agency's proposed decision, and will come to their own decision later this year.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what information on the *(a)* conditioning and *(b)* chemical composition of radioactive waste included in the national radioactive waste inventory; and what plans she has to require more detailed information on the characteristics to be included. [95265]

Mr. Meacher: The 2001 UK Radioactive Waste Inventory, in reports DEFRA/RAS/02.005 to 010 (as listed), contains comprehensive information on the conditioning and chemical composition of radioactive waste. There are no plans to require more detailed information on these characteristics at present. Copies of these reports are being placed in the House Library.

Reports:

Electrowatt-Ekono (UK) Ltd. The 2001 United Kingdom Radioactive Waste Inventory—Detailed Information for BNFL Wastes: Capenhurst, Sellafield and Springfields. DEFRA/RAS/02.005, Nirex Report N/043, October 2002

Electrowatt-Ekono (UK) Ltd. The 2001 United Kingdom Radioactive Waste Inventory—Detailed Information for BNFL Wastes: Magnox Station Sites and Berkeley Centre. DEFRA/RAS/02.006, Nirex Report N/044, October 2002

Electrowatt-Ekono (UK) Ltd. The 2001 United Kingdom Radioactive Waste Inventory—Detailed Information for BEG(UK) Ltd. and BEG Ltd. Wastes. DEFRA/RAS/02.007, Nirex Report N/045, October 2002

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Electrowatt-Ekono (UK) Ltd. The 2001 United Kingdom Radioactive Waste Inventory—Detailed Information for UKAEA Wastes. DEFRA/RAS/02.008, Nirex Report N/046, October 2002

Electrowatt-Ekono (UK) Ltd. The 2001 United Kingdom Radioactive Waste Inventory—Detailed Information for MOD Wastes. DEFRA/RAS/02.009, Nirex Report N/047, October 2002

Electrowatt-Ekono (UK) Ltd. The 2001 United Kingdom Radioactive Waste Inventory—Detailed Information for Amersham plc, Urenco and Minor Producer Wastes. DEFRA/RAS/02.010, Nirex Report N/048, October 2002

Recycling (Somerset)

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the level of recycling was in Somerset county council in 2002. [98310]

Mr. Meacher: Our current figures show that Somerset county council's recycling and composting rate was 16 per cent. in 2001–02, the latest year for which data are available.

Recycled Goods

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what incentives and preventative measures are planned to encourage *(a)* local councils and *(b)* other public bodies to use more recycled goods in their service provision. [87965]

Mr. Meacher: Within Government, the Sustainable Procurement Group has considered the scope to stimulate markets for recycled goods via public procurement and will make its recommendations to Ministers within the next few weeks. The Group has sought advice from the Waste Resources Action Programme (WRAP) (which was set up to encourage market development for recycled goods) on increasing the uptake of recycled products across Government and we expect its recommendations to point the way to significant improvements in purchasing of recycled products throughout the public sector. The increasing statutory targets that currently exist for local authorities will also provide an incentive for them to ensure that there is a market for recycled goods in place.

More recently the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit report on Waste Strategy has recommended that the work that the Waste Resources Action Programme (WRAP) is undertaking with the Local Government Association and Improvement and Development Agency to promote the take-up of green procurement by local authorities be extended still further. It also suggested that formal mechanisms be put in place to roll out best practice tools developed by the Sustainable Procurement Group to local government. In Central Government it recommended targets for the use of recycled materials. Voluntary green targets were also recommended for local authorities to purchase more recycled goods, minimise waste volumes and to encourage them to recycle more of their waste. The Government aim to publish their response to that report in the spring.

Smokies

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what investigations have been undertaken by her Department into the production of "smokies" using imported contaminated carcases of goats and sheep; and what action the Government have taken to address this issue. [97126]

Ms Blears: I have been asked to reply.

The production of smokies, whether from imported or domestic carcases, is unlawful because it is a requirement under European Union law that sheep or goat carcases for human consumption be flayed immediately after slaughter.

The Food Standards Agency issued guidance on smokies to local enforcement authorities and to border inspection posts in May 2002; since when successful action has been taken on a number of occasions against both imported and domestically produced smokies.

The Government are also taking wider action to tackle illegal imports of meat. A recent progress update on this was given in the answer from my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Morley) on 27 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 558W.

Waste Management

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what *(a)* grants and *(b)* borrowing permissions have been made available to local authorities, in each year from 1997 to date, to facilitate (i) waste minimisation, (ii) reuse of materials, (iii) recycling of materials and (iv) incineration of waste. [96476]

Mr. Meacher: The main source of revenue funding for local authority waste services is formula general grant, comprising the main Revenue Support Grant and National Non-Domestic Rates, provided by the Government under the annual Local Government Finance Settlement. This is distributed to local authorities through Formula Spending Shares. Waste services are covered by the Environmental, Protective and Cultural Services (EPCS) block of FSS which provides for a wide range of local authority services including libraries, local transport and flood defence, as well as waste. The element for waste services is not separately identified within the total, and spending decisions are for local authorities to make in the light of their own priorities and the wishes of their electorate. In total, the figures for the block are:

	£ million
2000–01	8,175
2001–02	8,601
2002–03	8,961
2003–04	9,340
2004–05	9,583
2005–06	9,896

The figures for 2000–01 to 2003–04 are those provided in the Local Government Finance Settlement for the respective years. The figures for 2004–05 and

2005–06 are those set out in SR2002. They do not include resource equalisation which took place in 2003–04 and increases to EPCS FSS by £2.230 million in each of the three years to 2005–06.

Prior to 2000–01 resources were provided to local authorities for recycling under a Supplementary Credit Approval scheme. The figure for 1997–98 was £2.159 million.

Defra's Waste Minimisation and Recycling Fund has provided £50 million in 2002–03 and £90 million in 2003–04 to encourage local authorities to expand recycling operations in their area. The Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) has also been allocated £40 million from 2000–01 to 2003–04 to work on overcoming market barriers to reuse and recycling of waste. An additional £15 million was made available to WRAP for 2002–04 from the Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund to promote increased use of alternative materials as aggregates.

The Government have also provided Private Finance Initiative (PFI) credits for waste and recycling projects of £220 million in SR 2000 and £355 million in SR 2002. So far, PFI waste projects approved by Defra have typically been large integrated waste management schemes including a variety of waste treatment options.

As part of a Local Public Sector Agreements (LPSA) the Government offers, at the outset, a pump-priming grant, unsupported credit approvals and potential relaxations in statutory and administrative requirements. To date local authorities have been awarded approximately £5 million in pump priming grants, and £16 million in Unsupported Credit Approvals to facilitate the improvement of waste minimisation and recycling. Typically, financial support has been used to improve enforcement and publicity; to develop civic amenity sites; and to initiate or expand kerb-side collection schemes.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

AIDS Vaccine (Eastern Africa)

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what funding her Department has allocated for research into HIV/AIDS subtype A vaccines in Eastern Africa; what progress is being made towards a vaccine for the HIV/AIDS subtype A virus; and if she will make a statement. [98992]

Clare Short: My Department has been funding the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative (IAVI) since 1998. Our current 5-year, £14 million, programme of support began in January 2000.

IAVI has eight vaccine constructs under development, all specifically aimed at the HIV strains most prevalent in developing countries. Trials in various phases are planned for each of these over the next 2–5 years. The candidate vaccines currently being developed by the Medical Research Council, and Oxford and Nairobi Universities are aimed at combating the subtype A strain of HIV most common in East Africa.

The Oxford-Nairobi trial is making significant progress. The vaccine candidate has progressed from the laboratory to approval for initial human testing in 18 months and is the first vaccine designed specifically for Africa to be tested in humans. Phase I and II trials are now ongoing in Oxford and Kenya. IAVI hope to move into Phase III efficacy trials by 2005.

Burma (Humanitarian Assistance)

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of providing cross-border humanitarian assistance to internally displaced people in Burma. [98267]

Clare Short: We monitor the humanitarian situation in Burma and Thailand including the situation for the 140,000 refugees living in camps, an estimated 1 million irregular migrants living on or near the border and the vulnerable populations living in border areas in Burma itself. Getting relief to internally displaced people living on the Burmese side of the border is difficult and dangerous. We provide humanitarian assistance on both sides of the border through carefully selected agencies eg UNHCR and ICRC in Thailand and Burma. The ICRC is the only organisation with a permanent international presence on both sides of the border. We also support WHO's border health programme in Thailand. In addition, we support food relief assistance for refugee camps through the Burmese Border Consortium (BBC). In the current financial year 2002–03 DFID's assistance in these areas will amount to around £3 million.

Central African Republic (Medical Supplies)

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development pursuant to her answer of 4 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 854W, on the Central African Republic, what action is being taken to tackle the shortage of medical supplies. [98582]

Clare Short: The UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) in the Central African Republic (CAR) has now provided the health ministry with vaccines to enable it to continue routine immunisations in health facilities. The vaccines are to combat tuberculosis (TB), yellow fever, diphtheria-tetanus-whooping cough (DTW) and measles.

The nationwide immunisation campaign, initially scheduled to start by mid-December 2002, has not yet begun due to the ongoing conflict between government forces and rebels.

Chad-Cameroon Oil Pipeline

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what external audits have been commissioned for the World bank funded Chad-Cameroon oil pipeline; and whether these audits will be made public. [98272]

Clare Short: Project arrangements provide for regular audits, on the Chad-Cameroon pipeline projects' accounts, plus independent opinions from the International Advisory Group (IAG) and External Compliance and Monitoring Group (ECMG). All IAG and ECMG reports are in the public domain and are available from the project website: http://www.worldbank.org/afr/ccproj/ Financial audits are not made public.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the cost of the World Bank funded Chad-Cameroon oil pipeline. [98273]

Clare Short: The cost of the Chad-Cameroon Petroleum Development and Pipeline Project is estimated at US$3.7 billion, which is being funded largely by private industry.

The World Bank Group will provide $93 million in loans—$53.4 million for Cameroon and $39.5 million for Chad— to finance the two governments' equity share in the project, and a $100 million loan from the International Finance Corporation (IFC) to the joint-venture pipeline companies. In addition to investments in the main oilfield development/pipeline project, the World bank is funding two projects aimed at strengthening the capacity of the Chadian and Cameroonian governments in environmental management and effective monitoring of the petroleum sectors. A total of US$29.5 million is being provided by the International Development Association (IDA), the World bank's lending arm for the poorest countries, for this.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of allegations of fraud concerning the World bank funded Chad-Cameroon oil pipeline. [98274]

Clare Short: We are aware of allegations made by a former employee of Exxon-Mobil, which appear to stem from concerns over specification of equipment being procured for the project. The World Bank Group looked into the concerns raised and we are content with the response given. My Department has confidence that the World Bank's systems for monitoring the implementation of this project, and for investigating any complaints, are appropriate. We are not aware of any other allegations of fraud.

Child Soldiers (Burma)

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of the number of child soldiers in Burma; and what steps she is taking to tackle this. [98266]

Clare Short: An exact figure is not known. But a recent Human Rights Watch study estimated that there could be up to 70,000 child soldiers in Burma.

The UN Security Council has now passed a resolution on Children Affected by Armed Conflict, which was based on the UNSG's report on child soldiers. In our statement on this to the Security Council, UK representative Jeremy Greenstock highlighted our concerns about child soldiers in Burma.

The issue of child soldiers was also taken up in the UK Co-sponsored resolution at UNGA last November. We will be ensuring that the issue is addressed at the UN Commission on Human Rights where the EU will be tabling a resolution on the human rights situation in Burma. In addition the UK has in place a weapons embargo and a ban on all military links with the Burmese armed forces in view of their appalling human rights record.

Child Trafficking (Togo)

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps are being taken to tackle the trafficking of children in Togo. [98587]

Clare Short: Child trafficking is an international problem requiring co-ordinated action. The British Government are one of the strongest supporters of the International Labour Organisation's Convention on the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour. This complements the work carried out in West Africa by Governments and other international organisations such as UNICEF. My Department is also funding Anti-Slavery International to develop the capacity and commitment of local NGOs to end trafficking and the abuse of child domestic workers in West Africa.

Command and Staff College (Nigeria)

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the estimated cost is to the Government of funding for the Bournemouth University Disaster Management Centre course at the Command and Staff College in Nigeria. [98585]

Clare Short: The total cost of the two week Disaster Management Course and a further one week "Training the Trainer" course is £51,173. Funding is provided under the Africa Conflict Prevention Pool from resources allocated to the Ministry of Defence.

Emergency Operation Appeal (Western Sahara)

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will provide a breakdown of how the £1 million contribution to the Emergency Operation Appeal in the Western Sahara will be spent. [98583]

Clare Short: My Department is contributing £1 million to the World Food Program to provide emergency humanitarian assistance to populations affected by drought and crop failure within the Western Sahel. Assistance will be focussed mainly in Mauritania, but will also include Cape Verde, Senegal, The Gambia, and Mali. WFP has identified that 578,550 persons are affected by severe food insecurity or are in need of emergency intervention to prevent deterioration in their food and nutritional status. The operation is planned to last twelve months and will distribute 55,365 tons of food. 120,000 people in the Aftout region of Mauritania, the most severely affected area, will receive full ration enriched meals (2,100 Kcal); a further 384,550 beneficiaries in Mauritania, Cape Verde, Senegal and The Gambia will receive reduced ration meals (1,800 kcal); and 74,000 beneficiaries in the regions of Kayes and Koulikoro in Mali will receive cereal rations only (1,050 kcal).

My Department is making available a further £570,804 to Oxfam, who will act as an implementing partner for WFP. Oxfam are well established within the region and will distribute the food supplied by WFP. Oxfam will undertake targeted food distribution to 36,280 of the most vulnerable people in the Aftout region, along with the provision of seeds, tools, pesticides and fencing materials to support vegetable gardening. Further capacity building measures will include studies into safe drinking water, food security and nutritional surveillance.

Eritrea

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what development aid has been made available in each of the last two years to Eritrea. [98806]

Clare Short: Bilaterally we provided £788,000 in 2002 and £839,000 in 2001. These funds were spent on meeting humanitarian needs and also on a small grants scheme. In addition we contributed 20 per cent. of EC spending, which in 2000, the most recent year that we have figures available for, was a UK contribution of £700,000.

In addition we provided £500,000 in 2002 and £250,000 in 2001 to the UN Trust Fund for the delimitation and demarcation of the border between Eritrea and Ethiopia.

The UK does not have a development partnership with Eritrea. We will continue to make a contribution to meeting urgent humanitarian needs, and to the consolidation of the peace process. We will also continue to assess the scope for helping with economic and political reform.

Ethiopia

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development whether malnutrition rates in Ethiopia are increasing. [98270]

Clare Short: The latest UN assessment is that although they have not observed a general deterioration in the nutritional status of the drought affected population, there has been a slow but gradual increase in Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) in some of the drought affected areas of Ethiopia. Some areas are now above 10 per cent. GAM allowing no margin for error. The situation therefore requires constant monitoring.

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if, at the meeting to be held with the Prime Minister of Ethiopia, Meles Zenawi, she will ask him what steps are being taken by the Ethiopian Government to investigate the detention without trial and torture and ill-treatment of *(a)* up to 60 demonstrators arrested in Oromia in April 2002 and *(b)* approximately 48 persons in the capital Addis Ababa, suspected of being members of the Oromo Liberation Front in August 2002. [98827]

Clare Short: Her Majesty's Government encourage the Ethiopian Government to handle political protest—violent or peaceful—in accordance with the provisions of their own law and relevant international conventions on human rights. I shall be discussing this issue within the context of the request for support I have received from Prime Minister Meles for transforming the Ethiopian police force into a force working with the community.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development to what extent funding to Ethiopia under the Department's Direct Budget Support system will be conditional upon an improved human rights situation in the country. [98873]

Clare Short: My Department is developing a three-year programme of direct budget support to Ethiopia to support the implementation of the Ethiopian Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Programme (SDPRP). This will follow up on the disbursement agreed in January 2003. We intend to measure progress by the Government against a range of indicators from the SDPRP and other Government policy statements that will be agreed between the Government and a group of interested donors, including the UK. These indicators should cover the full range of commitments in the SDPRP including issues related to democratisation, empowerment and respect for human rights—economic and social, as well as civic and political.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development whether, at her meeting with the Prime Minister of Ethiopia, she will raise *(a)* the detention without trial of thousands within Ethiopia; and *(b)* the likelihood of the Ethiopian Government either releasing such persons or placing them on trial as soon as possible. [98874]

Clare Short: In the Memorandum of Understanding I signed with the Ethiopian Government in January 2003, the Ethiopian Government renewed its commitment to protect the full range of human rights including economic and social rights of all Ethiopians, especially the poor. We are supporting the implementation of this commitment through our support for the Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Programme (SDPRP) and through regular dialogue with the Ethiopian Government, at which we raise human rights and other issues of concern. At my planned meeting with Prime Minister Meles, I expect to discuss progress on implementing the SDPRP and any issues of concern that arise.

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development whether the Department will be conducting training of Ethiopian police and security forces as referred to in the Department's Ethiopian Country Assistance Plan. [98828]

Clare Short: My Department will be leading a joint DFID/MOD/FCO mission to Ethiopia to discuss with Government and civil society what support might be usefully provided for security sector reform and reforming the police. The provision of training will be considered during that mission.

Global Fund (Contributions)

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what representations she has made to the US Government on contributions to the Global Fund to fight AIDS, TB and malaria. [98994]

Clare Short: The UK Government have pledged £138 million to the Global Fund to fight AIDS, TB and Malaria (GFATM) over five years and have urged other donor countries, including the US, to commit to multi year funding. The UK remains strongly committed to the fight against AIDS, TB and Malaria. In considering future contribution levels to the Fund, we will look closely at its performance and effectiveness relative to other channels of assistance, and at the extent to which the Fund is supporting health and development plans and processes formulated by developing countries.

Iraq

Mr. Laxton: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what preparations are being made to *(a)* monitor the humanitarian impact of military action in Iraq and *(b)* provide the appropriate humanitarian assistance. [98600]

Clare Short: My Department is holding regular discussions with the Ministry of Defence, UN agencies and other humanitarian actors about contingency planning for a range of eventualities in Iraq.

In the event of military action, a key priority for the Government would be to minimise the suffering of the Iraqi people, who are already very vulnerable. This would include: provision of immediate humanitarian assistance by those best placed to do so; and re-establishment of the UN Oil For Food Programme distribution network. DFID is providing an additional £3.5 million contribution to support UN humanitarian contingency planning for Iraq, including the prepositioning of basic supplies, through funding to UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, WHO, OCHA and UNSECOORD.

Mr. Laxton: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what additional funds have been allocated for humanitarian relief to accompany any military action in Iraq. [98601]

Clare Short: DFID has a contingency reserve of £100 million which we will draw on for any emergency situation in Iraq.

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) what steps have been taken to monitor the humanitarian situation in Iraq in the event of military action; [98880]

(2) what analysis has been conducted as to likely humanitarian needs in the event of military action in Iraq. [98882]

Clare Short: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave my hon. Friend for Derby, North (Mr. Laxton) (to PQ 98600) earlier today.

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what additional funds have been allocated to address the need for humanitarian relief in Iraq following military action. [98881]

Clare Short: DFID has a contingency reserve of £100 million, which we will draw on for any emergency situation in Iraq.

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what contingency plans she has made to provide assistance to the people of Iraq in the event of military action being taken against that country. [98954]

Clare Short: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave my hon. Friend for Derby, North (Mr Laxton) (to PQ 98600) earlier today.

IT Contracts

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list IT contracts in her Department above £50 million in each year since it was established; what the inception date for each system was; when it became fully functional; when it became fully debugged; and what the cost of over-runs has been. [99007]

Clare Short: My Department has taken forward IT projects on a step-by-step incremental basis and we have had no contracts above £50 million.

Malawi

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much aid her Department is giving to Malawi to deal with food shortages. [98271]

Clare Short: The Department for International Development has spent approximately £34 million since the onset of the crisis: on food importation and distribution, provision of wages for employment on public works programmes (cash for work), support to agricultural production (targeted inputs of seed and fertiliser for 2 million of the poorest farmers) and rehabilitation of rail and road links on the import corridors. DFID's contribution forms a significant part of the effective consortium approach developed to deal with the crisis in which the Malawi Government, donors, NGOs and the commercial sector are partners.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what evidence has been collated by her Department on the early harvesting of immature maize in Malawi; and what assessment she has made of the effects of late planting of maize in Malawi on food stocks there. [98991]

Clare Short: Early harvesting of maize for immediate use is a regular component of the coping strategies for poor rural household in Malawi during the annual hungry season, which lasts normally from January to March. Although this may result in reduction in the grain harvest, the impact on national food security is expected to be minimal as present national maize grain stocks are higher than at any similar time during the last five years.

Although there has been some localised flooding, the general picture of the 2002–03 rainy season remains good, with the latest maize crop estimate for a harvest of 2.05 million tonnes, about 95 per cent. of national requirements.

Maximising Impact in the Water Sector

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the National Audit Office's report, "Maximising Impact in the Water Sector"; and if she will make a statement. [98975]

Clare Short: I welcome this report. It provides a welcome contribution to improving our work in the water sector as well as other areas. I was pleased to see that the National Audit Office concluded that our projects on water and sanitation have been largely successful, and that DFID is highly influential internationally. The National Audit Office's recommendations provide further impetus to strengthen our approach in areas such as evaluation and maximising the take-up of DFID research.

I also refer my hon. Friend to my written ministerial statement to Parliament on water on 28 January 2003, ahead of the forthcoming World Water Forum in Kyoto in March 2003, setting out our view of the key issues in the sector and our approach to addressing them.

Mobile Communications (Third World)

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development whether development assistance is available to help with the expansion of mobile communications in the third world. [98808]

Clare Short: We are providing assistance in various ways to help bring the benefits of mobile communications to poorer people in developing countries. For example, the Building Digital Opportunities programme is supporting work at the policy level (e.g. by assisting regulators to develop pro-poor policy environments) and with communities (e.g. supporting local approaches to providing valuable information to poorer communities through mobile phones). Strategic interventions such as our new CATIA programme (Catalysing Access to ICTs in Africa) and the Open Knowledge Network, both include support for pro-poor mobile communication channels.

In addition, we are working to attract greater private sector participation in expanding mobile communications in developing countries. In close consultation with key private companies and the DTI, we are jointly exploring how to enable the private sector bring affordable communications services to the great majority of people in developing countries without easy access to a public telephone. Mobile communications will play a critical role in this. In addition, DFID is contributing to broader infrastructure investment funds, such as the EAIF—Emerging Africa Infrastructure Fund—which can support, inter alia, investments in mobile communications facilities.

Montserrat

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what subjects she discussed with the Chief Minister of Montserrat during his recent visit to London. [98834]

Clare Short: We discussed Montserrat's progress towards self-sufficiency, including plans for a new airport, and future DFID support.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what financial resources her Department *(a)* allocated and *(b)* transferred to Montserrat in each year from 1998. [98835]

Clare Short: The figures are:

UK Financial Year	*Allocated (£000s)* [1]	*Disbursed (000s)* [2]
1998–99	33,000	31,096
1999–2000	23,934	22,640
2000–01	24,100	20,811
2001–02	24,400	24,412
2002–03	[1]20,000	[2]20,000

[1] Revised

[2] Estimated outturn

In addition I recently set aside a total of £45.6 million for Montserrat over the period 2003–04 to 2005–06, which will bring our total assistance by 2005–06 to over £225 million since the onset of the volcanic emergency. This will represent, for the coming three years, an increase of around 50 percent. of the budget that was previously available to Montserrat over that period.

Source:

1. Departmental records.
2. Statistics on International Development, 2002.

Palestinian Food Shortages

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on Palestinian food shortages. [98554]

Clare Short: The economic crisis has seriously compromised household welfare. Many Palestinian families have endured long periods without work or incomes, and are now dependent on food aid for their daily survival. The international community has responded to the growing crisis through a range of interventions, including the provision of food. Donor disbursements have doubled accordingly in the last two years. But unless Palestinians can move around to work and trade, the Palestinian economy will continue to stagnate and the spiral of unemployment, poverty and malnutrition will worsen.

Safe Drinking Water

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the progress towards halving by 2015 the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water. [98269]

Clare Short: Nearly two thirds of the world's population will be living in countries of significant water stress by the year 2025. 1.2 billion people currently lack access to safe drinking water and 2.4 billion people lack access to basic sanitation.

The percentage of people served with some form of improved water supply rose from 77 per cent. in 1990 to 82 per cent. in 2000. The greatest gain in improved water coverage was in South-central Asia, from 72 per cent. to 85 per cent. The percentage of people with access to basic sanitation increased from 51 per cent. to 61 per cent. in the same period. Much work, however, has yet to be done. In sub-Saharan Africa, only 58 per cent. of the population has access to improved water sources. The 2002 UN Human Development Report has indicated that nearly 25 countries, the majority in Sub-Sahara Africa, are lagging or are far behind in respect to meeting the MDG for water, with another 75 countries lacking data to effectively assess their progress. But all of the goals remain achievable if developing countries and the international community have the determination to ratchet up their efforts.

My Department is providing substantive financial support and technical assistance to initiatives that support the assessment of access to improved water supplies and sanitation, including the United Nation's Joint Monitoring Programme which provides the UN reference at both global, regional and country levels and the World Water Assessment Programme, a collective and consolidated UN system-wide assessment and reporting facility which provides analysis and data on the state of global freshwater and status review of the attainment of the water and sanitation targets.

To promote sustainable access to safe drinking water, my Department's activities at the international and national levels are looking to address the issues of political will, institutional capacity to provide and maintain services, scaling up initiatives to increase coverage, and long term sustainability incorporating cost-recovery and maintenance.

Somalia

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what development aid has been made available in each of the last two years to Somalia. [98807]

Clare Short: We provided over £2.8 million for Somalia in 2001 and over £1.5 million in 2002 This included contributions to the International Committee of the Red Cross' and United Nation's Appeals for Somalia, as well as activities such as primary health care, emergency nutrition, health assistance and water rehabilitation (through non-governmental agencies such as Action Contre la Faim, Medecins sans Frontieres, Norwegian People's Aid and World Vision).

We have also supported Somali women's participation in the peace process and local elections in Somaliland.

In addition, DFID's imputed share of EC expenditure in Somalia for 1999 and 2000 (the latest years for which figures are available) totalled £5 million.

Our engagement with Somalia focuses on three areas: (i) strengthening regions that have achieved sustained stability (e.g. Somaliland) and seeing what lessons we can help transfer to other parts of the country; (ii) supporting the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) led peace process and (iii) the continuation of the current humanitarian programme in war-affected areas, particularly in the south.

UN Humanitarian Assessment Missions

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development pursuant to her answer of 5 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 291W, on Central Africa, when she expects United Nations humanitarian assessment missions to enter the zones under rebel control. [98584]

Clare Short: To date, no humanitarian NGO or UN agency has been able to access zones under rebel control to assess the humanitarian and health needs of the population. We understand that a UN humanitarian assessment mission that was due to visit rebel zones on 6 February has been postponed; we have no details on when this will be rescheduled.

Water and Sanitation Projects

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what her expenditure plans are for financial assistance for water and sanitation projects, in absolute terms and as a proportion of the Department budget; and what proportion of the Departmental budget was allocated as financial assistance for water and sanitation projects, in *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2000–01. [98967]

Clare Short: In financial year 2001–02, my Department spent £87.2 million on water and sanitation related outcomes of various projects across its bilateral assistance programmes. Expenditure in 2000–01 was £90.6 million. In 2001–02, spending on water and sanitation accounted for approximately 6 per cent. of bilateral expenditure (£1,506 million). 70 per cent. of the expenditure, approximately £63 million, was spent on water and sanitation in 2001–02, being split 60:40 between urban and rural. 2001–02 was the first year in recent times that the urban sector received more support than the rural.

In terms of geographical allocation, Asia was the dominant recipient region (47 per cent. in 2001–02 and 42 per cent. in 2000–01), followed by Africa (31 per cent. and 32 per cent. respectively).

New commitments to the water and sanitation sector made during 2001–02 totalled £86.2 million.

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what proportion of the Department's financial assistance for water and sanitation projects was allocated to institutional capacity and human resources in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02; and what proportion will be allocated in (i) 2002–03 and (ii) 2003–04. [98976]

Clare Short: My Department's expenditure on water supply and sanitation has remained broadly static between 2000–02, at approximately £63 million, which accounts for 70 per cent. of the total water sector expenditure. Of that, 60 per cent. was allocated to urban and 40 per cent. to rural water and sanitation programmes. Total expenditure in the water sector was £90.6 million in 2000–01 and £87.2 million in 2001–02. Figures are not yet available for 2002–03. New commitments to the water and sanitation sector made during 2001–02 totalled £86.2 million.

We are not able to disaggregate expenditure data to determine precise allocation to specific activities within the water supply and sanitation sector. However the underpinning premise of all our water and sanitation programmes is to build and strengthen institutional capacity and human resource capacity in developing countries.

In addition to our work through our Country programmes, our Knowledge and Research (KAR) programme works to encourage our engagement with Southern institutions to encourage capacity building of formal and informal poor urban communities to improve local water and sanitation services.

Additionally, through our resource centres, OASIS and WELL, my Department is actively engaging with developing countries and their supporting institutions to build human resource capacity within the water and sanitation sector.

World Food Programme (Southern Africa)

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when figures for the WFP distribution of food aid for Southern Africa for January will be made available. [98823]

Clare Short: The figures for the WFP distribution of food aid for Southern Africa for January are due to be made available in early March.

I will place a copy in the House Library as soon as they become available.

Zimbabwe

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of food shortages in Zimbabwe. [98651]

Clare Short: The latest Zimbabwe Vulnerability Assessment Committee survey indicates that 7.2 million people are currently in need of emergency food aid. The WFP and bilateral programmes aim to target 40 per cent. of needs, with the Government of Zimbabwe and the private sector responsible for the greater part of the response. Government reports imports of around 700,000 tonnes of maize to date, but the distribution of this food is not transparent, and the private sector has been excluded from participation.

The performance of the World Food Programme and its implementing partners has improved steadily. In January 2003, 3.3 million people were fed, and another 2 million people received supplementary food through bilateral programmes. The WFP is close to meeting its revised target of feeding 4.5 million people in February 2003, and 5 million in March 2003. Contributions and pledges to the WFP emergency appeal mean that the main WFP pipeline is 83 per cent. full until June of 2003.

Prospects for the coming year are under assessment. Insufficient maize was planted and the lack of fertilizers and rainfall raise the prospect of another poor production year. The capacity of the Government of Zimbabwe to continue to import maize in quantity is of concern, and it is already clear that continued international assistance will be needed. Donors are already planning for the future, and urging Government to ease price controls, which are distorting internal markets, and to open importation to the private sector to help meet needs.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the humanitarian effects of the outbreak of foot and mouth disease in Zimbabwe. [98993]

Clare Short: The current FMD outbreak started in August 2001 at the time of the farm invasions, when fences were destroyed and domestic cattle were allowed to mingle with wild buffalo that carry the disease. Since then the illegal movement of animals and livestock theft has widened the geographic area of the outbreak.

Although the disease is highly infectious it appears to have a lesser impact in local domestic livestock, which although they become ill rarely die. There are fears however that the disease could spread to the more susceptible dairy animals. Exports of beef, dairy and pork products have been banned, halting the country's US$ 60 million export trade.

As smallholders own most of the cattle in Zimbabwe they are exposed to restrictions on animal movements and receive lower prices for their animals from infected areas. Foreign exchange shortages are limiting efforts to vaccinate animals at risk. Despite the best efforts of the veterinary services to control the outbreak there is neither the funding nor the political will to prevent illegal movement and restore the wildlife fences.

TRANSPORT

Alternative Fuels

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether she has issued guidelines to local authorities on the installation of facilities for the provision of *(a)* liquefied petroleum gas and *(b)* compressed natural gas. [97971]

Mr. Jamieson: Planning Policy Guidance note 13 states that local authorities

> "should look favourably at proposals"

to provide liquefied petroleum gas and natural gas infrastructure,

> "in order to deliver wider environmental objectives".

London Airports (Rail Access)

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the level of security for rail access to London airports. [98655]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department has objectively assessed all railway stations to ensure the security requirements in place are appropriate depending on the risk.

Transport Security

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the level of security at *(a)* transport infrastructure facilities other than airports and *(b)* railways. [98654]

Mr. Jamieson: In addition to airports, the Department for Transport sets the security standards in the UK for the maritime, Channel Tunnel and railway industries. The Department's security inspectors regularly monitor the security arrangements at, for example, ports, railway stations and the Channel Tunnel to ensure that the required standards are, and continue to be, met.

My Department's approach is to manage the risk to the industries arising from the threat of a terrorist attack. The security measures imposed seek to minimise the industries' vulnerabilities while recognising operational realities. The Government's aim is to set the measures to counter the risk.

All the security programmes are kept under continuous review. It is not our practice to detail the required security measures for obvious reasons.

Zero-sulphur Fuels

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what definition the Government uses of zero sulphur road transport fuel; what the present plans are for the introduction of zero sulphur motor transport fuels in the UK; and if he will make a statement. [98045]

Mr. Jamieson: The Secretary of State for Transport has responsibility for road fuel quality matters.

A Council and European Parliament directive, adopted at 3rd Reading on 6 February 2003, sets a maximum sulphur content of l0mg/kg for all petrol and diesel sold in the EU as from 1 January 2009. Other fuel properties are also defined in this directive, which is due to be published in the Official Journal of the European Community shortly. Fuels to this quality are generally referred to as "sulphur-free" or "zero sulphur" fuel. The Government will be introducing an amendment to the Motor Fuel (Composition and Content) Regulations to incorporate the directive requirements later this year.

The directive also requires Member States to ensure that petrol and diesel fuel to this quality is available on an "appropriately balanced geographical basis" from 1 January 2005 in order that it is available for the latest technology vehicles that can take best advantage of it. The Government are considering options, in conjunction with the oil industry, as to how best to achieve this objective.

A21

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps have been taken by the Highways Agency to evaluate the potential environmental impacts of route improvements to the A21. [98055]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 3 February 2003, *Official Report*, columns 35–37W.

Air Transport (Consultation)

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the impact of the inclusion of Gatwick Airport in the Government's consultation exercise on the *(a)* scope and *(b)* validity of proposals at other regional airports. [98275]

Mr. Jamieson: The forecasts for regional airports outside the South East and East of England, set out in the consultation documents published on 23 July 2002, were based on a range of policy scenarios which made alternative assumptions about the total quantum of capacity in the South East airports system. Our modelling suggests that the exact location of that capacity would have only a marginal impact on prospective demand at regional airports and would, therefore, not significantly affect the validity of the proposals for those airports.

The consultation remains open in all regions and will continue to do so until four months after the revised South East consultation document is published. We will continue to welcome comments on the proposals in those documents and any serious worked up alternatives until the consultation is finally concluded.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will allow a period of two months between the issue of his response to the consultation process on the future development of air transport in the United Kingdom and the publication of the White Paper. [98276]

Mr. Jamieson: We shall publish the Government's conclusions in a White Paper later this year.

We also intend to publish a summary of the responses to the consultation. However, in view of the very large number of responses we have received, and the need to check that the summary of them is accurate and complete, we cannot give any undertakings about how soon we could publish the summary.

British Airports Authority

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures he is taking to encourage the British Airports Authority in England to introduce low emission vehicles. [97980]

Mr. Jamieson: The British Airports Authority (BAA) has already introduced a number of low-emission vehicles at its airports, particularly Gatwick and Heathrow. These vehicles, which are in most cases eligible for Government grants under the Powershift programme, can make a small but significant improvement to local air quality in and around airports. BAA is also helping a number of local authorities to develop air quality action plans where its airports contribute to local air pollution problems. These action plans are likely to include further commitments to reducing emissions of pollutants from BAA's vehicle fleet.

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what security measures have been put in place along the route of the channel tunnel rail link; what discussions he has had with *(a)* the rail industry and *(b)* Home Office Ministers on security on the channel tunnel rail link route; and if he will make a statement. [98023]

Mr Jamieson: My officials have held detailed discussions with London and Continental Railways, the promoters of the channel tunnel rail link, about security measures. Any further disclosure regarding these security measures would not be in the public interest.

Croydon Tramlink

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the viability of the special purpose vehicles entered into between Amey and Croydon Tramlink. [98590]

Mr. Jamieson: Croydon Tramlink is a matter for the Mayor and Transport for London. I understand from them that there is no risk to the continued operation of the system.

Cycle Helmets

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what assessment he has made of the effects on incidence and severity of injuries to cyclists as a result of increased cycle helmet wearing in the UK; [98988]

(2) whether his Department has assessed the relative safety merits of *(a)* promoting helmet wearing for cyclists and *(b)* promoting helmet wearing for (i) car drivers and (ii) pedestrians. [98986]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department commissioned an independent review of the effectiveness of cycle helmets, which was published at the end of November 2002 as Road Safety Research Report Number 30. Among other things, it concluded that bicycle helmets are effective at reducing the incidence and severity of head, brain and upper facial injuries. Also, the Bicycle Helmet Initiative Trust has been running a cycle helmet promotion scheme in Reading since 1992. During that time, cycle helmet use by children has trebled and there has been a 45 per cent. reduction in the number of hospital treated head injuries.

We have not made a similar assessment for pedestrians and car occupants.

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of reports 286 and 365 published by the Transport Research Laboratory on the effects on cycle use of promotional campaigns to encourage cycle helmet wearing. [98987]

Mr. Jamieson: Cycle helmet wearing rates observed on major built-up roads have increased significantly from 16 per cent. in 1994 to 22 per cent. in 1999. TRL Report 286 is principally a study of observed cycle helmet wearing rates in 1996. The report includes an assessment of current local authority initiatives to promote cycle helmet wearing and observed wearing rates but does not provide sufficient evidence to draw any firm conclusions about the effect of promotional campaigns on the levels of cycling.

Our objectives to increase cycling and improve the safety of cyclists are complementary. A key component in making cycling more popular is to make it a safer and more pleasant activity. Cycle helmets are effective at reducing head, brain and upper facial injuries, so encouraging the use of cycle helmets is one of many approaches to improving the safety of cyclists on our roads. A number of other approaches are summarised in TRL Report 365.

English Nature

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent meetings he has had with English Nature; what was discussed; and if he will place a copy of the minutes in the Library. [97267]

Mr. Jamieson: As with previous Administrations, and in line with exemptions 2 and 7 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, it is not this Government's normal practice to release details of specific meetings or their content, as these discussions may have taken place on a confidential basis. All such contacts are conducted in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code, the Civil Service Code, and Guidance for Civil Servants: Contacts with Lobbyists. Copies of these documents are available in the Libraries of the House.

Freight Access Grants

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the charge in lorry miles as a result of the freezing of freight and track access grants; and if he will list the companies which will have their freight and track access grants frozen, with the dates on which the freeze will take effect. [98398]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer my hon. Friend to my answer to the hon. Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh) on 13 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 897W.

Greater London Assembly

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what financial assistance his Department gave to the Greater London Assembly in 2002; and for what projects. [95846]

Mr. Jamieson: The London Assembly is part of the Greater London Authority. It is responsible for scrutinising and reviewing the Mayor's exercise of his statutory functions. It has particular power to investigate, and prepare reports on actions and decisions taken by the Mayor or any member of the Greater London Authority. The London Assembly's specific costs are part of the overall Greater London Authority budget which is proposed each year by the mayor and is subject to the Assembly's agreement.

The GLA grants from the Department for Transport in 2002–03 are as follows:

GLA Transport Grant £1,024.118 million.

IT Contracts

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list IT contracts in his Department and its predecessors above £50 million in each year of the last 10 years; what the inception date for each system was; when it became fully functional; when it became fully debugged; and what the cost of over-runs has been. [99006]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department is aware of two contracts meeting the criteria.

DSA let a contract for the delivery of the screen based driving theory test from the inception date of 4 January 2000 until 3 September 2004. The contract value is £80 million in total. The system was fully functional from the inception date and did not need to be debugged. There have been no cost over-runs.

The Vehicle Inspectorate Agency awarded a contract for MOT Computerisation in February 2000. The contract value is £230 million. The planned completion date for full functionality is spring 2004. Cost has overrun by £4 million.

Laptop Computers

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many laptop computers were used by *(a)* Ministers and special advisers and *(b)* officials in his Department in each year since 1995; how many were (i) lost and (ii) stolen; what their cost was; and if he will make a statement. [98707]

Mr. Jamieson: The information requested on the use of laptop computers in each year since 1995 is not available centrally or in the form requested, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Since the establishment of the Department for Transport on 29 May 2002, there has been one reported case of a lost laptop computer, at a cost of £1,011. For the figures of the Department's predecessors, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test (Dr. Whitehead) on 29 January 2002, *Official Report*, Volume 379, columns 182–84W, to the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell).

Light Dues

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much was raised in light dues in the latest available year; and what his estimate is of the amount paid *(a)* per merchant ship per voyage and *(b)* by each fishing vessel (i) per voyage and (ii) per year. [98409]

Mr. Jamieson: The total income from light dues for 2001–02 was £74,785,262 of which £696,566 was paid by fishing vessels and tugs.

Light dues rates for merchant vessels in 2001–02 were levied at 0.41p per registered ton. Fishing vessels and tugs paid an annual rate of £202.00 for the first 10 metres and £21.00 for each metre of length in excess of 10 metres.

The rates were reduced in April 2002 to £0.40p per registered ton for merchant vessels and a cap of 40,000 tons was introduced, making the maximum charge payable £16,000 per voyage, to reduce the burden of light dues falling on the largest vessels. The rates for fishing vessels and tugs were also reduced to an annual payment of £190.00 for the first 10 metres and £20.00 for each metre thereafter.

Once a merchant vessel has paid light dues, there is no further liability for a period of one month from that date. Furthermore, no more than seven payments are required in any fiscal year. We therefore do not hold information on merchant vessel movements beyond the seven voyage limit. Neither do we hold records on fishing vessel or tug activity.

Liquefied Petroleum Gas

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the cumulative investment by the private sector in automotive liquefied petroleum gas refuelling infrastructure; how many automotive liquefied petroleum gas refuelling outlets there are in the United Kingdom; and how many car manufacturers offer liquefied petroleum gas models in the United Kingdom. [98182]

Mr Jamieson: There are currently over 1,100 LPG refuelling sites in the UK. The financial detail of this substantial investment in the technology is commercial information, private to the companies concerned. Eight vehicle manufacturers now offer LPG cars, in addition to the cars for which conversions are available. PowerShift grants are available for both purchase of new LPG cars, and conversions, which deliver the required environmental improvements.

Ministerial Speeches

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library a copy of the speech given by the Transport Minister to the Lunar Society on 8 February. [98022]

Mr Spellar: A speech text is not available—I spoke from notes.

Overweight Vehicles

Mark Tami: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the cost to *(a)* his Department and *(b)* local authorities of damage done to UK roads by overweight vehicles in (i) 1999, (ii) 2000 and (iii) 2001. [97072]

Mr. Jamieson: These figures are difficult to estimate, since they would require a detailed knowledge of the types of vehicle concerned, the extent of their overloading, the roads that they travelled on, and the distances they travelled. These figures are not available.

Two thirds of heavy goods vehicle mileage occurs on motorways and trunk roads. On these roads carriageways and bridges are designed to cater for overweight vehicles, and the effect of these vehicles is too small to quantify when compared to the cumulative effect of traffic over the life of a road.

Most modern articulated lorries are capable of carrying more than their normal operational weight safely. Overloading offences declined with the introduction of 40 tonne lorries in January 1999, and declined further when 44 tonne lorries were introduced in February 2001.

Pedestrian Crossings

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will amend the Zebra, Pelican and Puffin Pedestrian Crossings Regulations and General Directions 1997 to allow for the part-time operation of flashing beacons. [98588]

Mr. Jamieson: Zebra crossings operate 24 hours a day and part-time operation of beacons could be taken to imply that this was not the case. It would also remove an important safety element that warns drivers that they are approaching a zebra crossing. There is, therefore, a real danger that adopting this proposal would increase accidents at pedestrian crossings at times when the flashing beacons are turned off. In view of this, we have no plans to make this amendment to the regulations.

Rail Maintenance Contracts

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the maintenance contracts which have been awarded to private firms by the SRA since its inception; and if he will list the maintenance firms which have had their contracts prematurely terminated by the SRA. [98402]

Mr. Spellar: Railway asset maintenance is not dealt with by the SRA.

Rail Services

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to improve rail journey times between Leeds and Sheffield. [96821]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) is working with Midland Main Line to implement the latter's franchise commitment to provide an hourly non-stop service from Leeds to London, all of which will call at Sheffield. This will represent a substantial increase in the number of non-stop services between Leeds and Sheffield, although journey times will be largely unchanged.

Railway Inspectorate

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the total value was of *(a)* technical and financial contracts, *(b)* technical consultants used on a call-off basis and *(c)* financial consultants used on a call-off basis, by Her Majesty's Railway Inspectorate, in each year since 1992. [93229]

Mr. Jamieson: The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) does not let financial contracts and therefore has no information in respect of financial contracts or financial consultants.

The total value of work commissioned by HMRI for technical contracts in each year since 1992 is as follows:

£000

	External Research	*External support via call-off arrangements*
1992–93	9.3	60.9
1993–94	90.5	14.9
1994–95	143	50
1995–96	77.1	244
1996–97	214.6	55.4
1997–98	526.5	48.1
1998–99	263.3	61.1
1999–2000	878.9	24.9
2000–01	89.6	798.3
2001–02	241.5	264.5
2002–03[1]	314	127

[1] Figures cover period to 2 February 2003

Railways (External Consultants)

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the total value was of *(a)* technical and financial contracts, *(b)* technical consultants used on a call-off basis and *(c)* financial consultants used on a call-off basis, by the Office of the Rail Regulator, in each year since 1992. [93227]

Mr. Jamieson: The table shows expenditure by the Office of the Rail Regulator for the year 2001–02 and since 1 April 2002. Figures for the period before 2001 could be provided only at disproportionate cost to the Office of the Rail Regulator.

£

	2001–02	*Since 1 April 2002*
(a) Technical and financial contracts	383,000	226,000
(b) Technical consultants, call off	351,000	458,000
(c) Financial consultants, call off	378,000	695,000

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the total value was of *(a)* technical and financial contracts, *(b)* technical consultants used on a call-off basis and *(c)* financial consultants used on a call-off basis, by the (i) Health and Safety Commission and (ii) Health and Safety Executive relating to railway matters in each year since 1992. [93230]

Mr. Jamieson: The Health and Safety Commission (HSC) does not commission its own work since the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), as set up under the terms of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, has executive responsibility for commissioning appropriate work on HSC's behalf.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) does not let financial contracts and therefore has no information in respect of financial contracts or financial consultants.

The total value of work commissioned by HSE (including HMRI) for technical contracts relating to railway matters in each year since 1992 is as follows:

£000

	External research	*External support via call-off contract arrangements*
1992–93	9.3	60.9
1993–94	90.5	14.9
1994–95	143	50
1995–96	77.1	244
1996–97	214.6	55.4
1997–98	526.5	48.1
1998–99	263.3	61.1
1999–2000	878.9	24.9
2000–01	[1]95.1	798.3
2001–02	[1]248	264.5
2002–03[2]	314	421.5

[1] These figures include rail-related research commissioned by HSE's Safety Policy Directorate as well as HSE's HM Railway Inspectorate (HMRI).

[2] Figures cover period to 2 February 2003.

Renewable Energy

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what changes in unit payments for electricity have resulted from the switch by his Department to purchasing renewable energy which is exempt from the Climate Change Levy. [96488]

Mr. Jamieson: In response to Government targets, my Department has switched a number of its sites over to the purchase of electricity from renewable energy sources that are exempt from the Climate Change Levy. Where this has taken place, the actual average price was 4.07p/kWh, the 'standard' electricity price would have been [illegible] the increase due to the purchase of [illegible] energy is 0.17p/kWh or 4.3 per cent.

Road Building

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many of the schemes in the Government's targeted programme of improvements have been through all their statutory processes. [98021]

Mr Jamieson: There are 72 schemes in the Targeted Programme of Improvements and 28 of these, including six already delivered, have been through all their statutory processes.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the roads schemes where a full Environmental Statement under Directive 97/11/EC was produced before inclusion in the Government's targeted programme of improvements [98024]

Mr. Jamieson: A full Environmental Statement under Directive 97/11/EC was produced for the following 33 schemes, before inclusion in the Government's targeted programme of improvements; A1 Willowburn-Denwick Improvement, A1(M) Ferrybridge-Hook Moor, A1(M) Wetherby-Walshford, A2/A282 Dartford Improvement, A5 Nesscliffe Bypass, A6 Great Glen Bypass, A6 Rushden and Higham Ferrers Bypass, A6 Rothwell-Desborough Bypass, A6 Clapham Bypass, A6 Alvaston, A10 Wadesmill-Colliers End, A11 Roudham Heath-Attleborough Improvement, A21 Lamberhurst Bypass, A27 Polegate Bypass, A41 Aston Clinton Bypass, A43 Silverstone Bypass, A43 Whitfield Turn-Brackley Hatch Improvement, A43 M40-B4031 Dualling, A46 Newark-Lincoln Improvement, A63 Selby Bypass, A66 Stainburn and Great Clifton Bypass, A120 Stansted-Braintree Improvement, A249 Iwade-Queenborough Improvement, A500 Basford, Hough, Shavington Bypass, A650 Bingley Relief Road, A1033 Hedon Road Improvement, M25 J12–15 Widening, M60 J5–8 Widening, M6 Carlisle-Guardsmill Extension, A595 Parton-Lillyhall Improvement, A1 Dishforth-Leeming, A1 Bramham-Wetherby (including Wethe[illegible]ypass), A1 Leeming-Barton.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps are taken by the Highways Agency to evaluate the potential effects of road building schemes on *(a)* SSSIs, *(b)* AONBs and *(c)* national parks before Ministerial approval. [98054]

Mr. Jamieson: All road building schemes undertaken by the Highways Agency are subject to environmental assessment. Potential effects on SSSIs, AONBs and National Parks are considered as part of this assessment process.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list completed road building programmes that have affected designated *(a)* SSSIs, *(b)* AONBs and *(c)* national parks in each year since 1997. [98056]

Mr. Jamieson: The following major trunk road schemes completed in or since 1997 (completion year in brackets) affected:

(a) SSSIs

A34 Newbury bypass (1998);

M5J8–9 Widening (1998);

M1-A1 Lofthouse-Bramham Link Roads (1999);

M66 Denton-Middleton Contract 1 (2000);

A13 Thames Avenue to Wennington (1997);

(b) AONBs

M25 Junctions 8–10 Widening (1998);

A417/A419 Swindon-Gloucester DBFO (1998);

(c) National parks—none.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list road schemes proposed by local authorities in England and Wales in local transport plans that will affect *(a)* sites of special interest, *(b)* areas of outstanding scientific natural beauty, *(c)* national parks and *(d)* internationally designated sites; and in each case whether a preferred route has been announced. [98057]

Mr. Jamieson: The following schemes listed, which have been accepted or provisionally accepted in local transport plans, will have some effect on such areas as indicated by an *(a)*, *(b)*, *(c)* or *(d)* as appropriate. Local authorities will work with the statutory environmental bodies to implement appropriate mitigation. Where a preferred route has been announced this is indicated by "PR". My Department is not responsible for road schemes in Wales.

Oakham Bypass—*(a)* PR

A43 Corby Link Road—*(a)* PR

Brunei Link & Harnham Relief Road—*(a)* PR

Weymouth Relief Road—*(a)* *(b)* PR

East Luton Corridor—*(b)*

A158 Coastal Access, Lincolnshire—*(b)* PR

Carlisle Northern Development Route—*(d)* PR

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list road building programmes by county. [98053]

Mr. Jamieson: A table containing a list of Highways Agency targeted programme of improvements road schemes by county and a list of English local authority major road schemes by local highway authority has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Road Gritting

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the authorities in England who have the direct responsibility for gritting trunk roads; and what the authorities' new responsibilities are for gritting roads. [98556]

Mr. Jamieson: The operation and gritting of trunk roads in England is the responsibility of the Highways Agency.

In England there is no explicit statutory duty on a highway authority to remove ice, but we shall introduce one at a suitable legislative opportunity.

Road Quietening Schemes

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the road quietening schemes that are being examined by his Department for the ASO. [98885]

Mr. Jamieson: The following lengths of A50 are included in the Ten Year Plan for Transport with a view to replacing the existing concrete surface with a quieter material:

Doveridge Bypass

Derby Southern Bypass

Foston, Hatton, Hilton Bypass, and

Blythe Bridge to Uttoxeter.

Rural Road Hierarchy

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the Government will implement a new rural road hierarchy. [98025]

Mr Jamieson: Following the publication of the Rural Road Hierarchy Report in November 2001 we are progressing work to improve safety across our rural road network. This includes the development of a framework to assess what speeds are appropriate together with surveys of what speeds are actually being driven on rural roads. The first results of this work should be available shortly and will feed into other work including a review of the guidance on setting speed limits due to start later this year.

Signage

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether the Circular which will explain the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions 2002 will provide guidance to highway authorities on avoiding sign clutter in the countryside; and when it will be published. [98027]

Mr Jamieson: DfT Circular 02/2003 was published on 31 January. It explains the differences between the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions (TSRGD) 2002 and the TSRGD 1994 that they replace. It does not contain guidance on sign clutter. However the Department will be publishing updated guidance later this year which will remind signing practitioners that signs should be used sparingly whether in the countryside or in towns. The revised Chapter 4 of the Traffic Signs Manual, on the use of warning signs, which we expect to publish in the summer, will provide advice on how to provide effective signing while minimising environmental intrusion. Revised guidance on the use of directional signs to tourist destinations will remind local authorities of the need to minimise the environmental impacts of signs, particularly in rural areas.

Speed Limits

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the highway authorities which have a policy of adopting a 30 mph speed limit as the norm through villages; and what action the Government are taking in respect of highway authorities which have not adopted a policy of 30 mph speed limits as the norm through villages. [98026]

Mr Jamieson: This information is not held centrally. Local highway authorities have powers to set speed limits on their roads according to local needs.

The Department is however developing guidance to local highway authorities on village entry signing to assist with introducing 30mph speed limits in villages — supported by other work that is seeking to simplify the process.

Strategic Rail Authority

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which organisations provided *(a)* legal, *(b)* financial and *(c)* auditing services valued at over £25,000 to the Strategic Rail Authority in 2002. [98339]

Mr. Jamieson: In the calendar year 2002, the following firms provided legal, financial and audit services with a value of over £25,000:

Firm	*Advice*
Cobbetts	Legal
Eversheds	Legal
Field Fisher Waterhouse	Legal
Mills and Reeve	Legal
Rees and Freres	Legal
HMPGLCD	Legal
Hollingsworth Bissell	Legal
Linklaters	Legal
Thomas Edgar Church Adams	Legal
PriceWaterhouseCoopers	Legal
Clifford Chance	Legal
Vizards	Legal
C. Hoare and Co	Legal
Brodies	Legal
KPMG	Legal
Arups	Legal
Gibb	Legal
Booz Allen and Hamilton	Financial
Eversheds	Financial
Lazard Brothers and Co	Financial
KPMG	Financial
Linklaters and Paines	Financial
Marsh UK Ltd.	Financial
Nichols Group	Financial
PriceWaterhouseCoopers	Financial
Operis Group	Financial
PKF	Financial
KPMG	Audit
PriceWaterhouseCoopers	Audit
PKF	Audit
Baker Tilley	Audit
Ernst and Young	Audit

Thames Gateway

Jon Cruddas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to establish a light rail link to Dagenham Dock and Rainham. [98711]

Mr. Jamieson: None. Light rail schemes in London are a matter for the Mayor and Transport for London.

Traffic Calming

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what guidelines and duties there are for local authorities on the imposition of traffic calming measures in mixed residential and industrial areas. [98865]

Mr. Jamieson: There is no specific duty on local highway authorities to impose traffic calming measures. However, they may wish to consider introducing them to meet their duty to have, as far as practicable, safe movement of traffic on roads within their area. Any measures implemented must be in accordance with the "Highways (Road Humps) Regulations 1999" or the "Highways (Traffic Calming) Regulations 1999", including the requirement to consult with representatives of those likely to be affected. The Department has issued guidance on traffic calming including Traffic Advisory Leaflets, and the Road Safety Good Practice Guide and has contributed to guidelines published by professional bodies.

Traffic Light Repairs

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what guidelines and duties there are for local authorities on the prompt repair of traffic lights; [98866]

(2) what *(a)* guidance he gives and *(b)* duties are laid upon local authorities, to repair defective traffic lights within a specified period. [98445]

Mr. Jamieson: Technical Standard TD24, All-Purpose Trunk Roads Inspection and Maintenance of Traffic Signals and Associated Equipment, was produced by the Highways Agency for their roads but also provides guidance to local authorities. It includes reference to non-routine maintenance. Faults causing safety hazards or unacceptable delay to road users should be attended as a matter of urgency with cover available 24 hours per day, seven days a week. Response and repair times will depend on the particular local circumstances and will be subject to contractual arrangements between local authorities and their contractors. TD24 is part of the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges and is available from the Stationary Office.

Local authorities also have a general duty to secure the "expeditious, convenient and safe movement of vehicular and other traffic (including pedestrians)" under section 122 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984.

Transport Schemes (Appraisal Review)

Jon Cruddas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will announce his review of the system for appraising new transport schemes; what the terms of reference are for the review; and when he hopes to complete the review. [98620]

Mr. Jamieson: The system for appraising new transport schemes is updated and revised periodically. At present, we are undertaking revisions to reflect the guidance in the Treasury's revised Green Book, "Appraisal and Evaluation in Central Government", published on 17 January 2003, and expect to issue these early in March 2003. We have undertaken research into assessing regeneration impacts following publication of the 1999 SACTRA (Standing Advisory Committee on Trunk Road Assessment) report, "Transport and the Economy". The results of Phase 1 of this work are published on the Department's website. We expect draft revised guidance on this topic to be issued in mid-2003.

DEFENCE

Aircraft Carrier Orders

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what proportion of the cost of designing and building the two recently ordered aircraft carriers is to be paid to *(a)* BAE Systems and *(b)* Thales; [98313]

(2) how the programme to design and build the two recently ordered aircraft carriers is to be shared between BAE Systems and Thales; and if he will make a statement. [98312]

Mr. Ingram: Our two new Future Aircraft Carriers (CVFs) have not yet been ordered. On 30 January 2003, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence announced the way forward for CVF. Our conclusion was that, to obtain value for money and provide the best capability, an alliance approach would offer the best meansof delivering a programme of this magnitude. We envisage that the alliance will be led by BAE Systems as the preferred Prime Contractor, with responsibility for project and shipbuilding management. Thales UK will assume a major role as the Key Supplier of the whole ship design. We intend the Ministry of Defence to take up a formal role within the Alliance. Negotiations on the alliance arrangements are now underway, and it is therefore not yet possible to state what proportion of the costs will be paid to BAE Systems or Thales. It is not intended to place the Prime Contract for the Demonstration and Manufacture phase of the CVF programme, during which the ships will actually be built, until the spring of 2004.

Biochemical Protection Suits

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of *(a)* Royal Navy and *(b)* Royal Marines personnel scheduled for deployment to the Gulf (i) have been and (ii) will be issued with CBW protection suits. [98412]

Mr. Ingram: All Royal Navy and Royal Marine personnel deployed to the Gulf will have access to sufficient CBW suits to meet our contingency plans.

Coastal Security

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the ability of the Royal Navy to *(a)* monitor and *(b)* prevent the landing of (i) terrorists and (ii) illegal immigrants from small boats on UK beaches. [98239]

Mr. Ingram: The Home Office is responsible for United Kingdom counter-terrorism policy, and the lead for domestic security lies with the civil authorities. Royal Navy ships conduct many routine operations and exercises around the United Kingdom throughout the year, and any of these ships could be diverted to meet a requirement at the specific request of the civil authorities. In addition, the Fleet Ready Escort, a Frigate or Destroyer continuously available at a high state of readiness, is at short notice to respond to any incident in United Kingdom waters.

Correspondence

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answer of 7 November, *Official Report*, column 477W, when he will write to the hon. Member for Reading, East. [87217]

Dr. Moonie: I replied to my hon. Friend today.

Defence Export Services Organisation

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the purpose is of the Defence Export Services organisation; what its net cost was in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [95794]

Mr. Ingram: The purpose of the Defence Export Services Organisation (DESO) is to support legitimate defence exports, co-ordinating Government assistance to United Kingdom defence exporters and overseas customers interested in acquiring United Kingdom defence products.

The net operating costs of DESO and related support functions over the last five financial years are as follows:

Financial Year	*£ million*
1997–98	14.380
1998–99	16.010
1999–2000	13.735
2000–01	12.360
2001–02	11.007

These costs are more than offset by financial benefits to the Defence budget arising from DESO's activities including economies of scale generated by exports for the Ministry of Defence's own procurement.

Defence Finance

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the scope for savings in the defence procurement budget as a consequence of increased European collaboration on defence procurement; and if he will make a statement. [96643]

Mr. Ingram: Collaboration in defence programmes can bring economic benefits by sharing non-recurring costs and through economies of scale in production and, further through the life cycle, by sharing in service support and upgrade costs. Collaboration is considered in all equipment programmes when developing the procurement strategies to best meet the needs of our Armed Forces, but it is not an easy option. Harmonising requirements, aligning funding and approvals processes and meeting workshare expectations amongst anything from two partners upwards is rarely straightforward. Thus tune, cost and performance risks can be magnified in collaborative programmes. Overall, however, the benefits more than outweigh the potential disadvantages.

Defence Fire Service

Mr. Maples: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence further to his answer of 10 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 506, on the Defence Fire Service, who made the decision locally not to respond to requests for assistance outside the perimeter; whether this decision was made *(a)* with the knowledge of and *(b)* on the instructions of a Government Minister; when the instruction was recognised as unnecessary; and whether the order was revoked (i) on the instructions of and (ii) with the knowledge of a Government Minister. [98938]

Mr. Ingram: The decision that the fire appliances based at Kineton would not respond to requests for assistance outside the perimeter on days on which local fire brigades were taking industrial action was made by the Fire Station Commander, on the advice of the Commandant of the Depot, and an order to this effect was issued on 1 November 2002. An investigation into the circumstances at Kineton was carried out in early February and as a result the order was revoked on the authority of the Defence Fire Service (Army).

Neither the decision to issue the original order nor its revocation was made on the instructions of, or with the knowledge of, a Government Minister.

Defence Procurement

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his estimate is of *(a)* cost overruns and *(b)* delivery delays in each UK military procurement project valued at £100 million and over in each year from 1990–91 to 2002–03; and if he will make a statement. [96819]

Mr Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the Major Projects Reports covering the years in question. These provide cost and delivery information on the Ministry of Defence's major equipment projects. Copies are available in the Library of the House.Information on the remaining projects from the years in question estimated to cost £100 million and over is not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost. Exemption 9 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information applies.

Eurofighter

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answer on 27 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 638W, on the Eurofighter, if he will make a statement on the procedure for the booking and use of designated areas for testing Eurofighter jets; and if he will publish the rules covering supersonic flights. [96760]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Fleet Readiness

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions since May 1997 the Royal Navy has not had at least one aircraft carrier immediately available for active service. [98229]

Mr. Ingram: There has not been an occasion since May 1997 when the Royal Navy has not had at least one aircraft carrier available for active service.

Friendly Fire

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent measures the Royal Marines have adopted to avoid friendly fire incidents by *(a)* UK and *(b)* allied forces. [98238]

Mr. Ingram: As stated in the answer given on 18 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 807W, to the hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. Keetch), tactics, techniques and procedures, situational awareness and target identification complement each other and form a triad of measures designed to achieve Combat Identification and minimise the risk of fratricide. In relation to possible operations in the Gulf, we are working closely with allies to establish robust arrangements on Combat Identification that maximise interoperability, and we will acquire additional equipment in time for any potential conflict to enable our forces, including the Royal Marines, to operate effectively alongside coalition forces.

Heathrow (Military Deployment)

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether armed forces personnel deployed to secure London Heathrow airport have been deployed with suits and respirators in preparation for a possible chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear attack. [98652]

Mr. Ingram: The deployment of the armed forces and their equipment is determined by a number of factors including the task to be undertaken, the environment in which they are to operate and the threat that they face. In the case of the recent operation at Heathrow airport, the police and military personnel were not deployed with Chemical, Biological, Radiological or Nuclear equipment.

Helicopters

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many helicopters there are in the *(a)* Navy, *(b)* Army and *(c)* Air Force, broken down by type. [98292]

Mr. Ingram: The number of helicopters in the Navy, Army and Air Force, broken down by type, as at 12 February 2003, are provided in the following table.

Helicopter	*Actual operating fleet*	*Sustainment fleet*[1]	*Disposal*[2]	*Comments*
Navy				
Merlin Mk 1	28	15	0	—
Sea King AEW Mk 2/7	9	4	0	—
Sea King HU Mk 5	11	5	0	—
Sea King ASW Mk 6	11	2	3	—
Lynx HAS Mk 3	31	4	0	—
Lynx HAS Mk 8	26	10	0	—
Sea King Mk 4/MK 6c	32	9	0	—
Army				
Lynx	[3]100	20	0	JHC asset
Gazelle	[3]118	11	0	JHC asset
Bell 212	3	0	0	JHC asset
A 109	3	1	0	JHC asset
Apache AH Mk 1	12	35	0	JHC asset
Air Force				
Sea King Mk 318	18	1	0	—
Sea King Mk 3a	5	1	0	JHC asset
Merlin Mk *3*	13	9	0	JHC asset
Wessex HC 2[4]	0	0	14	—
Puma	35	[5]13	0	JHC asset
Chinook Mk*3*	0	8	0	JHC asset
Chinook Mk 2/2a	31	9	0	JHC asset

Notes:

[1] The sustainment fleet includes helicopters undergoing scheduled base maintenance, those awaiting repair to accident damage, those that are in development and those held in reserve.

[2] Helicopters awaiting disposal

[3] Includes nine aircrat that are the School of Army Aviation assets.

[4] Wessex Helicopters are no longer operationally in service.

[5] Includes six aircraft recently purchased from Republic of South Africa to ensure enduring sustainability.

Hunting with Dogs

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what reports he has received of proposals for hunting with dogs on *(a)* Ministry of Defence land and *(b)* at the Colchester Garrison; and if he will take action to prevent such activity; [98399]

(2) what his policy is towards allowing Ministry of Defence land to be used for hunting with dogs; and if he will make a statement. [98400]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence has issued 27 licences for hunting with dogs on the Defence Estate for the 2002–03 season, including one for the Colchester area. In the absence of a statutory ban, my Department has no legal grounds on which to stop this activity, which has been undertaken under licensed conditions for many years on its estate. However, mindful of all the issues involved, foxhunting is restricted to those hunts that have traditionally held licences or enjoyed such rights on the Defence Estate.

The current foxhunting season, (which began on 1 September 2002 and which ends on 30 April 2003), is being conducted under strict terms and conditions, agreed with the Master of Foxhounds Association.

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the last time hunting with dogs was permitted on *(a)* Ministry of Defence land and *(b)* at the Colchester Garrison; and on how many occasions since May 1997 such activity has taken place. [98401]

Dr. Moonie: The information regarding the number of times hunting with dogs has taken place on Ministry of Defence land is not held centrally. Hunting has taken place in the Colchester Garrison area on eight days since May 1997, the last occasion being 14 December 2000.

Incremental Acquisition

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the implications of the practice of incremental acquisition for *(a)* the cost of ownership of warships and other major vessels, with particular reference to the depreciation or write-off rate applied to equipment replaced by enhanced items, *(b)* adjustments to the base cost for the purpose of calculating annual carrying charges and *(c)* the calculation of depreciation bases generally. [98240]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

International Military Services

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what claims for payment against the Government of Iraq in respect of contracts with International Military Services are outstanding. [99075]

Mr. Ingram: There are no claims for payment outstanding against the Government of Iraq in respect of contracts with International Military Services.

Land Mines (Gulf)

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the *(a)* possession and *(b)* possible use of landmines by Allied forces in the Gulf. [93939]

Mr. Ingram: The United Kingdom as a State Party to the Ottawa Convention does not possess operational anti-personnel landmines and will not use them. Allies' intentions are a matter for them. United Kingdom Forces will not provide any assistance for the use of anti-personnel landmines.

Land-Attack Cruise Missiles

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the value of equipping future Type 45 destroyers with land-attack cruise missiles. [98236]

Mr. Ingram: As was made clear in the SDR New Chapter in July 2002, in post-Cold War conventional military operations there has been an increased emphasis on the need for precision in the use of force, to minimise unintended casualties and accidental damage.

The ability to conduct covert stand-off reconnaissance and surveillance, the accurate pin-pointing of targets, the updating and communication of targeting information in near real time and the ability to strike hard with a high degree of precision, will all be important. Land attack cruise missiles can play a key role in such a scenario. This capability is presently provided by submarine-launched Tomahawk missiles.

The principal role of the Type 45 Destroyers will be Anti-Air Warfare. However, they are being designed and built with significant space and weight margins to enable incremental acquisition, should an emerging requirement necessitate a different equipment fit. Our requirements are being kept under review and, under such circumstances, the design could be modified to incorporate improved land attack capabilities, including a land attack cruise missile system.

Landmines Act

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to review Section 5 of the Landmines Act 1998. [98818]

Mr. Ingram: None.

Military Secondments

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many United Kingdom military personnel, broken down by rank and service, are currently *(a)* seconded to, *(b)* attached to, *(c)* under the operational command of and *(d)* on personnel exchanges with units or ships of the United States armed forces that (i) are deployed in South West Asia, the Gulf region or the Middle East, (ii) are on route to that region and (iii) have been ordered or alerted to deploy to that region. [98718]

Mr. Ingram: As at 14 February 2003, 31 United Kingdom military personnel serving as British Exchange Officers with United States units were either deployed or warned to deploy to South West Asia, the Gulf Region and the Middle East.

I am withholding information on the service and rank of these individuals under Exemption 1 (defence, security and international relations) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what arrangements are in place for United Kingdom military personnel who are *(a)* seconded to, *(b)* attached to, *(c)* under the operational command of and *(d)* on personnel exchanges to armed forces in countries which become party to an armed conflict that the United Kingdom is not a party to. [98719]

Mr. Ingram: Decisions on the arrangements for such United Kingdom military personnel would be made in the light of the circumstances pertaining at the time.

MRAV Programme

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on delays to the MRAV programme; and for what reasons he plans to procure fewer vehicles than was originally envisaged. [97189]

Mr. Ingram: The tri-national MRAV programme remains within its original time and cost approvals. However, there have been delays to the delivery of the first prototype vehicle and the Integrated Logistics Support programme. All partners are only contractually committed to the end of the development phase of the MRAV programme. No formal decisions on the number of MRAV vehicles to be procured have yet been made. Our plans for all acquisition programmes are continually under review and MRAV is no exception.

Nancekuke

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answer of 10 February 2003, *Official Report*, columns 513–14, on RAF Portreath, what studies excluding environmental surveys have been undertaken by *(a)* the Government or *(b)* agencies on behalf of the Government with respect to (i) past and (ii) current activities at Nancekuke in Cornwall in the last 30 years. [98384]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Libraryof the House.

Naval Deployment

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportions of *(a)* Royal Navy and *(b)* Royal Marines (i) personnel and (ii) equipment are scheduled for (A) despatch to the Gulf, (B) other duties and (C) maintenance, repair and refit. [98247]

Mr. Ingram: As at 18 February 2003, some 27 per cent. of Royal Navy surface ships and submarines, 15 per cent. of Royal Navy and 45 per cent. of Royal Marine trained personnel were deployed, or en-route, to the Gulf region. This compares with around 41 per cent. of Royal Navy surface ships and submarines, 14 per cent. of Royal Navy and 6 per cent. of Royal Marine trained personnel deployed on other tasks, including Operation Fresco. Some 32 per cent. of surface ships and submarines are currently in maintenance, repair or refit.

No further major Royal Navy or Royal Marine deployments are currently scheduled for the Gulf.

Naval Refits

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made in establishing estimated through-life costs of warships and other RN and RFA vessels; whether the estimates will be published in the Annual Major Projects Report; and when key stages on the route to publication will be reached. [98242]

Mr. Ingram: Whole life cost estimates are being developed for all major Royal Navy and Royal Fleet Auxiliary vessels as part of the Ministry of Defence's Through Life Management Planning process. The first phase of this work is due to complete in March 2003. A note on progress in developing whole life cost information was contained in Major Projects Report 2002, copies of which are available in the Library of the House. It is planned that Major Projects Report 2003 will include whole life cost data on the 20 projects for which the main investment decision has been taken. This will include the Astute submarine, the Type 45 Destroyer and the Landing Ship Dock (Auxiliary). The National Audit Office expect to publish their report at the end of the year.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the HMS Glasgow refit will be complete; how much it will cost; whether it is on budget; what the target date is for completion; when the ship will be ready for service; and if he will make a statement. [98848]

Mr. Ingram: HMS Glasgow has not undergone a refit. The ship was in extended readiness and regeneration work has been carried out in preparation for her re-joining the Fleet, to ease the short-term programming gap created by HMS Nottingham's unavailability. This package of work cost approximately £2.5 million, and was completed in December 2002 and within budget. On the return of ship's personnel from Operation Fresco, HMS Glasgow will undergo Sea Trials and training requirements before returning to the Fleet.

This regeneration work will enable HMS Glasgow to be available for operations until HMS Nottingham returns to service in November 2004, after which, on current plans, she will be in Extended Readiness.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the cost is of the repairs being carried out on the HMS St. Albans; when it will be ready for service; and if he will make a statement. [98849]

Mr. Ingram: The final cost of the incident involving HMS St. Albans, including her repair, is not yet known, but it is estimated to be less than £5 million. The repair work has been completed and the ship commenced harbour training on 11 February 2003. Although the crew from St. Albans have been assisting in Operation FRESCO, the ship is currently able to undertake some basic sea safety training, prior to the start of Operational Sea Training, scheduled for the end of March. This training is planned to complete in the summer and the vessel will then be available for operational tasking.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the *(a)* HMS Monmouth and *(b)* HMS Campbeltown refit will be complete; how much it will cost; whether it is on budget; what the target date is for completion; when the ship will be ready for service; and if he will make a statement. [98341]

Mr. Ingram: HMS Monmouth's refit at Rosyth is planned for completion in June 2003 and following associated sea trials she is expected to be ready for operational deployment later that month. The final refit costs will be determined once all work is completed, but are expected to remain within budget and be in the region of £19 million.

HMS Campbeltown's refit at Devonport is planned for completion in March 2003 and following associated sea trials she is expected to be ready for operational deployment in April 2003. Like HMS Monmouth, her final refit costs will be agreed once all work is completed, but are expected to remain within budget and be in the region of £10 million.

Both refits involve necessary equipment refurbishment and enhancements to their operational and support systems.

Naval Rules of Engagement

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to change the rules of engagement as they apply to Royal Navy warships facing suicide attack by small craft. [98234]

Mr. Ingram: Rules of engagement are classified as their disclosure could give an enemy information about the permissions and restrictions imposed on our forces. I am therefore withholding details in accordance with Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Naval Vessels (Handover)

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what will be the *(a)* revenue received from Romania for and *(b)* cost of modernising and preparing for handover (i) HMS Coventry and (ii) HMS London. [95887]

Mr. Ingram: The value to the United Kingdom of the first phase of the agreement is £116 million and includes the cost of modernisation and preparation of the ships for handover. I am withholding the details of the information requested in accordance with Exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information as it is commercial in confidence.

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the main items to be *(a)* removed, *(b)* replaced and *(c)* upgraded in preparing (i) HMS Coventry and (ii) HMS London for handover to Romania. [95888]

Mr. Ingram: The Seawolf missile system, the towed array sonar and a number of smaller sensitive equipments will be removed from ex-HM Ships Coventry and London prior to handover to Romania. A medium range gun will be fitted together with an associated fire control system. Refurbished gas turbine units will be refitted into the ships and, in addition, the Command and Control System will be modified to take account of the weapons fit. No other major systems will be upgraded during the preparation phase.

Old Military Equipment

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his Department's policy is on recycling old military equipment. [98299]

Mr. Ingram: Surplus and obsolete items are sold via the MOD's Disposal Services Agency (DSA) on a Governments-Government basis, through either competitive tender or a marketing partnership with Industry to achieve the maximum return for the taxpayer. The DSA has sole delegated authority to sell military equipment declared as surplus by the Armed Forces. Surplus equipment is sold either for re-utilisation for its original (military) purpose, for a secondary (commercial) purpose or for scrap.

Procurement

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) when the orders for the second batch of Astute class submarines will be placed; and for how many boats; [98245]

(2) whether the schedule for ordering later batches of Astute class submarines has been affected by the delayed building of the first batch. [98244]

Mr. Ingram: An agreed programme for the first buy of Astute is a pre-requisite of any future orders. On current plans, a decision on the timing and detail of future submarine orders is expected later this year.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the Defence Procurement Agency expects to award a contract for the 5.56 mm light machine guns; how much these guns will weigh; how many units will be produced; when the guns will come into full service; what the length is of the contract; and if he will make a statement. [98350]

Mr. Ingram: The Light Machine Gun requirement is for a weapon system with ancillaries that weighs less than 20 kg when loaded with a belt of 200 rounds. A contract for around 2,500 weapons is expected to be placed before the summer to achieve an approved in service date of 2004. The contract will take up to three years to complete.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to award a contract for the Light Forces Anti-Tank Guided Weapon System; how many units will be produced; what part of the Army will use it; when it will come into service; what the length is of the contract; and if he will make a statement. [98351]

Mr. Ingram: The Light Forces Anti-Tank Guided Weapon System contract, for in excess of 350 systems, was placed on 7 February 2003 and is expected to be completed in 2010.

The system is expected to enter service with the Joint Rapid Reaction Forces and the Mechanised Infantry in 2006.

Research and Development

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his estimate is of his Department's total expenditure on military research and development in each year from 1990–91 to 2003–04 (planned); and if he will make a statement. [96644]

Mr. Ingram: Research and Development figures for the years up to and including 2000–01 are published by the Defence Analytical Services Agency (DASA) in "UK Defence Statistics" and before 1992 were reported in "Volume 2 of the Statement on the Defence Estimates" (both of these are available in the Library of the House). All figures are net of receipts and include recoverable VAT, the Technology Demonstrator Programme (TDP) and certain other minor research items.

On this basis the figures covering expenditure by the Ministry of Defence on Research and Development for 1990–91 to 2000–01, as published in UK Defence Statistics, are given as follows:

Current prices in £ million

Year	*Research expenditure*	*Development expenditure*
1990–91	412	1,926
1991–92	466	2,091
1992–93	513	1,568
1993–94	654	1,625
1994–95	665	1,366
1995–96	676	1,394
1996–97	705	1,440
1997–98	656	1,655
1998–99	620	1,476
1999–2000	584	1,761
2000–01	558	1,821

The Ministry of Defence does not have a specific research and development budget. There is a research budget covering non-nuclear research known as the Research Building Block. Separately, the MOD has a much larger budget for the acquisition of equipment within which some expenditure may be regarded as equipment development and some as equipment production. The development element of the acquisition expenditure is not used as a control total. The amount that is statistically counted as development (rather than production) in any one year is largely a consequence of the stage of the procurement cycle at which major equipment projects happen to be in the year in question. Expenditure on 'development' for 2001–02 to 2003–04 is therefore not yet separately identifiable.

Research figures for the years 2001-02 to 2003–04 have been compiled according to the principles of Resource Accounting and Budgeting (RAB). The figures as follows are for the Research Building Block expenditure and forecasts. All the above figures for these three years exclude recoverable VAT, the Technology Demonstrator Programme (TDP) and other minor research items.

MOD Research Expenditure covering years 2001–02 to 2003–04 (inclusive):

£ million

Year	*Research expenditure*
2001–02	414 (actual)
2002–03	418 (forecast)
2003–04	421 (provisional)

Royal Naval Vessels

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the Royal naval vessels *(a)* scrapped, *(b)* sold, together with revenue received and *(c)* downgraded to reserve status in each of the past five years. [92961]

Mr. Ingram: The major former Royal Naval vessels (named capital ships) sold by the Ministry of Defence's Disposal Services Agency (DSA) in the last five years are listed as follows:

Year	*Vessels sold as scrap*
2000–01	HMS Birmingham, HMS Beaver, RFA Olwen, RFA Olna
2001–02	HMS Herald
	Vessels sold (or otherwise transferred) on a Government-to-Government basis or commercially
1998–99	HMS Soberton, HMS Egeria, HMY Britannia
1999–2000	HMS Kellington
2000–01	HMS Wilton, HMS Bicester, HMS Orkney
2001–02	HMS Bulldog, HMS Berkeley, HMS Orwell
2002–03	HMS Beagle, HMS London, HMS Coventry, HMS Shetland, HMS Alderney, HMS Anglesey, HMS Lindisfarne, HMS Guernsey

The net revenue to the MOD received from these sales is approximately £26.5 million.

As well as these larger ships, numerous minor vessels have been sold commercially by the DSA or via the DSA's marketing agreements, such as tugs and marine support craft.

Additionally, Canada has acquired the four ex-RN Upholder class submarines. The acquisition takes the form of an eight-year lease with an option for outright purchase. The first of the submarines was handed over to Canada on 6 October 2000 with the second submarine being handed over on 4 October 2001. The third submarine is to be handed over to Canada on 21 February 2003, with the fourth boat following later in 2003. Canada has exercised its option to purchase outright the first of the submarines, ex-HMS Unseen. The value of the lease to buy arrangement with Canada (undertaken by the MOD's Upholder Programme), which includes the submarines, training and initial spares, is some 610 million Canadian dollars.

No Royal Naval vessels were put in reserve in any of the last five years.

Sea Harriers

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence to what extent Naval FA2 Sea Harriers are capable of operating in an air defence role in the climatic conditions normally found in the Gulf. [98246]

Mr. Ingram: FA2 Sea Harriers of Joint Force Harrier are able to operate in the climatic conditions usually found in the Gulf. However, at hotter times of the year (between April and September) and dependent on the time of day of the operation, there are restrictions relating to the weight of ordnance the aircraft can bring back on vertical landing.

Strategic Tanker Aircraft

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to award a contract for the Future Strategic Tanker Aircraft programme; and what delays there have been to the originally forecast in-service date. [97187]

Mr. Ingram: Final bids for this prospective PFI project are expected from two consortia on 30 April 2003. We will be doing all that we can to down select a preferred bidder by the end of this year and aim to sign a contract by the end of 2004, although the precise timing will depend on a range of factors including a period of bankers' due diligence. We have delayed the planned introduction of the PFI service by one year from 2007 to 2008, to allow time for the PFI negotiations to be completed.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the MOD is expected to award a contract for the RAF's Future Strategic Tanker Aircraft; how many aircraft will be commissioned; how they will be deployed; what the projected costs are; when the aircraft will come into service; what the length of the contract is; and if he will make a statement. [97493]

Mr. Ingram: Final bids for this prospective 27-year PFI contract are expected from two consortia on 30 April 2003. We will be doing all that we can to down select a preferred bidder by the end of this year and aim to sign a contract by the end of 2004, although the precise timing will depend on a range of factors including a period of bankers due diligence. The number of aircraft needed to meet our service-based requirement varies between the commercial solutions. However, a total fleet size of up to 20 aircraft is anticipated. Operational deployments will be undertaken under the Command and Control of the Royal Air Force. The project has an estimated through life value of around £13 billion and is scheduled to enter service in 2008.

Submarine Refits

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the S and T class submarines which *(a)* have completed, *(b)* are undergoing and *(c)* will in future undergo major upgrades together with the (i) completion and (ii) due completion dates in each case. [98241]

Mr. Ingram: Upgrades to S and T class submarines are generally undertaken during docking periods of maintenance lasting six months or during major refit and refuel periods lasting three years. These are known as Upkeep Periods. All S and T Class submarines will undergo a number of Upkeep Periods throughout their lives, and those whose last Upkeep Period included an upgrade, and which are not currently undergoing an Upkeep Period are:

Submarine	*Completion date*[1]
HMS Splendid	Spring 1998
HMS Superb	Summer 1998
HMS Tireless	Summer 1999
HMS Triumph	Winter 1999
HMS Trafalgar	Summer 2000
HMS Turbulent	Spring 2002
HMS Sovereign	Autumn 2002
HMS Torbay	Winter 2002

[1] Dates shown are when the submarine rejoined the fleet.

Submarines currently undergoing an Upkeep Period and upgrade are HMS Sceptre and HMS Spartan, both of which are due to rejoin the fleet by summer 2003 and HMS Trenchant, which is due to rejoin the fleet by autumn 2003.

The next planned refit and upgrade is that of HMS Talent which is expected to commence in spring 2003 and take approximately three years to complete including post refit trials and training. Details of Upkeep Periods beyond 2003 are classified, and I am withholding this information in accordance with Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, which relates to defence, security and international relations.

Swiftsure Class Submarines

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which Swiftsure class submarines are non-operational; and for what reasons. [98248]

Mr. Ingram: Three Swiftsure Class submarines are currently non-operational. HMS Sceptre and HMS Spartan are both in the final stages of refit. They are shortly planned to undergo sea trials before formally joining the fleet later this summer. HMS Superb is currently undergoing a period of inspection before starting a planned maintenance period. She is expected to rejoin the fleet in the first half of 2004.

Technology Readiness Assessments

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish the Technology Readiness Assessment of each of the candidate unmanned air vehicles for Watchkeeper; with which allied armed forces each of the candidate UAVs for Watchkeeper will be interoperable; which weapons are cleared for use from each of the candidate UAVs for Watchkeeper; how many of these have been used in combat; and if he will list the countries of origin of the candidate UAVs for Watchkeeper. [97192]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence's written statement to the House on 7 February 2003, *Official Report*, columns 21–22WS.

The Technology Readiness Assessment and the ability of the competitors to achieve a mature integration of the technology will feature as discriminators in choosing the final solutions. I am therefore withholding this information in accordance with Exemption 13 on the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, which relates to third party's commercial confidences.

There are many levels of potential UAV interoperability that require different degrees of compatibility of air vehicle, ground segment equipment and data links. To optimise UAV interoperability, the United Kingdom is contributing to the development, in association with our NATO allies, of standard UAV interfaces.

The United Kingdom has not cleared any weapons for use with the candidate UAVs for Watchkeeper. Current requirements for Watchkeeper do not call for the solutions to be able to carry weapons. The Ministry of Defence is not aware of any weapons being cleared, by any other nation, for use with those UAVs now being considered by the Watchkeeper programme. Neither are we aware of them having been used in combat.

Component parts of the candidate UAVs for Watchkeeper, including the ground segment, the on-board sensors and the air vehicles, have their design origins in a number of countries. The current candidate air vehicles are derived from designs with origins either in the US or Israel.

Trimaran Hulls

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent assessment his Department has made of the suitability of trimaran hulls for future types of warship. [98237]

Mr. Ingram: A number of studies have been undertaken in recent years to examine the suitability of the trimaran hull form to meet future naval capability requirements. These studies have indicated significant potential advantages over more conventional hull forms for many naval roles. This led to the design and build of the 97 metre demonstrator RV Triton, which has recently completed an extensive and very successful trials programme. The data gathered will be shared with industry in support of possible trimaran solutions for future defence requirements.

Watchkeeper Competition

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to make an announcement on the winner of the Watchkeeper competition; and for what reasons there has been a delay in the down select decision. [97191]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence's written statement on 7 February 2003, *Official Report*, columns 21–22WS. We expect to select a single successful contractor for the demonstration and manufacture phase by mid-2004. Watchkeeper is a complex programme, involving the integration of aerial vehicles with a ground control segment and wider connectivity to future communication systems such as Bowman. Therefore it was important to ensure that those companies selected for the remainder of the assessment phase can deliver a solution that will meet our operational requirements, at price we can afford and within the required timescales. After initial assessment of the bids, we sought clarification on a range of issues from each of the four bidders in December 2002. The decision and subsequent announcement was then made as quickly as possible following receipt of each bidder's response to these additional points of clarification.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers, who have been refused asylum status, have been removed from the country in *(a)* the last year for which figures are available and *(b)* the previous five years. [97638]

Beverley Hughes: Data on those people who have been removed after seeking asylum at some stage are given in the table.

Removal of asylum seekers[1]

	Principal applicants	*Dependants*[2]
1997	7,165	N/a
1998	6,990	N/a
1999	7,665	N/a
2000	8,980	N/a
2001	9,285	[2]1,495
January to September 2002[3]	7,780	1,825

[1] Includes persons departing "voluntarily" after enforcement action has been initiated against them and persons leaving under the assisted voluntary return programmes run by the IOM.

[2] Data for dependants removed only shows those removed from April 2001 onwards. Data on dependants was not collected prior to this date.

[3] Provisional data subject to change.

Note:

Figures are rounded the nearest five.

Information on the number asylum seekers removed in the period October to December 2002 is due to be published on 28 February 2003 on the Home Office website: www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/whatsnew1.html.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans his Department has to house asylum seekers in Pyrford Court, Pyrford Common Road, Woking, Surrey. [97679]

Beverley Hughes: Pyrford Court, Pyrford Common Road, Woking Surrey has not to date been considered by the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) for emergency accommodation, dispersal accommodation or as an induction centre.

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people seeking asylum are registered as living at the Hinton Hotel, Fareham; and if the hotel provides accommodation to asylum seekers by arrangement with the National Asylum Support Service. [97680]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 13 February 2003]*: The voluntary sector use the Hinton Hotel as emergency accommodation to house asylum seekers. However, Fareham is not a cluster area for the dispersal of asylum seekers.

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the Government plans to renegotiate the UK's treaty obligations with regard to asylum seekers. [98769]

Beverley Hughes: Our obligations to asylum seekers are governed by the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol and the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). We have no plans to withdraw from either convention unilaterally or to renegotiate our obligations.

However, we will not be afraid to review relevant international obligations if current measures to tackle asylum are not effective.

Mental Illness (Prisoners)

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to reduce the number of people with mental illness in prison. [98767]

Hilary Benn: We are tackling excessive delays in arranging transfer to hospital for the most seriously ill. We are also working to improve the mental health services available to the majority of prisoners who are not so ill that they require hospital care.

Freight Search Technology

14. **Mr. Gareth Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on progress made in the introduction of UK-provided freight search technology in ports in *(a)* Northern France and *(b)* Belgium. [98770]

Beverley Hughes: We have already deployed detection equipment at both Calais and Coquelles. There is now the capability to screen 100 per cent. of freight vehicles embarking from Calais. We will shortly be placing equipment at those key continental ports in France and Belgium, such as Dunkirk, Cherbourg, Ostend and Zeebrugge, vulnerable to the displacement of clandestine entry following the tightening of security at Calais.

Burglary (Sentencing)

15. **Angela Watkinson** : To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the deterrent effect of custodial sentences for household burglary. [98772]

Hilary Benn: Domestic burglary is a serious offence, as has recently been made clear by the Government and the courts. As a rule, it should attract a custodial sentence unless it is a first time offence and there are clear mitigating circumstances. Sentences act as a deterrent in a number of ways, including restricting opportunities to re-offend and by tackling the causes of an individual's offending behaviour.

Police Officers (Paperwork)

16. **Peter Bradley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to reduce the paperwork of police officers. [98773]

Mr. Denham: We have set up a steering group, co-chaired by the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) and the Home Office, to take forward the recommendations of Sir David O'Dowd's Bureaucracy Taskforce, whose report was published last September. Amongst the achievements so far, the necessary provisions to introduce street bail are in the criminal justice bill; the Metropolitan Police Service has made 306 forms obsolete and we hope that the Custody and Case Preparation applications will be rolled out to all forces by April 2006.

Policing (North Yorkshire)

17. **Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on policing in North Yorkshire. [98774]

Mr. Denham: North Yorkshire Police had 1,417 officers on 31 March 2002, a record number. The force will receive over £70 million in general grant for 2003–04 and this will be supplemented by funding for a range of specific initiatives, including over £2 million from the Rural Policing Fund.

Police Forensic Services

18. **Dr. Cable:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the future of police forensic services. [98775]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Forensic science is an increasingly valuable tool in the fight against crime and its successful exploitation is key to the delivery of police reform. The use of DNA, in particular, has revolutionised crime investigation and also provides an invaluable source of intelligence.

As announced by my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham) on 23 July 2002 the principal provider of forensic science services to the police, the Forensic Science Service, is currently the subject to an independent review which is looking at the delivery, performance and responsiveness of the Service and the ways in which we can maximise its contribution to the work of the police and through them to the wider criminal justice system.

Street Crime

19. **Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on recent measures to combat street crime. [98777]

Mr. Denham: The Street Crime Initiative was launched in April 2002 in the 10 police force areas with the highest rates of recorded robbery during 2001–02. Its key aims are to increase the detection rate for street crime cases, increase the proportion of offenders charged and brought to justice, and speed up the process between arrest and sentence.

This practical and partnership driven approach from the Government, police and other agencies had, by the end of September 2002, reduced the overall number of street crime offences by 16 per cent since its inception. At the end of last September: robbery, the more violent street crime offence, was down 25 per cent compared to the month immediately preceding the start of the initiative.

Barry Probation Office

21. **Mr. John Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received about the proposed closure of Barry probation office; and if he will make a statement. [98778]

Hilary Benn: To date I have had no representations specific to the Barry Probation Office, though there have been local stakeholder discussions and I have received representations more generally on the property strategy of the South Wales Probation Board.

The decision to close the main probation office in Barry, and relocate staff to Cardiff, was made by the local employer, the South Wales Probation Board. This decision was made in the wider context of improving effectiveness in dealing with offenders. The Board's strategy is to release resources to redirect into staff, particularly new staff to deliver successful Drug Treatment and Testing Orders (DTTOs) and to introduce the more effective "enhanced community punishment".

Better targeting of public funds is an important aspect of improving public protection and reducing re-offending. The decision to double the planned number of DTTOs over the next two years underpins the success of their approach.

Council Tax Precept (Police Authorities)

22. **Mr. Heath:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average increase in council tax precept for police authorities in England and Wales for 2003–04 is, expressed as a percentage of 2002–03 levels. [98779]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: This information is not yet available. Police Authorities have until 1 March to set their budgets and precept levels for 2003/04 and until 8 March to report this to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

I shall write to the hon. Member when the information is available.

Teenage Offenders

23. **Dr. Ladyman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of offenders convicted in 2002 between the ages of 16 and 18 left school with no qualifications. [98780]

Hilary Benn: The information is not available in this precise form, but the Youth Justice Board's last general education audit, published in November 2001, showed that of juveniles who went into custody at least 71 per cent. had left school without any significant literacy or numeracy qualifications.

2 Marsham Street

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether a building research establishment environmental assessment method document has been prepared for the redevelopment of 2 Marsham Street. [96413]

Beverley Hughes: The Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method (BREEAM) is being applied to the redevelopment of 2 Marsham Street. The contract requires progress to be regularly reported. The most recent report on progress of the project using BREEAM (98) criteria estimating project performance indicates that an excellent rating is likely to be achieved. The BREEAM certificate will be issued after building completion when the achieved rating will be confirmed.

Ashfield Young Offenders Institution

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make a statement on the recent report on Ashfield Young Offenders' Institution; [97036]

(2) what sanctions he has imposed on Recruit as a result of the Ashfield Report; and what plans he has to encourage them to reform their recruitment policies; [97039]

(3) what discussions he has had with Recruit regarding *(a)* their record at Ashfield and *(b)* other prison contracts they are responsible for. [97037]

Hilary Benn: The operating contractor of Ashfield young offender institution is Premier Prison Services which also operates Doncaster prison and young offender institution, Dovegate and Lowdham Grange prisons. I have not had discussions with Premier about any of these prisons, but I visited Ashfield on 29 August 2002 because of the concern that had been expressed about its performance. I am also regularly informed by the Prison Service about significant developments there and elsewhere in the Service.

No sanctions have been imposed on Premier directly as a result of the report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons. However the Prison Service has made deductions from the fee payable to Premier totalling £350,305 during the period November 2001 to October 2002 for failures to deliver acceptable levels of performance.

Premier has recently introduced a new employment package for existing staff and new recruits in response to Prison Service concerns. The initial signs are encouraging in that the rate of staff resignations is falling.

The Director General of the Prison Service made the following statement on 3 February in response to the report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons on Ashfield young offender institution also published on 3 February:

> Ashfield has been struggling for some considerable time to provide an environment for young people which is safe and constructive. Premier's failures were so significant that in May 2002, some time before the Inspectorate's visit, I considered closing it and would have done so were it not for the population pressures we were facing. Instead, I took the unprecedented step of imposing a public sector governor and he made significant improvements. As Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons (HMCIP) report acknowledges, a new, more constructive and safer regime, some weeks in the design stage, was successfully launched shortly after the HMCIP visit.
>
> But these early improvements were not built upon as I had hoped. Since then I have personally intervened to help Premier recruit, in Vicky O'Dea, one of the most talented, committed and inspirational governors in the Prison Service. I have immense confidence in her and at last I am beginning to see signs of fundamental change for the better.
>
> Premier runs good prisons at Doncaster and Lowdham Grange and is fast improving Dovegate prison. However, the company is under no illusion that if the recent improvements at Ashfield are not built upon I will have to consider terminating the contract by inviting Premier's bankers to appoint another private sector company to run the prison. Failing that, I will have to consider bringing Ashfield into the public sector. For the time being, we will only be using half the places at Ashfield and paying Premier only part of its monthly fee.
>
> The introduction of the private sector into the running of prisons has brought immense benefits. My best prison is probably a private sector prison. But Ashfield, by some measure, is the worst. Sustained improvement is now vital if I am to be persuaded to leave the management of Ashfield in Premier's hands.

Capital Projects

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place the evaluations for the Capital Modernisation Fund projects relating to *(a)* crime reduction, *(b)* national police radio programme (PSRCP), *(c)* IT integration in criminal justice system, *(d)* DNA databases, *(e)* active communities prison pressures, *(f)* national strategy on police information systems, *(g)* government technical assistance centre, *(h)* video recording police interviews, *(i)* DNA database population, *(j)* video-links: modernising the court process, *(k)* post-release support hostel for prisoners after drug treatment, *(l)* electronic "chipping" of goods, *(m)* Project Lion, *(n)* firearms forensic database, *(o)* secure units for juvenile offenders, *(p)* security for small business, *(q)* detecting concealed people, *(r)* prison capacity and juvenile accommodation and *(s)* counter-terrorism in the Library; and if he will make a statement. [97024]

Mr. Denham: Of the projects listed in the question, only one has so far been completed. An evaluation report on the court video-links project is due in June. Evaluation reports for the eight demonstration projects under "electronic chipping of goods" will be available at the end of November.

Communications Data

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the comments of the Surveillance Commissioner in his annual report (HC 68), on what obligations are on public authorities when seeking access to communications data; and if he will make a statement. [97067]

Mr. Blunkett: I am not aware of any such comments in the Surveillance Commissioner's annual report (HC 68). If my hon. Friend has any further information I would be happy to consider it.

Computer Fraud

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cases of computer *(a)* hacking, *(b)* fraud and *(c)* theft his Department recorded in 2001–02; and on how many occasions computer systems have been illegally accessed by computer hackers (i) within and (ii) outside his Department. [97560]

Mr. Denham: Official records compiled under the government scheme for reporting Information Technology (IT) security incidents, the Unified Incident Reporting and Alert Scheme (UNIRAS), show the following figures.

The number of incidents of computer hacking was 0 in 2001 and 0 in 2002.

The number of incidents of computer fraud was 0 in 2001 and 0 in 2002.

The number of incidents of computer theft recorded was 14 in 2001 and 14 in 2002.

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) when he intends to reply to the letter to him dated 18 November from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mr. A. Z. Majid; [97087]

(2) when he intends to reply to the letter to him dated 18 November 2002, from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mr. A. Z. Majid. [98965]

Mr. Blunkett: I wrote to my right hon. Friend on 20 February 2003.

Crime (Humberside)

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners underwent treatment for drugs dependence in *(a)* Haltemprice and Howden, *(b)* the East Riding of Yorkshire and *(c)* England and Wales in each of the past five years. [97719]

Hilary Benn: Data on how many prisoners underwent treatment for drug dependency are only available from 2001–02 onwards and are as follows.

		Type of intervention	
	CARATs	*Detoxification*	*Rehabilitation*
Haltemprice and Howden			
2001–02	345	349	32
2002–03[1]	358	94	58
East Riding county			
2001–02	390	349	72
2002–03[1]	368	94	68
England and Wales			
2001–02	39,279	40,865	4,691
2002–03[1]	37,251	36,651	3,099

[1] Denotes 1 April–31 December 2002 data available only.

CARATs refers to counselling, assessment, referral, advice and throughcare services.

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many anti-social behaviour orders have been issued in the past 12 months in *(a)* Haltemprice and Howden, *(b)* the East Riding of Yorkshire and *(c)* the Humberside Police Authority area. [97726]

Mr. Denham: The number of notifications received by the Home Office of Anti Social Behaviour Orders (ASBO)s issued, from 1 October 2001 up to 30 September 2002 (latest available), within the Humberside Magistrates Court Committee area, (which includes the East Riding of Yorkshire local authority, in which the Haltemprice and Howden constituency is located), are shown, by local authority, in the table.

We are aware that the numbers of ASBOs made nationally have been consistently under reported in returns made by magistrates' courts and are considering how reporting can be improved.

The number of ASBOs as notified to the Home Office, by Magistrates' Courts Committee and local authority area for Humberside, 1 October 2001—30 September 2002

	Total issued
Humberside MCC/Police Force Area	4
of which local authority areas	
Kingston-upon-Hull CC	3
North Lincolnshire Council	1

Departmental Budget

Annette Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the principal components of the changes in the budget of the Home Office from 2002–03 to 2005–06; and if he will make a statement. [96901]

Mr. Blunkett: I refer the hon Member to chapter 10 of Her Majesty's Treasury publication "2002 Spending Review, New Public Spending Plans 2003—2006", Cm 5570, published in July 2002.

Departmental Consultations

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list consultations his Department has conducted since 1997; and when each consultation *(a)* opened and *(b)* closed. [97423]

Hilary Benn: The Home Department holds central records on issued consultations from 1997 for the Home Office, its non-departmental public bodies and agencies. Current consultation papers can be found on the website on http://www. homeoffice.gov.uk/consultations/consult_papers.htm. Archived consultation papers can be found on http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/atoz/consuarchive.htm

Determining all the details requested in the question for the archived records would require access to records at a disproportionate cost. However, the online archive does contain details of the consultation period for most of the consultation documents listed.

In order to give the fullest reply I have listed the details available for 2001/2002 Home Office consultation exercises.

Title of consultation	*Start date of consultation period*	*End date of consultation period*
Animal (Scientific Procedures Act 1 986) Review of the Ethical Review Process	11/01/2001	23/03/2001
Animal Rights Extremism: Government strategy	28/03/2001	27/04/2001
Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 New laws for a successful multi racial Britain	22/02/2001	15/05/2001
Proceeds of crime—consultation on draft legislation	05/03/2001	29/05/2001
The Law on Extradition—a review	12/03/2001	08/06/2001
Review of the Victim's Charter	27/02/2001	1 5/06/2001
Guidance on the use of an Intermediary under Section 29 Of the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999	08/05/2001	29/06/2001
Funding Community Groups	03/05/2001	23/07/2001
Review of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974	01/05/2001	31/07/2001
Justification for the use of X/Gamma radiation scanners by the Immigration Service for detecting people seeking to enter the UK illegally in vehicles and/or freight, by clandestine means	17/07/2001	27/08/2001
Extension of the Civil Penalty to rail freight shuttle wagons	18/07/2001	29/08/2001
Review of Part 1 of the Sex Offenders Act 1997	30/07/2001	19/10/2001
Making Punishment Work: Review of the Sentencing Framework for England and Wales	05/07/2001	31/10/2001
Assessing Communications Data Draft Code of Practice	13/08/2001	02/11/2001
Immigration and Nationality Directorate Review of Family Visitor Appeals	29/10/2001	14/12/2001
Ratification of the EU Driving Disqualification Convention	25/09/2001	18/12/2001
Fees for the removal and storage of vehicles, Under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984	16/11/01	28/12/01
Improving the planning of young people substance misuse services	01/11/01	31/12/01
Policing a New Century: a Blueprint for reform White Paper Consultation	05/12/01	21/01/02
Revising the definition of categories of deaths of members of the public during or following police contact	14/12/2001	31/01/2002
Police and Criminal Evidence Act—(PACE Code A)	11/03/2002	19/02/2002
The Motor Salvage Operators Regulations 2002. (Vehicles (Crime) Act 2001)	04/01/2002	01/03/2002
Secure Borders, Safe Haven White Paper Consultation	07/02/2002	21/03/2002
Extension of controlled drugs licensing	11/02/2002	01/05/2002
Proposed changes to the Misuse of Drugs legislation	04/03/2002	1 7/05/2002
Review of Crime Reduction Training	04/03/2002	27/05/2002
Review on Work Permit Policy on Recruitment and Employment Agencies and Contractors	18/03/2002	14/06/2002
Charging for the consideration of Work Permit applications in Great Britain	15/04/2002	05/07/2002
Merger of CDRPs and DATs	03/05/02	26/07/02
Police and Criminal Evidence Act Consultation on Code of Practice (Code B-E)	12/06/02	16/08/02
Working Holidaymaker Scheme	29/05/02	23/08/02
Review of Seasonal Agricultural Workers' Scheme	03/06/02	23/08/02
Breaking the Circle: a report of the review of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act	17/07/02	1 3/09/02
Criminal Justice System White Paper: Justice for All (Joint exercise with other Departments)	1 7/07/02	09/10/02
Criminal Justice White Paper Proposals on jury exemptions and excusals (Partial) Regulatory Impact Assessment	25/09/02	24/10/02
Connecting Communities Race Equality Grant programme future funding	31/07/02	25/10/02
Protocol to the Convention on mutual assistance in criminal matters between member states of the EU	09/08/02	01/11/02
Proceeds of Crime Act Section 292 -Code of practice for search powers regarding recovery of criminal proceeds	23/08/02	15/11/02
Proceeds of Crime Act—Part 7 Section 339 Money Laundering	23/08/02	15/11/02
Fundamental review of death certification and the Coroner services in England Wales and Northern Ireland	09/08/02	22/11/02
Code of Practice issued under Section 377 of the Proceeds of Crime Bill	14/10/02	03/01/03
Entitlement Cards and Identity Fraud	03/07/02	31/01/03
Implementation of juxtaposed controls at Calais	20/11/02	07/02/03
Supply of specific items of drugs paraphernalia to drug users	18/11/02	14/02/03

Domestic Violence

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether his Department has separate strategies for tackling domestic violence against *(a)* men and *(b)* women; and if he will make a statement. [96380]

Mr. Denham: The Government's policies are designed to ensure thatvictims of domestic violence receive help and support irrespective of gender, whilst recognising that this is a crime which predominantly affects women. Women are more likely to experience such violence over a lifetime, more likely to experience repeat victimisation, more likely to be injured and seek medical help, and more likely to experience frightening threats. Ministers have therefore emphasised that all forms of domestic violence are unacceptable and must be recognised and treated seriously, but have retained the policy focus on domestic violence against women, and children affected by domestic violence. This focus for the immediate future was agreed by the Ministerial group on Domestic Violence.

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what statistics his Department has collated on the extent of domestic violence against *(a)* men and *(b)* women; and if he will make a statement. [96381]

Mr. Denham: Domestic violence is not separately identified in recorded crime statistics collected by the Home Office.

The British Crime Survey (BCS) provides information on the number of incidents of domestic violence in England and Wales. It estimated that there were 122,000 incidents of domestic violence against men and 514,000 incidents against women in interviews in 2001/2.

The BCS figures are derived from a sample and so are subject to sampling error. Moreover, the BCS is carried out by face-to-face interviews and some respondents may be unwilling to reveal experience of domestic violence to interviewers. The 1996 BCS included a self-completion component on domestic violence to encourage disclosure. Results were published in Home Office Research Study No. 191—copies are available in the Library. This more confidential approach to measurement revealed that the proportion of women that were victims of domestic assault in the last year was over three times higher than in the main BCS. It found that six per cent of women and five per cent of men had been threatened or assaulted by a current or former partner in the last year.

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent research his Department has commissioned on domestic violence suffered by *(a)* men and *(b)* women; and if he will make a statement. [96382]

Mr. Denham: Research commissioned by the Home Office is listed. The number of men included in samples is usually too small for any meaningful analysis to be conducted.

Findings from the British Crime Survey Inter-Personal Violence Module. A specialist self-completion module was included on the national British Crime Survey in 2001 to measure the prevalence and extent of domestic violence, rape and sexual assault and stalking. The questions were addressed to both men and women. The findings from this survey will be reported in the summer of 2003.

Preventing Repeated Domestic Violence: A Demonstration Project on Merseyside, Police Research Group Crime Prevention Series, Paper 49, 1994 by Sam Lloyd, Graham Farrell and Ken Pease: an evaluation of a police led intervention to reduce repeated calls to the police.

Preventing Domestic Violence to Women, Police Research Group, Crime Prevention Unit Series, Paper 48, 1994 by Rebecca Morley and Audrey Mullender: a literature review on how to deal effectively, with incidents of Domestic Violence.

Policing Domestic Violence: Effective Organisational Structures, Police Research Series Paper TOO, 1998 by Joyce Plotnikoff and Richard Woolfson.

Domestic Violence: Findings from a new British Crime Survey self completion questionnaire. Home Office Research Study 191, 1999 by Catriona Mirrlees-Black. This provides data from the 1996 Domestic Violence self completion module.

Domestic Violence Matters: an evaluation of a development project. Home Office Research Study, 193, 1999 by Liz Kelly: an evaluation of an intervention by two civilian crisis workers based in a police station to look at effective ways of providing crisis support and advice to victims of Domestic Violence who have reported incidents to the police.

Arresting Evidence: Domestic Violence and Repeat Victimisation. Police Research Series, Paper 104, 1999 by Jalna Hanmer, Sue Griffiths and David Jerwood: an evaluation of a police-led intervention to explore the effectiveness of the police using repeat victimisation as a way of effectively prioritising cases and allocating resources.

Reducing Domestic Violence: What Works? Briefing Notes: Policing and Reducing Crime Unit, Crime Reduction Research Series, 2000: a series of literature reviews on which approaches and interventions are effective in reducing incidents of domestic violence in a number of different settings.

Crime Reduction Programme: Reducing Violence against Women Initiative (VAWI) is part of the national evidence-led Crime Reduction Programme which funds and independently evaluates multi-agency interventions to find out which approaches and policies are effective in reducing crime. Some 34 victim focused projects were funded as part of the Violence Against Women Initiative (25 specifically addressing domestic Violence) in July 2000, and these projects are still being evaluated to assess their impact and cost. Findings are due to be reported later this year.

Angela Watkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the timetable is for the Green Paper on domestic violence. [97614]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 13 February 2003]:* The consultation paper, setting out proposals to prevent domestic violence, deal with perpetrators and provide increased support to victims, will be published by Summer 2003. It will aim to generate a comprehensive response from the public, voluntary sector and others, to ensure the widest possible agreement on what needs to be done to prevent and deal with domestic violence.

Domestic Violence (Immigrants)

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the outcome of discussions between his Department, the Department for Work and Pensions and the Cabinet Office to address the issue of support for victims of domestic violence who are subject to immigration control. [97320]

Mr. Denham: We have widened the types of evidence acceptable to enable a victim of domestic violence to benefit from the concession under which a person in this position can apply for indefinite leave to remain. If evidence in the form of a court order or police caution is not available, we will accept more than one form of evidence from the following list:

a medical report from a hospital doctor confirming that the applicant has injuries consistent with being the victim of domestic violence;

a letter from a family practitioner who has examined the applicant and is satisfied that the applicant has injuries consistent with being the victim of domestic violence;

an undertaking given to a court that the perpetrator of the violence will not approach the applicant who is the victim of the violence;

a police report confirming attendance at the home of the applicant as a result of a domestic violence incident;

a letter from a social services department confirming its involvement in connection with domestic violence; and

a letter of support or report from a women's refuge.

The domestic violence concession was incorporated into the Immigration Rules in November 2002. This will ensure that domestic violence cases attract a right of appeal and that the facts of the case leading to the decision can be considered by the Appellate Authorities.

The Government is continuing to consider the issue of access to public funds.

E-mail Addresses

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department by what e-mail address members of the public may contact *(a)* him and *(b)* each of the Ministers in his Department; and for each e-mail address if he will state (i) the date it became active and (ii) the number of e-mails received in each month since activation [97436]

Mr. Blunkett: The address used for all contact by e-mail to the Home Office is public.enquiries@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk, and has been in use since 1999. No separate addresses for individual ministers are maintained. Details of the number of emails received each month are not available, but rough estimates have been kept on an annual basis since 1999 as follows:

1999	17,500
2000	37,000
2001	51,600
2002	86,000

These figures do not however include the large volumes of campaign emails received regularly by the Home Office. Forensic

A new Correspondence Tracking System is being introduced currently which will more accurately track and monitor public and ministerial correspondence. From June 2003 the system will also be able to track and monitor public emails.

Forensic Computing Units

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what budget was allocated for forensic computing units for each of the last three years; and what the proposed budgets are for each of the next three years; [97542]

(2) how many whole-time equivalent staff were working in the field of forensic computing in each constabulary, in each of the last three years. [97541]

Mr. Denham: The information sought by the hon. Member is not held centrally.

It is the responsibility of chief officers and police authorities to decide on the number of staff and proportion of their funding which they allocate to the operation of forensic computing units.

In 2001/02 the Home Office provided £25 million over three years, over and above general police funding, for the purpose of fighting hi-tech crime; £10 million of which is being used to enhance the powers of local police forces to investigate criminal activity online and to examine computer data forensically. In terms of staffing this sum to date has resulted in the training of a further 54 network investigators and seven forensic investigators across forces.

Forensic Pathology

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons in each year since its introduction have sat the examination for a Diploma of Forensic Pathology; how many have passed; if he will place in the Library a copy of the syllabus and learning structure for teaching the Diploma; what qualifications are required to teach this Diploma; and how many persons are qualified. [97782]

Mr. Denham: The Diploma in Forensic Pathology run by the Royal College of Pathologists commenced in 1995, for candidates who are in full-time forensic practice, and hold Membership of the Royal College of Pathologists.

The structure of the examination consists of two parts. The regulations and syllabus relating to the Diploma in Forensic Pathology, detail the examination structure and requirements for admission; copies of which will be placed in the Library.

There have been 10 persons awarded the diploma since its inception but a breakdown by year is not available.

Examiners are senior forensic pathologists appointed by the Royal College of Pathologists.

Immigration Offences

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women were detained in prisons in England and Wales for immigration offences on 1 February; and if he will make a statement. [98094]

Beverley Hughes: Data on the number of people held in prisons for offences under the Immigration Act are not available.

The latest available data show that at 28 September 2002 there were 220 people held solely under Immigration Act powers in Prison Service establishments in the United Kingdom, information on the reasons for detention would only be available by examination of individual casefiles at disproportionate cost.

Data for the period October to December 2002 are due to be published on 28 February 2002 on the Home Office website: www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/whatsnew1 .html

Kent Policing Model

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 5 February, *Official Report*, column 329W, on Kent Policing Model, what assessment he has made of the function of non-intelligence focused police patrol within the Kent Policing Model. [97598]

Mr. Denham: The deployment of patrol officers within Kent is an operational matter for the chief constable. A framework of inspections and performance measurement is in place for Kent, as it is for all other police forces.

Medical Jurisprudence

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons in each year since its introduction have sat the examination for a Diploma of Medical Jurisprudence; how many have passed; if he will place in the Library a copy of the syllabus and learning structure for teaching this diploma; what qualifications are required to teach this diploma; and how many persons are qualified. [97783]

Mr. Denham: The first Diploma in Medical Jurisprudence was awarded in 1962 by the Society of Apothecaries of London. The examination; which consists of two parts, was designed for registered medical and dental practitioners who have had experience of medico-legal practice.

The regulations and syllabus relating to the Diploma in Medical Jurisprudence, detail the examination structure and requirements for admission; copies of which will be placed in the Library.

The total number of diplomas awarded to date are 238. A breakdown of diplomas awarded, is available for the last 10 years and is detailed in the table:

	Candidates		
Year	*In the UK*	*Abroad*	*Total*
1992	6	8	14
1993	4	7	11
1994	5	3	8
1995	1	3	4
1996	3	9	12
1997	0	2	2
1998	2	1	3
1999	2	3	5
2000	3	4	7
2001	2	2	4
2002	1	1	2

The Diploma is a self-learning course and there are no specific requirements to be an examiner. They are nominated by the British Association for Forensic Medicine (BAFM).

MI5 (Right of Access)

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many subject access requests have been made to MI5 since the right of access was afforded; and how many have been granted. [97713]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 13 February 2003]:* The Security Service has received 127 Subject Access requests under the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998. The Security Service has disclosed personal data in 25 cases.

Nadhmia Auchi

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what response he has given to the application for the extradition to France of Nadhmia Auchi. [98315]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: For good and obvious reasons, it is our policy and practice not to comment, ahead of any arrest, on whether an extradition request for a particular individual has been received or is under consideration.

Neighbourhood Wardens

Annette Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Neighbourhood Wardens Initiative schemes have been established in England and Wales since 2000; where such schemes have been in operation; and how many people are employed as neighbourhood wardens. [98186]

Mrs. Roche: I have been asked to reply.

Since 2000, 207 Neighbourhood Warden schemes have become active. We are currently bringing forward a further 38 schemes. Employment figures for these schemes stand at a total of 1,464 wardens.

There are 245 wardens schemes distributed across the following regions:

East of England	17
East Midlands	12
North-West	49
London	43
West Midlands	29
Yorkshire and Humber	24
South West	16
South East	29
North East	21
Wales	5

Annette Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what research has been undertaken to assess whether Neighbourhood Warden Initiative schemes *(a)* have reduced crime, *(b)* have provided public reassurance and *(c)* are an effective deterrent to anti-social behaviour; and if he will make a statement. [98187]

Mrs. Roche: I have been asked to reply.

The research of the Neighbourhood Warden schemes funded by my department began in 2001 and involves a series of national and local quantitative surveys as well as in-depth qualitative investigations into case study areas. The evaluation of Neighbourhood Wardens is ongoing. Evaluation of the Street Warden programme, is in its early stages and interim reports are not yet available.

Copies of the 'Neighbourhood Wardens Scheme Evaluation Case Studies—Preliminary Report' and the 'Implications Paper' have been placed in the library of the House. The indications from these and other interim reports are that warden schemes are contributing to a reduction in levels of crime, provide public reassurance and are effective in deterring anti-social behaviour.

Non-Custodial Sentences

Annette Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent research his Department has undertaken into public opinion on community based alternatives to prison. [98192]

Hilary Benn: A public perception survey of the Probation Service was commissioned by the National Probation Directorate from Mori Social Research Institute. This primarily related to those community sentences which are the responsibility of the Probation Service. It reported on public awareness and the perceived effectiveness of the service in its various roles.

The results and report, "Perceptions of the National Probation Service", were circulated within the National Probation Service in September 2002. It is available to download from the probation pages of the Home Office website, and I will arrange for a copy to be placed in the Library.

Online Sales/Purchases

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what *(a)* products, *(b)* goods and *(c)* services were (i) bought and (ii) sold online by his Department in each of the last five years. [97437]

Beverley Hughes: The Home Department has not sold any goods or services on line in the past five years. The department has however purchased low value items on line during 2002 which are as follows:

Goods	*Services*
Stationery and office consumables	Training courses
IT consumables	Temporary staff
Publications	

Police Numbers (Nottinghamshire)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers there were in the Nottinghamshire Constabulary in each year since 1997; and how many there will be in each year for which projections are available. [98325]

Mr. Denham: Information on police strength for Nottinghamshire Police is set out in the table.

Year (as at 31 March)	*Police Officer Numbers*	*Civilian Support Staff Numbers*
1997	2,323	1,003
1998	2,322	987
1999	2,225	1,039
2000	2,204	1,024
2001	2,212	1,039
2002	2,330	1,087

Under the Crime Fighting Fund (CFF) recruitment initiative Nottinghamshire Police have been allocated an additional 157 recruits over and above the force's previous recruitment plans for the three years to March 2003. Funding for these officers will continue in 2003–04. The CFF will continue in 2003/04 and we will fund 75 per cent of the cost of new recruits through CFF rather than 100 per cent as in the past three years. Nottinghamshire Police Authority has been allocated £96,000 which on the basis of 75 per cent funding should be sufficient for the force to recruit a further 17 police officers through this fund.

Apart from ring-fenced provision for a particular purpose, such as the Crime Fighting Fund, decisions about the police budget and the allocation of resources, including numbers of officers, are matters for the Nottinghamshire Police Authority and the Chief Constable (Stephen Green QPM). It is therefore not possible to provide estimates of Nottinghamshire's police strength in future years.

Police Officers (Sickness)

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average number of working days lost through sickness among police officers in England was in 2002, broken down by *(a)* constabulary, *(b)* rank and *(c)* gender. [96744]

Mr. Denham: The average number of days lost through sickness absence for police officers in England and Wales for the year 2001–02, (the latest figures that are available) is 11.5. The national average for male and female officers is 11 days and 15 days respectively. Broken down by constabulary, the average number of days lost through sickness absence per officer are:

Force	*Average days per officer*	*Per Male Officer*	*Per Female Officer*
Avon and Somerset	13.0	13	14
Bedfordshire	9.5	8	15
Cambridgeshire	12.0	10	15
Cheshire	13.8	13	16
City of London	12.1	10	20
Cleveland	12.2	11	19
Cumbria	13.4	13	15
Derbyshire	11.5	11	15
Devon and Cornwall	10.4	9	14
Dorset	10.0	9	17
Durham	11.1	10	16
Dyfed-Powys	10.5	10	10
Essex	11.2	11	15
Gloucestershire	10.7	10	14
Greater Manchester	12.7	N/A	N/A
Gwent	15.6	14	21
Hampshire	11.1	10	14
Hertfordshire	11.9	11	16
Humberside	8.6	8	9
Kent	11.1	10	17
Lancashire	11.6	11	15
Leicestershire	12.2	11	20
Lincolnshire	12.0	11	16
Merseyside	12.6	12	20
Metropolitan Police	10.4	10	15
Norfolk	12.2	12	15
Northamptonshire	8.5	8	10
Northumbria	9.0	9	11
North Wales	10.5	10	11
North Yorkshire	9.9	10	10
Nottinghamshire	11.4	11	15
South Wales	12.7	12	15
South Yorkshire	11.6	11	12
Staffordshire	14.3	13	20
Suffolk	9.0	8	13
Surrey	10.9	10	15
Sussex	11.1	11	14
Thames Valley	11.4	10	17
Warwickshire	10.9	10	16
West Mercia	13.2	12	18
West Midlands	13.1	12	16
West Yorkshire	13.4	13	17
Wiltshire	13.2	12	17

(Figures published in the Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) Annual Report published on 19 December 2002)

One of the aims of the Strategy for a Healthy Police Service, published in October 2002, is to identify and address the disparity in levels of sickness absence between different groups within the police service.

Sickness absence data are not collected by rank.

Police Recruits (Compulsory Freemasonry Declaration)

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made on inserting compulsory disclosure of membership of the Freemasons in the contracts of new police recruits. [97185]

Mr. Denham: A scheme of voluntary registration was introduced in 1999. We continue to review its effectiveness—there are no current proposals for compulsory disclosure.

Prison Sniffer Dogs

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the adequacy of provision in prisons of sniffer dogs for the purpose of preventing drug use. [98521]

Hilary Benn: The availability of specialist drug dogs within the Prison Service has increased significantly following investment from the Comprehensive Spending Review 1997 and Spending Review 2000. All prisons now have access to both active and passive drug dogs. There are currently 261 active drug dogs and 212 passive drug dogs deployed across the Prison Service.

Prisoners (Escort Services)

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps are being taken to reduce *(a)* delays and *(b)* late arrivals of prisoners from court; what steps are being taken to improve the information received by prisons from escort contractors; and what assessment has been made of potential benefits of placing the responsibility for escort services on the Prison Service. [93329]

Hilary Benn: The delivery of prisoners to court on time has been affected by the recent increase in the prison population. The Prison Service is trying in a number of ways to improve performance and service delivery.

A recent pilot exercise at Pentonville prison streamlined the escort contractor's work so as to prioritise the delivery of prisoners to court, according to the needs and timings of court business; this resulted in an 11 per cent. improvement in performance in London. The pilot may be extended across the wider Prison Service estate, subject to further findings.

The number of courts linked to the video link system is also increasing, with 123 magistrates' courts and one crown court currently using the service. A further 30 crown courts are to receive video link equipment by the end of August 2003, with funding currently being sought for a further 50 crown courts to be linked to the system. This use of the video links system between courts and prisons, which results in a decrease in the number of prisoners having to attend court in person, should help to release contractors' resources and so reduce delays in the movement of prisoners.

The Prison Service is also reviewing the internal working practices of some of those prisons that serve the courts to see if a closer correlation between those arrangements and court business hours could be achieved.

The contracting out of prisoner escort arrangements has offered better value for money, a reduction in the number of escapes and has freed up prison officers to concentrate on their core duties. A recent Prison Service review confirmed that the service should continue to be contracted out. It also concluded that existing contracts, which are planned to become operational in 2004, should be replaced with more flexible ones to allow the Prison Service to respond more quickly to future business needs. The Prison Service is developing this approach and, together with the relevant agencies in the criminal justice system, is considering how all involved can work together to improve the service.

Prisoners (Foreign Nationals)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women detained in prisons in England and Wales on 1 February were foreign nationals who had completed their prison sentence and were awaiting deportation from the United Kingdom. [97774]

Beverley Hughes: This information is not held centrally and would be available only at disproportionate cost.

Prisons Minister

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which prisons the Prisons Minister has visited since his appointment. [97775]

Hilary Benn: The establishments I have visited since my appointment as Parliamentary Under Secretary for Community and Custodial Provision on 29 May 2002 are given in the table. Further visits will take place in due course.

	Date
Leeds	14 June 2002
Winchester	4 July 2002
Wormwood Scrubs	9 July 2002
Belmarsh	10 July 2002
Askham Grange	15 July 2002
Brixton	25 July 2002
Portland	27 August 2002
Weare	27 August 2002
Lewes	28 August 2002
Ashfiefd	29 August 2002
East Sutton Park	3 September 2002
Wayland	17 September 2002
Reading	20 September 2002
Feltham	23 September 2002
Holloway	23 September 2002
Wetherby	7 October 2002
Lincoln	24 October 2002
New Hall	15 November 2002
Feltham	26 November 2002
Leeds	24 January 2003
Wandsworth	29 January 2003

Retail Industry Crime

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his Answer of 14 January, *Official Report*, column 585W, on retail industry crime, how many small retail businesses in *(a)* Lancashire and *(b)* the North West of England have (i) applied for and

(ii) received a grant from the Government to improve security on their property; and when the new survey of crime affecting retail and manufacturing industry will be published. [97569]

Mr. Denham: Funding under the Small Retailers in Deprived Areas Initiative is allocated directly to regional Crime Reduction Directors, whose responsibility it is to distribute the money to Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs) covering the 10 per cent most deprived wards in the region. Proposals invited from CDRPs have to meet the scheme's strict criteria, and are worked up in close conjunction with the regional Crime Reduction Director, who submits them to me for approval. All proposals submitted to me in the first two years of the initiative have been approved without exception.

In the first year of the initiative (2001–02), over 80 small businesses in Lancashire benefited from funding of £73,234. In 2002–03, over 111 retailers and small businesses in the county stand to benefit from funding of £251,453.

For the North West of England, over 420 small businesses benefited from the 2001–02 allocation of £470,670, and over 1140 retailers and small businesses stand to benefit from the 2002–03 allocation of £942,209.

We expect the results of the new survey of crime affecting retail and manufacturing business, which my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary announced in April last year, to be published in the summer.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the answer of 14 January, *Official Report*, column 585W, on retail industry crime, if the report on the consultation on the means of creating and maintaining effective partnerships to reduce opportunities for crime against business will be *(a)* published online and *(b)* placed in the Library. [97779]

Mr. Denham: The consultation period on the business crime consultation document closes on 28 February 2003. We hope to publish a report on the outcome in the summer. The report will be published on the Home Office website and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the answer of 14 January, *Official Report*, column 585W, on retail industry crime, what the average size is of a grant made available from the Government to businesses for improving the security of small retail businesses. [97780]

Mr. Denham: In the first year (2001–02) of the Small Retailers in Deprived Areas Initiative, the average grant made available was £1,074 per small retailer. In the second year (2002–03), this has increased to £1,272 per individual business.

Sickness Absence

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the rate of staff *(a)* absenteeism and *(b)* sickness was in his Department and each of its agencies and non-departmental public bodies in each year from 1990–91 to 2002–03; what the target set is for his Department; and if he will make a statement. [93502]

Mr. Blunkett: Information on absenteeism is not collected centrally and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Information on Sickness Absence can be found in the annual report "analysis of sickness Absence in the Civil Service" published by the Cabinet Office. The average number of lost working days owing to sickness is as follows:

1997	11.4
1998	10.4
1999	11.1
2000	11.2
2001	8.0*

* This figure is currently being re-assessed and any corrections to the published figure for 2001 will be included in the 2002 report.

Figures for 1991–1996 are not available and figures for 2002 will be announced in due course.

The Home Office have introduced new guidelines, policies and procedures with a view to meeting its target to reducing sickness absence, published in its Service Delivery Agreements for April 2001 to March 2004.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many days were lost due to sickness absence in the Department in 2002. [90533]

Mr. Blunkett: Information on Sickness Absence can be found in the annual report "Analysis of Sickness Absence in the Civil Service" published by the Cabinet Office. The most recent report for the calendar year 2001 was announced by Ministerial Statement on 19 December 2002 and copies placed in the Library. The figures for 2002 will be announced in due course.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many working days have been lost due to illness in his Department in *(a)* 2002 and *(b)* each of the preceding five years. [90974]

Mr. Blunkett: Information on Sickness Absence can be found in the annual report "Analysis of Sickness Absence in the Civil Service" published by the Cabinet Office. The average number of working days lost owing to sickness is as follows:

1997	11.4
1998	10.4
1999	11.1
2000	11.2
2001	8.0*

The figures for 2002 are not yet available and will be announced in due course.

* This figure is currently being reassessed and any correction to the published figure for 2001 will be included in the 2002 Report.

Special Advisers and Press Officers

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* special advisers and *(b)* press officers have been employed by his Department in each year from 1994–95 to 2002–03; and at what cost in each year. [92444]

Mr. Blunkett: With regards to Special Advisers I refer the hon. Member to the answer provided by my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, South (Mr. Alexander) on 31 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 1056W. Press officer numbers are listed in the following table:

Year	*Number of press officers*	*Cost £ thousand*
1996–97	16	369,000
1997–98	13	332,000
1998–99	13	329,000
1999–2000	16	345,000
2000–01	31	863,000
2001–02*	35	1 million
2002–03	37	

Staff numbers for the press office increased when a Newsdesk was established in 2000. This was one of the recommendations from the independent external consultants who carried out a review of the structure and operation of the press office in 1999. One of the benefits of has been that media calls to the press office are being answered within four rings 90 per cent of the time. Previously there were occasions wh[illegible]o 40 per cent of media calls were lost.

Information prior to 1996/97 was not held centrally and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

* The Prison Service press office joined the Home Office in May 2001

Terrorist Attacks

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on *(a)* the stock of equipment and *(b)* its whereabouts to deal with an NBC terrorist attack in (i) London and (ii) East Sussex; and what plans he has to increase this stock. [96253]

Mr. Blunkett: The Government are taking precautions to ensure that emergency services, local authorities and Government Departments and agencies are prepared to respond to a Chemical, Biological, Radiological or Nuclear (CBRN) incident and that the emergency services have the right equipment and stocks.

The National Health Service (NHS) has increased its preparedness and nationally has 360 mobile decontamination units sent to key points around the country for use by Ambulance Service and hospital Accident and Emergency Departments. 7,250 personal protection suits have been distributed to key health workers. 2,350 police officers have been trained and equipped to deal with CBRN incidents and this programme is continuing.

It has been agreed that fire fighters will work alongside ambulance services by decontaminating people at a CBRN incident and £56 million has been allocated by the Government to buy equipment to do this in 2003.

Medical countermeasures are also stockpiled in strategic locations.

I cannot give details of the location of this equipment and stocks, as this information would self-evidently be of use to terrorists.

Violent Crime

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his estimate is of the proportion of violent crimes in each of the last five years where *(a)* alcohol and *(b)* illegal drug use were involved. [98173]

Mr. Denham: Police-recorded crime statistics can not provide information on the proportion of violent crime where alcohol and/or illegal drug use are involved. The British Crime Survey (BCS) reports on the victim's perception of offenders in violent incidents. Violent crime measured by the BCS can be classified into four sub-groups: domestic, mugging, stranger and acquaintance violence. The following tables show the proportion of violent incidents in which victims felt that the offender/s was under the influence of drink or drugs, firstly for all violence reported to the survey and then separately for the breakdown by individual types of violence. It should be noted that sweeps of the BCS were not conducted in 1997 or 1999.

Table 1. Whether offender/s under the influence of drink or drugs in violent incidents (1998 BCS, 2000 BCS, 2001–02 BCS interviews)

All violence

	1998 BCS	*2000 BCS*	*2001–02 BCS Interviews*
Under influence of drink	*(percentage)*	*(percentage)*	*(percentage)*
Yes	42	40	47
No	48	50	44
Don't know	10	9	9
Unweighted	942	1,052	1,341
Under influence of drugs	*(percentage)*	*(percentage)*	*(percentage)*
Yes	18	18	21
No	54	55	56
Don't know	29	27	23
Unweighted	942	7,052	1,341

Notes:

[1] Source 1998 BCS, 2000 BCS, and 2001–02 BCS interviews.

[2] Not asked if offender identified as under school age. In 1998 there was one incident of acquaintance violence where the offender was said to be under school age

[3] Figures may differ from those previously published due to a revision in the weighting process.

Table 2. Whether offender/s under the influence of drink or drugs by typology of violence (1998 BCS, 2000 BCS, 2001–02 BCS interviews)

	Domestic			*Mugging*			*Stranger*			*Acquaintance*		
	1998	*2000*	*2001–02*	*1998*	*2000*	*2001–02*	*1998*	*2000*	*2001–02*	*1998*	*2000*	*2001–02*
Under influence of drink	(percentage)			(percentage)			(percentage)			(percentage)		
Yes	33	43	45	15	17	19	59	53	58	45	37	51
No	60	55	49	53	70	62	30	34	31	50	53	43
Don't know	7	2	5	32	13	18	11	13	10	4	10	6
Unweighted	195	229	243	150	725	279	250	308	453	347	390	426

Table 2. Whether offender/s under the influence of drink or drugs by typology of violence (1998 BCS, 2000 BCS, 2001–02 BCS interviews)

	Domestic			*Mugging*			*Stranger*			*Acquaintance*		
	1998	*2000*	*2001–02*	*1998*	*2000*	*2001–02*	*1998*	*2000*	*2001–02*	*1998*	*2000*	*2001–02*
Under influence of drugs	(percentage)			(percentage)			(percentage)			(percentage)		
Yes	10	13	17	15	20	14	22	16	20	19	22	27
No	81	80	74	31	45	55	35	38	42	57	56	58
Don't know	9	7	9	53	35	31	43	46	38	24	22	15
Unweighted	195	229	243	150	125	279	250	308	453	347	390	426
Notes:												

Notes:

1. Source 1998 BCS, 2000 BCS, and 2001–02 BCS interviews.
2. Not asked if offender identified as under school age. In 1998 there was one incident of acquaintance violence where the offender was said to be under school age.
3. Results for mugging should be treated with caution due to the small number of incidents.
4. Figures may differ from those previously published due to a revision in the weighting process.

West Yorkshire Police

Jon Trickett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the percentage change was in West Yorkshire Police Authority's *(a)* aggregate budgets, *(b)* expenditure on uniformed police, *(c)* expenditure on other police officers and *(d)* other expenditure between 1997 and 2002. [96624]

Mr. Denham: The information is set out in the table.

	1996–97 £ million	*2001–02 £ million*	*Change %*
Police pay[1]	150.3	165.7	10.2
Civilian pay	33.3	48.1	44.4
Other expenditure[2](net)	80.7	109.1	35.2
Total net expenditure	264.3	322.9	22.2
Less use of reserves/balances	(4.3)	(8.8)	104.7
Net budget requirement	260.0	314.1	20.8

Sources:

Treasurer's Department of West Yorkshire Police Authority and Office of the Deputy Prime Minister

[1] A breakdown of police pay between uniformed and non-uniformed officers is not available.

[2] Other expenditure includes police pensions, civilian pay, running expenses and capital financing. It is net of income, mainly special and specific grants and, for 2001–02, £4.5 million from the Crime Fighting Fund.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Capital Programmes (Funding)

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much funding was available for capital programmes in *(a)* rural and *(b)* urban areas in (i) 2001–02 and (ii) 2002–03. [98300]

Mr. Miliband: We do not hold information in the form requested.

The following table shows the total central Government support for capital investment in school buildings for each local education authority area in England, by type of authority.

£ million

Authority type/LEA name	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
County		
Bedfordshire	[1]33,028	14,915
Buckinghamshire	11,110	16,547
Cambridgeshire	19,290	23,624
Cheshire	[1]30,622	18,778
Cornwall	16,597	23,925
Cumbria	12,963	17,495
Derbyshire	[1]46,017	30,988
Devon	23,845	40,284
Dorset	9,915	18,700
Durham	14,486	22,302
East Sussex	13,781	20,196
Essex	35,175	[1]68,698
Gloucestershire	20,965	21.993
Hampshire	32,422	44,387
Hertfordshire	20,792	35,755
Kent	[1]54,648	63,653
Lancashire	29,652	43,803
Leicestershire	12,743	20,531
Lincolnshire	[1]33,381	20,516
Norfolk	21,569	[1]122,808
North Yorkshire	15,059	20,597
Northamptonshire	19,454	[1]46,859
Northumberland	7,417	9,530
Nottinghamshire	[1]28,990	26,896
Oxfordshire	23,610	24,690
Shropshire	8,703	9,461
Somerset	11,073	15,093
Staffordshire	22,896	25,501
Suffolk	18,637	24,163
Surrey	24,072	32,092
Warwickshire	11,555	19,570
West Sussex	15,864	[1]81,212
Wiltshire	10,070	15,130
Worcestershire	14,955	20,302
County total	725,536	1,060,994
London		
Barking and Dagenham	5,794	[1]39,816
Barnet	6,135	13,157
Bexley	7,477	[1]45,800
Brent	8,206	7,063
Bromley	6,825	6,696
Camden	4,937	[1]21,837
City of London	114	133
Croydon	6,228	[1]28,266
Ealing	9,256	[1]49,422
Enfield	7,461	19,877
Greenwich	11,319	9,262
Hackney	8,428	7,816
Hammersmith and Fulham	3,611	4,153
Haringey	10,911	17,152
Harrow	4,042	[1]20,305
Havering	6,211	8,171
Hillingdon	7,643	[1]23,710
Hounslow	4,300	6,307
Islington	4,023	9,043

£ million

Authority type/LEA name	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
Kensington and Chelsea	2,961	2,099
Kingston upon Thames	3,863	5,592
Lambeth	9,572	6,752
Lewisham	7,825	[1]74,692
Merton	[1]32,605	14,014
Newnam	[1]38,435	13,916
Redbridge	[1]27,520	8,483
Richmond upon Thames	[1]22,245	3,367
Southwark	6,933	11,811
Sutton	6,750	7,938
Tower Hamlets	7,860	10,995
Waltham Forest	8,520	[1]65,389
Wandsworth	6,991	12,261
Westminster	3,573	5,255
London total	307,574	580,550
Metropolitan		
Barnsley	6,014	7,525
Birmingham	25,452	35,025
Bolton	[1]11,740	13,716
Bradford	53,180	51,662
Bury	4,736	5,728
Calderdale	[1]41,320	6,994
Coventry	9,121	[1]33100
Doncaster	8,276	10,601
Dudley	[1]31,027	9,792
Gateshead	7,905	7,085
Kirklees	10,188	[1]36,314
Knowsley	7,628	8,921
Leeds	19,177	[1]48,339
Liverpool	21,897	14,176
Manchester	23,337	20,508
Newcastle upon Tyne	[1]54,956	8,102
North Tyneside	22,349	[1]44,477
Oldham	7,908	15,814
Rochdale	7,039	7,598
Rotherham	11,491	[1]64,654
Salford	[1]28659	17,565
Sefton	11,146	15,207
Sheffield	[1]50,127	18,286
Solihull	7,156	13,301
South Tyneside	4,051	[1]21,703
St. Helens	5,462	9,816
Stockport	9,457	10,165
Sunderland	[1]29,527	14,700
Tameside	8,538	7,003
Trafford	7,785	11,283
Wakefield	10,160	12,181
Walsall	6,013	8,684
Wigan	8,304	15,217
Wirral	8,517	9,611
Wolverhampton	5,178	9,178
Metropolitan total	592,522	661,803
Unitary		
Bath and North East Somerset	4,607	11,118
Blackburn with Darwen	4,960	8,410
Blackpool	8,302	6,529
Bournemouth	4,657	3,189
Bracknell Forest	1,705	2,453
Brighton and Hove	[1]28,614	5,387
Bristol, City of	16,015	12,803
Darlington	4,309	4,561
Derby	9,802	8,249
East Riding of Yorkshire	9,409	13,431
Halton	5,619	5,316
Hartlepool	4,464	2,834
Herefordshire	4,927	6,573
Isle of Wight	5,341	8,635
Isles of Scilly	183	198
Kingston Upon Hull, City of	13,093	11,756
Leicester	9,750	7,285
Luton	4,557	6,021
Medway	11,484	13,639
Middlesbrough	4,501	7,441
Milton Keynes	8,822	14,430
North East Lincolnshire	3,599	7,861
North Lincolnshire	9,919	9,684
North Somerset	5,141	5,456
Nottingham	14,161	12,833
Peterborough	8,295	6,289
Plymouth	5,876	10,228
Poole	5,742	5,637
Portsmouth	3,842	4,256
Reading	5,556	8,768
Redcar and Cleveland	5,245	4,367
Rutland	758	2,777
Slough	2,823	5,951
South Gloucestershire	9,769	13,905
Southampton	[1]47,931	8,867
Southend-on-Sea	5,668	6,023
Stockton-on-Tees	[1]13,661	7,158
Stoke-on-Trent	10,410	11,346
Swindon	3,386	13,729
Telford and Wrekin	6,070	9,499
Thurrock	5,029	5,076
Torbay	5,988	9,134
Warrington	8,061	8,270
West Berkshire	3,144	5,191
Windsor and Maidenhead	2,630	4,982
Workingham	7,591	7,046
York	3,987	[1]17,218
Unitary total	369,403	371,809
England total	1,995,035	1,675,156

Note:

Figures exclude funds for ICT/National Grid for Learning.

Figures marked with an asterisk include approved Private Finance Initative (PFI) credits.

Classroom Replacement (Somerset)

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what assistance he plans to make available to Somerset county council to help with replacement of classrooms in 2003; [98282]

(2) what assistance is available in the county settlement for 2003 for classroom replacement. [98284]

Mr. Miliband: The Department currently allocates most capital funding for schools to local education authorities (LEAs) by needs-related formulae, and it is for authorities to assess and prioritise the capital needs of their school buildings through their asset management planning process, in consultation with local schools. Individual LEAs will therefore hold information on how much capital investment is being directed towards replacing classrooms in their area.

Central Government support for capital investment in school buildings in Somerset LEA totals £15 million (including Voluntary Aided schools) in 2002–03, rising to £19.2 million in 2003–04, with further allocations shortly to be announced. This forms part of the total capital investment for England of £3 billion in 2002–03, rising to over £3.8 billion in 2003–04.

Construction Industry Training Board

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans he has to exclude plant hire organisations from the scope of the CITB levy. [97912]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: I have received a proposal from the Hire Association Europe Ltd (a trade association for the hire and rental sector) to exclude the hire and rental sector from the scope of the CITB. I am currently considering the proposal and will be consulting more widely before making a decision.

Education (Havering)

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on *(a)* class sizes and *(b)* teacher retention in the London borough of Havering. [94206]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: Over the last five years, average class sizes in maintained primary and secondary schools in Havering LEA have been very similar to the national average, as shown in the table. In September 2002, Havering achieved full compliance with infant class size legislation.

Retention of good quality teachers in Havering, as elsewhere, is a key priority and we are aware that some schools in some areas are still experiencing problems. However, the new National Agreement signed by the Department and its key partners will enable us to take forward our plans for remodelling the teaching profession. This in turn will address the key recruitment and retention issues of workload and bureaucracy. Taken together with our work on improving pupil behaviour and strengthening leadership within schools, we believe this will lead to a further increase in new teachers in London and elsewhere and encourage more existing teachers to remain in the profession.

Maintained primary schools

	Average class size[1]				
Position in January each year	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
Havering LEA	28.0	28.2	27.9	27.3	27.1
Outer London	27.6	27.5	27.4	27.1	27.0
London	27.2	27.3	27.3	27.0	26.9
England	27.7	27.4	27.1	26.7	26.3

Maintained secondary schools

	Average class size[1]				
Position in January each year	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
Havering LEA	21.7	22.7	22.1	22.3	21.8
Outer London	21.4	21.5	21.8	21.9	21.9
London	21.7	21.8	22.0	22.1	22.1
England	21.7	21.9	22.0	22.0	21.9

[1] Classes taught by one teacher.

E-mail Addresses

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills by what e-mail address members of the public may contact *(a)* him and *(b)* each of the Ministers in his Department; and for each e-mail address if he will state (i) the date it became active and (ii) the number of e-mails received in each month since activation. [97450]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The Secretary of State and Ministers at the Department for Education and Skills can be contacted by members of the public by email at dfes.ministers@dfes.gsi.gov.uk—this email address has been active since 24 April 1999. The number of emails received each month for the last 12 months are shown in the following table. Figures for individual mail boxes are not retained beyond a one year period.

Month	*Number of emails*
2002	
March	121
April	144
May	116
June	118
July	181
August	88
September	2,897
October	294
November	209
December	164
2003	
January	1,274

Examinations

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills pursuant to his answer of 3 February, Official Report, column 87W, on examinations, what reasons he has researched as to why the costs were the same in 2001 and 2002; and how the costs relate to the number of pupils that took the tests in each year. [97850]

Mr. Miliband: The cost given in my earlier reply for printing, distributing and marking the Year 7 progress tests in 2001 was incorrect. The correct figure is £1.7 million, 300,000 more than the 2002 cost of £1.4 million. The additional 300,000 in 2001 was due to higher marking costs because of the greater number of pupils entered in that year, and initial set-up costs in the first year of progress tests for the external marking agency.

In 2001, 79,458 pupils took the English Year 7 progress test and 94,351 the mathematics Year 7 progress test. In 2002, 61,827 took the English, and 76,221 the mathematics Year 7 progress tests.

Health and Safety

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether his Department and its agencies have met the commitment arising from Action Point 13 of the June 2000 strategy statement on Revitalising Health and Safety to summarise health and safety performance and plans in annual reports from the year 2000–01 onwards. [89502]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: There was insufficient time for my Department to include a contribution on Health and Safety to the Department's annual report for 2000–01. We did include a contribution on performance and planning progress in 2001–02 and are currently preparing a more detailed entry for the 2002–03 report.

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what information he has on the application to his Department and its agencies of the checklist, circulated by letter by Sir Richard Mottram, referred to under Action Point 12 of the Revitalising Health and Safety strategy statement; and if he will make a statement. [89504]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: My Department's existing health and safety policy and procedures already incorporate many of the recommendations summarised in the ministerial checklist. The updated policy now under preparation will review existing provisions; update systems and approaches as necessary; establish new baselines against rigorous targets for reductions in work-related accidents and ill-health; and ensure that the Department can fully demonstrate compliance with these recommendations in addition to continuing to meet all of our statutory requirements.

Higher Education

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans he has to reduce the level of *(a)* regulatory requirements and *(b)* numbers of administrative staff in further education colleges; and if he will make a statement. [97923]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 13 February 2003]:* We are reducing and will continue to reduce the burden of unnecessary red tape on further education colleges. We have already announced plans to reduce the number of separate budget lines for the Learning and Skills Council from 45 to five, and to consolidate targeted funds for pay and staff training into colleges' core funding, and to introduce three year funding for colleges, from this year.

The Government and the Learning and Skills Council are committed to implementing in full the recommendations of the Bureaucracy Busting Task Force, chaired by Sir George Sweeney, which reported in November 2002. In particular, we will establish powerful scrutiny arrangements to keep in check demands on colleges, remove the requirement for all colleges to have an annual external audit of their Individual Learner Records, and work across government agencies to avoid repeat requests to colleges for the same information.

We are determined to go further. In particular, we are working with the Inspectorates to introduce more co-ordinated inspection arrangements, for example for colleges providing both FE and HE, and lighter touch inspection arrangements for better performing colleges. We will also assess, in 2003, the regulation of FE institutions through a review of the Instrument and Articles of Government.

FE institutions are independent corporations responsible for their own staffing and employment policies. As administrative burdens reduce, college managers will be free to make their own decisions about how they allocate resources within their own institutions.

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimates were used in establishing the costs of raising student bonds to cover a delay in repayment times, in drawing up the proposals in the policy document, The Future of Higher Education; and if he will make a statement. [98133]

Margaret Hodge: Raising bonds to cover a delay in repayment times of student loans is not part of the policy set out in the White Paper. We decided not to pursue bonds as an option because the gains from a Government issue of bonds were not clear, and the cost of borrowing by higher education institutions (to fund the lending involved in a bonds option) would inevitably have been higher than borrowing by Government. Forecasts of Government net debt are published bi-annually in the pre-budget report and the financial statement and budget report.

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimates were made of the extra income tax an average graduate earning £400,000 more than the average non graduate would pay if they were *(a)* a standard rate tax payer and *(b)* a higher rate tax payer, in drawing up the proposals in the policy document, The Future of Higher Education; and if he will make a statement. [98134]

Margaret Hodge: We said in the White Paper, The Future of Higher Education, that those with higher education qualifications earn around 50 per cent. more than non-graduates. Since graduates earn more than non-graduates, they also pay more tax. The amount of extra income tax they would pay over a working life will depend on how personal allowances, tax rates and thresholds change over time.

In drawing up the proposals in the White Paper, no specific estimates were made of the extra income tax that graduates would pay over their working lives compared to non-graduates. The underpinning analysis was based on the principle of balancing the contribution from the taxpayer with the contribution from the student, bearing in mind the substantial benefit which is derived from having a degree.

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate of the funding gap in higher education his Department used in drawing up the proposals in the policy document, "The Future of Higher Education"; and if he will make a statement. [98145]

Margaret Hodge: Recent studies into the capital requirements of higher education institutions concluded that there was a need for some £8 billion of investment in infrastructure. The Secretary of State receives regular confidential advice from the Higher Education Funding Council for England and others on the financial needs of the sector against the background of the 36 per cent. real terms fall in spending per higher education student between 1989 and 1997. The announcements made in the White Paper "The future of higher education" and in the annual grant letter to the Higher Education Funding Council for England show the Government are increasing spending on higher education in England by an average of over 6 per cent. a year above inflation in the three years to 2005–06.

Higher Education (Family Incomes)

Mr. Keith Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many families with at least one child in higher education had an income of less than £10,000 in each of the last five years. [94440]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 30 January 2003]:* I refer my right hon. Friend to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Lynn Jones) on 6 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 358W. Historic data are not available for students from families with parental residual[1] income below the threshold for means-tested tuition fee support. The current student support scheme introduced in 1998–99, provides students with full fee support if their income is below the threshold. Under the mandatory awards scheme in operation up to 1997–98, students received a full means-tested maintenance grant if their residual income was below the threshold. The threshold is reviewed and uprated annually.

The following table shows the numbers of students entitled to full support (as outlined above) under each scheme for the academic years 1996–97 to 2000–01 and the relevant residual income thresholds in each year.

[1] Residual income is gross income less the allowances detailed in my Department's guidance, "Financial Support for Higher Education Students".

Number of higher education students (thousands) assessed to receive full student support in England and Wales[1]
Academic year 1996–97 to 2000–01[2]

	Academic year[3]				
	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*[4]	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*[5]
Residual income threshold level for dependent students (£)	16,050	16,450	16,945	17,370	17,805
Residual income threshold level for independent students (£)	12,700	13,105	13,405	14,700	15,070
Student support scheme students[6, 7]					
Dependent students	—	—	69	148	194
Independent students	—	—	39	68	95
Total all students	—	—	108	216	289
Mandatory scheme students[8]					
Dependent students	199	201	134	81	27
Independent students	144	137	77	40	12
Total all students	343	337	211	121	39
Total all students[9]					
Dependent students	199	201	203	229	221
Independent students	144	137	116	108	107
Total all students	343	337	319	337	328

[1] The table shows awards made by local education authorities in England and Wales to students normally domiciled in their area.

[2] Provisional.

[3] New students in 1998–99 received support for maintenance through income-assessed grants (comprising about a quarter of the support available) and non income-assessed student loans (about three quarters of the support available). From 1999–2000, students who entered higher education from 1998–99 onwards received support for maintenance entirely through loans, of which approximately three-quarters of the value was non income-assessed.

[4] Data in 1998–99 include an estimated 15,000 student support scheme students in England and Wales who, because they did not expect to receive a contribution to their support from public funds did not make an application to their local authority.

[5] Data for academic year 2000–01 are provisional.

[6] Student support scheme funding arrangements in higher education came into effect from the start of the 1998–99 academic year, thus accounting for the apparent steep rise in student numbers through the academic years.

[7] Most new students in 1998–99, 1999–2000 and 2000–01 were expected to contribute up to £1,000, £1,025 and £1,050 respectively towards the cost of their tuition depending on family income.

[8] Students who entered higher education up to 1997–98 and those who entered in 1998–99 to whom the mandatory scheme funding arrangements applied received support for maintenance through income-assessed grants.

[9] Totals may not add through due to roundings.

Maintenance Grant

Jeff Ennis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate he has made of the cost to his Department of introducing a maintenance grant of *(a)* £1,000 per annum, *(b)* £1,500 per annum and *(c)* £2,000 per annum for higher education students from households in the lowest (i) quartile and (ii) decile of annual income. [96393]

Margaret Hodge: The estimated costs of providing maintenance grants of *(a)* £1,000 per annum, *(b)* £1,500 per annum and *(c)* £2,000 per annum to students in the lowest (i) quartile and (ii) decile of annual income in 2001–02 are presented in the following table.

Estimated costs of maintenance grants in academic year 2001–02
£ million

	Residual income	
Level of grant	*Lowest quartile*	*Lowest decile*
£1,000	200	80
£1,500	300	120
£2,000	390	160

Note:
Figures have been individually rounded

These estimates are based on projected student numbers for English and Welsh domiciled students in UK Higher Education Institutions in 2001–02. As numbers increase so would the cost of providing grants to a fixed percentage. The figures in the table assume that all students either the lowest 25 per cent. or

10 per cent. qualify for the full amount of the grant and that those above these levels get no grant. In practice, means tested grants are almost always tapered out more gently above the threshold for entitlement of the full grant. This increases the costs.

National Behaviour and Attendance Strategy

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on his national behaviour and attendance strategy. [97152]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: We are investing £470 million over the next three years in the national behaviour and attendance strategy to help tackle poor behaviour and absence from school, as well as introducing Fixed Penalty Notices and extending the use of Parenting Orders for persistent truancy offences.

£73 million will be spent on a universal element that will, through the behaviour and attendance strand of Key Stage 3, provide all secondary schools in England with behaviour and attendance auditing materials, training materials designed to help staff manage unacceptable behaviour, and a support structure. A further £396 million will be used to provide targeted packages through the behaviour and attendance strand of Excellence in Cities that will enable around 400 secondaries and approximately 1500 primaries to have multi-agency education and support teams for pupils and their families, police involvement with schools and more truancy sweeps.

Network Learning Communities

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many designated specialist schools are involved in the network learning communities organised by the National College for School Leadership. [98029]

Mr. Miliband: There are 105 specialist schools involved in networked learning communities.

Renewable Energy

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what changes in unit payments for electricity have resulted from the switch by his Department to purchasing renewable energy which is exempt from the Climate Change Levy. [96480]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: In 2001–02 my Department purchased 10 per cent. of its electricity from renewable sources which were exempt from the Climate Change Levy. The overall bill was 0.06 per cent. higher than if no renewable electricity had been purchased.

School Exclusions

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many problematic drug users *(a)* were temporarily excluded from school, *(b)* permanently excluded from school and *(c)* have one or more GCSEs in the last year for which figures are available. [98149]

Mr. Miliband: The information requested is not available centrally. The Department's regular data collections on pupils in schools and exclusions from school—mainly the Annual Schools' Census—do not record whether or not pupils are drug users. Similarly, pupil attainment data do not record this.

Following a review of data collected on exclusions, the department is planning to collect information from Local Education Authorities on both fixed term and permanent exclusions on a termly basis from this summer. We expect that this will capture the reason for exclusion.

Secondary Schools (Haltemprice and Howden)

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will list the class sizes for *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools in Haltemprice and Howden in each of the last five academic years. [94304]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The information requested is shown in the table:

Maintained primary and secondary schools: average class size[1]
Haltemprice and Howden parliamentary constituency
January 1998–2002

	Maintained primary schools	*Maintained secondary schools*
2002	27.2	22.0
2001	27.7	21.6
2000	28.2	22.7
1999	28.7	22.9
1998	29.3	22.8

[1] One teacher classes

Skill Shortages (Suffolk)

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment he has made of the skill shortages experienced by employers in Suffolk. [97384]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: My Department has funded a number of surveys of employers to assess their current and future skill needs. The Employers Skill Survey, funded by my Department, interviewed 27,000 employers across England in 1999 and in 2001, and was carried out on a smaller scale in 2002. The survey results provide evidence on trends in skill shortages, including headline measures at the level of local Learning and Skills Council boundaries.

The role of assessing detailed skill needs in regions and localities is the responsibility of Regional Development Agencies and the Learning and Skills Council respectively. However, the Employers Skill Survey 2001 showed that 2.1 per cent. of employers in Suffolk reported skill shortages compared to 3.7 per cent. across England as a whole.

Skills Training

Ross Cranston: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether the forthcoming review of the funding of adult education will include a review of provision for those private individuals who fund their own skills training. [97958]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Review of Funding of Adult Learning has a remit to consider all funding for adult learning post 19, including how the Government's various support mechanisms for learning could be more effectively deployed to provide incentives to employers to engage in training; cause institutions to be responsive to employer needs, building their capacity to work with employers; widen participation in learning by the low skilled; and enable Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) to play their full and effective role in developing and implementing regional skills strategies. The outcomes of the Review will form part of the Skills Strategy, to be published in June 2003.

Ross Cranston: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assistance he intends to give to private individuals who meet the cost of skills training from their own resources as opposed to their employer's; and if he will make a statement. [97959]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Government is not yet in a position to make a statement about the assistance that will be given to private individuals meeting the costs of learning. As part of the fundamental Review of the Funding of Adult Learning that is currently being undertaken, we are looking at all possible options for funding the acquisition of skills, from the points of view of both individuals and employers. The outcomes of the Review will form part of the Skills Strategy, to be published in June 2003. The Strategy will set out how different government programmes and policies will contribute to raising the skills of the population.

Ross Cranston: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent representations he has received from learning providers about *(a)* the need for higher level IT skills and *(b)* the Government's policy on this issue. [97965]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: I have not received any significant representations from learning providers on the need for higher level skills in the Information Technology (IT) sector in recent months. However, we remain aware of their ongoing importance and committed to the policies we have introduced to meet these needs. Skills deficits in the sector have declined from their peak in 1999 when the Stevens report, "Skills for the Information Age" highlighted these issues. Since that time, an £8 million programme of measures has been put in place to improve the image of the IT industry, build greater understanding of the labour market and strengthen links between education and industry.

Recent developments include establishing New Technology Institutes to provide high quality teaching facilities and progression routes into honours degrees, based on partnership between universities, colleges and employers. And currently, e-skills-UK are in the final stages of development to becoming the Sector Skills Council for the industry. They will provide a vital lead in articulating employers' requirements and helping to ensure there is high quality and relevant provision available.

Ross Cranston: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether the skills strategy about which he has recently consulted will include provision to encourage private individuals to meet the costs of their own skills training in higher level IT skills and other skill areas. [97966]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Government will publish the Skills Strategy in June 2003; one element of that Strategy will be the consideration of how individuals can be encouraged to meet the costs of learning at higher levels. The Review of Funding of Adult Learning—the outcomes of which will feed into the Skills Strategy—is currently considering ICT issues, including how ICT skills might be delivered, and how training to acquire those skills might be supported through funding.

Social Policy Research

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what evaluation has been made of social policy research commissioned by Government agencies at *(a)* the University of York and *(b)* other universities; and if he will make a statement. [94591]

Margaret Hodge: The Department evaluates all its research projects using systematic criteria. The process also includes holding feedback meetings with research contractors after completion and publication of the contracted work. The findings from research link directly to departmental policy development and programme evaluation.

The Department has run five projects with the University of York in the last four years. Four projects have been completed and have fully met the Department's requirements. The fifth is still in progress.

Information received from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) states that

"The ESRC evaluates all of its research projects using systematic criteria".

Since 1990, the council has funded 301 social policy research projects at UK universities, including 12 projects at the University of York. All this work has been evaluated by the ESRC's research evaluation committee, and the results have been used to guide the development of the council's research strategy.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans he has to expand social policy research on a regional basis, commissioned to educational institutions within that region; and if he will make a statement. [94592]

Margaret Hodge: The Department has no plans to expand its research in any particular region.

The Department's research projects are normally commissioned through competitive tendering exercises. Universities across the UK, as well as other research organisations are invited to express an interest in tendering for individual research projects through the Department's research website. Contractors are then invited to submit a tender.

In the financial year 2002–03 the Department has 84 projects contracted to universities with a total contract value of £20 million.

Information received from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) states that

"The ESRC will continue to fund social policy research through its grant awarding boards and has no plans to allocate funds on a regional basis."

Special Needs

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many children are enrolled in special needs education establishments; and how many schools with special needs provision there are *(a)* in England and Wales and *(b)* in each local education authority. [96625]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The information requested has been placed in the Libraries.

The information provided includes the number of special schools and the number of pupils in those schools. It also includes the number of pupils with a statement of Special Education Needs (SEN) and the number of pupils with SEN, but without a statement in maintained primary and secondary schools. In keeping with the SEN Code of Practice 2001 the special educational needs of children will normally be met in mainstream schools or settings.

For information on Wales I refer the hon. Member to the Welsh Assembly.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the annual total cost is of special needs education in England and Wales, broken down by local education authority. [96626]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The information requested is not held by the Department in this form. The following table details the amount each LEA spends on SEN funding as reported in its Section 52 BudgetStatement. This includes the LEA central spend and the amount delegated to schools that is notionally for SEN. Information is also given showing how much each LEA receives through SEN Standards Fund grant:

Funding provided by LEAs for SEN in England in 2002–03

All figures as reported by LEAs through their Section 52 budget statements at 6 February 2003.

LEA Number:	*LEA Name:*	*Total funding for SEN*[1,2]	*SEN Standards Fund (£)*
201	City of London	236,600	3,473
202	Camden	15,641,127	356,966
203	Greenwich	22,178,180	548,289
204	Hackney	16,777,833	446,394
205	Hammersmith and Fulham	10,181,377	284,832
206	Islington	13,071,992	412,874
207	Kensington and Chelsea	6,711,499	172,389
208	Lambeth	20,863,299	462,390
209	Lewisham	15,200,492	523,992
210	Southwark	19,204,289	593,172
211	Tower Hamlets	22,053,375	756,602
212	Wandsworth	23,631,595	401,719
213	Westminster	8,419,270	284,850
301	Barking and Dagenham	11,060,380	392,638
302	Barnet	27,766,463	555,785
303	Bexley	17,184,898	445,489
304	Brent	16,728,644	515,926
305	Bromley	16,876,550	514,196
306	Croydon	23,125,421	624,552
307	Ealing	22,031,735	578,333
308	Enfield	19,108,245	608,760
309	Haringey	21,606,606	552,293
310	Harrow	13,115,046	322,654
311	Havering	9,678,197	397,584
312	Hillingdon	19,577,874	457,857
313	Hounslow	16,092,095	449,613
314	Kingston upon Thames	10,551,892	202,323
315	Merton	12,966,936	265,064
316	Newham	23,767,278	774,089
317	Redbridge	14,878,819	487,733
318	Richmond upon Thames	7,598,885	214,613
319	Sutton	14,685,590	305,375
320	Waltham Forest	22,874,896	500,193
330	Birmingham	101,417,436	2,585,541
331	Coventry	19,653,653	625,665
332	Dudley	17,254,425	583,112
333	Sandwell	18,966,621	673,797
334	Solihull	11,245,334	409,502
335	Walsall	18,705,987	589,239
336	Wolverhampton	16,566,442	544,127
340	Knowsley	13,226,573	483,870
341	Liverpool	29,791,546	1,253,449
342	St. Helens	9,724,840	373,966
343	Sefton	16,038,519	589,487
344	Wirral	22,028,958	781,104
350	Bolton	16,513,091	556,148
351	Bury	11,461,352	326,055
352	Manchester	29,976,057	1,203,034
353	Oldham	13,791,650	543,617
354	Rochdale	13,843,454	490,952
355	Salford	15,900,945	510,802
356	Stockport	13,387,314	485,295
357	Tameside	10,108,375	473,930
358	Trafford	12,222,731	416,047
359	Wigan	19,073,439	591,448
370	Barnsley	11,641,026	452,304
371	Doncaster	15,626,470	638,822
372	Rotherham	17,802,382	553,637
373	Sheffield	21,226,585	973,164
380	Bradford	22,863,022	1,129,345
381	Calderdale	9,551,724	414,346
382	Kirklees	20,237,948	784,743
383	Leeds	43,069,380	1,398,372
384	Wakefield	14,993,699	630,932
390	Gateshead	10,953,161	394,233
391	Newcastle upon Tyne	15,272,962	578,462
392	North Tyneside	11,138,565	386,192
393	South Tyneside	17,575,930	346,625
394	Sunderland	11,873,978	720,548
420	Isles Of Scilly	56,840	2,516
800	Bath and North East Somerset	8,465,849	261,928
801	Bristol City of	28,349,268	663,005
802	North Somerset	9,264,633	282,153
803	South Gloucestershire	13,198,640	403,433
805	Hartlepool	7,153,072	228,260
806	Middlesbrough	10,576,948	366,466
807	Redcar and Cleveland	7,023,656	327,969
808	Stockton-on-Tees	13,102,445	407,466
810	Kingston upon Hull City of	19,393,098	588,652
811	East Riding of Yorkshire	18,853,655	521,650
812	North East Lincolnshire	8,521,036	361,416
813	North Lincolnshire	10,623,631	289,341
815	North Yorkshire	34,779,643	884,781
816	York	11,185,006	261,608
820	Bedfordshire	20,980,789	664,405
821	Luton	13,521,604	422,055
825	Buckinghamshire	30,021,856	717,443
826	Milton Keynes	17,493,025	376,336
830	Derbyshire	50,632,480	1,255,381
831	Derby	15,838,470	475,510
835	Dorset	25,829,938	520,653
836	Poole	8,445,388	192,091
837	Bournemouth	9,796,742	223,400
840	Durham	26,773,011	952,525
841	Darlington	5,116,672	191,595
845	East Sussex	33,612,326	747,091
846	Brighton and Hove	17,925,701	367,140
850	Hampshire	66,087,734	1,781,879
851	Portsmouth	12,211,286	315,149
852	Southampton	12,262,618	375,014
855	Leicestershire	30,937,175	953,200
856	Leicester	21,189,894	631,182
857	Rutland	1,736,448	46,373
860	Staffordshire	44,684,920	1,405,701
861	Stoke-on-Trent	10,782,710	544,872
865	Wiltshire	20,090,762	646,262
866	Swindon	12,966,379	317,745
867	Bracknell Forest	5,167,077	144,065
868	Windsor and Maidenhead	6,617,485	183,074
869	West Berkshire	8,252,059	231,090

LEA Number:	*LEA Name:*	*Total funding for SEN*[1,2]	*SEN Standards Fund (£)*
870	Reading	6,786,016	194,840
871	Slough	8,675,140	227,685
872	Wokingham	7,522,778	218,582
873	Cambridgeshire	36,070,099	788,170
874	Peterborough	15,452,957	365,952
875	Cheshire	38,194,690	1,137,524
876	Halton	9,523,934	285,959
877	Warrington	10,355,877	347,215
878	Devon	39,122,425	1,041,682
879	Plymouth	18,161,040	492,046
880	Torbay	6,060,759	228,566
881	Essex	69,923,243	2,125,590
882	Southend-on-Sea	11,510,525	306,222
883	Thurrock	8,455,476	254,967
884	Herefordshire	10,457,240	244,567
885	Worcestershire	23,007,369	846,417
886	Kent	86,940,791	2,274,562
887	Medway	17,800,794	484,053
888	Lancashire	88,090,821	2,095,325
889	Blackburn with Darwen	14,802,781	351,988
890	Blackpool	9,955,145	278,757
891	Nottinghamshire	32,796,893	1,334,933
892	Nottingham	9,723,343	626,071
893	Shropshire	12,274,705	414,188
894	Telford and Wrekin	11,520,969	330,669
908	Cornwall	25,392,606	796,800
909	Cumbria	29,069,358	870,145
916	Gloucestershire	31,843,035	872,565
919	Hertfordshire	58,419,568	1,742,247
921	Isle of Wight	8,664,367	234,033
925	Lincolnshire	33,910,718	997,991
926	Norfolk	38,641,139	1,248,755
928	Northamptonshire	34,167,211	1,099,536
929	Northumberland	30,009,036	564,435
931	Oxfordshire	27,923,355	861,854
933	Somerset	26,284,662	735,134
935	Suffolk	29,692,548	1,063,841
936	Surrey	72,841,153	1 ,349,662
937	Warwickshire	33,292,978	790,627
938	West Sussex	50,492,439	1 ,039,050

[1] Includes from Table 1: Total central spend by LEAs on SEN which covers Educational Pyschology Service/Assessments and statementing, provision for pupils with statements, specialist support: Pupils with and without statements, promoting good practice/collaboration/integration; and ISB for special schools.

[2] Also includes from Table 2A of the budget statement funding delegated to primary and secondary schools identified as "notional SEN" (figures are only indicative of the amount that might be spent by schools on SEN).

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps his Department is taking to ensure special needs provision is available for children with autism; and if he will make a statement. [96803]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Schools and local education authorities have duties under the Education Act 1996 to identify, assess and make suitable provision for children with special educational needs, including those with autism. Provision for children with autism is made in mainstream schools with support; autism units attached to maintained schools; generic special schools; independent, non-maintained or maintained autism specialist schools or through home-based provision.

To help schools, local education authorities and others develop and audit appropriate provision, my Department, in partnership with the Department of Health, published good practice guidance on autistic spectrum disorders last year. Among other things, this reflected the work of the Department for Education and Skills-funded West Midlands SEN Regional Partnership which has been focusing on a regional, multi-agency approach to creating a range of provision to meet the range of autistic children's needs.

Stage 3/GCSE

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment he has made of the effect of in-school variation on value added standards of achievement at key stage 3 and GCSE. [96714]

Mr. Miliband: There is evidence of wide variation in pupil progress in schools. The Department plans to publish a Statistical Bulletin later this year analysing value added at each key stage by pupil characteristics. This will for the first time link the new Pupil Level Annual School Census data with value added data.

Student Loans

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what his estimate is of the annual cost of the collection of student loan repayments; what sum is paid by his Department to the Inland Revenue for this work; and if he will make a statement. [95379]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 3 February 2003]:* There are two types of student loan. Borrowers under the pre-1998–99 scheme of mortgage style loans repay their loans direct to the Student Loans Company (SLC). Most borrowers under the current income-contingent loans scheme repay their loans through the tax system.

The SLC will spend around £12 million in the 2002–03 financial year on collecting repayments on mortgage style student loans not sold to the private sector, and on those income-contingent loans not collected by the Inland Revenue—voluntary repayments and repayments from borrowers outside the UK. The Inland Revenue is expected to charge around £1.9 million for collecting income-contingent loan repayments through the tax system in 2002–03. These costs are shared between England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Study Support Schemes

Annette Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what research has been commissioned by his Department to assess the benefits of youth action groups established with funding through partnerships of study support schemes; whether youth action groups have helped to reduce anti-social behaviour in school age children; and if he will make a statement. [98185]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Partners for Study Support scheme is being evaluated by the University ofSunderland and their report will be published in April 2003. Only one of the 134 projects funded through this scheme involved youth action groups. Crime-reduction projects in other school-related schemes are being evaluated as part of those schemes.

Teacher Vacancies (Portsmouth, South)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teacher vacancies there were in Portsmouth, South in each year since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [98097]

Mr. Miliband: Vacancy figures are available only at local authority level. The table provides information available for Portsmouth LEA since it was created in April 1997.

January	*Teachers*[1]	*Vacancies*[2]	*Vacancy Rate*[3] *(percentage)*
1998	1,220	23	1.9
1999	1,390	16	1.2
2000	1,310	19	1.5
2001	1,330	59	4.5
2002	1,250	35	2.8

[1] Full-time teachers in post in the maintained schools sector.

[2] Advertised vacancies for full-time permanent appointments (or appointments of at least one term's duration) in maintained nursery, primary, secondary and special schools. Includes vacancies being filled on a temporary basis.

[3] Vacancies as a percentage of teachers in post.

Source:

DfES annual 618 survey

Training and Skills (Financial Support)

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much financial support he is giving in 2002–03 for training and skills in *(a)* rural and *(b)* urban areas. [98305]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: This is a matter for the Learning and Skills Council. John Harwood, the Council's Chief Executive, will write to the hon. Gentleman with the information requested and a copy of his reply will be placed in the Library.

Tuition Fees

Jeff Ennis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate he has made of the additional income that would be raised by increasing the payment towards tuition fees under the existing arrangements to £1,500 per annum. [96394]

Margaret Hodge: Assuming that the means tested element of tuition fees for Academic Year 2002/03 had been set at £1,500 rather than £1,100, we estimate that English Higher Education Institutions would have received additional fee income of £310 million in the Financial Year 2002–03, made up from

(i) approximately £160 million of public contributions and,

(ii) approximately £150 million of private contributions.

The residual income[1] threshold[2] at which private contributions to fee support begin and the level of residual income at which the public contribution to fees reaches zero, are both assumed to be unchanged. Therefore the steepness of the taper (private contribution per £ of residual income) is assumed to increase. It has been further assumed that the changes to fees and means-testing have no impact on the number of students going to higher education, nor on their distribution by residual income.

These estimates are based on projections of student numbers for 2002/03 derived from actual data for academic year 2000/01. Private contributions have been estimated from 2000/01 LEA income assessment data and assumed growth rates in annual earnings.

[1] Residual Income is gross income less the allowances detailed in my Department's guidance, "Financial Support for Higher Education Students"

[2] £20,480 for dependent students and £17,715 for independent in 2002/03.

Universities (Access)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how he will ensure students will not be excluded from universities who charge higher tuition fees. [97414]

Margaret Hodge: Any university which wishes to charge variable fees will be required to have an Access Agreement which will be approved and monitored by the Access Regulator. The Regulator will monitor admission arrangements to ensure they promote fair access and will seek to extend current good practice through, for example, bursary schemes. The maximum fee will be capped in real terms for the duration of the next Parliament at £3,000. Additionally no student or family will have to pay fees before or while they are studying. Students will be able to defer their fees as for the current maintenance loans. No interest above inflation will be charged on either loans for maintenance or fees, and the threshold at which repayment starts will be raised to £15,000 to make repayment easier for everyone. Students from low income backgrounds will be eligible to have up to £1,100 of their fees paid, and student grants of £1,000 will also be introduced for those from low income families.

University Entrants

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on the number of students expected to enter university in *(a)* 2003–04 and *(b)* 2004–05. [98062]

Margaret Hodge: The latest data from the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) show UK and overseas applicants for entry into English universities are up by 1.7 per cent. from 300,000 in 2002–03 to 305,000 in 2003–04. These are very early figures as the applications cycle is only just beginning, but we welcome the increase in applicants. It is too early to say what the final picture will be as it is final acceptance figures, not early application figures, which are the most important indicator of entry to HE.

Detailed estimates of the number of students expected to enter university in 2004–05 are not available.

Vocational Training

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills pursuant to his answer of 3 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 98W, on vocational training, if he will set out his plans for the programme to ensure two weeks of work experience with employers or other organisations is available for all pupils in Key Stage 4. [96764]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Over 95 per cent. of school pupils already undertake work experience placements in their last years of compulsory schooling to develop the skills and attitudes essential for the world of work. About 75 per cent. of these placements are for two weeks or longer. The Department provides £25 million a year, via the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), for school/business links activities. Around £10 million goes towards the costs of the work experience programme, which aims to ensure that all Key Stage 4 pupils can undertake at least two weeks' high quality work experience. In addition, a range of guidance and support is provided by the Department and the LSC to help local partners meet this objective. Independent evaluations of work experience show that placements are generally satisfactory and well-received by schools, pupils and employers.

HEALTH

Child Protection

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on his role in maintaining accurate child protection records. [98758]

Jacqui Smith: In December 1999, the Secretary of State published Working Together to Safeguard Children, a guide to interagency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, using his powers under Section 7 of the Local Authority Social Services Act 1970.

"Working Together to Safeguard Children" includes guidance to agencies and professionals in relation to record keeping. It makes clear that good record keeping is an important part of the accountability of professionals to those who use their services, and that well kept records provide an essential underpinning to good child protection practice.

Records should be accessible and comprehensive, with judgments made, and actions and decisions taken being carefully recorded. They should use clear, straightforward language, should be concise, and should be accurate not only in fact, but also in differentiating between opinion, judgements and hypothesis.

The Social Services Inspectorate performance monitors the implementation of the Working Together to Safeguard Children guidance (and other relevant Government guidance) through its programme of inspections of children's services.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures he is taking to improve joint working between Multi-Agency Public Protection Panels and Area Child Protection Committees to safeguard children. [96063]

Jacqui Smith: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on Monday 10 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 587–88W.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many allegations in terms of the Children's Act 1989 were made by health trusts in respect of child protection issues in each of the last five years. [98343]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is not held centrally.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent discussions he has had with *(a)* representatives of the NSPCC on child protection and *(b)* the Fostering Network on care of children. [98487]

Jacqui Smith: The Department works closely with voluntary organisations which have an interest in safeguarding children.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health has had no recent discussions. However, I meet with relevant voluntary organisations to discuss these issues.

Imported Infections

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how he intends to take account of the views of clinicians and community-based organisations working with vulnerable populations in the inquiry into imported infections; [97092]

(2) from which key stakeholders evidence will be sought for the inquiry into imported infections. [97091]

Ms Blears: The Cabinet Office is co-ordinating an internal review of immigration and infectious diseases and access to the National Health Service, involving relevant government departments including the Department of Health. The review will establish the facts on the impact of imported infections on public health and NHS resources and report to Ministers. There are no plans at this stage of the review to seek views from external stakeholders.

Acute Psychiatric Beds

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many acute psychiatric beds in each strategic health authority are occupied by patients aged *(a)* over 65, *(b)* over 75 and *(c)* over 85. [97673]

Jacqui Smith: The Department does not routinely collect such information.

Ambulances

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many fully operational ambulances were stationed *(a)* during the day and *(b)* at night at each of the ambulance stations in the Ribble Valley and Fulwood in each year since 1997. [97670]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Area Child Protection Committees

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what resources are *(a)* available and *(b)* proposed for area child protection committees; [96065]

(2) if he will make a statement on future arrangements for Area Child Protection Committees. [96040]

Jacqui Smith: Area child protection committee (ACPC) expenditure, is a matter for local agreement. As a multi-agency forum, the ACPC should be supported in its work by its main constituent agencies, reflecting the investment of each agency in activities which are of benefit to all, in particular inter-agency training.

The Joint Chief Inspectors' report Safeguarding Children, published on the 14 October 2002, contains a recommendation that the Department of Health should review the current arrangements for ACPCs to determine whether they should be established on a statutory basis to ensure adequate accountability, authority and funding.

The Government have welcomed the publication of this report, and will respond in full to its recommendations, together with those of the Victoria Climbie Inquiry in the Children At Risk Green Paper in the spring.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is on placing Area Child Protection Committees on a statutory footing; and if he will make a statement. [98594]

Jacqui Smith: The Joint Chief Inspectors' report Safeguarding Children, published on 14 October 2002, contains a recommendation that the Department of Health should review the current arrangements for area child protection committees, to determine whether they should be established on a statutory basis to ensure adequate accountability, authority and funding.

The Government have welcomed the publication of this report and will respond in full to its recommendations, together with those of the Victoria Climbie Inquiry, in the Children At Risk Green Paper in the spring.

Audiologists

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many audiologists are employed by each NHS trust; [97878]

(2) how many vacancies for audiologists there are in the NHS. [97888]

Jacqui Smith: Information on numbers of audiologists employed in National Health Service trusts and vacancies for audiologists in the NHS are not separately available; they are included in physiological measurement staff. The information available has been placed in the Library.

Building Capacity Grant

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to organise a further round of funding of the building capacity grant. [97043]

Jacqui Smith: The Building Care Capacity Grant 2002–3 represents the final year of this funding to local authorities. Funding for building capacity was absorbed within the overall personal social services settlement for 2003–04. Furthermore, the Access and Systems Capacity Grant 2003–4 is a new grant, intended to expand the capacity and range of community based social care services for older people, and is being distributed according to the new older people's formula for social services.

Cancelled Operations

Dr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 28 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 803W, on cancelled operations, what monitoring will be undertaken centrally to ensure that hospitals are meeting the guarantee set out in the NHS Plan. [95858]

Mr. Hutton: In line with the NHS Plan cancelled operations guarantee, data are collected on the numberof patients still waiting for an operation 28 days after their operation was originally cancelled by the hospital for non-clinical reasons on the day of surgery. As part of these data returns, from Quarter 4 2002–03, National Health Service trusts will be required to submit full data on where patients, who are breaches of the NHS Plan guarantee, have been treated; for example, at the same NHS trust, at another NHS Trust, in the private/independent sector or abroad.

Cancer Plan

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment has been made of the effectiveness of the money allocated for palliative care in the cancer plan. [97084]

Ms Blears: Estimates from Help the Hospices show that the level of statutory funding for voluntary hospices has increased by 14 per cent, in cash terms over the past two years. However, it is clear that only slow progress has been made towards meeting our commitment in the NHS Cancer Plan of an extra £50 million for specialist palliative care by 2004. That is why we are setting up a central budget for the £50 million from 2003–04. I refer my hon. Friend to the response I gave him today.

Cancer Research

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money was spent on average in each of the last five years on research into *(a)* the prevention of cancer and *(b)* the link between diet and cancer in the UK. [97321]

Ms Blears: The information requested is not available. However, in April 2001 the Government established the National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI) in partnership with the charities and the pharmaceutical industry.

The NCRI's first strategic analysis, which was published in October 2002, was an overview of the £257 million a year of cancer research in the United Kingdom that is directly funded by the NCRI's fifteen partner organisations. This analysis showed an apparently small investment—2 per cent.—in research into cancer prevention. But this category only included research aimed at the direct application of strategies to prevent cancer, and several other facets that inform preventive strategies are covered by other categories, such as aetiology, which includes diet.

The real investment in research relevant to future cancer prevention strategies was therefore larger than 2 per cent., but was still relatively low. The NCRI partner organisations agreed that the scale of research into cancer risk would benefit from closer joint examination. The NCRI has established a strategic planning group to carry out a much more detailed analysis of the research activity in this area, to discuss any potential opportunities and to identify any further action necessary.

Teenage Cancer

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many beds are available for teenage cancer patients on exclusively teenage wards in *(a)* the North West of England and *(b)* Lancashire. [98512]

Jacqui Smith: Information on bed numbers is not collected centrally at the level of detail requested.

Child Abuse/Neglect

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children were recorded as having died in each of the last 10 years following suspected or confirmed *(a)* abuse and *(b)* neglect. [94029]

Jacqui Smith: Information detailing the number of children who have died in each of the last ten years following abuse or neglect is not held centrally.

However, by revamping its databases of serious cases, the Department of Health has a record of serious case notifications from 1 April 2002. Of the 119 notifications between 1 April 2002 and 31 January 2003, 91 were of deaths and 28 were of serious injuries.

Information detailing the number of children under 16 years old, who are currently recorded as being victims of homicide (a category which covers murder, manslaughter and infanticide) over the last ten years has been placed in the Library.

Children's Database

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) which agencies and organisations have access to the Department of Health's computerised database of deaths and serious injuries of children; [94621]

(2) what use is made of the information on the Department of Health's computerised database of deaths and serious injuries of children. [94627]

Jacqui Smith: No outside organisations have routine access to the database. However, data derived from this database and its predecessors have been made available to bona fide researchers and others with a legitimate basis for their inquiry.

The data will inform policy development and the biennial overview of Serious Case Reviews (the first of which was published in June 2002), thus ensuring that important lessons from case reviews are put into the professional and public domain without compromising the confidentiality of vulnerable children, such as siblings of children who have died as a result of child abuse.

Chiropodists/Podiatrists

Mr. Pollard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what discussions there have been between the Department of Health and the Health Professions Council on how the public will differentiate between the different clinical competencies and qualifications of individual chiropodist and podiatrist practitioners; [95643]

(2) if he will make a statement on the efficacy of using the titles chiropodist and podiatrist to differentiate between the clinical competencies and qualifications of different chiropodist and podiatrist practitioners; [95644]

(3) what plans the Department of Health has to recommend to the Health Professions Council that they institute a sub-register for current chiropodists who may decide not to join the Health Professions Council's register; [95645]

(4) what plans his Department has to recommend to the Health Professions Council that they create protected titles other than chiropodist and podiatrist. [95646]

Ms Blears *[holding answers 12 February2003]:* My right hon. Friend the Minister of State met the President and Chief Executive of the Health Professionals Council (HPC) on 4 December 2002, at which meeting all aspects of the HPC's proposals were discussed.

The HPC consulted about which titles should be protected by law and has undertaken extensive market research to understand the public's perception of titles currently in use by healthcare professionals. The HPC's decision to propose the protection of both chiropodist and podiatrist reflects the general perception that these titles are used interchangeably. The titles indicate that those registered have met HPCs standards of competence. All applicants for registration will be expected to meet standards of proficiency, whether they are applying through the transitional arrangements, as international applicants or as UK applicants who have completed an approved course.

The HPC proposes using subsections of the register to distinguish between modalities of care but believes that to distinguish between skill levels would be confusing and unnecessary. The HPC has no plans to introduce a sub-register for those practitioners who do not meet the Council's standards of proficiency and who would not therefore be able to use the protected titles. Ultimately, it is for the HPC to propose and the Privy Council to determine the protected titles that will be associated with parts and subsections of the Health Professions Register.

Clinical Competence

Barbara Follett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has undertaken and commissioned on the appropriateness of a three years out of five rule to assess clinical competence; and if he will make a statement. [94233]

Mr. Hutton: None. The three years out of five years rule is drawn from European Union Directives on recognition of qualifications for all professions which require a relevant qualification.

Correspondence

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Salford (Ms Blears), will reply to the letters of 25 October 2002, 9 December 2002 and 13 January 2003, from the hon. Member for West Suffolk concerning Mr. Dominique Porché, a constituent. [95900]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 6 February 2003]:* A reply was sent to the hon. Member on 12 February 2003.

Delivery Unit

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many officials in his Department have been assigned to do specific work *(a)* with and *(b)* for the Delivery Unit since June 2001; [94366]

(2) when Ministers from his Department last met members of the Delivery Unit; and on how many occasions since its establishment Ministers have met members of the Unit; [94327]

(3) which announcements made by his Department since June 2001 have been cleared in advance with the Delivery Unit; [94365]

(4) which Ministers and officials from his Department have visited areas outside London accompanied by Members of the Delivery Unit; [94364]

(5) when the Permanent Secretary in his Department last met members of the Delivery Unit; [94369]

(6) how many reports his Department has been comissioned to produce by the Delivery Unit in the next *(a)* 12 and *(b)* 24 months; [94367]

(7) if he will list the reports made since June 2001 by his Department to the Delivery Unit; [94368]

(8) what targets have been set for his Department by the Delivery Unit since June 2001; and what progress has been made in meeting such targets; [94371]

(9) when Ministers from his Department last met *(a)* the Prime Minister and *(b)* officials to discuss targets set by the Delivery Unit; and what plans there are for further meetings. [94370]

Mr. Lammy: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is responsible for meeting the Department's Public Service Agreement targets set out Cm 5571, copies of which are available in the Library.

The Delivery Unit was established to strengthen the capacity of Whitehall to deliver the Government's key objectives. It works closely with us to help us deliver our PSA targets, and we are in regular contact with members of the Unit.

Information about internal meetings is not disclosed under Exemption 2 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Elderly People (Patient Transfers)

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the effect on their health of transferring elderly people between residential or nursing homes. [98862]

Jacqui Smith: The Department recognises that moving into and between care homes can be difficult and stressful for any long-term resident, particularly vulnerable older people.

Such moves, including ones made as a result of care home closures, should be handled as sensitively and appropriately as possible. Proper arrangements should be made for the safe and satisfactory transfer of all residents to other suitable homes. There should be adequate time for this to be done, in a way that allows both residents and their relatives a choice in where they are to move to, and which creates the minimum possible discomfort to all concerned.

Epilepsy

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on progress towards an action plan for reducing sudden death by epilepsy; [97982]

(2) what guidance he gives to consultants of patients with epilepsy to ensure that those patients are fully informed about the risks of sudden death from the complaint. [97983]

Jacqui Smith: We are committed to improving services for people with epilepsy. We have published an epilepsy action plan in response to the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) sponsored national clinical audit of epilepsy-related death and recommendations in the chief medical officer's 2001 annual report. The action plan is available in the Library.

The audit report and action plan draw the attention of local National Health Service clinicians and organisations to the need to establish or review policies and practices regarding the management of epilepsy and epilepsy related deaths.

Fluoridation

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the compatibility of fluoridation of the public water supply with the European Convention on Human Rights. [96811]

Ms Blears: In our view fluoridation is compatible with the Convention. It is a valuable health measure and fluoridation schemes can only be implemented where the local population has been consulted and have indicated their support.

Food Labelling

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to improve food labelling; and if he will make a statement. [95549]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 13 February 2003]:* The Food Standards Agency has adopted a wide-ranging action plan to tackle the issues consumers have identified as priorities for improving food labelling. The Agency is pressing for a number of important changes in European law; for example on country of origin labelling, nutrition labelling and health claims. It is also working closely with stakeholders on a range of voluntary initiatives, including clearer labelling, appropriate use of claims like 'fresh', 'natural' and 'pure' and more extensive, clearer country of origin labelling.

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will require food products which contain artificial sweeteners and display a label indicating that they are sugar free to display details of the artificial sweeteners in the same typeface as the sugar free declaration. [95550]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 13 February 2003]:* Foods containing artificial sweeteners are required by law to be marked or labelled with the indication "with sweetener(s)" or "with sugar and sweetener(s)" as appropriate, if they carry a 'sugar free' claim. There is no requirement for this indication to be in any particular size or type of lettering, but it must be clearly legible.

Labelling rules are set at European Union level and are currently being reviewed by the European Commission. In the meantime, the Food Standards Agency is reviewing its labelling guidance and plans to advise that sweetener declarations should be given due emphasis.

Greater London Assembly

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what financial assistance his Department gave to the Greater London Assembly in 2002; and for what projects. [95849]

Ms Blears: The Department does not provide financial assistance to the Greater London Assembly.

Health Chief Executives

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list Chief Executives of health bodies who have left their posts over the last 24 months; if he will give the reason in each case; and what financial package arrangements were made in each case. [97096]

Mr. Hutton: The Department does not collect information centrally on the number of chief executives leaving their posts, the reasons for leaving nor on the payments made.

Health Professions Council

Barbara Follett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the professional advisory committees; and what discussions he has had with the Health Professions Council on its proposals for professional liaison groups. [94230]

Mr. Hutton: I met with the President and Chief Executive of the Health Professions Council (HPC) on 4 December 2002, when all aspects of the HPC's proposals were discussed.

Under the Professions Supplementary to Medicine Act 1960, the Council for Professions Supplementary to Medicine (CPSM) had permanent standing uni-professional advisory committees. The Health Professions Order 2001 allows the Council to set up professional advisory committees to advise the Council or its statutory committees on matters affecting relevant professions. Any advisory groups or committees may be multi-professional with flexibility to provide profession specific advice as and when required. Ultimately, it is for the HPC to decide how best to obtain the necessary advice and also the mechanism for supplying it.

Home Care

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which local authorities have a zero rating policy for charging for home care. [97792]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 13 February 2003]:* The information requested is not collected centrally.

Home Care Charges

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list, by local authority area in England, the *(a)* average and *(b)* maximum home care charges made by local authorities. [98318]

Jacqui Smith: Information on individual council's home care charging policies is not held centrally.

The Department of Health issued statutory guidance to local councils for home care charges in November 2001. The guidance states that when assessing a person's income, charges should not reduce users' incomes below basic levels of income support plus a 25 per cent. buffer, and when setting an overriding maximum charge councils should consult users.

Homeless People

Mr. Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on how access to the health services of homeless people living in *(a)* hostels and *(b)* bed and breakfasts is being encouraged. [87437]

Ms Blears: National Health Service services are available free to anyone who is ordinarily resident in the United Kingdom, including anyone who is homeless. Primary care trusts (PCTs) have a duty to ensure appropriate and timely access to healthcare for everyone in their area, including the homeless and those living in hostel accommodation.

In addition, the new requirement on local authorities to carry out a review of homelessness in their area and develop a homelessness strategy with local partners, such as the PCT, will help to identify gaps in services and ensure that there is appropriate mainstream and specialist health care for homeless people.

We have in place a range of initiatives to improve access to primary care services for homeless people. These include the development of a model general medical service local development scheme for PCTs and the promotion of locally agreed personal medical services (PMS) contracts with a similar focus. There are now nearly 90 PMS pilot schemes which include the homeless as a priority objective. In addition, we are generally trying to improve access to NHS services for all through a variety of different access routes, for example, through walk-in-centres, diagnosis and treatment centres and one-stop primary care centres.

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what support is offered to homeless people to help them register with general practitioners; and what duty general practitioners have to register homeless people; [96872]

(2) what action the Government have taken to alleviate the problem of homeless people not registered with general practitioners. [96873]

Mr. Hutton: National Health Service medical primary care services are available free to everyone who is ordinarily resident in the United Kingdom, including anyone who is homeless. The Department is taking a range of actions to improve access for such people.

These initiatives include developing targeted personal medical services pilot schemes, a model general medical services local development scheme, the provision of NHS walk-in centres and, most recently, reminding GPs, in the monthly GP newsletter for February 2003, that a patient does not need to have a permanent address to register for services.

Hospital Acquired Infection

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the implications of hospital acquired infections for delayed discharge rates; and what representations he has received from care homes refusing to take residents from NHS trusts who have MRSA. [97691]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 13 February 2003]:* Data on the impact of hospital acquired infections on discharge from hospital are limited. However, it is estimated[1] that patients who acquire an infection in hospital remain in hospital on average an extra 11 days.

We have not received evidence that refusal to take patients because of methicillin resistant staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) is a significant problem. MRSA is not a contraindication to admission to a residential or nursing home and a Department of Health leaflet, entitled "MRSA—What nursing and residential homes need to know", provides advice on this topic.

Hospital Beds

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the change in the total number of hospital beds was in 2001–02. [88749]

Mr. Hutton: The average daily number of available general and acute beds in National Health Service hospitals increased in 2001–02 by 789 to 136,583 compared to the previous year.

The Chief Executive's Report published on 20 December demonstrates where increased resources have led to an improved system of care. A system that is flexible and where increased activity happens outside the traditional inpatient hospital stay—in outpatients or in primary care. In the mental health sector, services for users are developing to provide prompt assessment and treatment round the clock for people with acute mental health needs who would otherwise have to be admitted to hospital. New services have been developed with an increase in patient contact with assertive outreach teams, crisis resolution teams and early intervention teams over the last year.

Hospital Building Programmes (London)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much public funding is available for NHS hospital building programmes within the Greater London area. [95231]

Ms Blears: National health service capital allocations for the period 2003–04 to 2005–06 were announced on 8 January 2003. The capital allocations provide funding for the NHS hospital building programme and other capital investment within the NHS.

The amount allocated to the NHS organisations in London was £307million for 2003–04, £340 million for 2004–05 and £374 million for 2005–06. A breakdown is shown in the table.

This investment will be supplemented by additional public capital funding that will be issued in the future, and by investment from the Private Finance Initiative.

£000

	2003–04	*2004–05*	*2005–06*
Strategic Capital to Strategic Health Authorities			
North West London StHA	39,819	43,419	46,717
North Central London StHA	26,377	33,922	36,834
North East London StHA	33,376	34,416	37,370
South East London StHA	31,067	34,501	37,462
South West London StHA	23,819	22,839	24,800
Operational Capital Allocations to NHS Trusts			
Barnet PCT	928	1,060	1,199
Enfield PCT	273	312	353
Haringey PCT	244	261	279
Camden PCT	869	992	1,122
Islington PCT	298	341	385
Royal Free Hampstead NHS Trust	4,921	5,617	6,356
North Middlesex University Hospital NHS Trust	2,010	2,211	2,502
Whittington Hospital NHS Trust	2,426	2,669	3,020
Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust	114	130	139
Great Ormond Street Hospital NHS Trust	1,481	1,690	1,912
Moorfields Eye Hospital NHS Trust	1,101	1,257	1,422
Barnet, Enfield and Haringey MH NHS Trust	1,860	2,123	2,402
Camden and Islington Mental Health NHS Trust	817	932	1,055
University College London Hospital NHS Trust	5,709	6,517	7,374
Barnet and Chase Farm Hospitals NHS Trust	3,716	4,242	4,800
Havering PCT	738	797	902
Barking and Dagenham PCT	101	108	115
City and Hackney PCT	497	567	641
Tower Hamlets PCT	1,159	1,240	1,327
Newham PCT	826	908	1,027
Walthamstow, Leyton and Leytonstone PCT	300	321	343

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[1] The Socio-economic Burden of Hospital Acquired Infection PHLS1999, also available at www. doh.go v. uk/ha/costs, htm

£000

	2003–04	2004–05	2005–06
Chingford, Wanstead and Woodford PCT	181	203	228
Redbridge PCT	121	129	139
North East London Mental Health NHS Trust	1,255	1,433	1,621
Barking, Havering and Redbridge Hospital NHS Trust	6,125	6,992	7,911
Whipps Cross University Hospital NHS Trust	2,532	2,890	3,270
Newham Healthcare NHS Trust	2,033	2,321	2,626
Barts and The London NHS Trust	8,454	9,405	10,063
Homerton University Hospital NHS Trust	2,169	2,321	2,483
East London and The City Mental Health NHS Trust	889	951	1,073
Hillingdon PCT	204	233	264
Hammersmith and Fulham Primary Care Trust	277	297	317
Ealing Primary Care Trust	382	409	463
Hounslow Primary Care Trust	271	290	310
Brent Primary Care Trust	631	675	723
Harrow Primary Care Trust	259	295	316
Kensington and Chelsea Primary Care Trust	1,307	1,492	1,689
Westminster Primary Care Trust	432	493	557
The Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital NHS Trust	996	1,066	1,141
The Hillingdon Hospital NHS Trust	2,926	3,340	3,779
Ealing Hospital NHS Trust	1,601	1,713	1,917
West Middlesex University NHS Trust	2,138	2,288	2,448
St Mary's NHS Trust	3,577	3,935	4,210
West London Mental Health NHS Trust	3,315	3,784	4,223
Chelsea and Westminster Healthcare NHS Trust	5,631	6,427	7,272
Hammersmith Hospitals NHS Trust	9,080	10,364	11,726
Royal Brompton and Harefield NHS Trust	3,304	3,771	4,238
Central and North West London Mental Health NHS Trust	1,389	1,486	1,590
North West London Hospitals NHS Trust	4,375	4,993	5,650
Bromley PCT	544	621	703
Greenwich PCT	126	144	163
Bexley PCT	124	133	142
Lambeth PCT	337	385	435
Southwark PCT	336	384	434
Lewisham PCT	427	488	552
Queen Elizabeth Hospital NHS Trust	1,156	1,236	1,323
Bromley Hospitals NHS Trust	2,408	2,748	3,110
Queen Mary's Sidcup NHS Trust	1,656	1,821	2,061
Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Trust	9,832	11,223	12,699
The Lewisham Hospital NHS Trust	2,790	3,069	3,472
King's Healthcare NHS Trust	5,280	6,027	6,768
Oxleas NHS Trust	710	760	813
South London and Maudsley NHS Trust	3,236	3,462	3,705
Kingston PCT	196	224	253
Croydon PCT	257	275	294
Wandsworth PCT	2,145	2,448	2,770
Richmond & Twickenham PCT	100	112	124
Sutton & Merton PCT	912	1,041	1,178
Kingston Hospital NHS Trust	2,314	2,508	2,838
Mayday Healthcare NHS Trust	1,888	2,076	2,349
St George's Healthcare NHS Trust	5,413	6,179	6,991
The Royal Marsden Hospital NHS Trust	1,895	2,028	2,170
SW London and St George's Mental Health NHS Trust	2,121	2,421	2,635
London Ambulance Service NHS Trust	6,033	6,455	6,907
Epsom and St Helier NHS Trust	4,128	4,417	4,726

Hull and East Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many delayed discharge patients there were in the Hull and East Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust in the last year for which figures are available. [94300]

Jacqui Smith: Delayed transfer of care figures are published quarterly on a primary care trust basis and are available in the Library.

Hydrotherapy

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which hospital trusts have hydrotherapy pools; and if he will make a statement. [97508]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is not collected centrally.

International Advice Line

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer of 17 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 794W, on the international advice line, how many calls were received on 08458 50588 in *(a)* December 2002 and *(b)* January 2003. [97342]

Mr. Hutton: The overseas nurses' advice line received 12 completed calls in December 2002 and 23 completed calls in January 2003.

National Cancer Plan

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much of the National Cancer Plan money that has been allocated so far for palliative care has been received by *(a)* voluntary based hospices and *(b)* NHS hospices. [97389]

Ms Blears: The NHS Cancer Plan, published in September 2000, pledged that the National Health Service contribution to the costs of specialist palliative care, including hospices would increase by £50 million by 2004.

Estimates from Help the Hospices show that the level of statutory funding for voluntary hospices has increased by 14 per cent, in cash terms over the past two years. To enable faster progress towards the commitment to increase NHS investment in specialist palliative care by £50 million by 2003–04, we have made available an extra £10 million from central budgets for specialist palliative care for 2002–03.

A central budget of £50 million per annum for the year 2003–04 to 2005–06 has been set up for specialist palliative care. I refer the hon. Member to the response I gave to my hon. Friend, the hon. Member for Jarrow (Stephen Hepburn) today.

National Care Standards Commission

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what qualifications are held by National Care Standards Commission inspectors relevant to their work in inspecting residential nursing homes. [98014]

Jacqui Smith: All inspectors employed by the National Care Standards Commission are required to hold a professional qualification and have a minimum of three years' experience working in a nursing, social care or health setting, to enable them to undertake their work as inspector.

Neuroleptic Prescribing

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment he has made of the incidence of inappropriate neuroleptic prescribing in nursing and residential homes; and if he will make a statement; [97209]

(2) what steps he has taken to reduce the over-medication of older people in *(a)* residential and *(b)* nursing homes; and if he will make a statement; [98033]

(3) what estimate he has made of the number of older people who are inappropriately prescribed *(a)* traditional and *(b)* atypical antipsychotic medication. [98032]

Jacqui Smith: Estimated numbers of prescription items for antipsychotics (all antipsychotics and atypical antipsychotics) are shown in the table.

Estimated number of prescription items for antipsychotics per 1,000 population

	Elderly (60+)	*Non-elderly*
All antipsychotics		
1999	213	64
2000	224	67
2001	210	64
2002[1]	109	35
Atypical antipsychotics		
2001	81	55
2002[1]	25	17

[1] April-September.

Source:

Prescription Cost Analysis (PCA) data

Information is not available about prescribing specifically in care homes.

The Government are aware of concerns about the possibility of inappropriate prescribing of antipsychotic medication in care homes and of the results of a recent survey on this issue. A number of developments should help ensure that antipsychotic medication is used only when appropriate. In particular, implementation of the medicines management supplement of the older people's national service framework and the requirements in the care homes national minimum standards around management of medication should ensure that any problems are picked up.

NHS Beds

Dr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the baseline was for the target for extra beds by 2004 in general and acute wards announced in the NHS plan. [97813]

Mr. Hutton: The baseline for the NHS Plan target was the average daily number of available beds in general and acute wards open overnight in 1999–2000.

Nurses and Nursing Agencies

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 5 February, *Official Report*, column 225W, on international nurse recruitment, in what form each agency responded to the allegations; what methods were used to verify the information given by *(a)* the agency and *(b)* the overseas nurse who instigated the complaint; and what appeals procedures are in place if one party disagrees with the findings of the Department's ruling. [97285]

Mr. Hutton: In all cases the allegations have been received in writing and the agencies have responded in writing. After consideration of the allegation and the responses the Department has, again in all cases, decided no further action was necessary. No party has this far expressed any disagreement with the Department's decision. Should there be a disagreement, the Department would consider a higher level internal review.

Palliative Care

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many homeless people were not registered with a general practitioner in *(a)* Jarrow constituency, *(b)* South Tyneside, *(c)* Tyne and Wear and *(d)* England in each year since 1997. [96871]

Mr. Hutton: The Department does not hold information on the number of people, whatever their circumstances, not registered with a general practitioner.

The data on registered patients do not allow homeless people who are registered with a GP or personal medical service pilot provider to be separately identified.

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how much of the £50 million allocated for palliative care will be given to South Tyneside; [96875]

(2) what the criteria are for hospices to qualify for funding allocated for palliative care under the cancer plan; [96876]

(3) what plans there are to speed up the allocation of the £50 million allocated for palliative care in the cancer plan. [96874]

Ms Blears: A central budget of £50 million per annum for the year 2003–04 to 2005–06 has been set up for specialist palliative care. This ensures that the pledge in the NHS Cancer Plan of an additional £50 million per annum by 2004 is met. South Tyneside Primary Care Trust (PCT) has provisionally been allocated £173,000.

Before any allocations can be made from the central budget, the agreed cancer network plans will need to be approved by the strategic health authority—which will oversee the process and retain its monitoring role—and then be submitted to and approved by the National Partnership Group.

The National Partnership Group is chaired by Professor Mike Richards, the National Cancer Director. It includes representatives from all levels of the National Health Service and a wide range of voluntary organisations. Network plans must be submitted to the National Partnership Group by 31 March at the latest and the group will approve plans as soon as possible after that. Allocations will be made as soon as plans are approved. The £50 million is to help tackle inequalities in access to specialist palliative care and to enable the NHS to make a realistic contribution to the cost hospices incur in providing agreed levels of service. The money is for specialist palliative care services in their entirety and not for voluntary hospices alone although, as they play an essential role and provide two thirds of all specialist palliative care, it is reasonable to expect they will get a fair slice of this extra money. Information about this process, about the criteria and of the provisional allocation for each PCT has been placed in the Library and is available on the Department of Health's website at www.doh.qov.uk/cancer/palliative 03 06.htm.

Patient Records

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what procedures are in place for correcting false records relating to patients in the NHS. [98120]

Mr. Lammy: Patient records should reflect the observations, judgements and factual information collected by the contributing health professional. Incorrect factual information should be corrected by those responsible for maintaining the record and the Data Protection Act 1998 provides a legal basis for enforcing such corrections when appropriate. An opinion or judgement recorded by a health professional, whether accurate or not, should not be subsequently amended however as it is essential for understanding the clinical decisions that were made and to audit the quality of care.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what procedures are in place for preventing a health trust *(a)* destroying records within its possession and *(b)* failing to disclose information. [98121]

Mr. Lammy: Each National Health Service trust and health authority is legally responsible for managing records and complying with legislation and guidance on disclosing information.

In the NHS, guidance and governance arrangements have been designed to assure compliance with law and good practice, while minimising the overheads of managing and auditing detailed procedures. Independent authorities, such as the Audit Commission, Health Service Commissioner and Information Commissioner, oversee the governance arrangements and may impose sanctions where there is a significant failure to comply.

Trusts keep records to support patient care and other legal requirements, but it is also necessary to destroy records when they are of no further value. Destruction should be controlled by formal retention and disposal arrangements based on the NHS Retention and Disposal Schedule issued by the Department of Health.

Trusts are legally obliged to give patients access to their own personal information, and are expected to be open about their organisation, policies and processes. But there are also circumstances when it is right to withhold information. Such circumstances are set out clearly in published guidance on data protection and openness.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in whom rests final authority to *(a)* retain and *(b)* destroy patient records and associated documentation. [98122]

Mr. Lammy: Final authority for retention or destruction of National Health Service records rests with the individual NHS trust, primary care trust or heath authority concerned.

NHS patient and administrative records are public records. The Public Records Act 1958 requires everyone handling public records to manage them responsibly from the time they are created to their eventual destruction or selection for permanent preservation.

Destruction of records should only be carried out according to formal retention and disposal arrangements, based on the NHS Retention and Disposal Schedule issued by the Department of Health, but varied by agreement with senior clinical and administrative staff to suit local conditions.

The Department of Health last issued guidance on record keeping, with a revised NHS Retention and Disposal Schedule, in 1999. The guidance and disposal schedule are availableon the Department of Health web site at http://www.doh.gov.uk/nhsexec/manrec.htm

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether it is permissible for medical records to be released on an unsolicited basis by one health trust to another. [98128]

Mr. Lammy: Health records are held in confidence, subject to common law obligations of confidence and the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998.

It would be permissible for a health trust to release medical records to another trust on an unsolicited basis where —

there is a legal requirement to do so;
there is a public interest in such a disclosure e.g. where child protection issues have arisen;
the patient has requested or otherwise consented to the release;
the record has been effectively anonymised.

Public Bodies

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those public bodies for which his Department is responsible where provision is made in the job description of the chairman that the policies of the body are compatible with those of the Secretary of State. [97243]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 12 February 2003]:* The job descriptions for the chairs of the following bodies state they should ensure that their board observes the Secretary of State's policies and priorities.

National Health Service trusts
Strategic health authorities
Primary care trusts
The Dental Practice Board
The Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health
The NHS Appointments Commission
The National Institute for Clinical Excellence

Respite Care (Disabled People)

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans the Government have for increasing *(a)* the numbers of carers and *(b)* the effective use of respite care for the disabled. [97984]

Jacqui Smith: The Department has committed funding of £1.5 million, to the national social care recruitment campaign, launched in October 2001. The campaign comprises national advertising, leaflets, posters, local and national public relations activity, a helpline, and a website. The materials produced are available to local employers to support their own recruitment and retention efforts to reduce vacancy rates in the social care workforce.

The effective use of respite care for the disabled is supported by the carers' grant, introduced in 1999 to support councils in providing short breaks for carers to enable them to continue to care whilst maintaining their own health and wellbeing.

Secure Hospitals

Mr. Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many prisoners with mental health problems were awaiting transfer to a secure hospital on the last day of 2002, broken down by prison establishment. [98524]

Jacqui Smith: Data are not currently collected in the form requested.

Sexual Assault

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many sexual assault referral centres in the UK the Department funds *(a)* alone and *(b)* jointly with another agency, at premises other than at hospitals; [97123]

(2) how many sexual assault referral centres the Department funds *(a)* alone and *(b)* jointly with another agency. [97240]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 12 February 2003]:* The Department does not directly fund sexual assault referral centres (SARCS). We understand that there are currently six SARCs in England but that their funding is a matter for the local police force and or authority and the local primary care trust and National Health Service trust.

However we are aware that the Home Office, through the crime reduction programme—violence against women initiative, is funding a nurse forensic examiner project at St Mary's SARC in Manchester. It is also funding a project to examine the impact that SARCs may have on attrition rates for sexual offences; comparing SARC areas with areas where no SARC is available. These are research projects, and interim data are currently being analysed. The findings will help inform decisions about future SARC development.

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what the Department's policy is on locating future sexual assault referral centres at *(a)* hospitals and *(b)* separate premises; [97121]

(2) what steps are being taken by the Department to support the establishment of sexual assault referral centres; [97238]

(3) how many sexual assault referral centres there are in the UK at hospital premises. [97241]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 12 February 2003]:* People who have been raped or sexually assaulted require access to a variety of services including forensic examination, counselling and treatment to prevent sexually transmitted infections and pregnancy. We are aware that sexual assault referral centres (SARCs) have been developed in a number of areas to provide a 24 hour comprehensive service under one roof. Information on numbers of SARCs is not collected centrally however we understand that there are currently six across England. A number of different models exist, which include centres located within or attached to hospitals.

We will work with the Home Office to support the further development of SARCs and other service options.

Skin Conditions

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the impact on long-term conditions, with particular reference to eczema, psoriasis and acne, if they are omitted from the National Service Framework on long-term conditions. [97981]

Jacqui Smith: The national service framework for long-term conditions will have a particular focus on neurological conditions, and brain and spinal injuries.

But in so doing, it will also tackle some of the common issues which are relevant to a wider range of people with long-term conditions generally and help to drive up the quality of treatment and care.

In September 2000, the NHS Modernisation Agency established the Action on Dermatology programme. Around £35 million has been invested in capital projects since then. Action on Dermatology—Good Practice Guidance was published on 20 January 2003 and issued to dermatology departments in primary care trusts and strategic health authorities. This will help ensure that people with dermatological conditions have access to appropriate services and support across the country.

In December 2001, the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) issued Referral Practice, a guide to appropriate referral from general to specialist services. The booklet includes the suggested referral practice for atopic eczema in children and psoriasis. A copy of the booklet is available at http://www.nice.orq.uk/pdf/Referraladvice.pdf

Social Services

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 9 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 328W, how many older people received each category of community based social services in each year since 1997. [96775]

Jacqui Smith: The figures quoted in the answer of 9 January 2003 come from the Key Statistics (KS1) return that is used to calculate the social services performance assessment framework (PAF) indicators. This information is contained in the publication 'Social Services Performance Assessment Framework Indicators 2001–2002' which is available at http://www.doh.gov.uk/paf. The indicator 'C32–Older people helped to live at home' provides the total number of older people receiving community-based services as at 31 March for the years 1998–2002. However, a breakdown of individual services is not available.

Social Work Degrees

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department is taking to minimise tuition fees costs for people wanting to undertake a three-year social worker degree. [98591]

Jacqui Smith: The bursary for social work students, which we are introducing in September 2003, will include the contribution for tuition fees which the local education authority has assessed the student should meet.

Social Work Diploma

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what level of specialisation in child care and child protection practice will be included in the new three year Diploma in Social Work. [96106]

Jacqui Smith: The training for the new social work degree has an emphasis on learning for practice. There is a requirement for students to spend a minimum of 2002 days learning in practice in at least two settings, to include statutory social work tasks involving legal intervention and of providing services to at least two user groups. Training providers must also ensure that students undertake specific learning in a number of key areas including communication skills with children, adults and those with particular communication needs. Partnership working and information sharing across professional disciplines and agencies must also be covered. I have placed a copy of the Requirements for Social Work in the Library.

On qualification there are opportunities for further training in specialist areas such as childcare. As part of the reform of social work education, the General Social Care Council (GSCC) is undertaking a review of the current framework for post-qualifying training for social work. This will include a review of the PQ Child Care Award.

Social Workers

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance he has issued on the training of unqualified staff as social workers from in-house local authority social services departments. [96076]

Jacqui Smith: I have not issued any guidance regarding the training of unqualified staff as social workers. However, at the Association of Directors of Social Services (ADSS) conference in October 2000 my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, announced funding for a three-year student support scheme for those studying for first level professional social work qualifications.

The funds for this scheme were put into a ring-fenced sub-programme of the Training Support Programme Grant and they have been used to enable employers to develop their experienced care staff by putting them forward for training in the Diploma in Social Work (DipSW). This year the funds can also be used to support staff who commence the new three year degree in social work in September 2003. The funds available in this TSP sub-programme are as follows:

2001–02	£3 million
2002–03	£13 million
2003–04	£13 million

In 2003–04, £6 million will be allocated to ensure that each local council area has a Trainee Social Worker scheme. Some councils already have schemes to 'grow their own' social workers through trainee social worker schemes. The programme we are proposing will ensure that a scheme will be operating in all areas.

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he is taking to increase the number of applications to be social workers in *(a)* London and *(b)* the UK. [97585]

Jacqui Smith: To make social work a more attractive career choice, a new degree level qualification in social work is being introduced from September 2003. It will make newly qualified staff more confident, competent and better equipped for the realities of social work practice. Also, for September, a non-means tested bursary is being introduced to encourage more students to enter social work training. It will be payable to new and existing students, who ordinarily reside in England and who are not funded by their employer.

Both developments are supported throughout, by the national social work recruitment campaign, launched in October 2001, backed by funding of £1.5 million. Applications for social work courses have risen for the first time in seven years, by 8.3 per cent, on the numbers for 2001.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many vacancies he estimates there are for social workers in *(a)* the Portsmouth area and *(b)* England; and if he will make a statement. [98344]

Jacqui Smith: We do not hold central information on social worker vacancies in each local authority area. A survey undertaken by the Employers Organisation found that, across all local authority social services in England as at 30 September 2001, around 10 per cent, of all field social worker posts were vacant. Regional variations show that, as of 30 September 2001, the south west has vacancy rates of 8.5 per cent.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he is taking to increase the number of social worker applications in *(a)* the Portsmouth area and *(b)* England; and if he will make a statement. [98345]

Jacqui Smith: To make social work a more attractive career choice a new degree level qualification in social work, is being introduced from Sept 2003. It will make newly qualified staff more confident, competent and better equipped for the realities of social work practice. Also, for September, a non-means tested bursary is being introduced to encourage more students to enter social work training. It will be payable to new and existing students, ordinarily resident in England, who are not funded by their employer.

Both developments are supported throughout, by the national social work recruitment campaign, launched in October 2001, backed by funding of £1.5 million. Applications for social work courses have risen for the first time in seven years, by 8.3 per cent, on the numbers for 2001. The action taken by the Department of Health is to increase the number of social worker applications in England. It is for local employers to take other specific action locally.

Strokes

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what research has been carried out to assess how many patients admitted to hospital as a stroke patient were admitted to the stroke unit during their stay at any time in *(a)* the UK, *(b)* England and *(c)* the Lancashire and Cumbria Strategic Health Authority; and if he will make a statement; [97864]

(2) what plans he has to expand follow-up treatment to help increase the numbers of stroke patients who have a return to normal blood pressure six months after discharge; and if he will make a statement. [97853]

(3) what research has been carried out to assess the number of stroke patients for whom it would be appropriate to be assessed in their own home prior to discharge that undergo such assessment in *(a)* the UK, *(b)* England and *(c)* Lancashire and Cumbria Strategic Health Authority; and if he will make a statement; [97857]

(4) what research has been carried out to assess *(a)* the number of stroke patients discharged into residential or nursing home care, having been previously independent, in (i) the UK, (ii) England and (iii) Lancashire and Cumbria Strategic Health Authority and *(b)* the reasons for most patients being discharged into such residential or nursing home care; and if he will make a statement; [97856]

(5) what plans he has to increase the aftercare and secondary prevention on stroke patients following their discharge to include *(a)* hypertension management, *(b)* lipid lowering and *(c)* modification of behavioural risk factors; and if he will make a statement; [97863]

(6) what assessment has been made of the change in the numbers of stroke patients who have brain imaging within the two day target of the National Service Framework for Older People; what plans he has to *(a)* increase these numbers and *(b)* achieve a 100 per cent. target rate; and if he will make a statement; [97855]

(7) what research has been carried out to identify the reasons for the number of stroke patients for whom it would be appropriate to be assessed in their own home prior to discharge that do not undergo such an assessment; and if he will make a statement; [97851]

(8) what plans he has to increase the number of stroke physicians in hospital trusts; and if he will make a statement; [97899]

(9) what targets the Department sets for assessment of stroke victims by *(a)* swallowing assessment within 24 hours, *(b)* visual fields recorded within 24 hours, *(c)* weighing the patient and *(d)* brain imaging assessment criteria; and if he will make a statement; [97862]

(10) what research has been carried out to assess the number of patients admitted to hospital as a stroke patient who *(a)* spend no time within the stroke unit during their stay and *(b)* are admitted to the stroke unit during their stay and who receive 50 per cent.or more of their treatment within the unit in (i) the UK, (ii) England and (iii) Lancashire and Cumbria Strategic Health Authority; and if he will make a statement; [97854]

(11) what research has been carried out to assess the numbers of stroke patients who have a return to normal blood pressure six months after discharge in *(a)* the UK, *(b)* England and *(c)* Lancashire and Cumbria; and if he will make a statement; [97852]

(12) what plans he has to improve the effectiveness of stroke units and to increase the capacity of units; and if he will make a statement. [97898]

Jacqui Smith: We do not collect routinely information on stroke services at the level of detail requested in these questions. The most comprehensive source of information is the National Sentinel Stroke Audit, carried out by the Royal College of Physicians. The audit was commissioned by the National Health Service in 1998 and was last updated in 2002. The results can be found at

http://www.rcplondon.ac.uk/pubs/strokeauditQ1-02.pdf.

The audit contains information covering discharge arrangements, and clinical assessments including swallowing assessments and visual fields. The 2002 audit shows that 73 per cent. of trusts who participated had a stroke unit, compared to 56 per cent, three years earlier. In addition, 83 per cent, of patients receive brain imaging—the highest ever level. The audit shows that 80 per cent, of trusts that participated have a consultant physician with specialist knowledge of stroke who is formally recognised as having principal responsibility for stroke services. While it is recognised that some services need to increase their capacity, the audit notes that very significant improvements have already been made.

Our major vehicle for further improving standards for stroke services is through the older people's national service framework (NSF), which sets specific milestones for improvement by 2004 of stroke services in primary care trusts (PCTs), specialist services and general hospitals that care for people suffering from a stroke. Our document, Improvement, Expansion and Reform, which sets for the NHS a priorities and planning framework for 2003–6, makes clear that implementation of the older people's NSF is a top priority and that the 2004 milestone around specialist stroke services is a key target.

We monitor progress against the key milestones in the NSF. From the information gathered so far, we know that 83 per cent, of the hospitals who have replied now have plans to have a specialist stroke service in place by April 2004.

Under the NSF, PCTs will need to ensure that every general practice can identify and treat patients identified as being at risk of stroke because of high blood pressure, atrial fibrillation or other risk factors by April 2004. To help ensure that the treatment they receive is of a consistent standard, the National Institute of Clinical Excellence is developing guidelines for the management of hypertension in primary care. The Institute's report is expected next year.

Implementation of the NSF for older people is leading to real improvements in stroke services and making a difference to people's lives. The development of better services and improved standards in stroke care requires the right balance between national standards, provided by the NSF, national clinical guidelines and local control. It will be important to ensure that stroke care services are co-ordinated and fully integrated within a full range of other relevant local services.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what monitoring has taken place against the April 2002 milestone contained in Standard Five of the National Health Service Framework for Older People, for every general hospital treating stroke patients to have a plan to introduce a specialised stroke unit by April 2004; and what proportion of hospitals have met the milestone. [94579]

Jacqui Smith: An exercise conducted in autumn 2002 concluded that 83 per cent. of hospitals have plans in place to introduce a specialist stroke service from 2004.

Tobacco Products

Mr. Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the system of licensing for sale of tobacco products by retailers. [93111]

Ms Blears: There is at present no system of licensing for retailers of tobacco products.

There is a Tobacco Enforcement Protocol (published in March 1998) aimed at assisting local authorities with regard to the enforcement legislation to prevent the sale of tobacco products to minors. The Department of Health has sponsored an initiative over the last year to improve the awareness and training of trading standards officers and enforcement officers of local authorities involved in this work. This has been done in co-operation with the Trading Standards Institute (TSI) and the Local Authority Co-ordinators of Regulatory Services (LACORS).

Vehicle Fleets

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made with renewal of NHS trusts' vehicle fleets on a lower emission basis, broken down by volume and percentage for each category of vehicle, type of power unit and/or type of fuel, in each of the last three years. [96593]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 10 February 2003]:* Reducing vehicle emissions is a key transport issue, which has been agreed as a priority across Government. Against a baseline year of 2002–03, all Departments are aiming by 31 March 2006 to reduce road transport vehicle carbon dioxide emissions by at least 10 per cent, and requiring at least 10 per cent, of all fleet cars to be alternatively fuelled.

Progress against these targets will be reported in the Sustainable Development in Government annual reports. The first full report against the Framework will be in 2003, reporting against the baseline year of 2002–2003.

The National Health Service has a vehicle fleet of more than 40,000 vehicles but information in the format requested is currently not available.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 25 February 2003

TREASURY

Gibraltar

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what studies his Department has assessed of the possible effect on the *(a)* industry and *(b)* economy of Gibraltar if the UK were to enter the eurozone. [98913]

Ruth Kelly: The Government have made clear that a comprehensive and rigorous assessment of the five economic tests will be made within two years of the start of this Parliament.

Working Tax Credit

Mr. Steve Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate how many *(a)* couples with children, *(b)* couples with no children and *(c)* single childless people will be entitled to the new working tax credit. [94024]

Dawn Primarolo: The Working Tax Credit is expected to benefit 1.35m families with and without children.

Asbestos

Mr. Heald: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the annual cost *(a)* in each year since its introduction and *(b)* over the next five years of tax relief on work done to remove asbestos; and if he will make a statement. [98656]

John Healey: The legislation is intended to aid the regeneration of sites that are contaminated by harmful substances, not just asbestos. Estimates of the cost for cleaning sites contaminated with asbestos are therefore not available. However, the full cost of the Finance Act 2001 relief for regeneration of sites contaminated by harmful substances was estimated at £50 million in 2001–02, £85 million in 2002–03 and £75 million in 2003–04. Figures for the remaining two years are not available.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the *(a)* verification and *(b)* auditing arrangements for claims for tax relief on work done to remove asbestos. [98657]

Dawn Primarolo: Claims for land remediation relief under the Finance Act 2001 provisions are subject to the same verification and auditing arrangements as any other entry in a Corporation Tax return.

Child Tax Credit

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate how many couples are ineligible for children's tax credit because the income of the highest earner is too high, but would be eligible for child tax credit because their joint income is below the upper limit. [94048]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 28 January 2003]:* Without FRS data for 2002–03 it is not possible to provide reliable estimates.

Climate Change Levy

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimates his Department has made of the annual cost to British industry of the climate change levy *(a)* overall and *(b)* per sector. [98712]

John Healey: The climate change levy is expected to raise about £0.9 billion from business and the public sector in 2002–03. This has been recycled back to these sectors through a 0.3 percentage point cut in employers' national insurance contributions, support for enhanced capital allowances for investments in energy efficiency measures, and spending on renewable energy and energy efficiency, principally through the Carbon Trust.

The levy package is expected to be broadly revenue neutral between industry and the service sector. It is not possible to determine the impact on individual sectors as this depends on the extent to which they are eligible for discounts for energy-intensive users, their use of levy-exempt renewable energy and combined heat and power, and their take-up of the enhanced capital allowances and support from the Carbon Trust.

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what measures have been taken to assist sectors that are unable to comply with the Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control Directive, and are ineligible for a rebate on the climate change levy, with the cost of the climate change levy; [98714]

(2) what measures his Department has taken to assist small businesses to meet the cost of the climate change levy. [98713]

John Healey: The climate change levy (CCL) was introduced in a package which involves reductions to employer national insurance contributions and support for energy efficiency, which is broadly revenue neutral to business as a whole. As part of the package, the Government supports businesses investing in approved energy-saving technologies through enhanced capital allowances. All businesses can take advantage of the help available from the CCL funded Carbon Trust which supports energy efficiency improvements by business and the development of low carbon technologies. Some of the Carbon Trust schemes, for example their small firms loan scheme, are intended specifically to benefit small firms. In addition, many of the smallest businesses' energy use will be below that at which levy becomes payable, so will not pay any levy at all.

In recognition of the need to protect the competitiveness of energy-intensive industries subject to international competition, the Government allows an 80 per cent. discount from the levy for businesses in energy-intensive sectors covered by the Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control (IPPC) regime, providing they have entered into climate change agreements with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

(DEFRA) to meet two-yearly energy efficiency targets. The Government targets relief from the levy on those sectors covered by the IPPC as it covers the main energy-intensive sectors subject to international competition.

Finally, in order to give all businesses an incentive to agree to emissions targets, the Government have also launched the UK emissions trading scheme, with an incentive worth £150 million after tax over five years.

Departmental Staff (Northern Ireland)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the *(a)* numerical and *(b)* percentage breakdown by perceived community origin are of *(i)* Inland Revenue and (ii) Customs and Excise staff employed in Northern Ireland. [97791]

John Healey: The information is as follows:

HM Customs and Excise

Out of the total number of 631 the numerical *(a)* and percentage *(b)* breakdown by perceived community origin of HM Customs and Excise staff employed in Northern Ireland as at 1 January 2003 is:

	Number	*Percentage*
Protestant	229	36
Roman Catholic	355	57

It has not been possible to determine the community origin of 7 per cent. of staff.

Inland Revenue

Out of the total number of 1,703 the numerical *(a)* and percentage *(b)* breakdown by perceived community origin of Inland Revenue staff employed in Northern Ireland as at 1 January 2003 is:

	Number	*Percentage*
Protestant	745	44
Roman Catholic	838	49

It has not been possible to determine the community origin of 7 per cent. of staff.

Liquefied Petroleum Gas

Mr. Drew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what financial aid is available for those petrol stations which wish to supply liquefied petroleum gas. [98899]

John Healey: Government policy on encouraging the use of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) has centred on encouraging the use of vehicles through lower rates of excise duty and grants to convert cars to LPG through the powershift programme. This policy has been very successful with over 1,100 stations now selling LPG across the country compared to 150 in 1998.

Meetings

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) whether meetings between officials of his Department and representatives of Guernsey are held on Jersey; [98912]

(2) how often meetings are held between his Department's officials and representatives from the Isle of Man; and whether meetings are held purely when necessary; [98911]

(3) what his Department's policy is regarding consultation with representatives of Jersey on economic decisions that could affect Jersey. [98910]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given by the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 11 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 114–15W.

Metallgesellschaft Case (Compensation)

Denzil Davies: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much compensation has been paid to claimants by the Inland Revenue following the decision of the ECJ in the case of Metallgesellschaft (C-397/98); and what his estimate is of the total amount that will be paid. [98548]

Dawn Primarolo: To date, the Inland Revenue has paid a total of £32,489,711.

Other claims made on the basis of this decision are still subject to legal proceedings. It is impossible, at this time, to estimate the total amount that might be paid in the future.

North Sea Tax Regime

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made as to the effect tax changes on North Sea oil and gas companies announced in the Budget statement 2002 are having on the competitiveness of the industry. [99025]

John Healey: The Budget 2002 changes to the North Sea taxation regime make new investment in the North Sea more economic for oil and gas companies while extracting a fairer share of revenue for the taxpayer. The reforms are too recent for a comprehensive assessment of their overall economic impact, but the Government are encouraged by early evidence from the UKOOA report of November 2002, which found that

> "total capital expenditure for the period 2001–2010 is forecast to increase by around £1 billion, compared with last year's forecast."

Tax and Benefits

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* families and *(b)* individuals have gained from tax and benefit changes since 1997; and on average by how much. [98256]

Dawn Primarolo: As a result of tax and benefit changes introduced since 1997, by 2003–04 households with children will be, on average, £1,200 per year better off. Some 6.4 million households with children will be better off.

By 2003–04, all households will be £740 per year better off on average as a result of measures introduced since 1997. Each adult will be £440 per year better off on average. There are nearly 35 million adults in households that will be better off as a result of measures introduced since 1997.

Tax Credit Helpline

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what performance targets have been set for the tax credit helpline; and what have been the monthly performance levels against those targets since the helpline was established. [94237]

Dawn Primarolo: A helpline was set up in August 2002 to handle detailed inquiries about the two new tax credits—Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit. The introduction of these two new tax credits in April 2003 represents a large one-off piece of work for the Inland Revenue. That work includes handling telephone enquiries and processing claims. The helpline has not been set stand-alone performance targets because, as a one-off exercise, call handling and claims processing are effectively being managed as a single stream of work—allowing resources to be allocated across the two in the light of changing workload priorities.

The underlying aim at the helpline is to ensure that people can get through when they need to. That is monitored in a number of ways, including looking at the volume of calls received and handled. The best available evidence on calls made and calls received indicates that, in each month since August 2002, a high proportion—certainly more than 90 per cent.—of callers have got through on the same day.

Taxation

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will estimate the number of families where the principal earner has a gross income above the higher rate threshold and the gross household income is below £58,175; [93061]

(2) if he will estimate the number of families entitled to the children's tax credit where the recipient has a gross income of between £34,515 and £42,450 and the gross household income is between £50,000 and £58,175; [93060]

(3) if he will estimate the number of families entitled to the children's tax credit where the recipient has a gross income of less than £34,515 and the gross household income exceeds £50,000; [93058]

(4) if he will estimate the number of families entitled to the children's tax credit where the recipient has a gross income of less than £42,450 and the gross household income exceeds £58,175; [93057]

(5) if he will estimate the number of families entitled to the children's tax credit where the recipient has a gross income of less than £34,515 and the gross household income exceeds £58,175; [93059]

(6) if he will estimate the number of married or cohabiting couples with children whose combined taxable income exceeds £34,515 but is less than £50,000 in 2003–04; [93063]

(7) if he will estimate the number of married or cohabiting couples with children whose combined taxable income exceeds £34,515 but is less than £58,175 in 2003–04; [93065]

(8) if he will estimate the number of married or cohabiting couples with children whose combined taxable income exceeds £42,450 but is less than £58,175 in 2003–04; [93064]

(9) if he will estimate the number of married or cohabiting couples with children whose combined taxable income exceeds £42,450 but is less than £50,000 in 2003–04. [93062]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 23 January 2003]:* No reliable estimates exist.

Thermal Insulation

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer further to his answer of 22 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 42W, on thermal insulation, what the implications are of the European Union Court Case 416/85, EC Commission *v.* United Kingdom for the possibilities of VAT reduction on the sales and installation of energy saving materials; and if he will make a statement. [98563]

John Healey: European Court of Justice case 416/85 concerned the scope of the UK's zero rates. The Court held that zero-rating could only be justified for clearly defined social reasons and for the benefit of the final consumer.

The long-standing formal agreements with our European partners make entirely separate provision for reduced rates (of no lower than 5 per cent.) and allow relief for the 'supply, construction, renovation and alteration of housing provided as part of a social policy'. Under this provision, the UK has been able to introduce a reduced rate for installations of certain energy-saving materials in homes. Our current policy is to restrict the relief to the installation of materials whose primary purpose is to save energy, and the European Court case has no bearing on this limitation.

As I explained in my answer of 22 January, we are not able to introduce a reduced rate of VAT for energy-efficient or energy-saving materials sold direct to the public. This is not because of the European Court case, but rather that the reduced rate provision makes clear that goods and materials can only have a reduced rate when they are supplied as part of an overall service.

UK Listing Authority

Mr. Colman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what the principal regulatory risks are that the UK Listing Authority is responsible for managing; [99159]

(2) what progress the UK Listing Authority has made in reviewing the monitoring of continuing compliance with the Listing Rules and in recommending improvements; and if he will place in the Library a copy of the review's results and recommendations; [99161]

(3) what progress the UK Listing Authority has made in reviewing the requirements for approval and vetting of listing and other documentation, and in making recommendations; and if he will place in the Library a copy of the review's results and recommendations; [99158]

(4) what the outcome was of the UK Listing Authority's risk-based review of the sponsor system and recommendations for improvements; and if he will make a statement on his policy towards including such an objective in the authority's objectives for 2002–03. [99160]

Ruth Kelly: The United Kingdom Listing Authority (UKLA) is part of the Financial Services Authority, which is independent of the Government. The duties of the FSA in its capacity as the UKLA are set out in section 73 of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000. Following on from these duties, the UKLA formulates and enforces Listing Rules that:

provide an appropriate level of protection for investors in listed securities;

facilitate access to listed markets for a broad range of enterprises;

seek to maintain the integrity and competitiveness of UK markets for listed securities.

The UKLA also has operational objectives, that are more task-specific, which are discussed each year with the Treasury. These objectives can be found on the UKLA section of the FSA website.

Issues relating to the UKLA's review of the Listings Rules are a matter for the UKLA.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Burma

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what is the *(a)* value of imports the UK received from Burma and *(b)* the nature of these imports in 2002. [88773]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 8 January 2003]*: I have been asked to reply.

According to figures published by HM Customs and Excise, UK imports of goods from Burma in 2002 were as follows:

£000

Product	*Value*
Fish, (not marine mammals), crustaceans, molluscs and aquatic invertebrates and preparations thereof	8,310
Vegetables and fruit	485
Coffee, tea, cocoa, spices, and manufactures thereof	7
Oil seeds and oleaginous fruit	10
Cork and wood	979
Pulp and waste paper	121
Cork and wood manufactures (excluding furniture)	1,302
Textile yarn, fabrics, made-up articles, nes and related products	49
Manufactures of metals, nes	14
Power generating machinery and equipment	1,225
Machinery specialised for particular industries	1
General industrial machinery and equipment, nes and machine parts, nes	2
Office machines and automatic data processing machines	1
Electrical machinery, apparatus and appliances, nes and electrical parts thereof (including non-electrical counterparts, nes, of electrical household type equipment)	2
Transport equipment other than road vehicles	29
Prefabricated buildings; sanitary, plumbing and lighting fixtures and fittings, nes	6
Furniture and parts thereof; bedding, mattresses, supports, cushions and similar stuffed furnishings	1,437
Articles of apparel and clothing accessories	50,177
Footwear	20
Professional, scientific and controlling instruments and apparatus, nes	1
Miscellaneous manufactured articles, nes	94
Commodities and transactions not elsewhere classified	66
Total	64,337

nes = not elsewhere specified

Note:

Products are classified according to the Standard International Trade Classification (revision 3).

Work Placements

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many university students her Department and associated agencies has supported or sponsored with a work placement in the last year; what her policy is on work placements; what plans she has to develop such schemes; and what her policy is on paying their university fees. [98549]

Clare Short: My Department has extensive contacts with UK Universities and supports work placements for students on an ad hoc basis.

DFID is also a corporate sponsor of the Windsor Fellowship. The Windsor Fellowship is a charity whose aim is to identify high achievers from Black and Asian communities and to offer them a development programme. We have provided six Fellows with eight-week placements. DFID also provides up to four placements a year under the Cabinet Office Summer Development Programme for potential applicants to the fast stream from within the ethnic minorities. Attachments last between six to eight weeks.

It is not our practice to pay university fees of those whose placements we sponsor.

We do not operate a formal scheme for the placement of university students and have no plans to do so.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

E-mails

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission what type of software is used to filter e-mails in the House. [98279]

Sir Archy Kirkwood: A commercially available software package is used to detect and block incoming messages containing viruses and to filter incoming e-mails containing inappropriate material.

Internet Monitoring

Mr Liddell-Grainger: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission whether use of the internet within the parliamentary estate is monitored. [98278]

Sir Archy Kirkwood: The Parliamentary Communications Directorate monitors the amount and type of internet traffic in order to manage the network and to inform planning decisions. For staff of the House of Commons, the House Authorities reserve the right to monitor individual use of the internet upon a written request from a departmental establishments officer.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Criminal Records Checks

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people applying for positions within residential care and nursing homes are awaiting clearance from the Criminal Records Bureau in *(a)* the East Riding of Yorkshire, *(b)* Hull and *(c)* England.[Transferred] [97721]

Hilary Benn: Data on outstanding applications for specific job types or the areas requested are not available because there are no IT procedures at present to extract this data from the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) database. This functionality is expected to be available during subsequent system releases.

Disclosures are currently taking an average of five weeks to complete. Many of the outstanding applications at any time will be the subject of requests to applicants or Registered bodies for future information. There are 62,327 cases over three weeks old (less than two weeks output), plus a further 82,204 such cases awaiting information from customers.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether civil offences are recorded in disclosures issued as a result of criminal records bureaux checks. [97675]

Hilary Benn: At present, the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) is issuing Standard and Enhanced Disclosures. These show spent and unspent convictions, cautions, reprimands and warnings recorded on the Police National Computer. In appropriate cases, the CRB searches a list kept by the Department for Education and Skills of people who are considered unsuitable to work with children. An Enhanced Disclosure would also include other information held in local police records which, in the chief officer's opinion, is relevant to the matter in hand and ought to be included in the Disclosure. It is possible that a Disclosure might include information about a civil offence as a result of such other enquiries.

Anti-trafficking Budgets

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much the budgets of the *(a)* police, *(b)* Customs and *(c)* intelligence services were to combat *(i)* drug, (ii) firearm and (iii) people trafficking in (A) 2001, (B) 2002 and (C) 2003. [96907]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The information is as follows:

(a) Police Authorities and Chief Officers are responsible for setting budgets and making operational decisions within them. The information sought is not available centrally.

(b) Her Majesty's Customs and Excise spent as follows on detecting and deterring the smuggling of illegal drugs and other prohibited and restricted goods: £229 million in 2000/01; and £229.6 million in 2001/02. (source: HMCE Annual Reports)

(c) It has been the policy of successive Governments not to disclose information concerning the breakdown in the allocation of resources of the Intelligence Agencies or provide information about their activities. However, in April 2001 it was exceptionally announced that the Security and Intelligence Agencies had been awarded additional funding to aid the fight against crime in the areas of drug trafficking and people smuggling. The amounts allocated were:

			£
	2001/02	*2002/03*	*2003/04*
(i). drugs trafficking	5. 9m	6. 6m	7. 7m
(iii). people smuggling	0.6m	0.5m	0.6m

Anti-war Protest

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what mechanisms he will use to ensure that the numbers of anti-Gulf War protesters marching to Hyde Park on 15 February 2003 are accurately counted. [97956]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 24 February 2003]:* The Government do not calculate the number of people participating in marches and demonstrations. The Metropolitan Police Service (MPS), as well as other police forces, use a range of techniques for estimating the numbers involved.

British Detainees (Switzerland)

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has received from Swiss authorities regarding two Britons detained in Switzerland last year on suspicion of terrorist activities at the Gösgen nuclear power station in Switzerland. [98852]

Mr. Blunkett: Due to the confidential nature of cases received in respect of Mutual Legal Assistance, I can neither confirm nor deny the existence of letters of request. In any event, we would discuss operational cases where criminal investigations may be on-going.

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to reply to the letter to him dated 4 November from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Ms Mansoureli Bozorovia. [97086]

Mr. Blunkett: I wrote to my right hon .Friend on 24 February 2003.

Crime (Humberside)

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people arrested in *(a)* Haltemprice and Howden, *(b)* the East Riding of Yorkshire and *(c)* the Humberside Police Authority area tested positive for category A or B drugs in each quarter since 1997. [97723]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: At present arrestees throughout England and Wales are not routinely tested for drugs, so it is not possible to provide the level of detail requested.

However, the New English and Welsh Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring (NEW-ADAM) research programme, which involves interviewing and drug testing those arrested by the police at 16 sites throughout England and Wales, does provide some information. Analysis of the data from the first eight sites in the survey, collected during 1999–2000, shows that of those arrestees that provided a urine sample, 65 per cent. tested positive for one or more illegal drugs, while 30 per cent. tested positive for two or more such substance. Indeed, 29 per cent. tested positive for opiates (including heroin) and/or cocaine (including crack).

Drug test results are also available from three drug-testing pilot sites. The Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000 gave the police power to drug test arrestees once they are charged with a "trigger offence" (these include property crime, robbery and specified Class A drug offences). The proportion of police tests, collected during July 2001 to February 2002, where results were positive for cocaine and/or heroin were: Hackney, 63 per cent.; Nottingham, 58 per cent.; Stafford and Cannock, 47 per cent.

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* prosecutions and *(b)* convictions were recorded in each year since 1997 in the Humberside police authority areas for *(i)* carrying a loaded firearm in a public place, (ii) acquiring a firearm under the age of 17, (iii) being a person under 14 possessing an air weapon or ammunition, (iv) being a person under 14 possessing an air weapon in a public place, *(v)* supplying an air weapon to a person under 14 and (vi) making improper use of an air weapon. [97722]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The information contained in the table gives the number of defendants proceeded against and convicted of the various firearms offences requested, in the Humberside police force area, 1997 to 2001.

Statistics for 2002 will be published in the autumn.

Number of defendants[1] proceeded against at magistrates courts and convicted at all courts[2] for certain firearms offences, Humberside, 1997 to 2001

		1997		1998		1999	
Offence description	*Statute*	*Proceeded against*	*Convicted*	*Proceeded against*	*Convicted*	*Proceeded against*	*Convicted*
(See footnote[3] for definition of Firearm Groups) *(i) Carrying a loaded firearm in a public place*							
Carrying loaded firearm in public place etc. (Group I)	Firearms Act 1968 sec. 19 amended by the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 section 157 sch. 8 part III	1	1	2	1	—	—
Carrying loaded firearm in public place etc. (Group II)	Ibid.	1	1	1	—	—	—
Carrying loaded firearm in public place etc. (Group III)	Ibid.	5	6	9	9	3	2
Total		7	8	12	10	3	3
(ii) Acquiring a firearm under the age of 17							
Person under 17 acquiring firearm (Group I)	Firearms Act 1968 section 22(1)	—	—	—	—	—	—
Person under 17 acquiring firearm (Group II)	Ibid.	—	—	—	—	—	—
Person under 17 acquiring firearm (Group III)	Ibid.						
Total		—	—	—	—	—	—
(iii) Person under 14 having with him an air weapon or ammunition therefore, (Group III)	Firearms Act 1968 section 22(4)	—	—	—	—	—	—

Number of defendants[1] *proceeded against at magistrates courts and convicted at all courts*[2] *for certain firearms offences, Humberside, 1997 to 2001*

Offence description	*Statute*	*1997* *Proceeded against*	*Convicted*	*1998* *Proceeded against*	*Convicted*	*1999* *Proceeded against*	*Convicted*
(iv) Person under 17 having with him an air weapon in a public place, (Group III)	Firearms Act 1968 section 22(5)	—	—	1	1	1	1
(v) Supplying air weapon to person under 14, (Group III)	Firearms Act 1968, section 24(4)	—	—	—	—	1	1
(vi) Person under 14 making improper use of air weapon when under supervision, (Group III)	Firearms Act 1968 Section 23(1)*(a)*	—	—	—	—	—	—

Offence description	Statute	*2000* *Proceeded against*	*2001* *Convicted*	*Proceeded against*	*Convicted*
(See footnote[3] for definition of Firearm Groups)					
(i) Carrying a loaded firearm in a public place					
Carrying loaded firearm in public place etc. (Group 1)	Firearms Act 1968 sec. 19 amended by the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 section 157 sch. 8 part III	1	1	—	—
Carrying loaded firearm in public place etc. (group II)	Ibid.	—	—	—	—
Carrying loaded firearm in public place etc. (Group III)	Ibid.	9	7	4	3
Total		10	8	4	3
(ii) Acquiring a firearm under the age of 17					
Person under 17 acquiring firearm (Group 1)	Firearms Act 1968 section 22(1)	—	—	—	—
Person under 17 acquiring firearm (Group II)	Ibid.	—	—	—	—
Person under 17 acquiring firearm (Group III)	Ibid.	2	2	—	—
Total		—	—	—	—
(iii) Person under 14 having with him an air weapon or a ammunition therefore, (Group III)	Firearms Act 1968 section 22(4)	—	—	—	—
(iv) Person under 17 having with him an air weapon in a public place, (Group III)	Firearms Act 1968 section 22(5)	—	—	1	1
(v) Supplying air weapon to person under 14, (Group III)	Firearms Act 1968, section 24(4)	1	1	—	—
(vi) Person under 14 making improper use of air weapon when under supervision, (Group III)	Firearms Act 1968 section 23(1)*(a)*	—	—	—	—

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[1] These data are on the principal offence basis.

[2] Due to the time lag between committal for trial and appearance at the Crown Court, it is possible for number convicted to exceed those proceeded against in a given year.

[3] For the purposes of recording offences. Firearms are divided into three groups as follows:

Group 1—All firearms etc. other than those described in Group II and III.

Group II—Shot guns as defined in section 1(3)*(a)* of the Act.

Group III—Air weapons as defined in section 1(3)*(b)* of the Act.

Criminal Records Bureau

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for Criminal Records Bureau checks processing will be postponed from March 2003 to 2004. [96589]

Hilary Benn: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave him on 20 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 176W.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will commission an evaluation of the impact of the Criminal Records Bureau on volunteering in deprived communities. [96591]

Hilary Benn: We are determined that the operation of the Criminal Records Bureau should benefit the voluntary sector. As part of the Bureau's wider consultation arrangements with its customers, a voluntary and community sector working group has been established whose terms of reference specifically include monitoring the implications of the disclosure service for, and considering how the service should best meet the needs of, the voluntary and community sector.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the Criminal Record Bureau plans to launch an advisory service to employers about the availability of checks in a variety of countries; how much the contract is valued at; when the contract will expire; how many people are employed in the service; how much his Department is investing in the service; and if he will make a statement. [97141]

Hilary Benn: The Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) launched an overseas information service on 4 December 2002. This provides information, via a fax-back service, on the criminal record checking regimes available in 15 countries. It is expected that the number of countries included in this service will rise during the course of 2003.

The aim of the service is to provide employers with information that will lead them to sources of information overseas, beyond those capable of being offered by the CRB, to help them make safer recruitment decisions. The only contracted-out element is the fax-back service operated by iTouch (UK) Limited. The amount received by iTouch (UK) Limited over the period of the contract will depend upon the number of inquiries made to the faxback service. The contract is scheduled to run until December 2005, at which time it will be reviewed. All other aspects of the scheme are administered by civil servants employed by the CRB. Two members of staff undertake this work as part of their other duties. The total measurable cost of providing the service during the current financial year has so far been £3,650.00.

The overseas information service is a non-statutory service provided by the CRB. Part V of the Police Act 1997 under which the CRB was created did not envisage the CRB obtaining overseas criminal records as part of the Disclosure service. Nevertheless, it was recognised that foreign nationals (and UK nationals returning from a period of residence overseas) make up a significant portion of the UK workforce. These individuals often occupy positions of trust, which would normally attract a CRB Standard or Enhanced Disclosure. However a Disclosure would be of limited use for employers seeking to recruit a foreign national, given that it is unlikely that these individuals would feature on the UK data sources accessed as part of the CRB Disclosure service.

The faxback service provides information regarding the availability of criminal records from overseas, in particular the application procedure involved in obtaining such records from overseas. Calls are charged at premium rate (£1 per minute). The following 15 countries are featured on the faxback service:

Australia
Canada
Denmark
France
Germany
Jamaica
Malaysia
Netherlands
New Zealand
Philippines
Poland
Republic of Ireland
South Africa
Spain
Sweden

The overseas information service also comprises an email enquiry facility (overseas@crb.gsi.gov.uk) and a National Rate enquiry line (0870 0 100 450).

The CRB is not involved in any application made to an overseas authority, nor is it responsible for the processes operated by or the nature of the information returned by that overseas authority. The costs incurred in the financial year 2001–02 amount to just over £25,000. The Overseas project was commissioned by the CRB Chief Executive in May 2001 and was concerned with establishing contact with, and benchmarking against, equivalent agencies overseas. This figure includes a number of fact-finding visits to many of the countries covered by the faxback service. The latest visit was undertaken in December 2001.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what date the Carter report has set for the restoration of checks against the Protection of Vulnerable Adults List; [97207]

(2) if he will list the *(a)* milestones and *(b)* targets that have been set by the Carter Inquiry into the postponement of Criminal Record Bureau checks; and when they are expected to be achieved. [97211]

Hilary Benn: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave him on 20 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 175W.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place a copy of the *(a)* enhanced, *(b)* basic disclosure and *(c)* standard forms and the *(i)* old and (ii) new explanatory notes for Criminal Records Bureau checks in the Library. [97210]

Hilary Benn: Basic Disclosures are not yet available from the Criminal Records Bureau, and as such Basic Disclosure Application Forms do not yet exist. A single application form is used for Standard and Enhanced

Disclosure applications and a copy of this form, along with both original and updated guidance notes, has been placed in the Library.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to his answer of 29 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 911W, on the Criminal Records Bureau, how much was paid to each organisation who conducted research for the Department; and if he will place a copy of each of the evaluations in the Library. [97225]

Hilary Benn: The following payments were made to each organisation that conducted research for the Department:

	£
Research Payments	
Accent Marketing and Research	16,293.26
Rosslyn Research Limited	5,710.50

A copy of these evaluations will be placed in the Library in due course.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects basic disclosures to be issued again by the Criminal Records Bureau; and if he will make a statement. [97690]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 13 February 2003]:* Basic disclosures are not yet available from the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB). In light of the operational difficulties that the CRB experienced in the summer of 2002, following the launch of the Enhanced and Standard Disclosure Services, the CRB decided to postpone the implementation of the Basic Disclosure Service, planned to start one year after the Enhanced/Standard Disclosure service. A revised implementation date has not yet been agreed and this is conditional upon the recommendations made to Ministers by the Independent Review Team.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to his answer of 3 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 72W, what the total cost is of the ex-gratia payments that have been made by the CRB. [98836]

Hilary Benn: The total cost of ex-gratia payments made by the Criminal Records Bureau, up to 15 February 2003, is £40,160.

Daedalus Site

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when his Department was made aware that the Daedalus site at Lee-on-the-Solent might be available for Home Office purposes. [99014]

Beverley Hughes: We announced on 11 February 2003 that we had identified HMS Daedalus as a potential site for an Accommodation Centre. We have put this into the public domain because, following preliminary work, we consider the site to be a serious prospect for an Accommodation Centre.

We first became aware in November 2002 that this site might become available for this purpose.

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what extra resources the Home Office will provide for Hampshire Constabulary for the policing of the Daedalus site at Lee-on-the-Solent in the event of the possible residential unit for young male asylum seekers being approved. [99015]

Beverley Hughes: The site at HMS Daedalus is being considered as a potential suitable site for an accommodation centre for single male asylum seekers. A final decision has not yet been taken. Detailed consultations have not yet begun.

Domiciliary Carers (Criminal Record Checks)

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the decision to allow employment of domiciliary carers for disabled people without them first being cleared by the Criminal Records Bureau from April 2003. [98553]

Hilary Benn: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary gave to a question by my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) on 4 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 100W.

Since the beginning of October 2002, the Criminal Records Bureau has issued on average over 40,000 Disclosures per week, and has produced in excess of 1 million Disclosures since 11 March 2002.

The independent review team, which my right hon. Friend announced last September, submitted its conclusions and recommendations at the end of last year. We hope to publish the team's recommendations, together with the Government's response, shortly.

Drink-driving Offences

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* drink-driving offences were recorded in each year since 1997 by the police constabulary and *(b)* successful prosecutions there have been in *(i)* England, (ii) Wales and (iii) Scotland since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [98488]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Available information on the number of proceedings and convictions for offences of driving whilst impaired by drink or drugs or driving above the specified limit for alcohol in England and Wales is given in the table by police force area. The data cannot be disaggregated between alcohol or drug offences.

Matters related to Scotland are for the Scottish Executive.

Proceedings at Magistrates courts and findings of guilt at all courts for offences of driving etc. after consuming alcohol or taking drugs[1] by police force area, England and Wales, 1997 to 2001

	1997		*1998*		*1999*		*2000*		*2001*	
Police force area	*Proceedings*	*Findings of guilt*	*Proceedings*	*Findings of guilt*	*Proceedings*	*Findings of guilt*	*Proceedings*	*Findings of guilt*	*Proceedings*	*Findings of guilt*
Avon and Somerset	3,114	2,812	2,832	2,566	2,971	2,728	2,719	2,462	2,403	2,197
Bedfordshire	1,323	1,146	1,167	1,060	961	869	884	797	1,013	914
Cambridgeshire	1,175	1,092	1,145	1,060	1,022	941	882	793	880	813
Cheshire	2,165	1,969	2,094	1,903	2,002	1,827	1,899	1,652	1,753	1,529
Cleveland	1,029	926	947	870	912	811	858	777	973	887
Cumbria	1,017	931	927	856	925	871	874	806	810	761
Derbyshire	1,852	1,612	1,695	1,547	1,613	1,463	1,599	1,417	1,612	1,411
Devon and Cornwall	2,637	2,342	2,531	2,265	2,507	2,277	2,421	2,199	2,594	2,369
Dorset	1,355	1,214	1,310	1,186	1,223	1,120	1,244	1,115	1,284	1,150
Durham	1,140	1,044	1,134	1,035	1,251	1,137	1,218	1,124	1,181	1,097
Essex	3,010	2,736	2,776	2,438	2,835	2,528	2,702	2,462	2,717	2,456
Gloucestershire	1,169	1,067	1,079	985	971	889	891	804	950	865
Greater Manchester	5,235	4,806	5,117	4,715	5,254	4,850	5,186	4,801	5,236	4,715
Hampshire	4,099	3,774	3,920	3,597	4,062	3,725	3,812	3,472	3,820	3,464
Hertfordshire	1,844	1,670	1,835	1,672	1,827	1,679	1,691	1,552	1,826	1,666
Humberside	1,411	1,274	1,473	1,358	1,410	1,323	1,468	1,371	1,355	1,259
Kent	2,533	2,321	2,853	2,627	2,851	2,633	2,807	2,592	2,861	2,575
Lancashire	3,684	3,389	3,204	2,945	3,290	3,010	2,879	2,584	2,570	2,304
Leicestershire	1,782	1,648	1,615	1,485	1,778	1,624	1,651	1,531	1,730	1,546
Lincolnshire	1,206	1,088	1,074	979	1,031	941	911	816	991	877
London, City of	463	436	338	301	259	236	193	162	182	162
Merseyside	3,113	2,719	2,760	2,451	2,369	2,137	2,515	2,128	2,513	2,195
Metropolitan Police	18,987	16,165	16,433	13,889	14,720	12,414	14,166	11,801	13,744	11,260
Norfolk	1,174	1,116	1,197	1.118	1,070	1,010	1,014	935	1,293	1,143
Northamptonshire	1,245	1,107	1,230	1,062	1,228	1,058	898	782	464	399
Northumbria	2,973	2,625	2,786	2,457	2,793	2,463	2,958	2,621	2,850	2,529
North Yorkshire	1,481	1,365	1,319	1,205	1,229	1,124	1,160	1,073	1,158	1,066
Nottinghamshire	2,270	2,031	2,013	1,804	2,026	1,802	1,915	1,722	1,786	1,598
South Yorkshire	2,581	2,296	2,188	2,002	2,076	1,927	2,322	2,122	2,231	2,020
Staffordshire	2,302	2,036	2,163	1,955	1,885	1,711	[2]—	[2]—	1,673	1,513
Suffolk	1,156	1,050	1,146	1,042	1,187	1,089	1,002	902	1,049	920
Surrey	1,512	1,380	1,455	1,328	1,538	1,417	1,729	1,539	2,055	1,592
Sussex	2,658	2,373	2,344	2,113	2,440	2,224	2,327	2,112	2,635	2,358
Thames Valley	4,564	4,070	4,355	3,896	4,192	3,725	3,921	3,496	3,681	3,275
Warwickshire	908	837	855	784	927	856	855	786	955	880
West Mercia	2,093	1,947	1,946	1,794	1,867	1,747	1,741	1,631	1,874	1,740
West Midlands	7,185	6,351	6,348	5,582	5,470	4,775	5,212	4,559	5,604	4,914
West Yorkshire	4,395	3,953	4,100	3,669	4,018	3,597	3,798	3,375	3,739	3,220
Wiltshire	1,120	1,043	1,184	1,108	1,067	1,009	997	930	1,127	1,045
Total England	104,960	93,761	96,888	86,709	93,057	83,567	89,329	79,671	89,172	78,684
Dyfed Powvs	1,163	1,029	1,102	995	1,047	944	985	858	973	867
Gwent	1,268	1,166	1,336	1,203	1,226	1,079	1,341	1,211	1,297	1,152
North Wales	1,496	1,354	1,410	1,306	1,347	1,248	1,430	1,332	1,366	1,227
South Wales	3,238	2,892	3,309	2,903	2,823	2,526	3,075	2,757	3,175	2,812
Total Wales	7,165	6,441	7,157	6,407	6,443	5,797	6,831	6,158	6,811	6,058
Total England and Wales	112,125	100,202	104,045	93,116	99,500	89,364	96,160	85,829	95,983	84,742

[1] Including offences under Road Traffic Act 1988 sec 4(1) and (2); 5(1)*(a)* and *(b)*; 6(4); 7(6):

Driving or attempting to drive a motor vehicle whilst unfit through drink or drugs (impairment).

Driving or attempting to drive a motor vehicle while having a breath, urine or blood alcohol concentration in excess of the prescribed limit.

Failing without reasonable excuse to provide a specimen for a laboratory test or two specimens for analysis of breath if at the relevant time he/she was driving or attempting to drive a motor vehicle.

In charge of a motor vehicle while unfit through drink or drugs (impairment).

In charge of a motor vehicle while having a breath, urine or blood alcohol concentration in excess of the prescribed limit.

In charge of a motor vehicle and failing to provide a specimen for a laboratory test or two specimens for analysis of breath if at the relevant time he/she was driving or attempting to drive a motor vehicle.

Failing without reasonable excuse to provide a specimen of breath for a preliminary test.

Excluding offences under Road Traffic Act 1988 sec 3A:

Causing death by careless driving when under the influence of drink or drugs.

[2] Not available (Staffordshire were only able to submit data for a sample of weeks in 2000).

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what studies his Department has undertaken in relation to drink-driving offences from the sale of alcohol from *(a)* supermarkets, *(b)* off-licences and *(c)* petrol filling station forecourts; and if he will make a statement. [98489]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: No studies have been undertaken on the commission of drink-driving offences relating to alcohol purchased from different retail categories. However, the Home Office has commissioned research that determines where people had been drinking on the most recent occasion they had driven after drinking alcohol: at home; at someone else's home; in a pub/pubs; in a restaurant; in a nightclub/club; outside in a public place (e.g. park, street); or a specified other. The results are currently undergoing analysis.

The Home Office remains committed to combating drink-driving and shall maintain an emphasis on effective enforcement and publicity. The UK has shown that a combination of rigid enforcement and advertising campaigns has a dramatic effect on reducing the numbers of killed and seriously injured in crashes involving illegal levels of alcohol, although we acknowledge there is still much to do. We are currently looking at the possibilities for helping effective enforcement of drink drive legislation, for example, by introducing roadside evidential testing.

Drugs

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average number of interventions through the criminal justice system is for a Class A drug misuser before *(a)* treatment, *(b)* a drug treatment and testing order and *(c)* a prison sentence is imposed. [98150]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Information is not available in the form requested. A range of interventions has been developed at key stages in the criminal justice system which seek to identify and engage drug misusers, particularly those using Class A drugs, in order to access them into drug treatment delivered within a community or custodial setting. Pro-active arrest referral schemes, drug treatment and testing orders, and prison treatment services are available throughout England and Wales. Drug testing under the provisions introduced by the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000 (including testing after charge and pre-sentence) is being piloted and implemented only in certain areas.

In the Updated Drug Strategy 2002 the Government set out a comprehensive new programme of criminal justice interventions with a view to delivering an integrated "end to end system" aimed at getting drug misusers out of crime into effective treatment.

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has for merging drug action teams and crime reduction partnerships; and if he will make a statement. [98083]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The Police Reform Act, from 1 April 2003, places a statutory responsibility on local authorities, police and others to formulate and implement a drugs strategy mirroring their responsibility for crime and disorder strategies. Multi-agency partnerships are the most effective way of delivering these strategies, but we currently support separate ones for drugs (149 Drug Action Teams in England) and (376 Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships in England and Wales). To reduce burdens on partnerships, ensure they are properly resourced and reduce overlaps in the delivery of community safety, this Government believe that partnerships should be brought together, through merger or, where that is truly not feasible, by developing closer working arrangements.

Many partnerships have merged or will have merged by 1 April 2003. Others, particularly in two tier authorities, are building on already close working relationships, in discussion with Local Strategic Partnerships, where they exist. We expect that, by April 2003, there will have been a complete overhaul in the way partnerships function, and to see improvements in delivery of the National Drug Strategy and local crime and disorder strategies.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been through the court system for *(a)* possession, *(b)* dealing and *(c)* trafficking of illegal drugs in each of the last five years. [98178]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The numbers of people proceeded against for possession, dealing and trafficking in illegal drugs in England and Wales in the last five available years are shown in the table.

Numbers of people proceeded against for drug offences, England and Wales, 1996–2000

Offence	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
Possession[1]	26,927	33,125	43,516	44,603	40,738
Dealing[2]	2,148	2,233	3,875	3,644	2,707
Trafficking[3]	4,067	4,033	5,561	5,021	3,728

[1] The term 'possession' refers to those proceeded against for unlawful possession.

[2] The term 'dealing' refers to those proceeded against for unlawful supply, possession with intent to supply unlawfully and unlawful import/export.

[3] The term 'trafficking' refers to those proceeded against for unlawful production, unlawful supply, possession with intent to supply unlawfully and unlawful import/export.

Source:

Home Office Research, Development, and Statistics.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been to prison for offences under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 in each of the last five years; and what proportion of these people were from black and ethnic minority backgrounds. [98179]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The table shows the prison population in England and Wales under sentence and remand for drug offences[1].

Year[1]	*White*	*Black*	*South Asian*	*Chinese and other*	*Unrecorded*	*Total*
1998	6,907	1,783	438	548	0	9,676
1999	6,823	2,054	430	588	6	9,901
2000	6,798	2,189	456	607	5	10,055
2001	6,803	2,611	512	643	6	10,575
2002	6,860	3,511	680	461	8	11,520

[1] June for each year

Source:

Prison Population Monthly Brief June 2002

[1] Includes all drug offences

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many drug treatment and testing orders have been issued to *(a)* heroin addicts, *(b)* crack cocaine addicts and *(c)* poly-drug users since the scheme began. [98148]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Between 1 October 2000 and 31 December 2002 (which is the latest month for which figures are available) 10,525 orders were made. Information relating to the proportion of Drug Treatment and Testing orders issued to heroin, crack or poly-drug users is not available centrally.

Iraq

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Iraqi citizens he expects to apply for asylum in the United Kingdom in the event of conflict in Iraq. [96164]

Beverley Hughes: A number of Iraqi citizens currently seek asylum in the United Kingdom on a weekly basis. It is not clear if the numbers would significantly increase following a conflict in Iraq.

Home Office officials routinely revise contingency plans to deal with increases in asylum seekers.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Iraqi refugees the United Kingdom will take in the event of conflict in Iraq. [96166]

Beverley Hughes: Home Office officials, in liaison with other Government Departments, routinely revise contingency plans, including those for large influxes of displaced persons.

There are, at present, no specific plans to take refugees from Iraq.

Point-of-sale Payment

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received from *(a)* banks and *(b)* retailers on conversion to microchip and PIN technology for point of sale payment transactions. [99113]

Mr. Denham: I met representatives of the Association of Payment and Clearing Services (APACS) on 12 July 2001 and 31 January 2002 to discuss the implementation of this technology. Since then I have received regular joint progress reports from APACS and the British Retail Consortium (BRC), as well as from the implementation programme managers.

The Chief Executive of APACS wrote to me in February and again in October last year to express concern about the possible outcome of an Office of Fair Trading investigation into Mastercard interchange fees. He advised me that a ruling that these fees were uncompetitive would put the implementation of Chip and PIN at risk.

The programme managers, together with representatives from APACS and the BRC, had a further meeting with Home Office officials on 21 January this year, when they advised that the programme was going well and was on target for implementation in late 2004.

Police Officers (Brain Injury)

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how frequently serving police officers returning to active duties after traumatic brain injury should be assessed by a clinical psychologist. [98674]

Mr. Denham: Police Occupational Health Units in England and Wales will review the case of each officer who has suffered a head injury before they resume duty. Where appropriate, additional psychological tests and treatments are given by either a clinical psychologist or neuropsychologist. The aim of such assessment is to ensure that each force complies with the duty of care described in the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974.

Prisons

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the rights of prison officers to undertake industrial action; and whether the Government plans to review these rights. [97127]

Hilary Benn: Section 127 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 makes it unlawful to induce Prison Officers to withhold their services or commit a breach of discipline. For this purpose a breach of discipline means a contravention of Prison Rules or the code of conduct and discipline in the Prison Service. If inducements occur and loss results, the Secretary of State may take legal action against the person or persons so inducing those staff for damages.

In addition, on the introduction of the Employee Relations Voluntary Agreement in April 2001, the union signatories (Prison Officers' Association (POA) and Prison Governors' Association (PGA)) also agreed not to induce, authorise or support any form of industrial action, which would have the effect of disrupting the operations of the Prison Service. The POA are contractually bound to honour this agreement, which in effect offers protection to the Prison Service against industrial action, in its ability to obtain injunctive relief.

There are no current plans to review the provisions of the Voluntary Agreement to which the Prison Service remain committed.

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many drug misusers under treatment have been *(a)* arrested and *(b)* imprisoned since 1 January 2002. [98146]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Information is not available in the form requested.Emerging evidence from the National Arrest Referral monitoring system provides some data relating to drug misusers who are arrested and voluntarily screened by arrest referral workers.

Data for October 2000 to September 2001 show that of the 48,810 arrestees screened by an arrest referral worker, 12 per cent. (5,268) were to continue in treatment they were currently receiving. The arrestees concerned are likely to be problematic drug misusers and may not be representative of the wider arrestee population.

Other research, from the New English and Welsh Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring programme (NEW-ADAM), has shown that of a total sample of arrestees interviewed, 29 per cent. said that they currently had a need for treatment and, of those, nine per cent. said that they were receiving treatment and 29 per cent. said that they were not.

The numbers of prisoners who have engaged in one or more of the Prison Service's range of drug interventions since 1 January 2002 are shown in the table:

Drug intervention	*Number of prisoners engaging since 1 January 2002*[1]
Detoxification	47,811
CARATs[2]	49,675
Rehabilitation programmes and therapeutic communities	4,334

[1] The data cover the period 1 January 2002 to 31 December 2002

[2] Counselling, assessment, referral, advice and throughcare services—a low-level intervention that provides a gateway assessment, referral and support service to prisoners both within custody and upon their initial release.

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many problematic drug users have been in prison. [98151]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Records of the actual number of problematic drug-misusing prisoners who pass through custody are not kept centrally by the Prison Service. Data from the Office for National. Statistics show that around 80 per cent. of prisoners have used drugs at some point before coming into prison, with 54 per cent. reporting drug dependency in the year prior to custody. With an annual throughput of approximately 130,000 offenders, an average of 70,000 drug-misusing prisoners may be in custody during the course of a year; with around 39,000 present at any one time.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his estimate is of the proportion of *(a)* the prison population, *(b)* those going through the court system and *(c)* those going through the court system charged under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 whose offending relates to the need to support illegal drug use over the last five years. [98177]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The numbers of prisoners who have engaged in one or more of the Prison Service's range of drug interventions since 1 January 2002 are shown in the table.

Prisoners engaging in one or more drug interventions between 1 January and 31 December 2002

Drug intervention	*Number*
Detoxification	47,811
CARATS[1]	49,675
Rehabilitation programmes and therapeutic communities	4,334

[1] Counselling, Assessment, Referral, Advice and Throughcare Services—a low-level intervention that provides a gateway assessment, referral and support service to prisoners both within custody and upon their initial release.

Records of the actual number of problematic drug-misusing prisoners who pass through custody are not kept centrally by the Prison Service. Data from the Office for National Statistics show that around 80 per cent. of prisoners have used drugs at some point before coming into prison, with 54 per cent. reporting drug dependency in the year prior to custody. With an annual throughput of approximately 130,000 offenders, an average of 70,000 drug-misusing prisoners may be in custody over the course of a year.

The level of detail required about the court system is not collected centrally. However, the NEW-ADAM[2] research programme shows that 65 per cent. of arrestees tested positive for one or more illegal drug. 40 per cent. of arrestees reported a connection between their illegal drug use and offending behaviour—and, when those who had committed acquisitive crime were examined, this figure rose to 55 per cent.

[2] New England and Wales Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring programme—a study that collected data from arrestees in police custody during 2000–01.

Probation Service

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures his Department is taking to *(a)* increase employment to the Probation Service and *(b)* ensure that officers have the necessary qualifications, training and experience to manage their caseloads; and if he will make a statement. [98194]

Hilary Benn: Trainee Probation Officers are recruited across England and Wales. This is achieved by an annual recruitment drive and the number of trainee probation officers recruited by this method has increased from 254 in 1998 to 787 in 2002.

The 2003 recruitment drive will commence on 17 March and will be advertised in the national press. The target number is 1,100, distributed in proportion across the nine regions of England and Wales.

Trainee probation officers complete the Diploma in Probation Studies over a period of two years. This professional qualification combines work and university based learning.

Candidates must attain a Community Justice NVQ Level 4 and an undergraduate degree in order to become fully accredited probation officers. The programme is provided in partnership with universities, who work with Regional Training Consortia and the National Probation Directorate.

The programmes are provided in accordance with the Core Curriculum and Regulatory Framework, administered on behalf of the Home Secretary by the Community Justice National Training Organisation (CJNTO). These documents are reviewed at intervals to ensure that the curriculum is updated to address current best practice. The programmes are subject to regular inspections conducted jointly by the CJNTO and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP).

In addition, the Probation Service has increased the number of Probation Service Officers and other staff to 8,282 in 2002 from 6,612 in 1998.

Staff involved in the delivery of Accredited programmes are provided with appropriate training that is subject to rigorous quality assurance as determined by the Joint Accreditation Panel at the point of programme approval.

Probation areas provide this and other related training via local and regional training units.

Property Crime

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his estimate is of the proportion of property crime related to the need of the perpetrator to support illegal drug use in each of the last five years. [98174]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Recorded crime figures include statistics on drugs offences, such as possession, and on acquisitive crimes, such as burglary, but do not record whether the latter are related to an offender's drug habits.

However, the New English and Welsh Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring (NEW-ADAM) research programme, which involves interviewing and drug testing those arrested by the police, confirms a link between drug misuse and acquisitive crime, including property crimes. Analysis of the data from the first eight sites in the survey, collected during 1999–2000, shows that 65 per cent. of arrestees provided a urine sample that tested positive for one or more illegal drug. The analysis also shows that up to 29 per cent. of arrestees tested positive for opiates (including heroin) and/or cocaine (including crack).

As a guide to the proportion of crime that is drug-related, analysis of the NEW-ADAM self-report data indicates that while only 21 per cent. of non-drug using arrestees reported having previously offended in the past 12 months, this figure rises to 75 per cent. for those arrestees who use heroin and/or cocaine/crack. Moreover, while users of both heroin and cocaine/crack represented just under one-quarter of all arrestees interviewed, they were responsible for more than three-fifths of all the illegal income reported.

In support of this, 55 per cent. of arrestees who reported using one or more drugs in the last 12 months and committing one or more acquisitive crimes, acknowledged a link between their drug use and their offending behaviour. This proportion rose to 78 per cent. for arrestees who said they had used heroin and cocaine/crack.

Recidivism

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the relationship between Class A drug addiction and recidivism among criminal offenders. [98138]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Information is not available in the form requested. However, the New English and Welsh Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring research programme, which involves interviewing and drug testing those arrested by the police at 16 sites throughout England and Wales, currently provides estimates of repeat offending by drug misusing offenders. Repeat offending drug misusing offenders are defined as the proportion of arrestees who are using heroin and/or cocaine and/or crack at least once a week and who have offended at least twice a month in the last 12 months. Analysis of the data from the first eight sites in the survey, collected during 1999–2000, shows the proportion of arrestees falling within the definition of repeat offending drug misusing offenders category was 15 per cent.

Refuge Provision (Capital Funding)

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what revenue funding will be provided to match the capital funding for new refuge provision announced on 11 December 2002. [98010]

Mr. McNulty: I have been asked to reply.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister announced on 11 December 2002 that it was making available £7 million to the Housing Corporation to increase safe accommodation choices for women and children. This capital funding will be allocated to local authority areas where provision for victims of domestic violence is identified as an unmet need in a homelessness or Supporting People strategy. The Supporting People programme, which will go live on 1 April 2003, will provide revenue funding for housing related support services for vulnerable people, which may include support for victims of domestic violence. In addition, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister will be making available £70 million in revenue support for local authorities and voluntary sector organisations in 2003–04 to support their work to tackle and prevent homelessness. These resources can be used to fund support services for victims of domestic violence if this is a priority within a local authority's homelessness strategy.

Terrorist Attacks

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures have been taken to ensure the integration of *(a)* planning and *(b)* communications between *(i)* the armed forces, (ii) the emergency services and (iii) volunteer organisations in the event of an NBC terrorist attack in the United Kingdom. [96254]

Mr. Blunkett: I chair three Cabinet Committees, which plan the prevention and response to terrorist attack. DOP(IT)(T) which oversees work to strengthen the United Kingdom's defence against terrorism; DOP(IT)(R) which works to build the United Kingdom's resilience and ability to manage the consequences of major emergencies; and the Civil Contingencies Committee which meets in times of crisis to manage the response. Key Government Departments and representatives of the relevant emergency services and agencies, attend these committees. The devolved Administrations are also involved in these committees. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community Safety, was given the responsibility, on my behalf, for Chemical Biological Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) co-ordination in 2001 and a dedicated team of officials at the Home Office supports him in this work.

The integration of volunteer organisations in response to civil emergencies of all kinds is co-ordinated through local authority emergency planning officers in accordance with the arrangements set out in the publication "Dealing with Disaster".

We are continually learning and developing the best way to protect the United Kingdom from terrorism and to manage the consequences of terrorism, in whatever form it comes. However the Government does not give detailed information on CBRN capabilities, as this information could be useful to terrorists.

Treatment Orders

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many treatment orders have been given to people with alcoholism in each of the last five years. [98175]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Powers to impose a drug and/or alcohol treatment requirement, as part of a community rehabilitation order or a community punishment and rehabilitation order, were contained in the Powers of Criminal Courts Act 1973, now the Powers of Criminal Courts (Sentencing) Act 2000. However, statistics for this do not differentiate between alcohol and drugs.

The table gives figures for the numbers starting community rehabilitation orders and community punishment and rehabilitation orders that contain a drug and/or alcohol element for the years 1997 to 2001.

Persons starting probation service supervision by year: community rehabilitation orders[1] with drug/alcohol treatment imposed under the Powers of Criminal Courts Act 2000[2], in England and Wales 1997 to 2001[3]

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Residential drugs/alcohol treatment	346	299	276	236	192
Non-residential drugs/alcohol treatment	1,039	1,394	1,590	1,795	1,133
Drugs/alcohol treatment by/under qualified medical person	631	843	1,131	1,101	793
Total drug/alcohol treatment	2,016	2,536	2,997	3,132	2,118

[1] Community rehabilitation order is the new name for a probation order under the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000.

[2] For 1997 to 2000 this was under the Powers of Criminal Courts Act 1973.

[3] In compiling probation statistics, each person is counted only once in the total even if several types of additional requirement started in the year. For this reason, the figures quoted above may slightly undercount those undergoing alcohol/drugs treatment.

Note:

1. From October 2000, when the Drug Treatment and Testing Order was rolled-out to courts in England and Wales, the power to attach a drug treatment requirement to a community rehabilitation order or community rehabilitation and punishment order was removed. This explains the lower total figures for drug/alcohol treatment requirements in 2001.

2. It should be noted that these figures represent those starting orders in the respective years, rather than orders made by the courts in each of these years.

Source:

Probation Statistics England and Wales, 2001. Table 3.12 *(a)* and *(b)*.

Persons starting probation service supervision by year: community rehabilitation and punishment orders[1] with drug/alcohol treatment imposed under the Powers of Criminal Courts Act 2000[2], in England and Wales 1997 to 2001[3]

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Residential drugs/alcohol treatment	4	5	3	1	6
Non-residential drugs/alcohol treatment	165	238	238	175	143
Drugs/alcohol treatment by/under qualified medical person	92	105	110	131	71
Total drug/alcohol treatment	261	348	351	307	220

[1] Community rehabilitation and punishment order is the new name for Combination Order under the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000.

[2] For 1997 to 2000 this was under the Powers of Criminal Courts Act 1973.

[3] In compiling probation statistics, each person is counted only once in the total, even if several types of additional requirement started in the year. For this reason, the figures quoted above may slightly un dercount those undergoing alcohol/drugs treatment.

Note:
1. From October 2000, when the Drug Treatment and Testing Order was rolled-out to courts in England and Wales, the power to attach a drug treatment requirement to a community rehabilitation order or community rehabilitation and punishment order was removed. This explains the lower total figures for drug/alcohol treatment requirements in 2001.
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Source:
Probation Statistics England and Wales, 2001. Table 3.12 *(a)* and *(b)*.

Vulnerable Prisoners

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women are being held in vulnerable prisoner units in prisons in England and Wales. [96246]

Hilary Benn: The number of male prisoners being held in vulnerable prisoner units in prisons in England and Wales was about 3,800 on 31 December 2002. There are no vulnerable prisoner units for women because the number of female prisoners requiring the specialist facilities that such units would provide is minimal and Governors will make specific arrangements for individuals locally.

MINISTER FOR WOMEN

Equal Pay

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Minister for Women if she will make a statement on the pay gap between women and men. [97717]

Ms Hewitt: The pay gap between women and men currently stands at 19 per cent., down from 30 per cent. in 1975 when the Equal Pay Act came into force. The Government are taking action to tackle the complex underlying factors behind the pay gap, including promoting voluntary pay reviews and good practice on equal pay through the Fair Pay Champions and Castle Awards. Denise Kingsmill is chairing a task force "Accounting for People" which is considering human capital reporting by companies and is likely to have significant implications for women in the workplace. The Employment Act 2002 introduces measures to help parents maintain links with the world of work and better balance their work and home lives. These will help women return to the labour market and have a positive impact on the pay gap. The Act also introduces an equal pay questionnaire that will make it easier to tackle pay discrimination in the workplace. All Government Departments are committed to carrying out a pay review by April 2003.

Equal Opportunities

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Minister for Women what measures she intends to take to encourage the promotion of women into *(a)* the board of FTSE 100 companies and *(b)* senior positions in trade unions; and if she will make a statement. [98059]

Ms Hewitt: I have welcomed Derek Higgs' proposals on how to widen the pool from which non-executive directors are drawn, which could bring more women into the boardroom. Derek Higgs made proposals for a more rigorous, fair and open appointment process. Subject to consultation on the detailed wording, the Financial Reporting Council intends to put the changes to the Combined Code into effect on 1 July. A small group of business leaders and others, led by Professor Laura Tyson of the London Business School, is also being set up to bring to greater prominence candidates, including women, from the non-commercial sector.

The Women and Equality Unit and TUC held a joint event in November 2002 which aimed at encouraging trade union women to apply for public appointments. This was part of a wider strategy to encourage women to see that they have the skills and confidence necessary to apply for senior positions in public life more generally,
including within their own unions.

I welcome the appointment in January of Frances O'Grady to the position of Deputy General Secretary of the TUC—the first time that a woman has been appointed to this position; and the appointment of Kay Carberry as Assistant General Secretary of the TUC, again the first time a woman has been appointed to this position.

PRIME MINISTER

Terrorism

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Prime Minister whether he has authorised military aid to the Civil Power in relation to the current terrorist threat to the UK. [98691]

The Prime Minister: Following a request from the police, the Government recently authorised a military deployment around Heathrow under the arrangements for providing military aid to the Civil Power. These arrangements have been used on many occasions in the past and will be used again in the future, whenever necessary, to ensure the security of the United Kingdom and its people.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Arms Exports

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her estimate is of the annual level of export credits for UK arms sales, in each year from 1990–91 to 2002–03; and if she will make a statement. [96816]

Ms Hewitt: ECGD guarantees in support of exports of defence equipment and services have been provided for the following amounts:—

Year	*£ million*
1990–91	778
1991–92	534
1992–93	1918

Year	*£ million*
1993–94	2112
1994–95	756
1995–96	893
1996–97	394
1997–98	727
1998–99	1,558
1999–2000	1,577
2000–01	2,556
2001–02	1,030
2002–03[1]	1,598

[1] To date

Auditor Liabilities

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether she has plans to cap auditor liabilities. [99090]

Ms Hewitt: The Government are considering proposals on auditor liability in the Company Law Review and will consult on its own detailed proposals in due course.

Burma

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) which British companies have investments in Burma; [97221]

(2) what the value of UK investment in Burma, including transfers via dependent territories, was in each of the past two financial years. [97219]

Ms Hewitt: HMG has no reliable annual figures on the level of investment from the UK and the dependent territories to Burma. Burmese statistics, which are often inaccurate, suggest total accumulated British investment of about US$1440 million. The most significant British investments are believed to be Premier Oil's, which are currently in the process of being sold, and those of British American Tobacco. We believe that some of the investment identified as being British is actually foreign investment that has been channelled through dependent territories.

Coal Industry

Mr. Grogan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the results of the consultation on investment for the coal industry. [98638]

Mr. Wilson: I intend to publish shortly a formal response to the consultation on the case for investment aid to the coal industry.

An outline framework for an investment aid scheme was submitted to the European Commission on 19 December 2002. But a number of important details remain to be finalised, and these are now being worked on in the light of the commitments set out in the Energy Policy White Paper Cm 5761, published on 24 February 2003.

Electricity

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what changes in unit payments for electricity have resulted from the switch by her Department to purchasing renewable energy which is exempt from the Climate Change Levy. [96485]

Ms Hewitt: The actual average price of electricity purchased during 2001–02 was 4.6438 p/KWh compared to the normal price of 4.5978 p/KWh. This is equivalent to an increase of 1 per cent. in the average price paid.

Entertainment

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her estimate is of the total spending of her Department on entertainment in each year from 1994–95 to 2002–03; and if she will make a statement. [92398]

Ms Hewitt: The Department of Trade and Industry's total spending on entertainment was as follows;

£ 000's

Year	Numbers
1998–99	704
1999–2000	887
2000–01	1,089
2001–02	1,165
2002–03	1,193[1]

[1] Estimate

As a result of the implementation of a new accounting system and several Machinery of Government changes, comparable figures are not available prior to 1998–99. This expenditure was incurred primarily in the promotion of British Trade, Science and Innovation, UK Business and Energy.

Fur (Labelling)

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent research her Department has *(a)* undertaken and *(b)* begun to undertake to assess the amount of fur derived from domestic animals labelled in a misleading manner for sale to the public; and if she will make a statement. [98183]

Ms Hewitt: The DTI has received professional advice from LGC Ltd. on the possibilities for undertaking DNA testing of products on sale in the UK that are alleged to contain fur of domestic animals. The advice stated that it had not yet been possible to identify a testing method that could reliably determine the specific type of fur that a product contains—i.e. whether such fur has come from a domestic animal or otherwise. I am placing copies of this advice in the Library of the House. We have asked LGC Ltd. to advise us further on the viability and costs of developing such a testing method.

We are also in discussions with other Governments who are seeking to undertake the same type of testing, to understand the approach they have taken to this problem.

There are no regulations in place requiring fur from domestic animals to be labelled as such. Where manufacturers choose to label their products, they must provide accurate information and action can be taken to prevent misleading labelling under the Trade Descriptions Act.

However, since it is not currently possible to identify products containing specifically domestic animal furs (as explained above), it is also not possible to determine when products have been mislabelled. The Government are working hard to overcome these problems to be able to determine levels of imports of these products, and to identify any labelling problems that may exist.

Grant Allocations

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many solar installations have been completed as a result of the grants made available by her Department; what has been the average cost of these installations to *(a)* her Department and *(b)* the recipient of the grant; and what carbon dioxide savings are expected as a result of these installations. [98669]

Mr. Wilson: By grants for solar installations we assume it is meant the £20 million First Phase of the Major Photovoltaics Demonstration Programme, which was launched by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on 26 March 2002.

Under Stream 1 of the programme (small individual systems up to 5kWp), 171 applications had been received by the middle of February 2003, of which 45 had been completed. The average cost of these installations to both Government and the recipient is £7,241, as the grants cover 50 per cent. of total costs. Most of the recipients are private homeowners, but there are also a few small businesses, schools and community groups. For the 45 completed installations (average 2kWp), total carbon dioxide savings are expected to be in the region of 29,000 kg a year.

Under Stream 2 (medium and large-scale installations from 5 to 100kWp), 90 applications have been made, half of which have been supported, but none have so far been completed.

IT Contracts

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list IT contracts in her Department above £50 million in each of the last 10 years; what the inception date for each system was; when it became fully functional; when it became fully debugged; and what the cost of over-runs has been. [98999]

Ms Hewitt: The core Department has let one IT contract with a lifetime value of more than 50 million in the last 10 years. This is the ELGAR PFI contract for the provision of IT desktop, application support and development, and business re-engineering services.

The contract was awarded on 27 November 1998 and the initial service became operational on 31 March 1999, as planned. System Acceptance testing of the new desk top service was completed on 30 November 1999, and the system became fully functional on 31 March 2000. Following user acceptance testing, the system was accepted by the Department and the system was fully debugged by 15 July 2000.

There were no additional costs to the Department for over-runs on this migration.

Redundancy

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the remedies to UK employees of multinationals who have been made redundant without the required *(a)* process of consultation, *(b)* notice, *(c)* definition of the criteria for selection for redundancy and *(d)* evidence that the post has become surplus to requirements. [98251]

Alan Johnson *[holding answer 24 February 2003]:* There is legislation in place to protect employees if they are affected by redundancy. Employees can seek redress through the employment tribunals or, in some cases, the civil courts.

(a) Consultation—Employers in the UK are under a statutory obligation to inform and consult employee representatives about proposed collective redundancies—that is, where they propose to make 20 or more redundancies at one establishment within a 90 day period. The consultation must be conducted in good faith, and must cover ways of avoiding the redundancies, or of reducing their numbers or mitigating their effects. Employee representatives may complain to an employment tribunal where they consider these obligations have not been fulfilled. The tribunal can make a protective award of up to 90 days' pay to each affected employee.

(b) Notice—depending on length of service both the employer and the employee are entitled to a minimum period of notice. Under the legislation this varies depending on how long the employee has been employed, from one week where he/she has been continuously employed for one month or more but less than two years, up to twelve weeks where continuously employed for 12 years or more. An individual employment contract may specify a longer period of notice. Employees who consider that they have incurred loss because they have not been given the minimum notice to which they are entitled under the legislation or under their contracts of employment, can bring actions for damages in the civil courts, or (if the employment has ended) in the employment tribunals.

(c) Criteria for selection— In, a collective redundancy case, the employer must disclose to employee representatives certain information in writing including the proposed method of selecting the employees who may be dismissed. Failure to do so is again enforceable through an employment tribunal.

(d) Redundancy is in principle, a fair reason for dismissal. However, subject to meeting the qualifying conditions, employees can complain of unfair dismissal through an employment tribunal if they believe that they have been unfairly selected for redundancy, that the employer otherwise acted unreasonably in dismissing them or that redundancy was not in fact the genuine reason for dismissal. The remedies available in a case where a tribunal finds in the employee's favour are reinstatement or re-engagement or a monetary award of compensation.

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on her assessment of the relative susceptibility to being made redundant of employees of multinationals operating within the EU of *(a)* British, *(b)* Dutch, *(c)* French and *(d)* other EU companies. [98252]

Alan Johnson: *[holding answer 24 February 2003]:* Job losses due to restructuring or plant closure are reported all over Europe and recent examples of this include Dresdner Bank, Siemens and Mobilcom in Germany, HP-Compaq and Bull in France, Lucent Technologies in the Netherlands, Fiat in Italy, Alcatel in Belgium, and Santander in Spain. In some cases these job losses are part of European or global restructuring programmes, for example, Alcatel, Ericsson and Nokia. UK firms, like those on the Continent, are subject to legislation implementing the EC Directive on Collective Redundancies designed to protect employees affected by redundancies. This requires consultation of employee representatives before collective redundancies can be made. Consultation must be undertaken in good faith with a view to reaching agreement, and must include ways of avoiding the dismissals, reducing the number of employees to be dismissed, and mitigating the consequences of the dismissals. The detailed rules vary from country to country, for example, some EU countries have more lengthy consultation periods than others. The law in the UK provides greater protection in certain respects than that in other Member States. For example, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden do not, unlike the UK, have a statutory requirement for severance pay. And UK law treats workers more equally in the event of redundancy than workers in Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Greece, Italy and Luxembourg where blue-collar workers receive lower levels of protection than white-collar workers. The system in the UK is relatively transparent and the costs involved for employers and the length of the process are predictable, unlike in many other EU countries. The Government believes that firms should not face excessive barriers to making redundancies that add to the uncertainty and time involved in what is a painful process. To do so could deter investment, and result in fewer jobs overall, not more.

Official Visits

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what official visits *(a)* the Minister for Science and *(b)* the Chief Scientific Adviser to the Government have made in each of the last three years in their scientific role. [98966]

Ms Hewitt: My noble Friend the Minister for Science and Innovation and the Chief Scientific Advisor to the Prime Minister have both undertaken a large number of visits to companies, universities and organisations in this country and overseas.

The overwhelming majority of these have been in their respective scientific capacities.

Recruitment Consultants

Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the other appointments the recruitment consultants used in the appointment of the Director General of Ofgen have advised her on; and if she will make a statement. [86203]

Mr. Wilson: Price WaterhouseCoopers were one of the firms of recruitment consultants retained by the Department on call-off contracts in 1998, and assisted in this particular recruitment. No central records are held on other appointments on which the firm may have assisted.

Royal Mail Investigation Branch

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the future of the powers of entry, search and arrest employed by the investigation branch of the Royal Mail. [97787]

Mr. Timms: Responsibility for enforcement policy for criminal offences under the Postal Services Act 2000 (the Act) is a matter for the Postal Services Commission (PostComm) who on 10 January 2003 published a decision document and statement of policy on these matters. Under the terms of its policy PostComm would look to Royal Mail to take the necessary enforcement action where offences are committed in relation to its postal services under Sections 83–88 of the Act.

Royal Mail is recognised by the Home Office as a non-police law enforcement body. They have no special powers to enter or search premises. Royal Mail investigators will only enter and search with the consent of the appropriate parties. Royal Mail investigators have the powers of arrest of a citizen as outlined in S24 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984; they have no enhanced rights to effect an arrest.

Royal Mail Group plc has no plans to seek any changes to the existing powers that apply to its investigators.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Middle East

11. **Claire Ward:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the progress of the peace negotiations between Israel and Palestine. [98792]

Mr. Straw: A settlement of the dispute between the Israelis and the Palestinians would, we believe, enhance global security, including the security of both the immediate region and the United Kingdom. This is why the Prime Minister has led the way, through political and practical support for the Quartet, in working for renewed negotiation towards the realisation through the roadmap towards President Bush's vision of a two state solution in 2005.

20. **Mr. Brazier:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the United States Government on establishing a Palestinian state; and if he will make a statement. [98802]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The establishment of a Palestinian state alongside Israel is at the heart of President Bush's vision of a final settlement, as set out in his speech of 24 June 2002. My right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary, FCO officials and I are in constant touch with US colleagues on how to realise that vision. We agree with them that the Quartet and its road map provide the right mechanism, and have given both our full support.

23. **Martin Linton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will table a resolution under chapter VII of the United Nations charter to impose a duty on Israel to halt and withdraw illegal settlements in the occupied territories. [98805]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We have no plans to table a UN Resolution on Israeli settlements in the occupied territories. Security Council Resolutions 446 and 465 state that they are illegal. The Government have made it clear that an early settlement freeze is essential to the continuing viability of the two-state solution.

Our priority for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict must be the implementation of those Security Council Resolutions already passed; most recently, Resolution 1435, which calls for a complete cessation of violence, withdrawal of Israeli forces from Palestinian cities and action by the Palestinian Authority to bring those responsible for acts of terror to justice. The UK played a leading role in the adoption of this resolution. We remain committed to further Security Council action, wherever this will be useful.

Mr. Best: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the Government's activities in seeking a Middle East peace settlement. [98414]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We fully support the efforts of the Quartet to restart a peace process leading via the Roadmap it agreed on 20 December to a realisation in 2005 of President Bush's vision of a two-state solution. That support is both political and practical. We convened the London meeting on Palestinian reform and nation-building in January; it was a British initiative during the hiatus in Quartet activity caused by the Israeli election campaign. From 18–20 February we hosted meetings of the Ad-Hoc Liaison Committee and Task Force on Reform. We remain ready to do all we can to underpin and complement Quartet activity.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the prospects for a peace settlement between Israel and the Palestinians. [98798]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary gave earlier in the House today to the hon. Member for North Wiltshire.

Syria (Kidnapped Israeli Soldiers)

14. **Mr. Gibb:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with President Assad of Syria regarding kidnapped Israeli soldiers. [98795]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I raised this issue with the Syrian Foreign Minister during the Syrian President's official visit to the UK on 16 to 18 December 2002.

Iraq

15. **Mr. Leigh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Iraq. [98796]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given earlier in the House today by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary to the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake).

Zimbabwe

16. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Government of South Africa on the search for a peaceful settlement to the Zimbabwe crisis. [98797]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We have regular contact with the South African Government and have shared with them our view of the problems in Zimbabwe. We have stressed our deep concern about the humanitarian situation. We have made our position clear: we want a return to good governance, respect for human rights and the rule of law. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister last discussed Zimbabwe with President Mbeki at Chequers on 1 February 2003.

Cyprus

17. **Mr. Dismore:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the progress of the Annan plan for Cyprus. [98799]

Mr. MacShane: My hon. Friend's timely question enables me to commend to the House this morning's written statement on Cyprus by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary. He praised the UN Secretary-General's skilful moves to bring the Cyprus peace process to a head, and explained what Britain is doing to help the UN bring the parties to agreement. A copy of this written statement was placed in the Library of the House on 25 February 2003.

22. **Mr. Love:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent steps he has taken to promote a settlement in Cyprus. [98804]

Mr. MacShane: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier today in the House to my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore).

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what funding his Department makes available for projects that involve members of the *(a)* Greek and *(b)* Turkish communities in Cyprus; and if he will make a statement. [98093]

Mr. MacShane: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office provides and administers two funds which finance projects in Cyprus.

In recent years, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's EU Action Plan, with a budget of £100,000 per annum has been used to finance projects such as EU accession seminars and training courses, for both the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities. These projects have been run in conjunction with the British Council and have been very successful.

Each year a portion of the Global Conflict Prevention Fund has also been allocated to fund projects such as training courses in both the north and the south of the island.

The British High Commission in Nicosia has made a significant contribution to bringing Cypriots of both communities together in a number of bi-communal projects.

European Security and Defence Policy

18. **Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met his French and German counterparts to discuss EU foreign and security policy. [98800]

Mr. MacShane: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary most recently met his French and German counterparts to discuss EU Common Foreign and Security Policy on 17 February 2003.

19. **Mr. Peter Duncan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the future of the European Security and Defence Policy. [98801]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The comprehensive agreement between NATO and the EU, reached in December 2002, ensures that the European Security and Defence Policy of the EU will be based on close co-operation with NATO. The Government welcome this strategic partnership in crisis management. The EU and NATO are now finalising the detailed arrangements to give effect to this agreement. The EU has already expressed its willingness to take over from NATO the stabilisation mission in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Iran (Human Rights)

21. **Mr. Pope:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next plans to raise the issue of human rights with his Iranian counterparts. [98803]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Her Majesty's Government have an ongoing dialogue with Iran on human rights. I and my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary make a point of raising human rights whenever we see our Iranian counterparts and will continue to do so.

Asset Recycling Programme

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his latest estimate is of the proceeds to his Department from the asset re-cycling programme agreed with HM Treasury for the period 1999–2000 to 2001–02; and if he will make a statement. [illegible]8440]

Mr. Rammell: The FCO achieved £90 million from recycling in the financial years 1999–2000 to 2001–02.

Chemical Weapons Convention

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the prohibitions on the use of *(a)* riot control agents and *(b)* other disabling chemicals as a method of warfare contained in the Chemical Weapons Convention 1993 would apply to potential conflict in the Gulf. [98166]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: All States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) have undertaken not to use any toxic chemical or its precursor, including riot control agents (RCAs), as a method of warfare. This applies in any armed conflict. RCAs are defined in the CWC as any chemical not listed in a Schedule which can produce rapidly in humans sensory irritation or disabling physical effects which disappear within a short time following termination of exposure. (A chemical listed in a Schedule is one identified for the application of verification measures under the CWC.)

Davinderpal Singh Bhullar

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the progress of representations to the Indian Government in the case of Professor Davinderpal Singh Bhullar. [98452]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We have made no specific representations to the Government of India over the case of Professor Davinderpal Singh Bhullar. In conjunction with the EU, we have demarched India about their use of the death penalty most recently in June 2001. We continue to follow Professor Bhullar's case closely, and are in discussions with EU partners over possible courses of action to take. Foreign Office officials met Professor Bhullar's wife on 12 February to discuss the case.

Defence Exports (India)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what changes he has made to guidance on export licensing, with particular reference to sales of defence equipment and technology to India, following the India-Iran defence cooperation agreement signed on 19th January. [99076]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: There has been no change to the Government's policy for considering arms export licence applications for India in light of any defence cooperation between India and Iran. We continue to consider all applications on a case-by-case basis against the Consolidated EU and National Arms Export Licensing Criteria and the prevailing situation. All export licences will continue to be issued subject to the condition that the stated end-user will not re-export the equipment to a third country or end-user outside the terms of the licence.

Departmental Consultations

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list consultations his Department has conducted since 1997; and when each consultation *(a)* opened and *(b)* closed. [97422]

Mr. Straw: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has conducted the following public consultations since 1997:

1. Panel 2000: Consultation Document. Presented to Parliament on 10 September 1998 and closed on 15 November 1998. The website address is

http://www.fco.gov.uk/Files/kfile/panel2000,0.pdf

2. International Criminal Court: Consultation on draft legislation. Presented to Parliament on 1 August 2000 and closed on 12 October 2000. The website address is *http://www.fco.gov.uk/Files/kfile/icc.pdf*

3. Private Military Companies: Options for Regulation. Presented to Parliament on 12 February 2002 and closed on 12 August 2002. The website address is:

http://www.fco.gov.uk/Files/kfile/mercenaries,0.pdf

4. Strengthening the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention: Countering the Threat from Biological Weapons. Presented to Parliament on 12 February 2002 and closed on 13 September 2002. The website address is:

http://www.fco.gov.uk/Eiles/kfile/btwc290402.pdf

Departmental Properties

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his latest estimate is of the *(a)* market value and *(b)* same use value of FCO-owned land and buildings; and if he will make a statement. [98377]

Mr. Rammell: The current Existing Use Value of the FCO estate at home and overseas is £1,026 million. The Open Market Value is £914 million.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his latest estimate is of the *(a)* same use value and *(b)* market value of the FCO properties at *(i)* Buenos Aires, Argentina, (ii) Bridgetown, Barbados, (iii) Santiago, Chile, (iv) Alexandria, Egypt, *(v)* Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, (vi) Helsinki, Finland, (vii) Bordeaux, France, (viii) Lyon, France, (ix) Marseilles, France, *(x)* Paris, France and (xi) Strasbourg, France; what plans he has to sell these properties; and if he will make a statement. [98381]

Mr. Rammell: The existing use values (EUV) and open market values (OMV) of FCO properties in the overseas posts in question is as follows:

FCO overseas properties: EUV and OMV

£000 Post	*EUV*	*OMV*
Abuja	7,400	7,400
Accra	6,572	7,670
Addis Ababa	7,374	0
Alexandria	511	511
Ankara	6,030	0
Atlanta	902	902
Bangkok	6,077	14,088
Berlin	6,521	5,385
Bombay	1,687	1,687
Bordeaux	293	293
Boston	4,087	4,087
Bratislava	2,702	2,702
Bridgetown	3,044	3,044
Buenos Aires	3,427	3,427
Calcutta	1,419	1,419
Guatemala City	3,755	3,755
Helsinki	11,276	11,276
Hong Kong	69,550	0
Houston	1,184	1,184
Kaduna	400	400
Kingston	3,247	3,247
Lagos	20,900	20,925
Los Angeles	2,645	2,645
Lyon	0	0
Madras	893	2,078
Marseilles	362	362
Munich	0	0
Muscat	5,007	1,325
Naples	0	0
New Delhi	40,820	7,023
Paris	62,497	62,497
Riyadh	4,344	4,344
Rome	41,784	41,784
Santiago	6,308	6,308
Seattle	685	685
Singapore	45,246	8,103
Strasbourg	580	580
Tokyo	55,184	0

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him today, UIN 98441, for details of individual properties at these posts which are in the process of being sold, or which are currently being considered for sale.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his latest estimate is of the *(a)* same use value and *(b)* market value of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office properties at *(i)* Whitehall/King Charles Street, London, (ii) Hanslope Park, Milton Keynes, (iii) Old Admiralty Building, Whitehall, (iv) 1 Carlton Gardens, London and *(v)* Lancaster House, London; and what plans he has to sell these properties; and if he will make a statement. [98390]

Mr. Rammell: The existing use values (EUV) and realisable open market values (OMV) of the FCO properties in the home estate are as follows:

(a) London Main Building: EUV £50 million, OMV £50 million

(b) Hanslope Park: EUV £11.5 million, OMV £11.5 million

(c) Old Admiralty Building: EUV £25 million, OMV £25 million.

1 Carlton Gardens and Lancaster House are not owned by the FCO but leased from the Crown Estate.

The FCO has no plans to sell any of its properties in the home estate.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to sell FCO properties in *(a)* Hong Kong, *(b)* Singapore and *(c)* France; and if he will make a statement. [98439]

Mr. Rammell: We are currently selling two staff flats in Paris but have no properties on the market in Hong Kong or Singapore.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which FCO properties his Department is *(a)* contracted to sell and *(b)* trying to sell; what sales proceeds are expected in each year to 2005–06; and if he will make a statement. [98441]

Mr. Rammell: The FCO has currently outstanding instructions to proceed to the exchange of contracts for the sale of six properties overseas. We have also instructed agents to offer a further 23 properties for sale. I am withholding part of the information requested Under Exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information (Third Party's Commercial Confidence), as valuations remain confidential until contracts are exchanged in order to maximise the return from sales.

FCO property sales as at 18 February 2003

Post	*Address*
Sale considered or under way but not yet in contract:	
Kuala Lumpur	432 Jalan Tun Razak
Nairobi	2 Kenya Road
Nairobi	3 Kenya Road
Port Louis	Trent Lodge
Pretoria	218 Crown Avenue
Beirut	Abey Villa
Tunis	Part of Habous Field
Gothenburg	Residence Stenkleviden
Madrid	Avenida Ahones 9
Madrid	Chalet 33 La Moralejo
Madrid	Flat 4 floor 5 Cerro de Castanar
Paris	Flat 146 34 Marc Chagall
Paris	Flat 148 34 Marc Chagall
Budapest	Flat 1 Kikelet
Budapest	Flat 2 Kikelet
Budapest	Flat 3 Kikelet
Caracas	Office Torre Las Mercedes
Guatemala	Avenida 7ta
New York	4 East 66th Street
Madrid	Cerro de Valdematin
Kiev	Plot Redbouutnaya Street Street 9
Lima	Plaza Washington
Washington	76 Kalorama Drive
In contract but not yet completed:	
Port of Spain	36 Elizabeth Street
Capetown	91 Parliament Street
Nairobi	Maji Mazuri
Amman	Mufti House
Madrid	Flat 4 floor 4 Cerro de Castanar
Bridgetown	DS10 House 4 Square

The target for the Third Triennium (financial years 2003–04 to 2005–06) is for £100 million of gross sales. The amount realised in each of the three years will depend heavily on market conditions and changing operational requirements.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what criteria are used to decide whether to possess an embassy or consular building in a particular *(a)* city and *(b)* country; and if he will make a statement. [98376]

Mr. Rammell: If accommodation is required in a particular city or country, the value for money offered by freehold purchase as opposed to leasing is assessed by comparing the costs and benefits of the two options using the techniques prescribed by the Treasury's guidance on appraisal and evaluation in Central Government (the "Green Book"). A decision to purchase a property freehold or long leasehold will also depend on whether the requirement is permanent, whether foreign governments are permitted to acquire such interests and whether, in practice, they are available on the market, and whether a purchase can be funded from the FCO's budget for capital investment.

In addition to using Treasury Appraisal techniques when deciding whether or not to purchase property freehold, the FCO monitors the value for money provided by its existing freehold and long leasehold estate using similar criteria to check that the retention of an owned property remains a better option than leasing.

EC Accession (Poetry on the Underground)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what funding he has made available to London Underground Limited to display multi-lingual poetry to mark the 30th anniversary of United Kingdom accession to the European Community. [98475]

Mr. MacShane: A total of £15,000 was made available to cover: design and production of nine different bilingual posters; 2,000 advertising spaces in carriages for a period of eight weeks, and the design and production of 5,000 booklets containing 25 poems representing all 15 member states.

E-mail Addresses

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs by what e-mail address members of the public may contact *(a)* his and *(b)* each of the Ministers in his Department; and for each e-mail address if he will state *(i)* the date it became active, and (ii) the number of e-mails received in each month since activation. [97464]

Mr. Rammell: All FCO Ministers may be contacted via a feedback form on the FCO website, www.fco.gov.uk/feedback. This has been the case since 1997. We do not hold statistics for messages received via this means.

In addition, the Minister for Europe can be contacted on ministereurope@fco.gov.uk This address was activated in December 2000. Figures for E-mails received are:

December 2000: 8 to February 2002: 124
January 2001: 9 to March 2002: 100
February 2001: 11 to April 2002: 116
Mar 2001:40 to May 2002: 92
April 2001: 34 to June 2002: 63
May 2001: 6 to July 2002:91
June 2001: 3 to August 2002: 55
July 2001:5 to September 2002: 133
August 2001: to October 2002: 142
September 2001: 79 to November 2002:90
October 2001: 121 to December 2002: 56
November 2001: 193 to January 2003: 104
December 2001: 82 to February 2003: 72[1]
January 2002:82 to February 2003:72

[1] So far to 7 February 2003.

European Constitution

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to ensure that a draft European constitution reflects Europe's religious heritage. [98042]

Mr. MacShane: The EU is a multicultural group of States with a large non-Christian population.Britain is itself a multi-cultural and multi-faith society. Any reference in the EU's constitutional Treaty would need to reflect this diversity, which is one of the greatest strengths of both Britain and the EU. That said, it is difficult to see what such a Treaty reference would add.

Article 10 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights already states that everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

Intergovernmental Conference

Stephen Hesford: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects the Intergovernmental Conference on a Future Treaty of the EU to begin work; and if he will make a statement. [98068]

Mr. MacShane: The timing of the next Intergovernmental Conference has not yet been confirmed. The Convention on the Future of Europe is due to present its results at the June 2003 European Council.

Malcolm Rennie/Brian Peters

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) whether his Department has made recent representations to the Indonesian Government about the need to co-operate fully with UN officials in connection with the investigation into the deaths of the two British newsmen. [98872]

(2) when recently released representations were first made by Her Majesty's Government to the Indonesian authorities about the deaths of Brian Peters and Malcolm Rennie; and whether he will list those representations made before June 1996. [98870]

(3) when his Department was first informed of the circumstances in which the two British newsmen died in Indonesia. [98871]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We cannot provide details of what representations were made by HMG before June 1996 about the deaths of Brian Peters and Malcolm Rennie because of the disproportionate costs involved in researching the answer.

Our Embassy in Jakarta reported on 24 October 1975 that five journalists from Australia had been killed during an attack on Fretilin forces in Balibo on 16 October 2003, and that the Australian Embassy had confirmed that two of the journalists, Brian Peters and Malcolm Rennie, were British citizens.

On 30 August 2002, at the UK's instigation, the EU urged the Indonesian Attorney General to co-operate with the UN investigation into the death of Brian Peters and his colleagues. We will continue to raise this issue with the Indonesian authorities.

Online Sales/Purchases

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what *(a)* products, *(b)* goods and *(c)* services were *(i)* bought and (ii) sold online by his Department in each of the last five years. [97465]

Mr. Rammell: This information could only be provided at disproportionate cost. The amount of fully online purchasing is limited, but for example we do currently buy some books, publications and technical supplies by this route. More generally we have increased the amount of business that is carried out in part by "e-procurement" methods and this will be further expanded when the FCO's new financial management system comes into operation later this year.

Overseas Students

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many overseas students were awarded FCO scholarships in each of the last five years; what their country of origin was; what the total cost was of the scheme for each year; and if he will make a statement. [98437]

Mr. MacShane: In 1998–99 2,196 overseas students were awarded FCO scholarships, at a cost of £39 million. In 1999–2000 2,300 scholarships were awarded at a cost of £40 million. In 2000–01 2,470 scholarships were awarded at a cost of £45 million. In 2001–02 2,510 scholarships were awarded at a cost of £46 million. In 2002–03 we expect to award 2,574 scholarships at a cost of £47 million.

These figures include scholars studying in the UK under the Chevening programme, the Commonwealth Scholarships and Fellowships Plan, the Marshall scholarships and Atlantic Fellowships. The cost includes contributions from the FCO, other Whitehall Departments and devolved Administrations, the private sector, and the higher education institutions.

The scholars came from more than 150 countries, territories and regions. I will write to the hon. Member, with further information.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his Department's policy toward awarding scholarships to overseas students. [98438]

Mr. MacShane: The FCO scholarships programme consists of Chevening scholarships, a contribution to the Commonwealth Scholarships and Fellowships Plan, and Marshall scholarships and Atlantic Fellowships for US citizens. The FCO believes it is in the UK's interest to attract top graduates and young professionals from overseas to study in this country. These individuals will go on to be tomorrow's leaders, opinion formers and decision makers in their own countries.

The FCO is working with other Whitehall Departments and the Devolved Administrations, the private sector, and UK Higher Education Institutions to increase the number of Chevening scholarships as part of the Prime Minister's Initiative to increase the number of overseas students studying in the UK.

Palestine (EU Aid)

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the European Commission regarding allegations of EU aid to Palestinian territories being directed into funding terrorist activities; and if he will make a statement. [98035]

Mr. MacShane: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the to the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) on 11 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 726W. The European Commission took part in the London meeting on Palestinian reform on 14

January 2003 where issues of financial management were discussed. The European Commissioner for External Relations, Chris Patten, has welcomed the decision of the European Anti-Fraud Office OLAF on 5 February 2003 to investigate allegations of misuse of funds donated by the EU in the context of EU budgetary support to the Palestinian Authority.

UK Companies (Competitiveness)

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his estimate is of the expenditure of his Department, in enhancing the competitiveness of UK companies abroad in the latest year for which information is available; what contribution to this spending was made by the companies which benefited; and if he will make a statement. [98434]

Mr. Rammell: Enhanced competitiveness of companies in the UK through overseas sales and investment is the objective of Trade Partners UK (TPUK), which is part of British Trade International. The latest available figures for TPUK funding are set out in the table.

Budget	*£ million* *2001–02 TPUK Outturn*
Programme	
Expenditure	61
Income	-2
Administration costs	
DTI	28
FCO[1]	136
Capital	
DTI	5
FCO	1

[1] FCO administration costs are shown for the whole of BTI. The figure cannot be broken down between TPUK and Invest UK funding.

Note:

FCO admin spend for 2001–02 represents the net operating costs as set out in the FCO Expenditure Allocation Report 2001–02.

Vehicle Fleets

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the annual rate is at which his Department and its agencies renew their vehicle fleets, by *(a)* volume and percentage for each category of vehicle, *(b)* type of power unit and *(c)* type of fuel; and what progress has been made on the replacement of vehicles on a lower emissions basis in the last three years. [96558]

Mr. Rammell: Reducing vehicle emissions is a key transport issue, which has been agreed as a priority across Government. Against a baseline year of 2002/03, all Departments are aiming by 31 March 2006 to reduce road transport vehicle carbon dioxide emissions by at least 10 per cent. and requiring at least 10 per cent. of all fleet cars to be alternatively fuelled. Progress against these targets will be reported in "Sustainable Development in Government" annual reports. The first full report against the Framework will be in 2003, reporting against the baseline year of 2002–03.

In UK the FCO has a rolling replacement programme to renew its fleet vehicles. Details are shown in the following table:

Category of vehicle	*Number of vehicles*	*Percentages replaced on an annual basis*	Petrol	Diesel	LPG/Electric
Cars	16	12	5	6	5-LPG
Light Goods Vans	14	15	—	13	1-electric
Minibuses	4	25	—	3	1-LPG
Heavy Goods Vehicles	5	Replaced between 5–7 years	—	5	—

All UK fleet vehicles meet current government targets for emission levels. 18 per cent. of our fleet is LPG/Electric. Alternative fuel and improved emission levels are always a factor in decisions on the purchase of new vehicles.

There is no standard replacement period for vehicles held by FCO's overseas posts. The timing depends on local circumstances and conditions including the availability of adequate maintenance facilities. The type of fuel used by the fleet of some 1400 vehicles is split between petrol (60 per cent.) and diesel (40 per cent.). Around 35 cent. of the fleet is purchased in the UK and good environmental performance was one of the criteria used to decide the award of the relevant contracts. Consequently vehicles supplied under these arrangements meet current government targets on emission levels.

Our Agency, the Wilton Park Conference Centre, has three vehicles (two diesel and one petrol). Given the size of the fleet there is no formal replacement programme. Alternative fuel and lower emission options will be considered in future purchases.

Venezuela

Mr. Borrow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action his Department is taking to promote political stability in Venezuela. [98781]

Mr. MacShane: We are in regular and extensive contacts with the Venezuelan Government and opposition, with EU partners and members of the Group of Friends supporting the OAS facilitation efforts, we have stressed the importance of respect for the constitution and for democratic principles.

Visa Fees

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his policy is on the real level of UK visa fees; and if he will make a statement. [98430]

Mr. Rammell: It has been the policy of successive Administrations that visa fees be set at a level to ensure that the full cost of providing the entry clearance service worldwide is met from fee income and that the UK taxpayer does not have to meet any of the costs. This continues to be our aim. There is also a Service Delivery Agreement (SDA) with the Treasury that there will be no increase in the real level of fees against a baseline set in 1997. The increase in fees made in July 2002 kept us within this SDA target.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much money was collected in visa fees for the latest year for which information is available; and if he will make a statement. [98473]

Mr. Rammell: Income from visa fees in financial year 2001–02 amounted to £77,403,853.

DEFENCE

Anti-rabies Tests

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reason Dundrennan Range was selected as the base range for anti-rabies tests; what statutory agencies were consulted over the testing; what plans there are for further such testing; and if he will make a statement on anti-rabies testing at Dundrennan Range. [88643]

Mr. Morley: I have been asked to reply.

The trial was authorised by Defra Ministers and the Central Science Laboratory obtained licences from the Home Office for working with foxes; from the Advisory Committee on Pesticides (ACP) for the use of the experimental poison (T3327) and from Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) to use means to reduce the risks to resident badgers on the study area. With agreement of MOD, the trial took place at a military training site with very restricted access to the public in Kirkcudbrightshire, Scotland. Local residents with access rights to the site, and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), were informed of the trial, which was carried out between 27 August and 15 September 2002. The poison baits were laid on 4 September and picked up on 7 September. The trial was successful in obtaining data required and there are no plans to repeat such a trial.

Biological/Chemical Weapons

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his policy is on the use by HM armed forces of biological and chemical weapons in future conflicts. [98837]

Mr. Hoon: The United Kingdom gave up its offensive biological and chemical weapons capabilities in the 1950s. As a state party of both the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC), the United Kingdom has renounced the use of such weapons.

We have played a leading role in the negotiations both of the BTWC of 1975, for which we are a depository Government, and the CWC which entered into force in 1997. We are fully compliant with our obligations under both conventions and continue to press for their full and effective implementation. The Government's policy is to work toward universal adoption of the CWC and BTWC and universal compliance with their obligations. The strength of our political commitment to both conventions is second to none.

Bullying (Bovington Camp)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recommendations have been made to improve protection against bullying at Bovington Camp, Dorset since October 2002; and what compensation has been paid to victims. [97832]

Dr. Moonie: So far as I am aware, no recommendations have been made to improve protection against bullying at Bovington Camp, Dorset since October 2002. It is standard practice for each new intake of recruits to be briefed personally by the Commanding Officer within 24 hours of arriving at Bovington on the Army's anti-bullying policy, outlining complaints procedures and welfare support. In addition, on arrival all military instructors must be fully conversant with the Army's zero tolerance stance on bullying and educated to spot the signs of any such behaviour. The Army's policy on harassment or bullying is clear: all incidents and allegations are taken extremely seriously and a thorough investigation is carried out in response to all formal complaints. Furthermore, appropriate action is taken against any individual(s) found guilty of practising or condoning such behaviour.

Information about compensation paid by the Ministry of Defence could lead to the identification of specific individuals. Accordingly, for reasons of confidentiality and the provisions of the Data Protection Act, it is not Ministry of Defence policy to release such information without the consent of the individuals involved.

Crichel Down Rules

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many times in each of the last 10 years the Crichel Down rules were applied by the Ministry of Defence; when the last occasion was; and in how many cases in each of the last 10 years MOD land subject to the rules reverted to the original owners. [98853]

Dr. Moonie: Information concerning the number of cases over the last 10 years where land reverted to the original owners is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The most recent case where the rules were found to apply was to agricultural land at Wroughton and the sale to the former owner completed on 27 January 2003.

The Ministry of Defence considers the application of the Crichel Down rules for all surplus sites as part of the disposal process. Where it is found that the rules apply, the site is offered back to the former owner at current market value. The land is not offered back to the former owner where, for instance, the use of the land has materially changed or where there are several former owners and a fragmented sale would realise less than a sale of the whole.

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will decide on the application of Crichel Down rules with respect to land which previously formed part of Marlborough at Falmouth, Cornwall and is now known as Swanvale OPA, Navy No. 2 site; and if he will make a statement. [98854]

Dr. Moonie: I currently expect that in April the Ministry of Defence will be in a position to write to those parties that have expressed a Former Owner interest, advising them of the application of the Crichel Down rules in this case.

Defence Estates, an agency of the Ministry of Defence, are responsible for the disposal of the former Oil Fuel Depot (OFD) at Swanvale, Falmouth. They have instructed consultants, Drivers Jonas, to investigate the application of the Crichel Down rules to OFD Swanvale, and prepare a report. DE anticipate that the final Drivers Jonas report will be received in March, after which it will be necessary to take further legal advice before writing to interested parties.

Daedalus Site

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans his Department had for the Daedalus site at Lee-on-the-Solent in *(a)* 1990, *(b)* 1995, *(c)* 2000 and *(d)* January 2003; and when the plans changed in each case. [99012]

Dr. Moonie: In 1990 HMS Daedalus, an operational Fleet Air Station, had been identified for closure as part of the Royal Navy's rationalisation of its fixed wing flying capability.

In 1995 the site was in the process of rundown prior to closure, and early disposal planning work had commenced, involving complex legal and planning issues. A development strategy was agreed with the two local planning authorities

By 2000 the marketing of the site had commenced, but additional planning and other issues delayed marketing. Against that background, and following the publication of "In Trust and On Trust: A Strategy for the Defence Estate" in June2000, a review of all Ministry of Defence establishments commenced. In July 2001, it was confirmed that the site had potential for future MOD re-use and investment. Part of the site has since been included within a private finance iInitiative to provide MOD service family married quarters. In January 2003 it was recognised that some peripheral parts of the site might be capable of disposal without detriment to potential re-use of the remaining core site by MOD The master planning and marketing strategies to implement this were under consideration prior to the approach by the Home Office on 11 February. Tuesday 25 February 2003.

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans his Department has to construct housing for MOD personnel at the Daedalus site. [99013]

Dr. Moonie: The Defence Housing Executive, an Agency of the Ministry of Defence, is inviting PFI bidders to tender for the build of 148 houses in the Gosport area, to meet the needs of Service families. Part of the Daedalus site, sufficient to build these houses, will be offered to bidders. Planning permission has however been sought for up to 300 houses in case a further development for Service family occupation is needed at a later date.

Frigate Decommissioning

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which *(a)* Type 42 destroyers and *(b)* Type 23 frigates are to be considered for removal from the fleet. [98233]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the answers my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence gave on 30 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 745W to the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) and on 7 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 458W to the hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth).

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether there has been an acceleration since the completion of the Strategic Defence Review in the rate at which Type 42 destroyers are expected to be paid off. [98243]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 7 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 457W, to the hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth). The Strategic Defence Review envisaged the progressive replacement of the capability provided by the Type 42 destroyer with a new vessel. The Type 45 destroyer is planned to come into service from 2007. On this basis, there has been no advancement of the Type 42 destroyers' expected pay off dates since the completion of the SDR.

Gulf Forces

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether *(a)* mail, *(b)* E-blueys, *(c)* private telephone calls up to 20 minutes per week, *(d)* E-mail, *(e)* newspapers, *(f)* library services, *(g)* BFBS, *(h)* combined services entertainment, *(i)* Expeditionary Forces Institute, *(j)* operational fitness equipment, *(k)* rest and recuperation and *(l)* free laundry are available to all members of all forces deployed to the Gulf; and if he will make a statement. [95907]

Mr. Ingram *(holding answer Monday 17 February 2003*: All elements of the Operational Welfare Package (OWP) listed are provided to all United Kingdom military personnel already deployed to the Gulf in support of Operations Resinate and Oracle. We are building up the OWP as quickly as possible for UK military personnel deploying overseas in preparation for possible operations against Iraq.

HMS Sultan

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans the MOD has to develop the use of HMS Sultan. [98625]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the written ministerial statement given by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces on 25 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 1–2WS. HMS Sultan was identified by the Defence Training Review as a potential location for the proposed Electro-Mechanical Engineering Defence Training Establishment. A final decision on the future utilisation of HMS Sultan will be made in the light of the options currently being studied in conjunction with industry.

Imams

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Imams are attached to the three services. [98847]

Dr. Moonie: There are currently no Imams attached to the Naval Service, Army or RAF. This is due to the relatively small number of Muslims serving in the armed forces. However, the armed forces have a representative-Religious Adviser from each of the major world religions, including Islam, and are working with the Religious Advisers and the nationally recognised Inter Faith Network to establish a network of local religious contacts for service personnel from those faiths.

Iraq

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what contingency plans he has to limit the damage to Iraq's power supply in the event of war. [97482]

Mr. Hoon: Any military action would be in conformity with international law, including the UN Charter and international humanitarian law. In all our military planning, very careful attention is applied to minimising the risk of damage to civilian infrastructure. I am withholding further information under Exemption 1 (Defence, Security and International Relations) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment has been made of the feasibility of establishing safe havens in Iraq in the event of war. [97485]

Mr. Hoon: In the event of any military operation, we would take very seriously our obligations to the civilian population of Iraq and our contingency planning takes this into account.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what contingency plans have been made for *(a)* civilian casualties and *(b)* humanitarian operations in the event of military action in Iraq; what role British forces will play in such operations; whether he has issued formal guidance on *(a)* and *(b)*; and if he will make a statement. [97772]

Dr. Moonie: Unlike Saddam Hussein, the United Kingdom takes very seriously its current and potential responsibilities towards the Iraqi people. In the event of conflict, United Kingdom forces will take the utmost care to minimise the risk to the civilian population through the careful choice of targets and the selection of weapons appropriate to those targets.

Although it is to be hoped that Iraq may yet choose to comply fully with UNSCR 1441, detailed contingency planning is underway to take into account the humanitarian consequences of any potential conflict. Formal guidance will be issued in the unfortunate circumstance that it becomes necessary to do so.

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with *(a)* the US Administration and *(b)* others concerning the protection and preservation of Iraq's ancient cities and monuments in the event of military conflict in the Gulf; and if he will make a statement. [97871]

Mr. Hoon: Any military action would be in conformity with international law, including the UN Charter and international humanitarian law. In all our military planning, very careful attention is applied to minimising the risk of damage to all civilian sites. I am withholding further information under Exemption 1 (Defence, Security and International Relations) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Joint UAV Experimentation Project

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the *(a)* remit, *(b)* timetable, and *(c)* proposed expenditure for the Joint UAV Experimentation Project is. [99072]

Mr. Ingram: The Joint UAV Experimentation Programme (JUEP) will explore the potential of UAVs to significantly enhance future military capability. A variety of activities will be undertaken, ranging from computer modelling and simulation to hands on experience of complete UAV systems operating as part of multi-national exercises. It is intended to establish an initial JUEP capability in 2003. Costs are yet to be established, but total expenditure is likely to be in the region of £65 million over a three-year period.

Medical Reservists

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many medical regular reserves are *(a)* serving on operations; and *(b)* eligible for call up. [91518]

Dr. Moonie [*holding answer Monday 20 January 2003*]: As at 17 February 2003, there were two medical regular reservists serving on operations.

As at 1 January 2003, 2,016 medical regular reservists in the Army and Royal Air Force were eligible for call-out. As at 15 January 2003, 445 medical regular reservists in the Royal Navy were eligible for call-out.

Terrorism

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) on how many occasions since 1 May 1997 the Government have authorised military aid to the Civil Power in relation to the mainland of Great Britain; and by what means in each case Parliament was so informed; [98687]

(2) when he most recently signed an order authorising military aid to the Civil Power; [98689]

(3) what steps he is required to take to inform Parliament that the Government has authorised military aid to the Civil Power; [98688]

(4) whether he has authorised military aid to the Civil Power in relation to combating current terrorist threats to the United Kingdom. [98690]

Mr. Ingram: In common with all armed forces deployments, the provision of Military Aid to the Civil Power (MACP) is authorised by a Minister within the Ministry of Defence, following a request from the police. The legal basis for this is the common law duty of every citizen to provide reasonable support to the police should they request it. The primacy of the police is recognised at all times. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has, of course, overall responsibility for the police and for security in the United Kingdom. There is consequently close and continuous consultation between the Ministry of Defence and the Home Office concerning the provision of this support.

Support is, for the most part, routine and is linked to active police investigations and operations. By far the largest single category concerns explosive devices. Excluding Northern Ireland, there were 957 occasions in 2001 when experts from the armed forces were asked by the police to provide support in the investigation of improvised explosive devices, and 431 occasions in 2002. The provision of other support, the nature of which varies considerably, is authorised on a case by case basis. On average between 30 and 40 of these requests are authorised each year, a small proportion of which are related to the terrorist threat.

There is no specific requirement to inform Parliament on each occasion support is authorised, and in view of the sensitivity of many police operations, it would be wrong to make public all the details of the support being provided.

Ministerial Meetings

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he last met Mr. Donald Rumsfeld. [98974]

Mr. Hoon: I last met Donald Rumsfeld on Wednesday 12 February 2003.

Nimrod/Astute Programmes

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to the answer of 23 January 2003 to the hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth), *Official Report*, column 52W, what progress he has made with BAE Systems in resolving the outstanding financial issues arising from the Nimrod and Astute programmes. [98581]

Mr. Hoon: As my noble Friend Lord Bach announced in another place on 19 February 2003, *Official Report*, column WA175–77, the Government have reached agreement with BAE Systems on the way ahead for these two strategically important defence projects. We have agreed a new structure for the two contracts which reduces risk, while placing new incentives on the company to perform. This will, however, involve a rise in the overall expected cost to completion and further delays to the in-service dates of the two projects.

For the Nimrod MRA4 project, which was originally won by British Aerospace (now BAE Systems) in open competition in 1996, the company has announced that it will be making a provision of £500 million against the project this year in its preliminary results for 2002. This is in addition to a previous provision of £300 million made in the company's 2000 results. For our part, the Government have agreed to delay the start of series production until we have seen demonstrated performance from the first three aircraft, and to increase our funding of the project by around £270 million, subject to final negotiations. This covers our share of restructuring the programme and will result in the achievement of an in-service date by 2009, defined as delivery of the sixth series production aircraft. As a result of the delay to the start of production, we now have the option of considering an increase in the aircraft's capability to meet the defence requirements of the 21st century. We have already introduced improvements to existing Nimrod MR2 aircraft which use some of the technology planned for the new MRA4 aircraft, thereby both reducing risk in the new programme and increasing existing capability.

The starting point for the Astute class attack submarine project was different. The original contract was based on a single source supplier, namely GEC-Marconi (which subsequently merged with British Aerospace to form BAE Systems) as the only United Kingdom provider of this unique defence capability. We sought to establish a fair price, given the economic conditions, and agreed joint assumptions on an open book basis at the time of contract signature in March 1997 on how the project would be delivered. These related, in part, to the benefits to be derived from the first comprehensive application of computer aided design (CAD) techniques to United Kingdom submarines. This will deliver significant advantages in the future, but its benefits have proved more difficult to realise on a programme of this complexity than either we, or the company, had assumed. We now know that the introduction of CAD requires more time and effort than either of us had originally anticipated. As a result, the Government have agreed to increase our funding by around £430 million, subject to final negotiations, as against an increased contribution by the company of £250 million which it has announced will be included as a provision in its preliminary results for 2002. These increases reflect the Government's acceptance of a share of the responsibility along with BAE Systems for the underestimate of the required effort and the consequent design delays. They also cover costs incurred through restructuring and other revisions to the project, and will result in the first of class coming into service by 2008. In the light of what we now know about the costs and benefits of CAD, we are confident that the new deal represents a good deal for the taxpayer and will provide outstanding new generation attack submarines for the Royal Navy.

This agreement has been reached following intensive negotiations, carried out in a constructive and co-operative spirit since the autumn. Both the Government and BAE Systems agree that the priority now is to put these difficulties behind us. We have agreed with the company that we will introduce new methods of project control and reporting on these and other projects. The exact details of the agreement required to establish formally the new financial structure and the revised in-service dates still need to be agreed. This should take several months and the Government will report further to the House when this has been achieved.

Overall, we expect the additional cost to the Government of these two contracts to be around £700 million, although significant additional Ministry of Defence expenditure will not begin until 2008 and will be spread over the following years. The scale of the financial consequences now announced by the company demonstrates that it accepts responsibility for its share of the serious difficulties that have arisen on these two immensely complex and demanding programmes. It is, however, appropriate, for the reasons that I have set out , that the Government should make these additional contributions to the Nimrod and Astute contracts. The unique military capabilities represented by these two programmes are crucial to Britain's future defences, and there are no alternative systems capable of offering comparable levels of performance at economic costs in any existing projects anywhere in the world. The Government are satisfied that both the Nimrod and the Astute project represent value for money. We now look to the company to deliver.

Procurement

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the procedure is for emergency procurement in a deployment of the armed forces. [98296]

Mr. Ingram: The urgent operational requirements process enables both the acceleration of existing programmes and new procurements against short timescales to equip the armed forces for a specific operational environment, a particular threat faced or an envisaged operational scenario. There are also arrangements to meet surge requirements for stock and consumables. Further information on the urgent operational requirement process can be found at www.mod.uk.

Reservists

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* reservists and *(b)* medical reservists have responded to call-up notices in the last three months; and if he will make a statement. [97771]

Dr. Moonie: As at 14 February, 5,495 call-out notices had been issued in support of Operation TELIC. Of these, 513 were issued to medical reservists. On the same date, 1,765 reservists had been accepted for service of which 198 were medical reservists. For all other operations, 140 reservists had been accepted for service between 1 December 2002 and 14 February 2003. Of these, seven were medical reservists.

Aircraft Carriers

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) whether the proposed pooling of Royal Navy and French aircraft carriers for future European Union military operations will ensure that at least one will always be immediately available to the EU *(a)* in addition and *(b)* as an alternative to being available for UK and NATO tasks; [98230]

(2) whether Royal Navy aircraft carriers required for *(a)* UK and *(b)* NATO tasks when already deployed on EU tasks would be made available for UK and NATO duties. [98231]

Mr. Hoon: At the Le Touquet summit, the United Kingdom and France announced that we would "develop the interoperability of [our] aircraft carrier groups, pursuing all areas of co-operation, in particular harmonising activity cycles and training". The aim will be to maximise carrier availability over the activity cycle. Aircraft carriers available on this basis might participate in national, coalition, NATO or EU-led operations, but will remain national assets. Decisions on the deployment of national assets for operations will continue to be for the nation concerned.

The Government make decisions on the deployment (and redeployment) of UK forces on operations on a case-by-case basis. These judgments are based on factors such as operational need, what forces we and others have to offer and any international treaty obligations that may be relevant, with NATO remaining as the foundation of our collective defence.

Telephone Helplines

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many telephone helplines are sponsored by his Department; and which of these helplines are charged at *(a)* national rate, *(b)* premium rate and *(c)* local rate. [95720]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence sponsors many telephone helplines, covering a wide variety of subjects. The primary helplines for all general inquiries are the MOD Public Enquiry Office on 0870 607 4455 and the Welsh Language Public Enquiry Office on 01554 821 413. Both of these numbers are charged at the national rate.

The main helplines which provide advice on specific subjects are:

Helpline	*Number*	*Charged at*
Low Flying Helpdesk	020 7218 6020	National rate
Gulf Veterans Advice Unit	0800 169 4495 020 7395 2375	Freephone National rate
Medical Assessment Programme Helpline	0800 169 5401	Freephone
Porton Down Volunteers Helpline	0800 783 2521	Freephone
Veterans Agency Helpline	0800 169 2277	Freephone
Defence Vetting Agency Helpline	01904 662 644	National rate
Defence Suppliers Service Helpline	0117 913 2844 0800 282 324	National rate Freephone
Royal Navy recruiting helpline	0845 607 5555	Local rate
Army recruiting helpline	08457 300 111	Local rate
RAF recruiting helpline	0845 605 5555	Local rate
TA recruiting helpline	0845 603 8000	Local rate
Meteorological Office helpline	0845 300 0300	Local rate

Helpline	*Number*	*Charged at*
Defence Estates—Disposal of MOD Land	0121 311 2015	National rate
SaBRE (Support Britain's Reservists And Employers)	0800 389 5459	Freephone

The above list is not exhaustive and does not include those helplines created specifically for serving military and civilian personnel and their dependants. Nor does it include those helplines that may from time to time be administered by individual units or establishments to provide advice on local or short term issues. Information on this is not held centrally and could be provided only with disproportionate cost.

Type 23 Frigates

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answer of 3 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 68W, on the Type 23 frigate, if he will list the systems being considered to enable attacks by small enemy craft to be dealt with. [98411]

Mr. Ingram: Lynx helicopters and close-range guns currently provide anti-ship and close in defence for Type 23 frigates. The project to provide surface vessels, including Type 23 frigates, with an improved capability to deal with the threat presented by small enemy craft is in its very early stages. The concepts currently being assessed include small and medium-calibre guns, rockets and non-lethal means. This assessment phase is expected to complete towards the end of this year.

Watchkeeper Programme

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he proposes to announce the shortlist of selected bidders for the Watchkeeper Programme; what sums were given to the bidders; and whether he is considering splitting the bid. [99073]

Mr. Ingram: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence announced on 7 February 2003 that the bidders selected for the remainder of the Watchkeeper assessment phase were: Northrop Grumman ISS International and Thales (UK). To date, around £25 million has been spent on the Watchkeeper programme, and the contracts for the remainder of the assessment phase will be worth approximately £9 million to each bidder. We expect to select a single successful contractor for the demonstration and manufacture phase by mid-2004.

CABINET OFFICE

Civil Contingencies (South-West)

Brian Cotter: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what civil contingency plans are in place for the south-west region in the event of a terrorist attack; and if he will make a statement. [99111]

Mr. Alexander: The UK has plans in place to maintain national security and protect the public. These classified contingency plans cover a wide range of emergencies, including terrorist threats, and are based on established multi-agency local emergency arrangements. They are regularly tested, reviewed and updated as circumstances change.

In addition, each administration region in England now has its own regional resilience team made up of emergency planning specialists. Through regional resilience forums, these teams will help co-ordinate emergency planning within and across regional boundaries.

Government Shareholdings

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office (1) what remit the Shareholder Executive Unit will have; [99114]

(2) what *(a)* organisational and *(b)* employment plans his Department has for managing government shareholdings in *(i)* the Royal Mail, (ii) the Royal Mint and (iii) British Nuclear Fuels; and what estimates have been made of the cost of such plans. [99143]

Mr. Alexander: The remit of the Shareholder Executive will be to work with Government Departments to improve their performance as a shareholder in a range of Government shareholdings in public and private sector companies as well as Government's more commercial trading funds. The Shareholder Executive will meet this remit in a number of ways. It will: scrutinise departmental shareholder resource requirements and assist in improving department's capabilities; help departments define their relationship with each company; set best practice standards and procedures for departments in their role as shareholder; and help departments distinguish and articulate long-term commercial and policy objectives for each shareholding. The Shareholder Executive will also become Government's centre of corporate finance and governance expertise, advising departments on shareholder-related management, corporate governance and finance issues as well as wider corporate finance and other industrial issues that arise from time to time.

The Cabinet Office is putting in place arrangements to enable the Shareholder Executive to become operational as soon as possible. An open competition is under way for the recruitment of a Chief Executive, who will be accountable directly to Lord Macdonald and the Cabinet Secretary for the performance of the Shareholder Executive. In due course, between 10 and 15 people drawn from Government Departments and the private sector will be recruited to support the Chief Executive in delivering the Shareholder Executive's remit. The costs of running the Shareholder Executive are likely to be modest relative to the potential benefits arising from improved shareholder performance.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Food Advertising (EU Funds)

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had with the European Commission regarding the use of EU funds on advertising food products. [98202]

Mr. Morley: My officials regularly take part in discussions with the European Commission in meetings of the Management Committee for the Council Regulations concerning the Promotion of Agricultural Products in both Third Countries and the Internal Market. Advertising forms part of the promotional activity permitted under these regulations.

Agricultural Exports

Mr. Roger Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what market research has been undertaken by *(a)* her Department and *(b)* Food from Britain since 1995 regarding the use of Foods from Britain by agricultural export companies; and if she will place a copy of those findings in the Library. [97869]

Mr. Morley: The Department has not undertaken any market research since 1995 into the use of Food From Britain by agricultural export companies. In 2000 research into the usage and attitude of their clients and other exporters was undertaken on behalf of Food From Britain. This was updated in 2002. A copy of the executive summary of the survey will be placed in the Library.

Mr. Roger Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many companies used the services, by type, of Food from Britain in each of the last 10 years; and how many of those companies were *(a)* small and medium-sized businesses and *(b)* less than five years old when they first contacted Food from Britain. [97870]

Mr. Morley: During the last 10 years the approximate total number of companies using Food From Britain is as shown below. Of these at least 50 per cent. were small and medium-sized businesses. Food From Britain does not hold information on the age of companies with which it deals.

Total number of companies using Food From Britain

Year	*No.*
1992/93	700
1993/94	1,200
1994/95	1,000
1995/96	1,000
1996/97	1,000
1997/98	1,100
1998/99	750
1999/2000	800
2000/01	800
2001/02	800

Mr. Roger Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for St Ives (Andrew George) of 16 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 728W, on agricultural exports, how much Food from Britain charges companies by size for use of their services. [97933]

Mr. Morley: Food From Britain does not charge for services by size of the company. Fees are calculated according to a number of factors including complexity of the service offered and staff time. Membership of the Fast Track scheme, which gives access to a range of additional export services, is based on the export turnover of a company as follows:

Export Turnover(£)	*Fee(£)*
Nil-250	500
250–500	1,000
500–1million	1,500
1–2million	2,000
2–5million	3,000
over 5million	4,500
Associate member	1,250

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs pursuant to her answer of 16 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 728W, on agricultural exports, how many companies used services provided by her Department's *(a)* agricultural exports promotion service and *(b)* Food from Britain in each of the last 10 years, broken down by *(i)* size by annual turnover and (ii) whether they were charged for those services in each of the last 10 years. [98012]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 24 February 2003]:* The information is as follows:

(a) The total number of companies using services provided by the agricultural exports promotion service (e.g. participation in fairs and missions) over the last 10 years was as shown in the following table. The vast majority were small and medium sized enterprises. The companies were not charged for any of the services provided.

Year	*Number of companies*
1993–94	270
1994–95	230
1995–96	380
1996–97	190
1997–98	660
1998–99	400
1999–2000	190
2000–01	210
2001–02	360
2002–03	350

(b) The total number of companies using services provided by Food From Britain over the last 10 years was as shown in the following table. The information is not available broken down by the size of annual turnover of the companies, although more than 50 per cent. were small and medium sized enterprises. Companies will have been charged for most of the services provided.

Year	*Number of companies*
1992–93	700
1993–94	1,200
1994–95	1,000
1995–96	1,000

Year	*Number of companies*
1996–97	1,000
1997–98	1,100
1998–99	750
1999–2000	800
2000–01	800
2001–02	800

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs pursuant to the answer of 16 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 728W, on agricultural exports, how much *(a)* revenue and *(b)* profit was raised through companies supported by Food from Britain in each of the last 10 years. [98013]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 24 February 2003]:* The income (other than grant in aid) which Food From Britain generates from the activities it undertakes is shown in the Annual Report and Accounts. The Accounts are laid before Parliament each year and copies are placed in the Library. The income in each of the last 10 years is as shown in the following table. Food From Britain is a non-profit making organisation.

£ million

	Income
1992–93	1.5
1993–94	1.7
1994–95	1.6
1995–96	2.5
1996–97	4.1
1997–98	3.8
1998–99	4.0
1999–2000	3.7
2000–01	4.1
2001–02	4.6

Bill of Rights (Animals)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if the Government will introduce a Bill of Rights for Animals; and if she will make a statement. [98101]

Mr. Morley: The Government have no plans to introduce a Bill of Rights for Animals. We are undertaking a review of animal welfare law with a view to modernising and consolidating them into an Animal Welfare Bill.

Bovine Subsidy Scheme

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the Rural Payments Agency will complete its review of the case referred by Mr. and Mrs. McCoy of Dartmouth regarding their 2001 bovine subsidy scheme claim. [99069]

Alun Michael: The Rural Payments Agency (RPA) received a number of representations about the penalties imposed and considered them in consultation with the industry, taking account of the advice and views of the European Commission. As a result, a number of categories were identified where a review of the earlier decision was considered to be appropriate. Full details regarding the consultation and the categories affected have been sent to all bovine producers.

The RPA aims to process cases as quickly as possible but has made a commitment to the industry to complete the exercise by the end of March 2003. Mr and Mrs McCoy's case will be considered under the review provisions and a reply will be sent to them by the deadline.

The RPA is required under European legislation to cross-check bovine subsidy claims against the British Cattle Movement Service (BCMS) Cattle Tracing System (CTS) database. Discrepancies were found when checks were carried out on 2001 bovine claims resulting in a significant number of producers having penalties applied and also delays in making the subsidy payments.

The schemes affected are Beef Special Premium, Suckler Cow Premium, Slaughter Premium (including the Veal Calf Scheme) and Extensification Payments.

Bovine TB

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many bovine TB reactors were positive in *(a)* Herefordshire and *(b)* Worcestershire in 2002; and how many have been positive in 2003. [97967]

Mr. Morley: Reactors to the tuberculin test are slaughtered and examined post-mortem. Infection is confirmed by either the presence of typical, visible lesions of tuberculosis or by the laboratory culture of the causative agent (Mycobacterium bovis) in tissue samples. These post mortem examinations, carried out in abattoirs, are less than 100 per cent. sensitive. Failure to detect visible lesions or failure to culture the organism from a test reactor does not necessarily rule out infection with M. bovis. It would be misleading, therefore, to equate unconfirmed test reactors to "false positives" or "negative" reactors.

The latest available data for 2002 show there were 892 confirmed reactors in Herefordshire and Worcestershire. The information is not available separately for each of the counties.

Laboratory culture of M. bovis takes several weeks. Consequently data for reactors disclosed so far in 2003 is not yet available.

Circus Animals

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans the Government have to change the law relating to the welfare of circus animals; and if she will make a statement. [98100]

Mr. Morley: There is currently a review of animal welfare law with a view to modernising and consolidating it into an Animal Welfare Bill. The legislation relating to the welfare of circus animals is part of that review. I am considering a thorough overhaul of the present licensing system for performing animals including the welfare of animals in circuses and circus winter quarters. Officials have held discussions with representatives from the performing animal industry, welfare organisations and other interested parties about the need for better regulation.

Coastal Erosion

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what work has been done by the Environment Agency in Somerset on coastal erosion. [98280]

Mr. Morley: Maritime District Councils are empowered to carry out works in the management of coastal erosion by the Coast Protection Act 1949. The Environment Agency does not have responsibility for coastal erosion.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what funding is being made available under the Government's financial statement 2003 for *(a)* West Somerset District Council and *(b)* Sedgemoor District Council for coastal erosion. [98281]

Mr. Morley: Grant aid is made available by DEFRA to support capital projects carried out by the maritime district councils to manage the risk from coastal erosion, provided they meet specified economic, technical and environmental criteria, are on the Department's forward capital programme and achieve the Department's threshold priority score. The total allocation for all authorities for coastal erosion works in 2003–04 is £35 million. Responsibility for deciding on which projects to promote and their timing rests with the councils. West Somerset District Council has an entry for a study on DEFRA's forward capital programme for 03–04 but Sedgemoor District Council has no entries.

Laptop Computers

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many laptop computers were used by *(a)* Ministers and special advisers and *(b)* officials in her Department in each year since 1995; how many were *(i)* lost and (ii) stolen; what their cost was; and if she will make a statement. [97498]

Alun Michael: The number of laptop computers used by *(a)* Ministers and special advisers was six and *(b)* officials was 1,835, in the 2001–02 financial year. In that year *(i)* five laptops were lost, and (ii) six were stolen; the total value of these was £18,675. None of the laptop computers lost or stolen was being used by a Minister or special adviser.

The Department only came into existence June 2001 so the information requested can only be given from that date.

Drainage Boards

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the powers of drainage boards. [98288]

Mr. Morley: The Land Drainage Act 1991 provides the powers and duties of Internal Drainage Boards who exercise a general supervision over all matters relating to drainage of land in their district.

The detailed powers are set out in Sections 14, 15, 19–21, 25, 36, 55–57, 62–64 and 66 of the Act. They include powers for the improvement and maintenance of existing works, construction of new works, acquisition and disposal of land, powers of entry and the making of byelaws.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the constraints are on the fund-raising powers of drainage boards. [98289]

Mr. Morley: The Land Drainage Act 1991 sets out the financial powers of internal drainage boards (IDBs). Section 36 provides for IDBs to meet their expenses (net of payments to, and receipts from, the Environment Agency (EA)) by drainage rates and special levies. Section 37 sets out how these payments will be apportioned. Sections 38–39 deal with differential drainage charges which are set by sub-dividing the IDB area. Sections 40–54 deal with levying of drainage rates and related provisions. Section 55 provides powers for IDBs to borrow in relation to their functions under the 1991 Act or to discharge other loans. Ministerial consent is required for new borrowing. Section 56 allows IDBs to set navigation tolls. Section 57 allows IDBs to seek contributions from the EA in relation to water from higher land or dealing with water before it reaches a main river.

We intend to use the forthcoming Water Bill to restore the power for IDBs to borrow to finance contributions to the Environment Agency, which was inadvertently lost when water legislation was consolidated in 1991.

Egg Marking

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the Government's policy on the individual marking of eggs. [97712]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 13 February 2003]:* In 2001 the EU agreed new rules requiring the compulsory marking of hen eggs. From 1 January 2004 eggs will have to be marked with a code identifying the method and place of production. This will improve consumer information and choice and will assist with traceability and enforcement of EU egg marketing regulations. We will soon be consulting interested parties on the format of the producer code. There is no truth in the rumours that each egg will have to be traceable back to an individual hen.

Egg marking will only apply to class A eggs most of which are sold at retail level. Some 80 per cent. of eggs produced and sold in the UK are already marked under the industry's Lion assurance scheme. In negotiations, the UK successfully argued for the inclusion of a provision in the new rules to allow the marking of eggs to take place at any approved packing centre as well as on farms. Furthermore, eggs sold by the producer directly to the consumer for their own use (e.g. farm gate sales or at farmers' markets) will not have to be marked, nor will any non-class A eggs or those sold for processing.

Equine Cruelty

Diana Organ: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what information she collates on the imposition of penalties for equine cruelty on a regional basis; and what plans she has to take further measures on equine cruelty. [98037]

Mr. Morley: There are no procedures in place for regularly collating information relating to the imposition of penalties for equine cruelty offences on a regional basis. Annual statistics relate to England and Wales as a whole.

We are undertaking a review of animal welfare law with a view to modernising and consolidating it into an Animal Welfare Bill. The review includes looking at ways to improve the welfare of captive and domestic animals, including equine species, and to reduce acts of cruelty.

Diana Organ: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will bring forward proposals for an automatic lifetime ban on keeping horses following a conviction for cruelty. [98048]

Mr. Morley: The Protection of Animals Act 1911 (as amended) provides that the court may disqualify a person convicted from having custody of any animal for such a period, as it thinks fit. There is no upper limit on the period of disqualification which a court may impose.

I am undertaking a review of all existing animal welfare legislation—including the 1911 Act—with a view to the introduction of a Bill that will consolidate and modernise these laws in a single Act. This review includes the penalties available to the courts. No decisions have been taken concerning the contents of the Bill which will be issued in draft for public consultation before it is considered by Parliament.

Fishermen

Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs pursuant to her answer of 6 February, Official Report, column 377W, on fishermen, what proportion of the aid that will be available for measures to support *(a)* the training of fishermen and *(b)* the diversification of their activities outside marine fisheries must contribute to a reduction of the fishing effort developed by the beneficiaries if they continue fishing on a part-time basis. [98597]

Mr. Morley: Grant is available for the training of fishermen in safety measures, under the fisheries structural fund. Payments are not conditional on reducing fishing effort. Assistance available from regional sources for supporting the diversification of fishermen's activities outside marine fisheries is administered independently of the obligations under the common fisheries policy for the limitation of fishing effort.

Flooding

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what EU funding is available for flood defences outside structural fund areas. [98291]

Mr. Morley: No significant financial assistance is made available by the European Union to assist member states in the provision of flood and coastal defences.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement about how she will deal with future flood alerts. [98065]

Mr. Morley: With Defra funding, the Environment Agency has developed a clear national strategy for developing its flood warning capabilities over the next 10 years in order to deliver the highest practicable quality of flood warning service across England and Wales. It is anticipated that in order to achieve defined performance targets for an effective flood warning service to increase both its coverage and the effective action taken by recipients of these warnings that investment will be focussed on the following specific but inter-linked areas of work:

upgrade and extension of detection and monitoring systems such as telemetry and weather radar to improve the identification of conditions likely to cause flooding;

the delivery of an enhanced national flood forecasting system to improve prediction of the time, location, likelihood, severity and duration of flooding;

developing a multi-media warning dissemination system to communicate flood warnings to "at risk" members of the public and to professional partners who need to respond (eg emergency services, local authorities, utilities, media and weather broadcasters);

targeted public awareness programmes and effective marketing and communication of flood risk, preventative actions and appropriate reactions to warnings to achieve an effective response.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the powers of flood defence committees. [98290]

Mr. Morley: Flood defence committees, whether regional or local, are executive committees of the Agency.

Section 106 of the Water Resources Act 1991 requires the Environment Agency to "arrange for all its functions relating to flood defence under the following provisions of this Act and the Land Drainage Act 1991 to be carried out by Regional Flood Defence Committees". The exceptions are issuing of levies, making drainage charges or borrowing money.

Regional flood defence committees are permitted to arrange for their functions to be carried out:

(a) by a sub-committee, or an under sub-committee of the committee or an officer of theAgency; or

(b) by any other regional or, as the case may be, local flood defence committee.

Statutory local flood defence committees have been established in the Environment Agency's Southern, Wessex and Anglian regions and in Wales.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what financial assistance is being given to the Environment Agency to help with flood prevention and relief in the Government's spending assessment for 2003. [98309]

Mr. Morley: The Environment Agency's flood defence function is funded mainly *(a)* from local authority levies which in turn are supported by funding from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, and *(b)* from Defra grant for capital projects for new and improved defences, related studies and flood warning. Additionally, Defra makes contributions to support the cost of agency national initiatives such as for the National Flood and Coastal Defence Database and on Catchment Flood Management Plans. Defra provision for 2003–04 is:

	£ million
Capital projects	64
National initiatives	5

Game Licences

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many game licences were issued for the 2002–03 season; how much it cost to administer the game licence regime in 2002–03; and what revenue was received. [98551]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 24 February 2003]:* The information requested in relation to game licensing during the year 2002–03 will not be available until later this year.

Genetically Modified Soya

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much *(a)* processed food and *(b)* soya milk, containing genetically modified soya grown in the USA, was consumed in the UK in the last year for which figures are available; and if she will make a statement. [98359]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 24 February 2003]:* Official figures on the levels of *(a)* processed food and *(b)* soya milk, containing genetically modified soya, grown in the USA and consumed in the UK are not available.

The following table shows UK imports of *(i)* unprocessed foods, (ii) lightly processed foods (goods that retain their raw recognisable form, such as meat, cheese and butter, powdered milk, flour, sugar etc.) and (iii) highly processed foods (goods such as confectionery, canned meats, jams, alcoholic drinks, ice cream etc.) from the USA in 2001.

Degree of processing	*Tonnes*
Unprocessed	702,978
Lightly processed	404,537
Highly processed	1,246,311

Crown Copyright
Source:
HM Customs and Excise
Data prepared by Statistics (Commodities & Food) Accounts and Trade, ESD, DEFRA

Grants (Farmers and Landowners)

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list for the latest year that figures are available, how many grants for farmers and landowners have been given, broken down by *(a)* greater than £1 million, *(b)* £800,000-£999,999, *(c)* £500,000-£799,999, *(d)* £300,000-£499,999, *(e)* £200,000-£299,000, *(f)* £100,000-£199,999, *(g)* £50,000-£99,999, *(h)* £25,000-£49,999, *(i)* £12,500-£24,999, *(j)* £5,000-£12,499, *(k)* £2,500-£4,999 and *(l)* less than £2,500. [98608]

Alun Michael: The table breaks down the CAP payments made by the RPA in the EAGGF financial year from 16 October 2001 to 15 October 2002.

Separate lines are shown for the IACS and non-IACS payments. In the latter category the beneficiaries are largely traders rather than farmers and the coverage is wider than England alone.

It is not possible to show the number of farmers and landowners who received amounts falling within the bands stipulated in the question without disproportionate cost.

	Trader schemes	*IACS schemes*	*Total EAGGF*	*Nationally/ EU partially funded schemes*
(a) Greater than £1,000,000	29	3	32	179
(b) £800,000-£999,999	20	3	23	54
(c) £500,000-£799,999	66	8	74	173
(d) £300,000-£499,999	107	38	145	359
(e) £200,000-£299,999	115	109	224	561
(f) £100,000-£199,999	232	895	1,127	2,123
(g) £50,000-£99,999	371	3,202	3,573	4,769
(h) £25,000-£49,999	563	6,885	7,448	9,392
(i) £12,500-£24,999	704	10,755	11,459	15,167
(j) £5,000-£12,499	1,456	24,038	25,494	31,048
(k) £2,500-£4,999	1,572	31,839	33,411	36,390
(l) Less than £2,500	83,757	489,420	573,177	590,135

Greater London Assembly (Financial Assistance)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what financial assistance her Department gave to the Greater London Assembly in 2002; and for what projects. [95853]

Alun Michael: No financial assistance was given directly to the London Assembly by central Government Departments in 2002–03.

The London Assembly is part of the Greater London Authority (GLA). It is responsible for scrutinising and reviewing the Mayor's exercise of his statutory functions. It has particular power to investigate, and prepare reports on actions and decisions taken by the Mayor or any member of the Greater London Authority. The London Assembly's specific costs are part of the overall GLA budget which is proposed each year by the Mayor is subject to the Assembly's agreement.

The GLA grants from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in 2002–03 as reported on the RA02 form are as follows:

	£million
GLA Grants	
Revenue Support Grant	659.641
Redistributed Non-Domestic Rate	267.654
General GLA Grant	27.950

IT Contracts

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list IT contracts in her Department and its predecessors above £50 million in each of the last 10 years; what the inception date for each system was; when it became fully functional; when it became fully debugged; and what the cost of over-runs has been. [99008]

Alun Michael: Defra has not let any new IT contracts with a whole-life cost above £50 million since it was established as a new Department in June 2001.

Information covering earlier periods, or for Defra's Executive Agencies and NDPBs, is not readily available and could be constructed retrospectively only at disproportionate cost.

Live Sheep Exports

Mr. Prosser: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many live sheep were exported from Dover to continental Europe on 1 February 2003; when and where health certification was carried out in respect of the sheep; how many of the sheep were rejected as unfit for the intended journey, *(a)* during inspection for health certification purposes and *(b)* at Dover docks, and to where those sheep were taken, and what the address was of the final destination given on the route plan for each of the consignments. [98520]

Mr. Morley: The information requested is as follows:

Sailing date	*Total animals certified*	*Where consignments were certified*	*Animals rejected at certification*	*Animals rejected at Dover docks*	*Destination*
1 February	1,260	England	0	0	Germany

The sheep on the above sailing were certified within 48 hours of export and were sent to approved slaughterhouses.

These figures relate to the numbers of sheep certified for export and are subject to revision and change.

Over 30 Months Scheme

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the effect of the requirement to remove vertebral column from Over 30 Month cattle upon farmers rearing cattle in the West Country under the Beef Assurance Scheme; and if she will make a statement. [98357]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 24 February 2003]:* The requirement that vertebral column be removed in licensed cutting plants has created difficulties for members of the Beef Assurance Scheme. I understand that two cutting plants in Devon and Cornwall which may be able to accommodate cattle reared under the scheme have now been licensed by the Food Standards Agency.

Rural Payments Agency

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs pursuant to her answer of 11 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 647W, if she will list the main items of property that the Rural Payments Agency lost through theft in 2001–02, together with the value of those items. [98129]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 24 February 2003]:* The Rural Payments Agency only came into existence on 16 October 2001. Losses through theft from then until end December 2002 are as follows:

16 October 2001—31 December 2002: Loss of five laptops at £2,000 each and six mobile phones at £50 each, making a total of £10,500.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Laptop Computers

Dr. Cable: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many laptop computers were used by *(a)* Ministers and special advisers and *(b)* officials in his Department in each year since 1995; how many were *(i)* lost and (ii) stolen; what their cost was; and if he will make a statement. [98702]

Mr. Leslie: The information requested on the use of laptop computers in each year since 1995 is not available centrally or in the form requested, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Since the establishment of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister on 29 May 2002 there have been four reported cases of stolen laptop computers, at a total cost of £6,038.

Cash Incentive Schemes

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will place in the Library a summary of the responses to the consultation on the removal of the requirement for local authorities to obtain consent to run a cash incentive scheme. [98530]

Mr. McNulty: A total of 26 responses, which were generally strongly supportive of the proposal, were received. A summary of the responses will be placed in the library of the House.

Deprivation

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what response his Office has made to the Greater London Enterprise Report on Developing New Approaches to the Measurement of Deprivation. [94522]

Mrs. Roche: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has received parts of the Greater London Enterprise Report on Developing New Approaches to the Measurement of Deprivation as part of the consultation exercise on updating the Indices of Deprivation 2000. This report is currently being considered as part of the updating process.

Empty Homes

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many empty homes his Department had five years ago. by region; if he will establish an empty homes strategy within his Department; and if he will set a target for reduction in empty homes. [92922]

Mr. Leslie: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister was formed in May 2002. Therefore, we do not have information on empty homes from five years ago. The Fire Service College, an executive agency of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, currently has one vacant residential property, at the college site in Moreton-in-Marsh, which it envisages will be let shortly. The College's strategy is to ensure that residential property that is not required for staff use is held out for letting on short term tenancies. Its target is to ensure that it has no residential stock vacant for more than three months.

Housing

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what has been the ratio of population to *(a)* housing units and *(b)* bedspaces in each county of England in each year since 1997. [97407]

Mr. McNulty: This information is not available annually. Estimates of population per housing unit for 2001 will be possible later this year when figures on numbers of dwellings are published from the Census.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what proportion of new homes to be built in the UK will be transferred to the private renting sector; and what proportion will be built on brownfield sites. [98462]

Mr. McNulty: The information requested on the numbers of new homes available for private renting is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

In England, the target for the proportion of new housing on previously-developed land including through conversions of existing buildings is 60 per cent. by 2008. Latest available figures show that the percentage in 2000 was 60 per cent. and in 2001, 61 per cent.

Housing targets for other parts of the United Kingdom are a matter for the devolved Administration concerned.

Neighbourhood Renewal Fund

Mr. Battle: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much funding Leeds city council has received from the neighbourhood renewal fund; when funds were received; what projects have been funded and by how much; and which organisations are responsible for *(a)* managing and *(b)* delivering each project. [96968]

Mrs. Roche: Details of the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF) allocations made to Leeds city council are in the following table.

The purpose of the NRF is to support the improvement of mainstream service delivery in deprived areas, contributing to the achievement of the Government's floor targets in the five neighbourhood renewal themes of education, health, worklessness, crime reduction, and housing and the environment. In partnership with the Local Strategic Partnership, Leeds city council has allocated NRF across these floor target areas as follows:

Allocation 2001–02: £4,197,791

NRF resources spent in 2001–02

	£
Education	1,724,472
Employment	960,729
Crime	366,866
Health	0
Housing and Environment	383,160
Other	41,140
Total	3,476,367

Proposed spend 2002–03: £7,018,111 (including £721,424 carry over from 2001–02)

NRF resources allocated in 2002–03

	£
Education	2,245,690
Employment	963,440
Crime	1,511,170
Health	414,600
Housing and Environment	1,307,200
Other	701,000
Total	[1]7,143,100

[1] Over commitment to allow for slippage

NRF is paid in fortnightly instalments with the Revenue Support Grant to local authorities. Payments commenced in June 2001.

However, local authorities account for NRF expenditure through NRF Statements of Use, which are submitted to Government Offices annually in October. Leeds city council's NRF Statement of Use for 2002–03 is available on the LSP's (the Leeds Initiative) website.

Details of NRF supported projects and activities for 2002–03, including those organisations responsible for delivery, are as follows:

Floor Target	*Project*	*Organisation:*
Burglary Reduction	Anti-Social Behaviour	LCC—Community Safety Unit
	CASAC Target Hardening	LCC—Community Safety Unit
	Leeds Watch Local CCTV Initiative	LCC—Community Safety Unit
	Neighbourhood Wardens	LCC—Housing and Environmental Health Services
	New Neighbourhood Schemes	LCC—Social Services
	Youth Diversionary Initiatives	LCC—Youth Service
Cross Cutting	Community Planning—Locality Coordinators	LCC—Community Planning and Regeneration
	Data Mapping and Improved Information	Leeds Initiative
	Environment Call Centre	LCC—Community Planning and Regeneration
	Leeds Mediation Services	Community Mediation Services
	Neighbourhood Renewal Teams	LCC—Community Planning and Regeneration
Education	City Learning Centres	Education Leeds
	Counselling Scheme	LCC—Childcare and Early Development Service
	Ethnic Minority Pupil Achievement (devolved)	Education Leeds
	Ethnic Minority Pupil Achievement (retained)	Education Leeds
	Getting Started—Nursery Nurses	Education Leeds
	Integrated Children's Centres	LCC—Childcare and Early Development Service
	IT Access in Libraries	LCC—Leisure Services
	Leeds Film Festival Children's Workshop	LCC—Leisure Services
	Pupil Retention Grant (devolved)	Education Leeds
	Pupil Retention Grant (retained)	Education Leeds
	Study Support National (devolved)	Education Leeds
	Study Support National (retained)	Education Leeds
	Teaching Assistant Grant	Education Leeds
	Teaching Assistant Grant (retained)	Education Leeds
	Volunteer Reading Help	Volunteer Reading Help
Employment	Connexions Programme	LCC—Community Planning and Regeneration
	Construction and Training Agency (LCATA)	Leeds Construction and Training Agency
	Job Guarantee Programme	LCC—Dept. of Training
	Leeds Development Agency	Leeds Development Agency
	Second Chance School	LCC—Dept. of Training
	South Leeds Family Learning Centre	LCC—Dept. of Training
Health	Hamaara Healthy Living Centre	Hamaara Healthy Living Centre
	Increasing Exercise Opportunities—Mental Health	LCC—Social Services
	Space for Sport and Arts	Education Leeds
	Various Health Schemes	East Leeds Primary Care Trust
Social Housing	Beeston Housing Strategy	LCC—Housing and Environmental Health Services
	Binyard Improvements	LCC—Contracting Services
	Code of Standards Development Project	LCC—Housing and Environmental Health Services
	Dog Fouling Initiatives	LCC—Leisure Services
	Domestic Noise Nuisance Services (out of hours)	LCC—Housing and Environmental Health Services
	Enhanced Street Cleansing Services	LCC—Highways and Transportation
	Environment Task Force	LCC—Community Planning and Regeneration
	Extension of abandoned vehicle pilot	LCC—Highways and Transportation
	Flyposting and anti graffiti strategy	LCC—Community Planning and Regeneration
	Home Maintenance Project	LCC—Housing and Environmental Health Services
	Leeds House Condition Survey	LCC—Housing and Environmental Health Services
	Streetscene	LCC—Contracting Services

Supporting People Scheme

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the balance between mobile and permanent staff servicing the needs of older people under the Supporting People Scheme. [97784]

HOUSE OF COMMONS PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES (HANSARD) ● 2002-03

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Mr. McNulty: Supporting People will enable local authorities to provide user-centred, flexible services designed to meet local need. Local authorities are required to review all services (including those for older people) in their area between 2003 and 2006, to ensure that services meet the needs of users, are of high quality and are cost effective. It is the responsibility of each authority (and each service provider) to ensure that adequate staffing resources are in place to meet local need, and that the balance between the use of mobile and permanent staff is appropriate.

Sustainable Communities

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the other housing programmes identified in the table on page 7 of Sustainable Communities: Building for the Future are; and how much will be spent on each of these in *(a)* 2003–04, *(b)* 2004–05 and *(c)* 2005–06. [98516]

Mr. McNulty: Tabled are the "other housing programmes" identified in the table on page 7 "Sustainable Communities: Building for the Future", with planned expenditure for the next three years. Note that totals may not sum due to rounding.

£ million

Programmes	*2003–04*	*2004–05*	*2005–06*	*Total*
Housing Defects Grants	0.4	0.2	0.1	0.7
Disabled Facilities Grants	99.0	99.0	99.0	297.0
Safer Communities Supported Housing	39.0	10.0	10.0	59.0
Gypsy Sites	8.0	8.0	8.0	24.0
Estate Action	5.0	0.0	0.0	5.0
Housing Corporation (Other Programmes)	227.5	226.4	226.4	680.4
National Approved Letting Service	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.2
Housing Action Trusts	71.8	43.8	17.8	133.4
Home Improvement Agencies	8.9	10.9	10.9	30.7
Rent Assessment Panels	10.2	10.2	10.2	30.7
Housing Mobility Grants	4.0	6.7	12.2	22.9
Best Value in Housing	1.0	1.0	1.0	3.0
Private Landlords in Low Demand Areas-Pilots	1.0	1.0	1.0	3.0
Tenant Participation	6.1	5.1	4.1	15.3
Housing Publicity and Publications	0.8	0.8	0.8	2.4
Leasehold Enfranchisement Advisory Service	0.6	0.6	0.6	1.7
Valuation Office Agency Right to Buy charges	1.8	1.8	1.8	5.4
Tenants Deposit Scheme	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.2
Supporting People	61.5	63.5	48.5	173.5
Home Buying and Selling	1.5	1.5	1.5	4.5
Local Authority Funding of Pilot Lettings Systems	1.0	1.0	1.0	3.0
BME RSL transitional funding for rent reform	15.0	0.0	0.0	15.0
Total	564.4	491.7	455.0	1,511.0

The "Other Housing" line in the table on page 66 covers all of the tabled items except for disabled facilities grants, which are shown separately in that table.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Class Sizes (Derbyshire)

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will list the class sizes of *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools in Derbyshire in each of the last five years. [98887]

Mr. Miliband: The information requested is shown in the table.

Maintained primary and secondary schools[1]: Average class size[2], Derbyshire local education authority

Position in January each year	*Classes taught by one teacher*	
	Primary	*Secondary*
1998	29.4	22.2
1999	28.2	22.4
2000	28.3	22.5
2001	27.3	22.2
2002	27.0	22.3

[1] Includes middle schools as deemed.

[2] Classes as taught during the one selected period in each school on the day of the census.

Source:

Annual Schools' Census

Classroom Replacement (Somerset)

Mr Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many condemned temporary classrooms there are in Somerset; and how many temporary classrooms were replaced in Somerset in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02. [98277]

Mr. Miliband: The Department for Education and Skills does not hold information on numbers of replacement temporary classrooms.

Mr Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what guidelines the Government has issued on classroom replacement in Somerset. [98283]

Mr. Miliband: The Department for Education and Skills has not issued guidelines for replacement classrooms. Somerset, in common with other Local Education Authorities, determines priorities for its capital budgets, on the basis of its Asset Management Plan, which should take Government priorities into account.

Construction Industry Training Board

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans he has to review the operation of the Construction Industry Training Board levy. [97911]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The CITB's levy arrangements are subject to annual approval by Parliament. They continue to have the support of all the main employer organisations within the construction industry as a way of ensuring that the costs of training the workforce are shared by the whole industry. Also, as a non-departmental public body, the CITB is subject to quinquennial reviews of its function and performance. A review is currently underway.

Drugs

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many schoolchildren were excluded from schools for drug misuse in *(a)* Lancashire and *(b)* Chorley in the last year for which figures are available. [98225]

Mr. Miliband: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) on 14 January, columns 573–74W.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what support is given to *(a)* schools and *(b)* pupils to tackle drug use. [98226]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The DfES provides considerable support to schools to fulfil their statutory obligation to educate young people about drugs. In 2002–03, £15.5m has been made available via the Standards Fund to improve the extent and quality of drug education. Of this, £1.3m has been set aside under the drug, alcohol and tobacco education training package to support teachers' continuing professional development. We are currently revising and consolidating our guidance to schools to make clear the statutory responsibilities and outline good practice in drug education and incident management. This guidance along with the curriculum materials produced by the QCA and the learning and development website for PSHE will further help schools in this area. Additionally, through the National Healthy School Standard and local programmes support is given to schools in meeting national criteria in drug education.

Through schools' pastoral support systems, pupils vulnerable to drug misuse should be identified to ensure that those who need extra help either receive it in school or through access to external specialist help. Connexions advisers, which all young people should have access to, also play an important role in identifying and addressing pupils' needs.

Electronic Registration (Secondary Schools)

Jim Dowd: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills pursuant to his answer of 4 February, Official Report, column 188W, what benefits were envisaged when the tender process was undertaken; whether this benefit was lost by its discontinuance; whether the cessation of the tender was in accordance with EC regulations covering these matters; how many suppliers were short-listed; how many of these were unable to accept the terms and conditions and if he will name them; how many were able to accept the terms and conditions and if he will name them; what principal reason was given for being unable to meet the terms and conditions; whether issues relating to patents were cited; whether the short-listed suppliers were informed of the reasons for the discontinuance; and what ratification procedure will be used to assess applications from schools. [99110]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The tendering process was aimed at reducing burdens on schools through establishing framework contracts with a range of suitable suppliers of electronic registration solutions to offerschools choice and a simple way of contracting with their preferred supplier. The decision to abandon the procurement exercise was taken because too few of the short-listed suppliers could meet the terms and conditions of the framework contracts, thus severely restricting the choice for schools. Information about these contracts and short-listed suppliers is commercially confidential.

Tendering was stopped in accordance with all appropriate regulations and the schools included in the electronic registration project are now free to buy systems on the open market subject to ratification by the Department. Guidance on purchasing systems has been made available to schools and this, together with information on the process for the approval of systems is available to view on the TeacherNet website:http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/Management/tools/ict/IMS/Electronic_Registration/

Graduate Tax

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will publish his costings that underlie his estimate that the administration costs for a graduate tax would be in the region of £1 billion. [96671]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The estimate of up to £1 billion was not for administration costs, but for the additional upfront cash costs of implementing a graduate tax over and above the cost of variable fees and loans, as proposed in the White Paper "The future of higher education". The costs of a graduate tax system are greater for several reasons:

The graduate tax would need to support both maintenance and tuition costs, and the upfront costs of non-means tested maintenance grants for all, to be funded by the tax, are considerably more than the cash costs of means-tested loans;

Under a graduate tax there is no possible mechanism for early additional repayments. With our existing loans, graduates are making additional repayments to clear their debts faster, and this reduces Government's costs. In addition, some students may choose not to take out a loan, but to pay up-front, which also reduces costs; and

The rate of repayment is slower for a graduate tax than for loans, and so it takes longer for the Government to reach 'break even' point.

Higher Education

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills pursuant to his statement of 22 January, *Official Report*, column 303, on higher education, what the evidential basis was for his description of universities having offered great research accompanied by shoddy teaching; and to which courses at which universities he was referring. [93943]

Mr. Charles Clarke: I was highlighting the new measures announced in "The Future for Higher Education" which are aimed at ensuring that teaching is of a universally high standard. These new arrangements will mean that reputation for research excellence will no longer be assumed to be a proxy for high quality teaching. Concerns about the quality of teaching were raised by students with Ministers during their visits to universities, and reflected in some reports by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education. The White Paper on Higher Education also identified a number of shortcomings in the way that University teaching was recognised, supported and awarded.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills pursuant to the answer by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury to the hon. Member for Eddisbury (Mr. O'Brien), of 6 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 396W, on higher education, what research the Department for Education and Skills commissioned to conclude that the proposals included in the White Paper would have a positive impact on the economy; and if he will publish the research. [99128]

Mr. Charles Clarke: We are confident that the proposals in the White Paper will have a positive benefit on the economy and more widely on the quality of life. The proposals were informed by a range of research that has been published by the Department, by academics and by other organisations including:

other Government Departments including the Department for Trade and Industry (DTI),

the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE),

the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD),

Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS),

Universities UK,

Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI); and

the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IPS).

In many cases, references to the underpinning research are made in footnotes to the White Paper; and the research itself can be found in these organisations' publicly available websites. The Department's own research publications are at http://www.dfes.gov.uk/research/and http://www.skillsbase.dfes.gov.uk.

Higher Education

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many people entered higher education from *(a)* Lancashire and *(b)* the North West of England in 1997 and each subsequent year. [94131]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The latest available information is shown in the table.

Accepted applicants to full-time and sandwich undergraduate courses by area of home residence[1]

Students from:	*Year of entry 1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
Lancashire	7,750	6,266	6,660	6,314	6,670	6,792
Blackburn with Darwen	[2]—	591	802	847	801	869
Blackpool	[2]—	502	554	566	616	574
The North West[3]	26,385	26,291	27,253	27,081	28,332	29,144

[1] As a result of local government reorganisation, Blackburn with Darwen and Blackpool which were previously part of Lancashire, became separate LEAs in 1998.

[2] Not applicable.

[3] Includes Lancashire Blackburn, Blackpool, Cheshire, Warrington, Halton, Cumbria and Greater Manchester.

Source:

Universities and Colleges Admissions Service.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of the planned increase in higher education funding is *(a)* tied to particular schemes and *(b)* for specified purposes. [98505]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The table on page 19 of the White Paper "The future of higher education" (Cm 5735) includes details of higher education funding in England from 2002–03 to 2005–06.

Based on that table, the analysis in the following table shows how each of the spending categories contributes to the total increase of funding between 2002–03 and 2005–06 of £2.3 billion.

£ million

	2002–03	*2005–06*	*Increase of 2005–06 over 2002–03*	*% of total increase in funding*
Research	1,910	2,633	723	31
Knowledge transfer	62	114	52	2
Teaching and learning, of which:	3,943	4,963	1,020	44
Centres of Teaching Excellence	0	35	35	2
Expansion[1]	—	32	32	1
Access and widening participation	86	132	46	2
Management, Leadership and strategic development	15	34	19	1
Student support	1,578	1,996	418	18
Other	2	14	12	1
Total	7,596	9,918	2,322	100

[1] Foundation degree development and incentives

As shown in the table above, the funding allocated to 'teaching and learning' will increase by £1,020 million between 2002–03 and 2005–06. Of that increase, £287 million will be for capital and £733 million for recurrent expenditure, made up of funding to cover increased costs and the anticipated increase in student numbers. The recurrent increase also includes additional funding for human resources and pay differentiation for those who teach well (which will be consolidated into all institutions' block grants and allocated by formula once they develop satisfactory human resources strategies) and Centres of Teaching Excellence. The funding allocated for the Centres of Teaching Excellence, and other smaller initiatives that will not be allocated to all institutions by formula, will make up around 6 per cent. of the total recurrent increase in teaching and learning.

IT Contracts

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will list IT contracts in his Department and its predecessors above £50 million in each of the last 10 years; what the inception date for each system was; when it became fully functional; when it became fully debugged; and what the cost of over-runs has been. [98995]

Mr. Charles Clarke: We have no IT contracts in my Department or its predecessors for systems costing £50 million or more in the last ten years.

IT Staff (Higher Education)

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what studies he has carried out into the shortage of IT staff in higher education since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [98693]

Mr. Charles Clarke: No such studies have been made by the Government itself; but the Universities and Colleges Employers Association has undertaken surveys of university staff in general. The findings indicate recruitment and retention is an issue in certain disciplines only, including some aspects of information technology. In 2000, the Government announced funding of £50 million, £110 million and £170 million in England for the years 2001–02 to 2003–04 to underpin human resource strategies in each higher education institution to address recruitment and retention among other things. The Government have recently announced further funding of £50 million in 2004–05 and £117 million in 2005–06 for the same purpose.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many IT teaching posts in higher education were unfilled in each year since 1997. [98694]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The information is not held centrally. Individual universities and higher education colleges, as employers, are responsible for monitoring their own vacancies.

IT Teaching (Core Curriculum)

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills why IT is no longer part of the core curriculum; and if he will make a statement. [98696]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is currently a National Curriculum foundation subject at all four key stages of compulsory education. The 14–19 strategy document "14–19: opportunity and excellence", published on 21 January 2003, confirmed that ICT will remain compulsory during Key Stage 4, recognising the importance that ICT plays in preparing young people to participate in a rapidly changing world in which work and other activities are increasingly dependent on access to, and skilful use of, technology.

We expect that, in time, pupils will increasingly develop their ICT skills through other subjects and ICT may no longer need to be discretely specified as a statutory required National Curriculum subject.

Maintenance Grants

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills at what level maintenance grants will be introduced for university students from households where the income is between £10,000 and £20,000; and what criteria will be used to assess eligibility. [98447]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The level of grant available for students from households with income between £10,000 and 20,000 will depend on the threshold below which the full grant will be paid. I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to the hon. Member for Birmingham Selly Oak (Mrs. Lynne Jones) on 6 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 359W. Precise details on the eligibility criteria will be announced in due course.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of medical students are from families whose family income is *(a)* less than £10,000, *(b)* £10,000 to £15,000, *(c)* £15,001 to £20,000 and *(d)* over £20,001, using the definition of income that he proposes to use in assessing eligibility for a maintenance grant. [98316]

Margaret Hodge: My Department collects data from Local Education Authorities on the assessed contributions by students to fees, grants and loans for all students eligible to apply for student support. This includes medical students. The latest data are for 2000/1 and relates to the definition of residual income[1] that applied in that year. It is not possible to estimate the income[1] distribution of medical students (adjusted to account for changes in definition proposed for the new maintenance grant) separately from this survey because separate data by course subject are not collected.

In respect of estimates of residual incomes under the proposed definition for maintenance grant for all students, I refer to my reply to the hon. Friend's previous question.

[1] Residual Income is gross income less the allowances detailed in my Department's guidance, "Financial Support for Higher Education Students".

National Curriculum Alternatives

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps he is taking to increase the flexibility of Section 96 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000 to take account of the needs of further education colleges who are working in partnership with local schools to provide alternatives to the National Curriculum; and if he will make a statement. [98980]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Any external qualification which meets the published principles for approval can be approved under Section 96 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000. The qualifications are approved for specific age groups; pre-16; 16–18 or over 18 but under 19. Approvals are independent of delivery arrangements.

There are already 271 partnerships between schools, further education colleges and others as part of the Increased Flexibility for 14–16 Year Olds' Programme delivering vocational and work-related learning opportunities to 14–16 year olds.

National Insurance

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the annual cost will be of the forthcoming uplift of National Insurance Contributions for *(a)* higher and *(b)* further education institutions. [98672]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The additional cost in employers' national insurance contributions in 2003–04 for all Higher Education institutions in England is estimated to be around £60 million and for all Further Education institutions in England the estimate is £25 million. Higher and Further Education institutions receive funding for staff costs from a variety of sources, both public and private, so the element of the increase to be covered from public sources will be only a proportion of this. The actual cost in National Insurance contributions will depend on the number of staff employed and their pay level. These are matters for the institutions to determine.

In the 2002 Spending Review, Higher and Further Education received generous increases in total funding, averaging 6 per cent. in real terms in each of the three years to 2005–06. As a result of these increases, publicly planned funding per full-time equivalent student will rise by 7 per cent. in real terms between 2002–03 and 2005–06 in both Higher and Further Education. This will put Further and Higher Education institutions in a good position to meet these costs.

Post-16 Staying-on Rate

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the post-16 staying on rate was in each region and nation of the UK in *(a)* 1992, *(b)* 1997 and *(c)* 2002. [98449]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 24 February 2003]:* The table gives the percentage of 16-year-olds participating in post-compulsory education in each region and nation of the UK in 1992–93, 1997–98 and 2000–01, the latest year for which figures are available.

Percentages[1]

16-year-olds participating in post-compulsory education[2]*—time series*

Region of Study	*1992–93*[3]	*1997–98*	*2000–01*[4]
United Kingdom	78	77	78
North East	70	68	74
North West	75	74	74
Yorkshire and the Humber	74	74	76
East Midlands	75	74	75
West Midlands	76	75	76
East	80	79	80
London	80	79	81
South East	83	80	78
South West	82	79	79
England	78	76	77
Wales	75	75	79
Scotland[5]	77	92	90
Northern Ireland[6]	88	73	76

Notes:

[1] As a percentage of the 16-year-old population.

[2] At school or in further education. Includes a small element of students in higher education institutions.

[3] Excludes evening only students. There is a slight discontinuity with data shown for later years due to the use of different data sources in England and Wales.

[4] Data for Scotland refer to 1999–2000.

[5] The estimates of 16-year-olds at school exclude those pupils who leave school in the winter term at the minimum statutory school-leaving age.

[6] Figures for 1997–98 and 2000–01 exclude students in part-time further education (17.8 per cent. and 15.1 per cent. respectively), which should not be aggregated with full-time further education or schools activity due to the unquantifiable overlap of these activities.

Source:

Department for Education and Skills; National Assembly for Wales; Scottish Executive; Northern Ireland Department of Education.

Probation Service Centre (Chippenham)

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills pursuant to his answer of 11 February 2003, *Official Report*, columns 694–95W, whether it is in accordance with his Department's guidelines for a probation service centre to be opened adjacent to Ivy Lane School in Chippenham, Wiltshire. [98523]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 24 February 2003]:* The location of probation service centres is a matter for the Home Office. My Department's published guidance on school security, as set out in my previous reply, does not specifically cover questions of the opening of such centres near existing schools.

School Maintenance

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what his latest estimate is of the repair and maintenance backlog cost for schools in *(a)* England and *(b)* each local education authority; and if he will make a statement. [98375]

Mr. Miliband: School premises condition costs for local education authorities were summarised in the answer to parliamentary question 32896 on 13 February 2002. In that response, a table detailed the cost of repair and renewal needs for each local education authority, broken down into three orders of priority. The DfES has not received any more recent data.

Authorities have been asked to supply new data in April-May this year and we plan to publish analysis following appraisal of the data.

Science Research Investment Fund

Ms Dari Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether the formula used to calculate shares of the Science Research Investment Fund 2004–06 takes account of universities engaged in applied scientific research. [98810]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The Science Research Investment Fund in England is allocated to institutions according to a formula based on institutions' total research income and on the amount of quality-related research income that they receive from the Higher Education Funding Council for England. Both of these factors take account of applied scientific research.

Skill Shortages

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what assessment he has made of the skill shortages experienced by employers in England; [96728]

(2) what assessment he has made of the skill shortages experienced by employers of *(a)* mechanics, *(b)* plumbers, *(c)* electricians and *(d)* builders in England. [96769]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: My Department has funded a number of surveys of employers to assess their current and future skill needs, and also monitors a number of external measures of skills shortages such as those coming from the CBI's Quarterly Industrial Trends Survey.

The Employers Skill Survey, funded by my Department, interviewed 27,000 employers across England in 1999 and in 2001, and was carried out on a smaller scale in 2002. The survey results provide evidence on trends in skill shortages, including headline measures for broad industries and occupations.

Our own surveys, and the CBI measures, indicate that skills shortages are relatively low and stable given the historically high levels of employment we are experiencing. However, the Employers Skill Survey results do show that skilled craft trades are among the occupations most affected by skill shortage vacancies, and also that the construction industry experiences one of the highest levels of skill shortage vacancies relative to its employment levels.

The Skills in England report, published earlier this month by the Learning and Skills Council, also stresses that the construction sector has the most severe skills shortages (as a percentage of employment). The health and social care sector also suffers from a disproportionately high share of skill shortage vacancies. Occupationally associate professionals and skilled trades have the greatest share of skill shortages.

Detailed information on specific occupations is not collected by the Department. It is the role of the Skills for Business network (the Sector Skills Development Agency and the Sector Skills Councils) and the two Industry Training Boards to assess detailed skill needs within their particular industries.

Skills Sector Councils

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills why he has established skills sector councils to improve skills in the hospitality and leisure sector. [95861]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA) has been established to fund, support and champion a new UK-wide network of influential employer-led Sector Skills Councils (SSCs). SSCs have been charged to lead the skills and productivity drive in industry or business sectors recognised by employers. They bring together employers, trade unions and professional bodies to work with government to develop the skills that UK business needs.

A proposal to set up a Sector Skills Council for Hospitality, Leisure, Travel and Tourism, is now in the development stage. The prospective SSC is receiving support from the SSDA to prepare a detailed Labour Market Assessment and Business Proposition. Their final proposal will be judged against the criteria set out in the published SSC standard. If successful, the SSDA Board will recommend that the Secretary of State issues a five year licence to operate as a Sector Skills Council.

Special Educational Needs

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps he has taken to identify the special educational needs of children born to *(a)* crack cocaine and *(b)* cocaine-addicted mothers. [94214]

Mr. Miliband: The Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD) has a statutory duty to advise the Government on drug misuse. Its Prevention Working Group has carried out an in-depth inquiry into the needs of children of problem drug users and is due to report to Government in summer 2003. The report will include policy and practice recommendations for Government on how they can ensure the needs of these children are met, including the role of health, social care, education, criminal justice and other services.

Children's special educational needs are assessed on an individual basis regardless of their family or social circumstances. The Government recognise the importance of early identification and intervention for all children with SEN and will include our plans to strengthen action in this area in a new SEN action programme to be launched later this year.

Specialist Schools Programme

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills pursuant to his answer of 11 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 697W, on specialist state schools, what percentage of schools participating in the specialist schools programme are languages colleges. [98905]

Mr. Miliband: 16 per cent. of operational specialist schools are language colleges.

Study Support Schemes

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many youth action groups have been established with funding through partnerships of study support schemes. [98184]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Partners for Study Support grant scheme, which finished in March 2002, encouraged schools to work with voluntary, private and public sector organisations to develop innovative and sustainable study support partnerships. One of the 134 projects funded through the scheme enabled Crime Concern to work with St Helen's Crime and Disorder Reduction Task group and other local organisations to develop a youth action group at local schools in the St Helen's area. Outside the study support scheme, my Department is also funding other school-based projects to prevent crime. For example, we have set up 100 Safer School Partnerships where a police officer works in a school to reduce crime locally, make the school a safer place for learning, help keep young people in education, and re-engage them with their community.

Sustainable Communities Plan (Ashford)

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what provisions he has made in his departmental budget for the spending entailed in the Sustainable Communities plan on schools in Ashford; and if he will make a statement. [98636]

Mr. Miliband: The Department provides capital funding for new pupil places as part of its annual capital round, but at this stage it is too early to say what the costs will be for new provision in Ashford. Most of the revenue funding for new pupil places would be provided through Kent LEA's Education Formula Spending Share. Education Formula Spending Share, and most DfES revenue grants, are primarily provided on a per pupil basis; new pupil places created as a result of the Sustainable Communities plan in Ashford would receive their share of national revenue funding totals accordingly.

Teacher

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* secondary school teachers, *(b)* primary school teachers and *(c)* classroom assistants are employed in Derbyshire; and how many teacher vacancies there were in each year since 1997. [98884]

Mr. Miliband: The following table provides information for Derbyshire since re-organisation in April 1997.

January each year

	1998	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
Teachers in post[1]					
Secondary	*2,600*	*2,630*	*2,670*	*2,730*	*2,810*
Nursery/primary	*2,520*	*2,600*	*2,670*	*2,690*	*2,700*
Vacancies[2]					
Secondary	*13*	*13*	*11*	*19*	*21*
Nursery/primary	*25*	*11*	*25*	*24*	*13*
Teaching Assistants[3]					
Secondary	*150*	*170*	*230*	*280*	*320*
Nursery/primary	*660*	*690*	*790*	*1,030*	*1,180*

[1] Full-time equivalent teachers in post in the maintained schools sector.

[2] Advertised vacancies for full-time permanent appointments (or appointments of at least one term's duration) in maintained nursery, primary, secondary and special schools. Includes vacancies being filled on a temporary basis.

[3] Includes full-time equivalent nursery assistants, special needs support staff, minority ethnic pupil support staff and non-teaching assistants.

Source:

DfES annual 618G survey and Annual School Census.

Diana Organ: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many schools made errors on form TPP-S concerning the number of teachers who had gone through Round 1 on Teachers Performance Pay; and how many errors related to teachers in Gloucestershire. [98117]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 24 February 2003]:* LEAs checked the accuracy of school returns in the autumn. The DfES further challenged apparently inaccurate survey returns in early January in 1,000 cases. 12 of these inaccuracies related to returns made by schools in Gloucestershire.

Diana Organ: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teachers in Gloucestershire went through Round 1 on the Teachers Performance Pay Scheme; and what percentage this is of teachers in Gloucestershire. [98118]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 24 February 2003]:* It is too early to say how many teachers who passed the threshold in Gloucestershire will be advanced by their schools to upper pay scale point two.

Diana Organ: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the closing date was for accepting errors on form TPP-S for rectification. [98681]

Mr. Miliband: Local education authorities were asked to comment on the data returned on form TPP-S by their schools by 20 December 2002. The Department also contacted some schools whose data still appeared obviously inaccurate during the week commencing 6 January and allowed them to amend returns until 10 January.

Temporary Classrooms

Mr Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many temporary classrooms there are in England. [98285]

Mr. Miliband: As part of the data collected through the appraisal of Asset Management Plans, the Department for Education and Skills has some information on the overall area of temporary accommodation at schools, but it is not possible from these data to identify with any precision the actual number of temporary classrooms.

Training Costs

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what his estimate is of the average cost to the public purse of *(a)* training a plumber, *(b)* training an electrician, *(c)* training a plasterer and *(d)* a degree course, broken down by further education colleges, universities and higher education institutions, for each parliamentary constituency and each local education authority area. [94703]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Publicly funded training of plumbers, electricians, plasterers and other craft occupations is usually provided through Modern Apprenticeships for young people or through programmes provided by further education institutions. Reporting on the costs of this learning is the operational responsibility of the Learning and Skills Council. I have asked John Harwood, the Council's Chief Executive, to write to the hon. Member providing the information requested and a copy of his reply will be placed in the Library.

Figures for degree courses broken down in the way requested are not held centrally. For higher education in England, the Government allocates funding via the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). The HEFCE provide teaching grants on the basis that similar courses are funded at similar rates irrespective of the type of institution providing the education. The detailed allocations are calculated according to the numbers and types of students in the institutions, and the courses they are taking. Different courses are weighted at different levels to reflect, for example, the higher costs of providing laboratory-based and medical courses. There are also adjustments made to the calculations to reflect London weighting, the additional costs of teaching students from disadvantaged backgrounds and mature and part-time students. The cost to the public purse of a degree course will therefore reflect these weightings and adjustments.

Tuition Fees

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate he has made of the proportion of full-time students who *(a)* are exempt from paying the full tuition fee of £1,100, *(b)* pay a proportion of the tuition fee and *(c)* pay the full tuition fee. [98448]

Mr. Charles Clarke: In Academic Year 2000/01 (the latest year for which data are available):

(a) 42 per cent. of students in England and Wales who were eligible to be assessed for student support were not required to make a payment to the fee contribution of £1,050, and

(b) 19 per cent. paid a proportion of the fee contribution, and

(c) 39 per cent. paid the full tuition fee contribution.

These figures are based on provisional 2000/01 data (published on 30 April 2002).

University Applications

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many students applied to attend university in each of the last three years in *(a)* Lancashire and *(b)* the UK. [97411]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The latest available information is shown in the table.

Applicants to full-time and sandwich undergraduate courses by area of home residence

	Year of entry		
Students from:	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
Lancashire	7,781	8,091	8,134
UK	389,091	399,645	401,854

Source:

Universities and Colleges Admissions Service

Vocational Skills

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what progress has been made on developing a suite of qualifications which provide a progression route from entry level through to level three and which accredit vocationally related skills; and if she will make a statement. [98981]

Mr. Miliband: There are 129 entry level qualifications which provide progression to a variety of qualifications at level one. In addition there are 617 vocationally related qualifications at levels one to three currently accredited. Many of these qualifications form coherent and progressive suites covering all three levels. This position changes as new qualifications are accredited to meet the needs identified by sectors for workforce development.

Working Age Population (Qualifications)

Mr. Jim Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of the working age population had *(a)* no qualification and *(b)* no qualification above NVQ Level 2 in each region and nation of the UK in *(i)* 1992, 1997 and (iii) 2002. [98451]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 24 February 2003]:* The information requested is presented in the following table:

Table 1: The Level of Highest Qualification held by People of Working Age[1] in the UK and UK Countries and by Government Office Region (GOR). Labour Force Survey 1992, 1997 and 2002

Percentage

	Above level 2[2]	*Level 2*[3]	*Below level 2*[4]	*No qualifications*	*No qualifications above level 2*
Autumn 2002					
UK	44.4	21.9	19.2	14.5	55.6
NE	39.3	22.6	20.3	17.8	60.7
NW	42.2	22.5	18.5	16.8	57.8
Y&H	42.0	21.5	20.3	16.1	58.0
EM	41.9	22.3	20.2	15.6	58.1
WM	40.3	22.3	19.7	17.7	59.7
EE	41.3	23.9	21.3	13.5	58.7
LN	47.5	20.3	19.4	12.8	52.5
SE	48.8	21.9	19.1	10.1	51.2
SW	46.8	21.7	21.6	10.0	53.2
ENG	44.1	22.0	19.9	14.1	55.9
WAL	42[illegible]	23.1	17.2	17.2	57.5
SCO	50.2	19.7	15.8	14.4	49.8
NIR	41.2	23.4	12.0	23.4	58.7
Autumn 1997					
UK	38.7	22.3	21.6	17.4	61.3
NE	32.7	22.3	22.8	22.2	67.3
NW	38.0	22.3	21.6	18.1	62.0
Y&H	36.3	21.5	23.3	19.0	63.7
EM	36.3	21.8	22.6	19.3	63.7
WM	34.3	22.0	22.4	21.3	65.7
EE	36.2	24.7	23.7	15.5	63.8
LN	43.2	20.7	20.9	15.2	56.8
SE	42.0	22.9	22.1	13.0	58.0
SW	40.9	23.2	21.7	14.2	59.1
ENG	38.5	22.3	22.2	16.9	61.5
WAL	36.5	22.3	19.5	21.8	63.6
SCO	43.5	21.5	18.3	16.6	56.5
NIR	34.4	23.0	15.7	26.9	65.6
Autumn 1992					
UK	30.7	22.0	21.2	26.1	69.3
NE	25.7	22.0	22.2	30.1	74.3
NW	28.2	22.3	21.4	28.1	71.8
Y&H	27.3	22.5	22.1	28.2	72.7
EM	26.1	21.6	21.8	30.5	73.9
WM	26.1	20.9	22.5	30.5	73.9
EE	29.4	23.8	23.7	23.1	70.6
LN	35.6	20.4	19.8	24.1	64.4
SE	33.8	23.1	22.4	20.6	66.2
SW	31.6	23.3	23.1	22.0	68.4
ENG	30.0	22.2	22.0	25.8	70.0
WAL	26.7	22.1	21.4	29.7	73.3
SCO	39.3	20.4	13.6	26.7	60.7
NIR	—	—	—	—	—

[1] Working Age is defined as males aged 16–64 and females aged 16–59.

[2] Qualifications above level 2 are as follows:
Level 5 includes Higher degrees and other qualifications at Level 5. Level 4 includes First degree. Other degree and sub-degree higher education qualifications such as teaching and nursing certificates HNC/HNDs, other HE diplomas and other qualifications at level 4. Level 3 includes Vocational qualifications include those with RSA Advanced Diploma. BTEC Nationals. ONC/ONDs. City and Guilds Advanced Craft or trade apprenticeships and other professional or vocational qualifications at Level 3. Academic qualifications include those with Advanced GNVQs. more than one GCE A level or SCE Highers/Scottish Certificates of Sixth Year Studies (CSYS) at Level 3.

[3] Vocational qualifications include those with BTEC general certificates YT certificates, other RSA qualifications, other City and Guilds or other professional or vocational qualifications at Level 1 Academic qualifications include those with one or more GCSE grade G or equivalent (but less than five at grades A-C).

[4] Vocational qualifications include those with BTEC general certificates, YT certificates, other RSA qualifications, other City and Guilds or other professional or vocational qualifications at Level 1 Academic qualifications include those with one or more GCSE grade G or equivalent (but less than five at grades A*-C)

Note:
The Labour Force Survey was not conducted in Northern Ireland in Autumn 1992

Source:
Labour Force Survey (LFS): Autumn quarters 1992, 1997 and 2002

LORD CHANCELLOR

Bow Street Magistrates Court

Mr. Malins: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department pursuant to her answer of 16 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 644W, concerning Bow Street Magistrates Court and night sittings, when she expects to be able to write to the hon. Member for Woking. [98648]

Yvette Cooper: The Final Evaluation Report for the Extended Court Sitting Hours pilot was published on 27 January 2003. I am writing to the hon. Member for Woking (Mr. Malins) with a copy of that report.

In regard to the questions raised in his previous question, I can now inform him that:

(1) the night sessions at Bow Street Magistrates Court, which ran between the dates of 17 May 2002 and 28 September 2002, from 6pm until midnight on Friday and Saturday evenings, operated for a total of 200 hours; *(a)* during the course of the pilot 155 (42 pe[illegible].) of cases were disposed of at first hearing; and *(b)* 213 (5[illegible]nt.) of cases were remanded over until a later date;

(2) the total cost for all agencies concerned in the pilot operation of the night session at Bow Street Magistrates Court was £1,198,669.

Laptop Computers

Dr. Cable: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many laptop computers were used by *(a)* Ministers and special advisers and *(b)* officials in his Department in each year since 1995; how many were *(i)* lost and (ii) stolen; what their cost was; and if he will make a statement. [98704]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Prior to 1999 the figures for laptops supplied for use in my Department cannot be produced without incurring disproportionate cost. The figures for the years from 1999 onwards are as follows:

Laptops supplied

	(a) Ministers and special advisers	*(b) Officials*
1999	2	674
2000	2	693
2001	2	689
2002	2	706

The figures for *(i)* lost and (ii) stolen laptops are as follows:

Laptops lost and stolen

	(i) Lost	*(ii) Stolen*	*Cost (£)*
1995	—	9	—
1996	—	12	—
1997	—	2	—
1998	—	4	4,300
1999	—	2	1,200
2000	—	3	2,500
2001	1	15	22,500
2002	—	14	19,600

Note:

Only officials' laptops have been lost or stolen; we do not have any figures for costs before 1998.

The Department is actively promoting guidance on the security of IT equipment, increasing staff awareness in this area.

Legal Services Commission

Mr. Malins: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what percentage salary increase was awarded to the staff of the Legal Services Commission, broken down by grade, in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02. [98645]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

TRANSPORT

Heavy Goods Vehicles (Northern Ireland)

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment has been made of the number of additional HGVs which will be required on roads in Northern Ireland if the working time directive is applied. [99124]

Mr. Jamieson: My officials are discussing the likely impact of the directive on the UK as a whole, with representatives from both sides of industry. Much will depend on current vehicle usage, the amount of working time drivers currently perform and whether existing operations and shift patterns need to be revised.

A regulatory impact assessment will be published later this year, alongside a consultation document on how the directive could be transposed into UK law.

Airports (Police Services)

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will list those airports whose operators are not charged for police services and presence; and for what reason charges are not made; [98564]

(2) if he will list those airports which are designated for police purposes, and for which the airport operators are charged for police services. [98565]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 3 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 34W, which explained the current situation with regard to the designation of airports for uniformed policing purposes. There are presently nine designated airports, the listing of which would be inappropriate on security grounds.

Departmental Spending (Ashford)

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what provisions he has made in his departmental budget for the spending entailed in the Sustainable Communities plan in and around Ashford; and if he will make a statement. [98637]

Mr. Jamieson: The Highways Agency is promoting improvements to the existing junction 10 of the M20 with the costs fully covered by the developers. Further planned growth at Ashford will be facilitated by a new junction to the south of the existing junction 10 and the and the Secretary of State has asked the Highways Agency to investigate the feasibility of its provision.

In addition some £5.2 billion of public and private investment is already being made available to complete the channel tunnel rail link which will greatly improve the accessibility of Ashford.

Freight Traffic

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what effect on planned growth in freight traffic between 2000–01 and 2010–11 he expects to result from the deferred schemes of *(a)* the Trans Pennine/South Humberside freight capacity works, *(b)* Felixstowe to Nuneaton Phase 2, *(c)* the de-scoped East Coast Main Line and *(d)* reviewed Phase 1 of Felixstowe to Nuneaton. [98968]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) confirmed in its revised Strategic Plan (issued at the end of January 2003—copies in the House Library) its objectives for freight. These and other objectives will be reviewed as the 10 Year Plan is rolled forward.

Portland Helicopter

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will be making an announcement on the future of the Bristow helicopter operation at Portland. [98650]

Mr. Jamieson: This Government is committed to ensuring the continued provision of appropriate civilian maritime search and rescue services for our coasts. We have listened very carefully to all the arguments for and against moving the helicopter based at Portland and announced last week that the Coastguard helicopter will continue to fly from there. The Maritime and Coastguard Agency is now in a position to let a new contract for the continued provision of a helicopter based at Portland for beyond May 2003, when the current contract expires.

Public Transport (Overcrowding)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what definition he uses for overcrowding on different forms of public transport. [98612]

Mr. Jamieson: There is no definition for overcrowding on public transport. However all rail operators are required to provide a frequency of service and adequate capacity to prevent excessive crowding and to have in place strategies for dealing with regular systematic crowding when it occurs. On buses and coaches, regulations are also in place to prohibit the carriage of more than the authorised number of passengers.

Rail Injuries

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many of the non-fatal injuries that occurred on the rail network required hospital treatment in each year since 1997; and what definitions his Department uses for the different categories of injury incurred by passengers on the rail network. [98589]

Mr. Jamieson: The recording of information on injuries occurring on the railway network are a requirement of the Health and Safety Executive's (HSE) Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (RIDDOR), 1995. It is a RIDDOR requirement that HSE is informed of the following injuries:

(a) Fatalities;

(b) Major injuries to railway employees;

(c) Minor injuries to railway employees resulting in an absence from their normal range of work duties for more than three consecutive days;

(d) Injuries to members of the public resulting in the injured person being removed from the site of the accident and taken to hospital for treatment.

Information provided by the HSE on the numbers in each year since 1997 of non-fatal injuries that occurred on the rail network is shown in the following table:

	Injuries to railway employees				
Year	*Major*[1]	*Minor*[1]	*Injuries to passengers requiring hospital treatment*	*Other members of the public requiring hospital treatment*	*Injuries to trespassers and attempted suicides requiring hospital treatment*
2001–02	351	2,023	2,401	92	179
2000–01	300	2,135	2,795	84	177
1999–2000	340	2,065	2,742	85	144
1998–99	376	2,070	2,671	101	149
1997–98	351	2,088	2,747	127	136

[1] These figures will include some injuries that required hospital treatment.

Note:

The figures refer to injuries occurring on all railways (including tramways and underground systems.

Rail Passenger Partnership Fund

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what level of funding under the Rail Passenger Partnership Fund is identified for transfer to regional assemblies in England. [98883]

Mr. Jamieson: The level of funding for Rail Passenger Partnership schemes that will transfer to elected regional assemblies in England has not been determined yet.

Rail Services (Scotland)

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what responsibility the Strategic Rail Authority has for rail services in Scotland. [98383]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority's responsibilities and its relationship with the Scottish Government are set out in the Transport Act 2000. The SRA has overall responsibility for the strategic development of the national passenger and freight railway network serving Scotland, England and Wales.

The SRA must have regard to directions and guidance from the Scottish Ministers in respect of ScotRail services, provided these are not inconsistent with its directions and guidance from the Secretary of State or its financial framework. It also takes into account non-binding advice from the Scottish Ministers in respect of cross-border passenger services provided by non-Scottish franchises.

The SRA is working closely with the Scottish Executive on the replacement process for the current ScotRail franchise, which ends in 2004. The SRA must seek the consent of the Scottish Ministers before awarding the franchise.

Railway Standards and Safety Board

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which organisation is managing the recruitment of the senior staff for the Railway Standards and Safety Board; and who is chairing the selection committee. [98340]

Mr. Jamieson: Network Rail is managing the recruitment process for the Chairman and Chief Executive of the Rail Safety and Standards Board on behalf of the industry. The selection committee will decide who its chair will be.

Speed Limits

Mr. Maples: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the proposed new national guidance on speed limits to be published. [99051]

Mr. Jamieson: Guidance on the setting of speed limits already exists in the form of Circular Roads 1/93. This remains good advice but we recognise the need to update it. Work currently under way which will feed into a review, is planned for the latter part of this year.

Strategic Rail Authority

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many consultants the SRA employs; and what specialities they cover. [98403]

Mr. Jamieson: Since 1 April 2002 the Strategic Rail Authority has employed the services of 95 consultancy firms with expenditure valued above £25,000. The work procured covers a wide range of subjects, including legal, financial, technical and IT services. Information regarding the work procured valued at under £25,000 is not readily available.

Traffic Lights

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to encourage local authorities to introduce traffic lights based on light emitting diodes. [98028]

Mr. Jamieson: It is widely recognised that light emitting diode (LED) traffic signals potentially offer good optical performance combined with high reliability and good energy efficiency. A number of LED traffic signals are available for local authorities to purchase and install. Some authorities are installing them, in spite of the significantly higher prices of these signals over conventional filament lamp types. Energy cost savings go some way to offsetting the price difference but there is still a major financial commitment if LED signals are used.

LED traffic signals are still relatively new and we expect there to be improvements in their specifications generally, including reliability and power consumption, and lower prices as product designs improve. As a result, authorities may, not unreasonably, be waiting to see these demonstrated before committing to large-scale purchase.

As there is a competitive market for light emitting diode signals, with at least five manufacturers supplying them, and in view of the above, I do not believe specific incentives are required to encourage their use.

Transport 10-year Plan

Jon Cruddas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will announce the terms of reference of the review of his 10 year transport plan referred to in the Sustainable Communities Plan. [98619]

Mr. Jamieson: The 10 year plan for transport published in 2000 set out the intention to review the plan periodically "to ensure that the Plan continues to provide the most cost-effective and efficient means of delivering our transport strategy and that it takes account of new pressures and developments". The report on progress towards delivery of the Government's 10 year plan for transport, published last December, confirmed that we will be conducting such a review to consider with Spending Review 2004. That review will take account of the progress made so far and the challenges that have to be met in the period up to 2015 and beyond.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Asbestos

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what level of interference with asbestos is required to meet the definition that a person has disturbed asbestos for the purposes of the Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations 2002; and if he will make a statement. [98665]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Asbestos has been disturbed if asbestos fibres have been released. The types of work that would do this include, for example, drilling holes with power tools and sawing or sanding material. Working near asbestos-containing material may disturb it if it is in poor condition for instance knocking against the material. To assess whether asbestos will be disturbed the type of material, location, extent, accessibility, amount of damage and deterioration (and if it is sealed in) all need to be considered.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether it is the Government's policy that asbestos should be removed only as a last resort; what assessment he has made of whether the availability of 150 per cent.tax relief on the removal of asbestos has led to asbestos being removed unnecessarily; and if he will make a statement. [98686]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Government's policy is that asbestos in good condition that will not be disturbed is safe to leave in place providing it is properly managed. HSE has no evidence that 150 per cent. tax relief, which applies only to the regeneration of derelict buildings to remove asbestos, is an inducement. The Government will keep the position regarding tax relief under review.

ASW

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what inquiries he has instituted into *(a)* the collapse of ASW and *(b)* the effect of the collapse upon the pension schemes of the Company's employees; and if he will make a statement on the Government's response to the situation. [94897]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 31 January 2003]:* As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, stated in a written answer given to the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) on 7 January 2003, *Official Report*, columns 144–45W, the Minister of State for Employment Relations, Industry and the Regions looked at ASW's difficulties in July last year when he tried to find a way to resolve them and enable the company to continue to trade.

Ministers have also met members of the Allied Steel and Wire (ASW) Action Groups' and their constituency MPs, to discuss the Groups' concerns about the Cardiff and Sheerness pension schemes.

On 15 October 2002, the Minister for Pensions and the Financial Secretary to the Treasury met with hon. Members for Sittingbourne and Sheppey and Cardiff, West, and members of the ASW Pensions Action Group. A number of practical ways forward were identified, including an undertaking by the Minister for Pensions to discuss the issues raised with colleagues across Government. Also, a number of technical pension issues were raised on the process of winding up, which the Minister subsequently resolved with the group.

Following an adjournment debate about ASW on 16 October, the Minister for Pensions arranged a meeting between the hon. Members for Sittingbourne and Sheppey and Cardiff West, the Occupational Regulatory Authority (Opra) and one of his officials to discuss the [illegible] concerns about the length of time it can take to wi[illegible] a pension scheme and other pensions issues.

Benefit Claims

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people are claiming *(a)* unemployment related and *(b)* sickness related benefits in each *(i)* local authority and *(ii)* parliamentary constituency in Wales. [96271]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The information is in the tables.

Unitary authority	*Number of people claiming Jobseeker's Allowance August 2002*[1]	*Number of people of working age claiming sickness related benefits August 2002*
Total Wales	46,900	218,700
Anglesey, Isle of	1,500	4,300
Blaenau Gwent	1,800	8,100
Bridgend	1,800	11,500
Caerphilly	2,900	17,500
Cardiff	5,700	18,500
Carmarthenshire	2,600	14,100
Ceredigion	900	4,400
Conwy	1,500	6,900
Denbighshire	1,100	5,900
Flintshire	1,800	7,400
Gwynedd	2,100	5,800
Merthyr Tydfil	1,200	7,600
Monmouthshire	800	3,600
Neath Port Talbot	2,300	14,300
Newport	2,800	9,300
Pembrokeshire	2,100	7,100
Powys	1,300	6,600
Rhondda, Cynon, Taff	3,500	24,800
Swansea	3,900	17,900
The Vale of Glamorgan	1,900	6,200
Torfaen	1 ,400	8,400
Wrexham	1,700	8,300

Parliamentary constituency	*Number of people claiming Jobseeker's Allowance August 2002*[1]	*Number of people of working age claiming sickness related benefits August 2002*
Total Wales	46,900	218,700
Aberavon	1,000	7,200
Alyn and Deeside	1,100	3,500
Blaenau Gwent	1,800	8,100
Brecon and Radnorshire	800	3,900
Bridgend	1,100	5,300
Caernarfon	1,000	3,400
Caerphilly	1,500	9,000
Cardiff, Central	1,600	4,400
Cardiff, North	700	2,400
Cardiff, South and Penarth	2,000	6,700
Cardiff, West	1,700	6,200
East Carmarthen and Dinefwr	800	5,300
West Carmarthen and South Pembrokeshire	1,200	4,200
Ceredigion	900	4,400
Clwyd, South	900	4,600
Clwyd, West	900	4,000
Conwy	1,300	4,100
Cynon Valley	1,000	7,200
Delyn	800	3,900
Gower	900	5,100
Islwyn	1,000	6,200
Llanelli	1,400	7,200
Meirionnydd Nant Conwy	600	1,700
Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney	1,500	9,800
Monmouth	800	3,600
Montgomeryshire	500	2,500
Neath	1,300	7,100
Newport, East	1,300	4,600
Newport, West	1,700	5,300
Ogmore	1,000	7,800
Pontypridd	1,200	6,800
Preseli Pembrokeshire	1,300	4,400
Rhondda	1,200	9,600
Swansea, East	1,500	6,900
Swansea, West	1,500	5,900
Torfaen	1,300	7,900
Vale of Clwyd	900	5,100
Vale of Glamorgan	1,500	4,900
Wrexham	1,000	4,200
Ynys Môn	1,500	4,300

[1] Later information is available for unemployment benefits, but August 2002 data have been provided in order to give figures comparable with the latest figures available for sickness related benefits.

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest hundred.

2. Sickness related benefits are Incapacity Benefit, Severe Disablement Allowance and Income Support with a Disability Premium.

3. Sickness related benefit figures are based on a 5 per cent. sample, and are therefore subject to a degree of sampling variation.

Sources:

Unemployment benefits: Count of claimants of Jobseeker's Allowance, Jobcentre Plus computer systems.

Sickness related benefits: Client Group Analysis of DWP Information Centre 5 per cent. statistical samples.

Benefit Uprating

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what recent research has been conducted into benefit uprating methods; and what conclusions were drawn from recent reviews of uprating methods. [97684]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 13 February 2003]:* We meet our statutory obligation by uprating benefits by the retail prices index (RPI) or Rossi (RPI less housing costs) to maintain their value in real terms.

RPI is a reliable measure of the impact of inflation on family budgets. Over 120,000 prices are collected every month, for a basket of goods and services covering the full range of consumers' expenditure. The basket is reviewed and updated annually to take account of changes in the pattern of expenditure. In addition, there is a programme of research into the methodology used in the RPI.

Benefits

Kevin Brennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what guidance he has issued to officials regarding *(a)* family birthday and *(b)* Christmas expenditure when calculating normal household expenditure for the purpose of assessing ability to repay overpayment of benefit. [98557]

Malcolm Wicks: No guidance has been issued specifically regarding family birthday or Christmas expenditure when calculating normal household expenditure for the purpose of assessing ability to repay overpayment of benefit.

If someone feels that the recovery rate of their overpayment is excessive, consideration can be given to their weekly outgoings to decide if recovery should be made at a lower rate. Basic necessities such as food, clothing or fuel costs are always taken into account when considering this.

Employer's Liability Compulsory Insurance

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the Employer's Liability Compulsory Insurance Review. [98596]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I refer the hon. Member to the Written Ministerial Statement I gave on 12 December 2002, *Official Report*, columns 23–24W.

Employment Development Fund

Mr. David Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much his Department plans to spend on the Employment Development Fund in each year from 2002–03 to 2004–05; what the purpose is of this fund; and if he will make a statement. [97350]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Employment Development Fund (EOF) was established to fund the delivery of employment policies, including the set up of Jobcentre Plus. As part of the 2002 Spending Review, the Department's settlement for the three year period from 2003–04 to 2005–06 subsumed the resources previously in the EDF.

The current expenditure plans of the Department for Work and Pensions are contained in Tables 1–11 of the 'Department for Work and Pensions Departmental Report—The Government's expenditure plans 2002–03 and 2003–04' (Command 5424), which is in the Library.

Independent Schools (Health and Safety)

Mr. Burnett: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many prosecutions of independent schools have been made by the Health and Safety Executive in each of the last 10 years; and of the independent schools that have been prosecuted, what the results have been. [94382]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: A table showing prosecutions taken by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) of schools which are not under local authority control, for the years 1996–2002, is given as follows. Data earlier than 1996–97 are not readily available.

Year	*Name of defendant*	*Comments*	*Result*	*Fine incurred (£)*
1996–97	Bradfield House School	Failure to comply with two Improvement Notices in relation to electrical safety	Guilty	2,000
1996–97	St. Edmund's Catholic School	Pupils suffered serious burns from explosion during a chemistry demonstration	Guilty	7,000
1997–98	Whitgift Foundation	Fall of employee working on roof	Guilty	5,000
1998–99	William Edwards Schools	Employee injured using a circular sawing machine	Guilty	500
1998–99	Queen Katherine School	Pupil injured at drilling machine	Guilty	6,250
2000–01	None	—	—	—

Year	*Name of defendant*	*Comments*	*Result*	*Fine incurred (£)*
2001–02	King Harold School	Pupil injured at woodworking machine	Guilty	10,000
2001–02	Mr. K. Boulter	Failure to ensure the safety of children, staff and visitors during major construction work	Guilty	17,000
2001–02	King Edward VI College	Fall of employee from a ladder	Guilty	5,000

Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what plans he has for an invest to save bid to the Treasury for the computerisation of industrial injuries disablement benefit records; and if he will make a statement; [95513]

(2) if he will estimate the cost of checking, and where necessary amending, industrial injuries disablement benefit records manually in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement; [95515]

(3) what estimate he has made of the likely costs of computerising industrial injuries disablement benefit records; and if he will make a statement; [95514]

(4) what plans he has to computerise industrial injuries disablement benefit claim records; and if he will make a statement. [95516]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Industrial Injuries Computer System holds personal information and payment details for around 342,000 Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit customers. It allows users to register new awards, record clerical payments, and generate ongoing benefit payments.

Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit already has a high degree of assessment accuracy and requires little in the way of maintenance of customer records. We have no current plans to develop the system further and have no recent estimate of the cost of doing so.

Information on the cost of checking and amending records manually is not available.

Injury Benefits

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many applications for injury benefits have been received pursuant to the NHS (Scotland) (Injury Benefits) Regulations 1998 (as amended) in each full year of their entry into force; and of those, what percentage have been successful upon *(a)* first application, *(b)* review and *(c)* appeal. [97914]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: *[holding answer 13 February 2003]*: This scheme is administered by the Scottish Public Pensions Agency, an agency of the Scottish Executive.

Jobcentre Plus

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what changes he intends to make to Jobcentre Plus regulations as a result of the evaluations of the ONE Programme. [99054]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: We have no plans to change the Jobcentre Plus regulations. The ONE evaluation has provided valuable information that we will use in the ongoing development of the Jobcentre Plus service.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he expects a new Jobcentre Plus office to be opened in Portsmouth; where it will be; how many staff it will employ; what its hours of operation will be; and if he will make a statement. [98095]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: We are progressively extending the new integrated Jobcentre Plus office network across the country over the next four years. These offices provide an active and responsive service to help people find jobs, and give advice on the full range of help and support available.

Plans are currently being developed to roll out the new integrated Jobcentre Plus service in Portsmouth. Partners and stakeholders were consulted about these plans in June and September 2002. Their comments are being taken into consideration in reaching final decisions, which will be announced in due course.

Medical Services

Kevin Brennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what proportion of targeted audits carried out by medical services have been categorised as grade C; [98423]

(2) how many targeted audits have been carried out on medical service reports in the last five years; [98424]

(3) what plans he has to reform the assessment procedures of targeted audits on medical assessments of claimants by Medical Services; and if he will make a statement. [98425]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: A total of 122,205 cases have been randomly audited since 1 September 1998, of which 5,134 were found to be C Grades, a proportion of 4.2 per cent.

The medical quality audit process has been shown to be robust and reliable, and there are no plans to change it. The Department is working with Medical Services to ensure that timely and robust remedial action is taken with doctors who fail to meet the required standards.

ONE Pilot Schemes

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people, broken down by client group, participated in the 'ONE' pilot schemes; and how many people in each client group obtained employment as a result. [91642]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 20 January 2003]:* Participation in ONE became mandatory from April 2000. During the period from April 2000 to April 2002, 457,976 jobseekers, 128,537 sick or disabled clients, 49,909 lone parents and 55,077 clients in other categories entered ONE.

Survey evidence from the ONE evaluation found that 41 per cent. of jobseekers, 25 per cent. of sick or disabled clients and 14 per cent. of lone parents, had moved into work of over 16 hours a week, four to five months after having begun their claim.

These figures correct those provided on lone parents in a previous reply to the hon. Member on 7 January which were taken from the ONE Management Information System which is less robust than the longer-term formal evaluation of ONE.

Further information on the employment effects of ONE has been published in DWP Research Report No 156 and DWP In-house Report No 88, copies of which are in the House of Commons Library. Final results from the ONE evaluation will be published on 31 January.

The majority of ONE offices will become fully integrated Jobcentre Plus offices by March 2003. The remaining offices will continue to provide an integrated service until they transfer as part of the Jobcentre Plus national roll out.

Mr. MacDougall: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of lone parents participating in the ONE programme have gained employment in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* Fife. [93562]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The only ONE pilot in Scotland was a Basic Model pilot in Clyde Coast and Renfrew, and so lone parents in Fife did not participate in the ONE programme.

The ONE evaluation found that 20 per cent. of lone parents in the Basic Model of ONE had moved into work of over sixteen hours a week when they were interviewed between ten and eleven months after having begun their claim.

Evaluation findings are not available for individual ONE pilot areas so we cannot provide separate figures for the Scottish pilot.

Final results from the ONE evaluation, including the employment effects of ONE, were published on 31 January 2003 as DWP Research Report No 183, copies of which are in the House of Commons Library.

Pension Schemes

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his latest estimate is of the cost to employers of following the full buy-out option contained in paragraph G33 of "Simplicity security and choice" technical paper published on 17 December 2002, if all pension schemes were to wind up. [96608]

Mr. McCartney: Within the Green Paper, "Simplicity, security and choice: working and saving for retirement" (Cm 5677), we are seeking views on two options for strengthening protection for members whose solvent employer decides to wind up their pension scheme. These are the "full buy-out" option and the "partial buy-out" option.

The Partial Regulatory Impact Assessment in "Simplicity, security and choice" technical paper contains the latest estimate of costs for these options, a copy of which is available in the Library of the House.

Pensioners Abroad

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions for what reason British pensioners living abroad are facing a delay in receiving their state retirement pension. [99070]

Mr. McCartney: This is a matter for Alexis Cleveland, Chief Executive of The Pension Service to reply. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Alexis Cleveland to Mr. David Willetts, dated 24 February 2003:

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions has asked me to respond to your recent Parliamentary Question asking for what reason British pensioners living abroad are facing a delay in receiving their state retirement pension.

The Department for Work and Pensions sent over 115 million items of mail in 2002 to overseas destinations.

Whilst every effort is made to ensure items destined for overseas customers arrive at their destination within the designated timescales, (5 calendar days for Europe and 10 calendar days for rest of the world destinations) unfortunately, sometimes delays are experienced.

The most common causes of delay to overseas customers' payments are problems within foreign postal authorities. For example strikes and adverse weather conditions, which affect the transportation of mail. Also national holidays in the receiving country can add delay,

Delays reported by customers are taken very seriously and every effort is made to ascertain the reason for the delay, although we are reliant on foreign postal authorities communicating delays or problems within their delivery network.

Overseas customers now have the option to have their Pension paid directly into their bank account. There are currently 30 overseas destinations which will accept direct payments, with a further 7 countries coming on board over forthcoming months. This method of payment eliminates payment delays caused by postal difficulties.

If you require further information about a specific case I will be happy to investigate further if you let me have details of the customer, country and the period of delay in non-receipt.

Pneumoconiosis Benefit

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many claims for pneumoconiosis benefit have been received in Wales in the last two years; and how many are outstanding. [96264]

Mr Nicholas Brown: The latest available information is in the table.

Estimated number of claims for Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit from pneumoconiosis sufferers in Wales

2000–01	900
2001–01	1,100

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest hundred and may be subject to a degree of sampling variation.

2. Information is not currently available on the number of claims outstanding.

Source:

10 per cent. sample of annual statistical returns from Disablement Benefit offices taken in March 2001 and March 2002.

State Pension

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the cost to the Exchequer, net of savings in means-tested benefits and of additional income tax revenue, of an increase of £5 per week in the basic state pension together with the introduction of age additions of £5 per week at age 75–79 and £10 per week at age 80 years and over, on the basis that the age additions for those aged 75 to 79 and 80 years and over are paid in full, regardless of contribution record. [92156]

Mr. McCartney: Our priority is to target help on those current pensioners who have the lowest incomes. While it is true that older pensioners tend to be poorer on average, income inequality is far more pronounced across the whole pensioner population than between pensioners of different ages. For example, the median net income of the richest fifth of pensioner couples is around four times that of the poorest fifth.

Age additions are not the most effective way to target those pensioners with the lowest incomes. For example, just under half of all minimum income guarantee claimants are aged under 75.

As a result of the minimum income guarantee, no pensioner need live on less than £102.10 a week and a couple on less than £155.80 per week from April 2003. All pensioners receiving MIG will be at least 21 per cent. better off in real terms as a result of MIG rises compared to 1997, with the youngest households gaining as much as one third. Following the introduction of pension credit, the average pensioner household will be over £1,150 per year better off due to Government measures introduced since 1997 and the poorest third of pensioners will be over £1,500 per year better off.

In addition to extra help for the poorest pensioners, the Government is committed to providing support for all pensioners throughout retirement. From April 2003 the full basic state pension will increase to £77.45 a week—an increase of 7 per cent. in real terms since 1997. Since 1997 the Government has also doubled winter fuel payments to £200, guaranteeing this for the rest of this Parliament, and has introduced free TV licences for those aged 75 and over. Both of these measures are helping pensioners regardless of their income.

If the maximum rate payable of the basic state pension was increased by £5 per week and weekly age additions of £5 were introduced for people aged 75–79 and £10 for people aged 80 and over in 2003–04, we estimate that the increase in public expenditure could be around £2.6 billion. This is calculated on the generous assumption that consequent savings in other benefits and any additional tax yield are channelled back into the basic state pension.

Notes:

1. Estimates are in cash terms for Great Britain and are rounded to the nearest £100 million.

2. The estimate takes account of offsetting savings in income related benefits and additional tax yield. Income related benefit offsets are calculated using the Department for Work and Pensions Policy Simulation Model for 2003–04. Additional tax yield is calculated by the Inland Revenue based upon the Survey of Personal Incomes 2000–01, projected to 2003–04.

3. Calculations assume the maximum rate payable of the basic state pension is increased by £5 per week and all other payments proportionately and that age additions of £5 per week are paid to all those aged 75–79 and £10 per week to those aged 80 and over.

4. For modelling purposes, pension credit is assumed to be in place throughout 2003–04. In fact, pension credit will begin in October 2003.

Source:

Department for Work and Pensions calculations.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate by how much it would be possible to raise the basic State Pension for the over-75s on a revenue neutral basis, and taking account of offsetting savings in expenditure on means-tested benefits and enhanced income tax revenue, if he were not to introduce the pension credit and were instead to spend the money on the state pension for the over-75s. [92153]

Mr. McCartney: Increasing the basic State Pension for those aged 75 and over would not target resources on those who are most in need. While it is true that older pensioners tend to be poorer on average, income inequality is far more pronounced across the whole pensioner population than between pensioners of different ages. For example, the median net income of the richest fifth of pensioner couples is around four times that of the poorest fifth.

If Pension Credit was not introduced and expenditure re-directed into the basic State Pension for those aged 75 and over in 2004–05, the maximum rate payable of the basic State Pension for those aged 75 and over could be increased from around £79 per week to around £98 per week and all other payments increased proportionately. This increase would only be possible on the generous assumption that savings from other benefits and any additional tax yield were channelled back into the basic State Pension for those aged 75 and over.

We estimate that the poorest third of pensioners could be around £130 a year better off under Pension Credit than if the maximum rate payable of the basic State Pension was increased to £98 per week for those aged 75 and over and Pension Credit abolished in 2004–05.

In this scenario, the only gainers from increasing the maximum rate payable of the basic State Pension and abolishing Pension Credit would be pensioners aged 75 and over. Among those aged 75 and over, the biggest gainers would be those higher up the income distribution.

Pension Credit has been designed to be simpler, fairer and less intrusive for pensioners than the Minimum Income Guarantee. We are designing the application process to be simpler including the use of the telephone for most applications. The capital rules excluding pensioners with savings of £12,000 or more from any help have been removed. Pensioners will have to report fewer changes to their circumstances and most will have their Pension Credit award fixed for five years.

Notes:

1. Figures are for Great Britain and are rounded to the nearest £1.

2. The Basic State Pension is assumed to rise by 2.5 per cent. in April 2004, reflecting the commitment given by the Government to increase the Basic State Pension by 2.5 per cent. or the September Retail Prices Index, whichever is higher.

3. The estimate takes account of offsetting savings in income related benefits and additional tax yield. Income related benefit offsets are calculated using the Department for Work and Pensions Policy Simulation Model for 2004–05. Additional tax yield is calculated by the Inland Revenue based on the Survey of Personal Incomes 2000–01, projected to 2004–05.

4. The estimate has been produced for 2004–05, the first full financial year of Pension Credit.

5. Projections of distributional consequences for 2004–05 are subject to a variety of assumptions and should be treated with caution.

Source:

Department for Work and Pensions calculations

Regional Agencies (Eastern Region)

Andrew Selous: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the locations of the offices of regional bodies and agencies in the Eastern region; by county, for which his Department is responsible. [95058]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The answer is in the tables.

Offices in East of England Government Office Region	
Bedfordshire	
Bedfordshire District Manager Location and District Office, Dunstable	Dunstable Jobcentre
Bedford Social Security Office	Leighton Buzzard Jobcentre
Bedford Jobcentre	Luton Social Security Office
Biggleswade Jobcentre	Luton Jobcentre
Cambridgeshire	
Cambridge Social Security Office	Peterborough Social Security Office
Cambridge Jobcentre	Peterborough Jobcentre
Ely Jobcentre	St Neots Jobcentre
Huntingdon Jobcentre	Wisbech Jobcentre
March Jobcentre	
Essex	
Essex District Manager Location and District Office, Chelmsford	Grays Jobcentre
Basildon Social Security Office	Harlow Social Security Office
Basildon Jobcentre	Harlow Jobcentre
Braintree Social Security Office	Harwich Jobcentre
Brentwood Jobcentre	Loughton Jobcentre
Canvey Island Jobcentre	Maldon Jobcentre Plus
Chelmsford Jobcentre Plus	Rayleigh Jobcentre Plus
Clacton Social Security Office	Southend Social Security Office
Clacton Jobcentre	Southend Jobcentre Plus
Colchester Social Security Office	Stansted Airport Jobcentre
Colchester High Street Jobcentre	Tilbury Jobcentre
Colchester Southway House Jobcentre	Witham Jobcentre
Grays Social Security Office	
Hertfordshire	
Bishop Stortford Jobcentre	St Albans Jobcentre
Borehamwood Jobcentre	St Albans Social Security Office
Hatfield Jobcentre	Stevenage Social Security Office
Herriel Hempstead Social Security Office	Stevenage Jobcentre
Hemel Hempstead Jobcentre	Waltham Cross Jobcentre
Hertford Jobcentre	Watford Social Security Office
Hitchin Jobcentre	Watford Jobcentre
Letchworh Jobcentre	Welwyn Garden City Jobcentre
Norfolk	
Cromer Jobcentre	Kings Lynn Jobcentre
Dereham Jobcentre	North Walsham Jobcentre
Diss Social Security Office	Norwich Chantry Social Security Office
Diss Jobcentre	Norwich Kiln House Jobcentre
Downham Market Jobcentre	Norwich Mountergate Social Security Office/Pensions Centre
Fakenham Jobcentre	Norwich Theatre Street Jobcentre
Great Yarmouth Social Security Office	Swaffham Jobcentre
Great Yarmouth Jobcentre	Thetford
Hunstanton Jobcentre	Wymondham Jobcentre
Kings Lynn Social Security Office	
Suffolk	
Suffolk District Manager Location & District Office, Ipswich	Leiston Jobcentre
Beccles Jobcentre	Lowestoft Social Security Office
Bury St Edmunds Social Security Office	Lowestoft Jobcentre
Bury St Edmunds Jobcentre	Mildenhall Jobcentre
Felixstowe Jobcentre	Newmarket Jobcentre
Haverhill Jobcentre	Stowmarket Jobcentre
Ipswich Social Security Office	Sudbury Jobcentre
Ipswich Jobcentre	Woodbridge Jobcentre
Offices outside the East of England Government Office region that serve the people within it	
Wembley Disability Benefits Centre	Notts Local Service Branch (CSA)
Disability Benefits Unit, Blackpool	North West Yorkshire Local Service Branch (CSA)
Invalid Care Allowance Unit, Preston	South East Yorkshire Local Service Branch (CSA)
Barnsley Satellite Processing Centre (CSA)	Western Local Service Branch (CSA)
Nottingham Satellite Processing Centre (CSA)	Hull Caller Centre (CSA)
Norwich Satellite Processing Centre (CSA)	Pensions Direct, National Pension Centre, Tyne View Park, Newcastle.
Sheffield Satellite Processing Centre (CSA)	Child Benefit Centre, Washington [1]
Central Local Service Branch (CSA)	

Notes:

[1] Responsibility for Child Benefit will transfer to the Inland Revenue in April 2003, when Child Benefit Centre will become the Child Benefit Office of then Revenue.

The following offices based outside Bedfordshire serve the population of Bedfordshire. Norwich Mountergate Social Pensions Centre; Wembley Disability Benefits Centre; Disability Benefits Unit, Blackpool; Invalid Care Allowance Unit; Preston, Hull Caller Centre, Tyne View Park, Newcastle; Child Benefit Centre, Washington and Western Local Services Branch (CSA)

Shoulder Impingement Syndrome

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to recognise impingement syndrome of the shoulder as a prescribed disease for the purpose of industrial injuries disablement benefit. [98598]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Representations concerning impingement syndrome of the shoulder were brought to the attention of the research working group of the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council (IIAC) at its meeting on 13 February 2003. Work related upper limb disorders are part of IIAC's programme of work for 2003–04 and the Council will consider the scientific evidence on Impingement Syndrome in its review.

Information is not collected centrally on the number of people affected by Impingement Syndrome of the shoulder. We have received no representations from the Department of Health on this issue.

Transco

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when the Health and Safety Executive's review of Transco's data handling will be completed; and whether the findings will be published. [94638]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: HSE received a final copy of Transco's consultants' report reviewing Transco's data handling arrangements on Tuesday 4 February. HSE is now awaiting Transco's formal action plan in response to the report and will consider both documents to determine whether any further action is necessary.

It is HSE's intention that the health and safety findings of the report will be made public.

Trillium Group

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many buildings were sold to the Trillium Group Ltd. under the Private Sector Resource Initiative for Management of the Estate; what the market value was of these buildings at the time of the sale; if he will list the buildings involved; and if he will make a statement. [98389]

Malcolm Wicks: On 1 April 1998 the then Department of Social Security transferred almost all of its estate through the Private Sector Resource Initiative for Management of the Estate (PRIME) to the private sector consortium now called LandSecurities Trillium. At that time the Department occupied approximately 700 buildings. Of these, only the 212 freehold and long lease buildings had a capital value and these are listed in the table. As part of the PRIME contract the Department received a cash consideration of £250 million for assets transferred. At the time of the transfer the Departments' property advisers estimated the value of the Estate to be over £300 million. The excess value of the estate is being recovered through reduced facilities payments.

The National Audit Office report entitled "The PRIME project: The transfer of The Department of Social Security Estate to the private sector" was published in April 1999. The report was positive and concluded that PRIME is likely to provide better Value for Money than continuing with the existing arrangements.

Freehold and long lease buildings (i.e. those with a capital value) transferred to Trillium from the Department of Social Security in April 1998. Modern leasehold properties are not listed.

Property name	*Freehold or Leasehold*
Aberdare Crown Building	F
Aberdeen Greyfriars House	F
Abertillery Crown Buildings	F
Aberystwyth Crown Buildings	L
Aberystwyth Old Welsh	L
Bromley Westmorland Road	F
Burton-upon-Trent Crown Building	F
Caerphilly Crown Buildings	F
Campbeltown Hall Street	F
Cannock Beecroft Road	F
Canterbury Nutwood House	F
Cardiff Government Buildings	F
Carmarthan Danybank Road	F
Castleford Wheldon Road	F
Chatham The Brook	F
Chelmsford Beeches Road	F
Cheltenham Rivershill House	F
ChesterLeStreet Station Road	F
Chippenham St. Pauls House	F
Chorley St. Marys Walk	L
Clitheroe Primrose Mill	F
Clydebank Radnor House	L
Coatbridge South Circular Road	F
Colchester Crown Building	F
Coventry Cofa Court	F
Cowdenbeath Factory Road	F
Crawley The Boulevard	F
Dartford Crown Buildings	L
Derby Forester House	F
Derby St. Andrews House	F
Dewsbury Rishworth Road	F
Diss Dominion House	F
Dumfries Irish Street	F
Dumfries Tormore	F
Dundee Magdalene Yard Road	F
Edinburgh Argyle House	L
Edinburgh Haymarket House	F
Edinburgh High Street-Portobello	F
Elgin Trinity Road	F
Ellesmere Port Whitby Road	F
Exeter Melrose House Unit 1	L
Falkirk Antonine House	F
Falkirk Callendar Park	F
Falkirk Callendar Park	F
Falkirk Heron House	F
Falkirk Heron House (PAU)	F
Fareham Crown Office	L
Folkestone Palting House	F
Frome Northover House	F
Galashiels Market Street	F
Garston Cressington House	F
Glasgow Atlas Road	F
Glasgow Coustonholm Road	F
Glasgow Crosshill Road	F
Glasgow Minerva Street	F

Property name	*Freehold or Leasehold*
Glasgow Muslin Street	F
Glasgow Nitshill Road	F
Glasgow Northgate	F
Goole Burlington House	F
Grantham Crown House	F
Great Yarmouth Yarmouth Way	F
Grimsby Cleethorpes Road	F
Grimsby Crown House	L
Halifax Crossfield House	F
Hamilton Douglas Street	F
Harlow Beaufort House	F
Hartlepool Crown Building	F
Hartlepool Crown House	F
Hastings Ashdown House	F
Havant Elmleigh Road	F
Haywards Heath Oaklands	L
Hexham St. Andrews House	F
Hinchley Wood KingstonByPass	
Houghton LeSpring Broadway House	F
Hull Government Buildings	F
Hyde Beech House	L
Ilkeston Crown Buildings	F
Newcastle Saxon House	F
Newton Abbott Ilford Park	F
Newton Stewart Victoria Street	F
Newtown Afon House	F
Northallerton Elder House	F
Northampton Gladstone Road East	L
Northshields Unicom House	F
Northwich Hartford House	F
Nottingham David Lane	F
Ormskirk Moorgate	F
Orpington The Walnuts	F
Oxford Harcourt House	L
Paisley Lonend	F
Penrith Voreda House	F
Penzance Branwell House	F
Peterhead Government Buildings	F
Peterlee Hatfield House	F
Plymouth Crownhill Court	F
Pontefract Newgate	F
Pontllanfraith Ennisclare	F
Poole Park Road	F
Port Glasgow Scarlow Street	F
Preston Albert Edward House	L
Preston Cop Lane	F
Preston Diadem House	L
Redcar Dawson House	F
Redhill London Road	F
Rochdale Newgate House	L
Romford Crown House	F
Rossendale Hurstdale House	F
Salisbury Crown Buildings	F
Scunthorpe Crown Buildings	F
Selby Abbey House	F
Sheffield Eastern Avenue	L
Shipley Woolcombers Hall	F
Shotts Dyfrig Street	F
Shrewsbury Whitehall	F
Skegness Government Buildings	F
Skipton Cavendish House	F
Smethwick Church Hill Street	F
Southend Prittlewell Chase	L
Southend Victoria House	F
St. Albans Beauver House	F
St. Helens Manor House	F
Stanley Towneley House	F
St. Austell Carlyon House	F
Stevenage Danestrate	F
Stirling St. Ninian's Road	F
Stornoway Castle Street	F
Stranraer Ashwood Drive	F
Sutton-in-Ashfield Crown Building	F
Swindon Spring Gardens House	F
Torbay Cotswold House	F
Trowbridge Homefield House	F
Twickenham Crown Buildings	F
Uxbridge Colham House	F
Wakefield Crown House	L
Walsall Lower Hall Lane	L
Welling High Street (30–40)	F
Whitehaven Mark House	F
Wick Girnigoe Street	F
Wigan Griffin House	L
Wigan Mesnes House	L
Wishaw Alexander Street	L
Worthing Crown Building	F
Wrexham Hightown Barracks	F

Unemployment

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what the change in the level of unemployment has been in the Jarrow constituency in each year since 1997; [96358]

(2) what action the Government have taken to help reduce unemployment in the Jarrow constituency since 1997. [96375]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Information on the change in the level of unemployment in Jarrow is in the table.

Change in claimant unemployment in the Jarrow constituency 1997 to 2003

	As at January						
	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*	*2003*
Total unemployment	3,428	3,130	3,170	2,879	2,592	2,598	2,334
Change from previous year	—	-298	40	-291	-287	6	-264
(Percentage)	—	(-8.7%)	(1.3%)	(-9.2%)	(-10.0%)	(0.2%)	(-10.2%)
Change from 1997	—	-298	-258	-549	-836	-830	-1,094
(Percentage)	—	(-8.7%)	(-7.5%)	(-16.0%)	(-24.4%)	(-24.2%)	(-31.9%)

Latest figure available is for January 2003. Information is provided for January of preceding years as figures are seasonally unadjusted.

Our policies have created a strong economy geared to delivering stability, low inflation and sound public finances. Building on this foundation, our labour market policies have helped to deliver record levels of employment across the country, and unemployment at its lowest level since the 1970s.

As the table shows, my hon. Friend's constituency has shared in this success. As well as the reductions in claimant unemployment in Jarrow since 1997, long-term unemployment (over 12 months) has been cut by over 70 per cent. The local Jobcentre has played an important part in these achievements, helping their clients move into work and working closely with employers to fill their vacancies. It is not only unemployed people that have been helped, across the New Deals in Jarrow over 2,000 people have been helped into work.

We have also introduced Action Teams for Jobs to help disadvantaged people in the most employment deprived areas move into jobs. Be the end of 2002, the Action Team operating in my hon. Friend's constituency had helped 820 people move into work. The Team has developed innovative ways to help jobless people overcome the barriers to work they may face. For example, they have secured funding from the Transport Projects Fund we introduced last year to provide a bus service from South Shields to the Metro Centre and Team Valley, running through Jarrow, to help their clients overcome their transport barriers to work. The Team are also taking their services into the communities they help in Jarrow using a Mobile Unit.

We are building on the services we provide in Jarrow. The new Jobcentre Plus office in Jarrow will open later this year, delivering a single, integrated service to benefit claimants of working age, with a clear focus on work. Jarrow will also be part of a progress2work-LinkUP pilot starting in the autumn. This new initiative will provide further support for those facing the greatest disadvantages in the labour market, including ex-offenders, homeless people and recovering alcohol misusers.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what recent assessment he has made of trends in the rate of unemployment in Portsmouth; and if he will make a statement. [98346]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Government's policies have created a strong economy geared to delivering stability, low inflation and have helped deliver a high and stable level of employment benefiting every part of the country. Alongside this, through Jobcentre Plus and programmes such as the New Deal, our labour market policies are helping more people move into work.

The number of people out of work and claiming Jobseeker's Allowance in Portsmouth has fallen by over 60 per cent. since 1997. Between January 2001 and January 2002 the number of claimant unemployed people in Portsmouth, as a percentage of the resident population of working age, fell from 2.7 per cent. to 2.4 per cent. However, in the last 12 months unemployment has levelled out and is 2.4 per cent. in January 2003. But, with unemployment at levels not seen since the 1970s and inflation and interest rates low, we believe that the UK is better placed than for many years to weather the current uncertainties in the world economy.

War Pensions

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many war pensioners with a diagnosed relevant psychiatric disorder have had their Incapacity Benefit terminated in each of the last three years for which figures are available; and how many had benefit restored on appeal. [96951]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Information on appeals is temporarily unavailable. I will write to my hon. Friend when the data requested become available and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

The available information is in the table.

Incapacity Benefit (IB) claims ceasing for people also claiming War Pension because of a psychiatric disorder

1 September 1999 to 31 August 2000	200
1 September 2000 to 31 August 2001	100
1 September 2001 to 31 August 2002	200

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest hundred.
2. Figures exclude a small number of cases held clerically.
3. Numbers are based on a very few sample cases and are therefore subject to a high degree of sampling error and should be used as a guide to the current situation only.
4. Figures exclude IB claims ceasing due to award of Retirement Pension.

Source:

Merges of 5 per cent. samples of the Incapacity Benefit and War Pensions computer systems.

HEALTH

Home Care

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many domiciliary carers seeking employment in *(a)* 2000, *(b)* 2001 and *(c)* 2002 were found to have a criminal record preventing them from work. [98552]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is not available.

Shoulder Impingement Syndrome

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of how many people suffer from Impingement Syndrome of the shoulder; and what representations he has made to his Department about the recognition of the syndrome as a prescribed disease for the purpose of industrial injuries disablement benefit. [98599]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I have been asked to reply.

Representations concerning Impingement Syndrome of the shoulder were brought to the attention of the research working group of the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council (IIAC) at its meeting on 13 February 2003. Work related upper limb disorders are part of IIAC's programme of work for 2003–04 and the Council will consider the scientific evidence on Impingement Syndrome in its review.

Information is not collected centrally on the number of people affected by Impingement Syndrome of the shoulder. We have received no representations from the Department of Health on this issue.

999 Calls

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the average time it took an ambulance to reach an emergency after the initial 999 call was made in *(a)* England and *(b)* Greater London over the last 12 months. [97817]

Mr. Lammy: Information about the average time it takes an ambulance to reach an emergency after the initial 999 call is not available. The latest information about the proportion of emergency calls resulting in an ambulance arriving at the scene of the reported incident within the Government's target response times for the London Ambulance National Health Service Trust, and all other ambulance trusts in England, is contained in the Department of Health Statistical Bulletin "Ambulance Services, England 2001–02". A copy of the bulletin is available in the Library and available at www.doh.gov.uk/public/sb0213.htm.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many 999 calls were made to the Greater London Ambulance Service between 20 December 2002 and 3 January 2003 for which it was decided an ambulance was not necessary; and what proportion of calls over this period such calls represented. [97834]

Mr. Hutton: The London Ambulance Service received 36,114 emergency calls between 20 December 2002 and 3 January 2003. After receiving clinical telephone advice, 699, or 1.9 per cent. of callers, did not subsequently require an ambulance.

Accident and Emergency Services

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients admitted to accident and emergency departments waited more than 12 hours before being treated in each of the last two quarters for which figures are available; and what the national average waiting time is for patients waiting more than 12 hours. [97737]

Mr. Lammy: The NHS Plan set a new target for accident and emergency (A&E), to reduce the maximum wait in A&E from arrival to admission, transfer or discharge to four hours by 2004.

In line with this target from August 2001, the Department has collected data on total time spent in A&E from arrival to admission, transfer or discharge. In Quarter 2, 2002–03, 3,095,650, or 77 per cent. of, patients spent less than four hours total time in A&E.

In addition, the Department collects data on waiting times in A&E post decision to admit patients to a hospital ward. In Quarter 2, 2002–03, 56,581, or 10 per cent. of, patients were not placed in a bed in a ward within four hours of a decision to admit. In Quarter 1, 2002–03, 54,546, or 9.7 per cent. of, patients were not placed in a bed in a ward within four hours of a decision to admit.

The Department does not collect information on how long patients wait in A&E before being treated or the average waiting time for patients in A&E.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of accident and emergency clinical staff, by category, which will need to be recruited to achieve the four hour waiting time target by the end of 2004. [97704]

Mr. Lammy: The NHS Plan set a new target for accident and emergency (A&E), to reduce the maximum wait in A&E from arrival to admission, transfer or discharge to four hours by 2004.

The Reforming Emergency Strategy was launched in October 2001 to help achieve the NHS Plan target. The NHS Plan included a commitment to increase the numbers of National Health Service consultants. For A&E, as set out in the strategy, this will result in the recruitment of an additional 183 A&E consultants by 2004.

In addition, new investment of 40 million was made available to recruit 600 additional A&E nurses to help to deliver the streaming system in A&E. At 31 December 2002, 692 additional A&E nurses had been recruited and were in post.

Acute Trusts

Mr. Lyons: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people from outside the UK were treated in acute trusts in 2001–02. [97985]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Food Advertising

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is on the advertising of fatty and other foods carrying health risks to the under-fives. [96829]

Ms Blears: The Food Standards Agency has met with consumers, enforcement authorities and industry to discuss the development of best practice guidance on the promotion, including advertising, of foods to children. It has also commissioned a review of research into the effects of promotional activity on children's eating behaviour, and will decide how best to take this matter forward when the results are available.

Current Government action to tackle children's diets and ensure that they have the opportunity to develop healthy lifestyles includes the National School Fruit Scheme, which will provide all four to six-year-olds with a free piece of fruit each school day. There is also considerable work in schools to help children develop healthy lifestyles.

Agenda for Change

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the new NHS foundation trusts will set their pay within the limits spelt out in Agenda for Change. [97304]

Ms Blears *[Holding answer 13 February 2003]:* The Government will ensure National Health Service foundation trusts are implementing Agenda for Change, if agreed, on establishment. Once established, they will be able to continue to benefit from wider agreements but will also have the additional flexibility and freedom to ensure the necessary mix of skills to provide the best standards of care to patients.

Arnica

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the use of arnica as a natural herbal remedy. [97517]

Ms Blears: There is a wide variety of remedies containing arnica which have either a marketing authorisation, or a homoeopathic registration or a product licence of right in the United Kingdom. In addition, remedies containing arnica may be sold as unlicensed herbal remedies under section 12 of the Medicines Act 1968. The products with a marketing authorisation are indicated for external use for the relief of bruising, muscle pain, muscle stiffness and sprains. Where the homoeopathic products have an indication this is generally for bruising and trauma.

Barnet Hospital

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps are being taken to reduce *(a)* waiting times and *(b)* cancelled operations for elective surgery at Barnet Hospital; and if he will make a statement. [98935]

Mr. Hutton: The National Health Service is working to reduce waiting times so that by the end of March 2003, the maximum waiting time for an inpatient appointment will be cut to 12 months.

Barnet and Chase Farm Hospital NHS Trust is working with the Modernisation Agency to reduce cancelled operations by improving theatre utilisation, planning and scheduling.

Behavioural Difficulties

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of children with educational and behavioural difficulties in *(a)* Haltemprice and Howden and *(b)* England. [93842]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested is currently not collected centrally.

There is currently no requirement for schools to submit information in the Annual Schools' Census on the nature of such pupils' disability or learning difficulty. However, in June 2001, the Department carried out pilot study involving a sample of 200 mainstream and special schools to assess whether it would be possible to collect data from schools on a broad range of types of Special Educational Needs (SEN). From January 2004 the Department is planning to ask schools and local education authorities to provide this information.

The available information on the total number of pupils with SEN in Haltemprice and Howden parliamentary constituency and in England is shown in the table.

Maintained schools: Number of pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN)—as at January 2002

	England	*Haltemprice and Howden*[1]
Pupils with statements of SEN		
Primary	70,729	106
Secondary	78,606	132
Special[2]	85,803	182
Total	235,138	420
SEN pupils without statement		
Primary	834,413	738
Secondary	519,116	711
Special[2,3]	2,407	5
Total	1,355,936	1,454

[1] Parliamentary constituency.

[2] Maintained special schools. Excludes dually registered pupils.

[3] Excludes General Hospital Schools. Data for pupils with SEN without statement are not collected from these schools.

Source:

Annual Schools' Census

Beta Interferon

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress is being made on increasing the availability of beta interferon for MS sufferers in York and North Yorkshire. [95200]

Jacqui Smith: The York multiple sclerosis service has begun implementing the beta interferon risk sharing scheme within the existing neurology facilities. To date four patients have been assessed and three have been accepted onto the scheme.

Plans are also in place for the recruitment of an additional consultant neurologist for this service which will enable the York service to be able to fully implement the scheme.

Blood Donations

Mr. Havard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when his Department will announce the results of its inquiry into whether recipients of blood are to be prevented from donating blood tissue or organs for transplant. [95571]

Ms Blears: The Government's Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Blood and Tissues (MSBT) has considered whether all blood transfusion recipients should be excluded from donating blood and has advised that this policy would have a damaging impact on blood supplies. There are therefore no plans to introduce this measure although we will continue to keep it under review. MSBT is continuing to consider possible further measures to reduce the theoretical risk of vCJD through blood transfusion.

In October 2001, the CJD Incidents Panel recommended in its consultation paper "Management of possible exposure to CJD through medical procedures" (www.doh.gov.uk/cjd/consultation) that people who received blood from donors with vCJD should be informed of their potential exposure and advised not to give blood or donate organs and tissues and that special precautions might be needed if they require surgery. The panel recommended that no one should be given this information until proper counselling and back-up facilities were made available.

A decision on whether to implement the Incidents Panel's recommendations has not been made. The issue is currently with the four United Kingdom Chief Medical Officers to agree a common approach.

Cancelled Operations

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many operations were cancelled less than two days before the due date, broken down by strategic health authority, in each of the last 12 months; [97828]

(2) how many operations were *(a)* cancelled and *(b)* delayed in each of the last 12 months in each strategic health authority area in England. [97833]

Mr. Hutton: Quarterly data are collected on the number of operations cancelled by the hospital for non-clinical reasons at the last minute (i.e. on the day patients are due to arrive or after arrival in hospital or on the day of their operation) and on the day of surgery. These data are available at strategic health authority level in the Library and on the Department's website at www.doh.gov.uk/hospitalactivity/data requests.htm. Data from strategic health authorities were first collected from Quarter 1 of 2002–03.

Cancer

Sir Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to ensure that teenagers diagnosed with cancer gain appropriate access to medical treatment and care; and if he will make a statement on the number of hospitals which provide dedicated care facilities for teenagers suffering from cancer. [96943]

Ms Blears: We are taking action to meet the specific needs of teenagers with cancer. We are providing funding through the national cancer research network to enable more teenage cancer patients to enter trials of the latest treatments. In addition we are looking at how teenagers can participate in the design of health services centred around their particular needs. This is being addressed through the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health. The contribution of patients will also be reflected in the forthcoming national service framework for children, young people and maternity services which will drive up standards of care in all health and social care settings for all children and young people. We hope to publish the first module on hospital services shortly. The national service framework will also inform guidance the National Institute for Clinical Excellence is developing on children's and adolescent cancers.

We do not hold details of all services centrally but are aware of at least eight units dedicated to teenage cancer patients in the national health service.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which hospitals have wards specialising exclusively in cancer in teenagers. [97804]

Ms Blears: We do not hold details of all services centrally but we are aware of eight units dedicated to teenage cancer patients in the following National Health Service trusts:

Middlesex Hospital, University College Hospitals NHS Trust, London;

University College Hospital, University College Hospitals NHS Trust, London;

Queen Elizabeth Hospital, University Hospital Birmingham NHS Trust;

Christie Hospital NHS Trust, Manchester;

Weston Park Hospital, Sheffield Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust;

St James's University Hospital, Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust;

Royal Victoria Infirmary, Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Trust;

Alder Hey Hospital, Royal Liverpool Children's NHS Trust.

Canthaxanthin

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he plans to take over the import into the UK from non-EU countries of *(a)* poultry and *(b)* eggs which are fed canthaxanthin; and if she will make a statement. [97577]

Ms Blears: In December 2002 European Union member states agreed the text of a Directive to reduce the maximum incorporation levels for canthaxanthin in feed. However, the United Kingdom successfully argued that maximum residue limits also be introduced for relevant foods. These will be set following a risk assessment and when European Commission legal powers are available later this year. The levels will apply evenly to both imports and home production.

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what tests will be carried out to check the levels of canthaxanthin in *(a)* poultry and *(b)* eggs imported into this country from non-EU countries. [97578]

Ms Blears: There are no statutory maximum permitted levels for canthaxanthin in eggs or poultry against which such tests could monitor compliance. Nevertheless, I am advised that the Food Standards Agency is considering such surveillance of canthaxanthin in food derived from European Union and non-EU countries as would be necessary both to inform the setting of future maximum residue levels and to inform estimates of consumer exposure.

Care Standards Act

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many responses he received to his consultation on regulations to the Care Standards Act 2000; and how many dealt with *(a)* room dimensions, *(b)* communal space and *(c)* training of staff. [97885]

Jacqui Smith: The consultation document issued on 16 August set out proposals to change certain national minimum standards for care homes for older people and care homes for younger adults (18–65) which relate to the physical environment. The consultation did not propose making any changes to the Care Homes Regulations 2001 issued under the Care Standards Act.

In total, 243 responses to the consultation were received. The majority of respondents commented on two or more of the standards. 109 of the responses mentioned the issue of room dimensions, 82 mentioned communal space, and 33 mentioned training of staff.

Chemical Protection Suits

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what allocation of chemical protection suits has been made to each ambulance NHS trust; and if he will make a statement. [97788]

Mr. Lammy: On 14 March 2002 the Department issued a letter outlining the process for purchasing mobile decontamination units and personal protective equipment (PPE) suits for chemical incidents.

The funding allocation made to each region in the financial year 2002–03 is:

	£
Eastern	458,000
London	575,000
Northern and Yorkshire	630,000
North West	673,000
South East	968,000
South West	706,000
Trent	407,000
West Midlands	583,000

Regional offices are free to agree with National Health Service trusts the number of decontamination facilities and the amount of associated PPE and any other items that can be obtained from the regional allocation to implement regional strategies.

The number of suits ordered to date by ambulance trusts is as follows:

	No.
Avon	100
Bedfordshire	100
Cumbria	100
Dorset	100
East Anglian	200
East Midlands	150
Essex	100
Greater Manchester	150
Guernsey	12
Hampshire	150
Hereford and Worcester	50
Kent	150
Lancashire	150
Lincolnshire	100
London	350
Mersey	200
North East	200
Oxfordshire	100
Royal Berks.	100
South Yorkshire	50
Surrey	150
Sussex	100
Tees East & North Yorks.	150
Two Shires	100
West Country	400
West Midlands	105
West Yorkshire	100
Wiltshire	100

Children (West Africa)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had with social services authorities in *(a)* Nigeria, *(b)* Sierra Leone and *(c)* the Ivory Coast about the dangers to children coming to the UK to live without their parents. [96111]

Jacqui Smith: None. However, as part of a recent Department of Health review of private fostering, officials from the Department have had discussions with organisations in this country with direct links to communities in West Africa, including the African Women's Welfare Association.

Cigarette Smuggling

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has carried out into the health implications of cigarette smuggling. [96516]

Ms Blears: There is clear evidence that price affects consumption and the availability of smuggled cigarettes acts against our efforts to reduce smoking prevalence.

The price a person has to pay for cigarettes is linked to the likelihood of that person smoking. The higher the price the greater the likelihood that a person will not buy cigarettes.

Smuggled cigarettes are sold at relatively low prices and therefore encourage people to purchase and smoke cigarettes. With lower levels of smuggling we would expect fewer people to smoke and hence fewer people to develop smoking related illnesses.

Congestion Charge

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what discussions he has had with the London Ambulance Service concerning the introduction of congestion charges in Central London; [97819]

(2) how many representations he has received concerning the possible consequential impact of the introduction of congestion charges in Central London on health services, with particular reference to emergency services, in London. [97818]

Mr. Hutton: I have received three letters from national health service professionals employed in London about the impact of the congestion charge.

The London Ambulance Service (LAS) has been actively involved in the consultation process for the congestion charging scheme and the development of the NHS reimbursement scheme, in discussion with Transport for London. The implementation of the reimbursement scheme is being led by the NHS and a steering group has been established, with trust, staff and patient representation, to oversee the development of the scheme and assess the impacts of congestion charging on both staff and patients.

My hon. Friend Under-Secretary for Public Health has visited the LAS and corresponded with the chief executive regarding the congestion charging and the NHS reimbursement scheme.

Coronary Heart Disease

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he next plans to visit coronary heart disease departments in hospitals in Havering. [97696]

Mr. Hutton: I have no current plans to visit coronary heart disease departments in hospitals in Havering at this time.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans he has to combat coronary heart disease in the London Borough of Havering; [97698]

(2) if he will make a statement on the levels of coronary heart disease in the London Borough of Havering. [97697]

Mr. Hutton: Figures available on trends in mortality from coronary heart disease (ICD 410–414) indirectly standardised ratios (SMR) for all ages, covering the time period of 1996–2000, show that there has been a sustained decrease in mortality in all of the primary care trusts in north east London, including Havering. This information is shown in the table.

	1996	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
England	86	81	78	74	69
Havering	89	79	71	79	75
Barking & Dagenham	105	94	93	96	87
Redbridge	91	76	81	74	74
Hackney	82	80	76	66	64
Tower Hamlets	100	89	79	77	73
Newham	100	96	95	100	89
Waltham Forest	96	92	78	94	85

The national service framework (NSF) for coronary heart disease (CHD), published in March 2000, sets out a 10 year strategy for tackling heart disease through improved prevention, identification and treatment of CHD. The NHS Plan reinforced this, including a commitment to significantly increase investment in services. Since the publication of the NSF, an additional 359 million revenue funding has been made available, most of this in baseline allocations, to enable local health communities to develop the services they need to meet the needs of their local population.

In north east London there is a cardiac network as well as the local Havering cardiac NSF implementation team working to ensure that the NSF is implemented fully. There is joint work ongoing between the local primary care trust (PCTs) and acute trust to improve speed of access to thrombolysis for patients admitted to accident and emergency with acute myocardial infarction.

There are also additional resources being made available from Havering PCT to support primary care in developing CHD registers. These are a key tool to enable systematic identification and treatment of people with, or at high risk of developing, CHD. The PCT also provides a smoking cessation service. Figures available are combined for Barking and Havering and in 2001–01, 318 people successfully quit, whilst in 2001–02 there were 502.

International research shows that diets rich in fruit and vegetables are protective against cardiovascular disease, including heart disease and stroke. The National School Fruit Scheme, which will be fully operation from 2004, will entitle school children aged four to six to a free piece of fruit each school day. The scheme was rolled-out to schools in London during the autumn of last year. The scheme is now available to all Romford schools with four to six year olds.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had with *(a)* Havering Primary Care Trust and *(b)* the Havering, Barking and Redbridge NHS Hospitals Trust regarding coronary heart disease. [97699]

Mr. Hutton: I have had no discussions with Havering Primary Care Trust and Barking Havering and Redbridge Hospitals National Health Service Trust regarding coronary heart disease.

Correspondence

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Northavon of 25 October 2002, regarding Mrs. J. A., his ref P01018183. [94021]

Jacqui Smith: A reply was sent to the hon. Member on 18 February 2003.

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he intends to reply to the letter to him dated 10th January from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mrs. H Fisher. [98964]

Mr. Milburn: A reply was sent to the right hon. Member on 24 February.

Delayed Discharges

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many delayed discharge patients there were in January in *(a)* the Suffolk West PCT area and *(b)* the Central Suffolk PCT area; and what percentage of those patients had been waiting over 28 days. [97391]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is not available for January. The latest centrally collected figures are for December 2002, when 34 patients in Suffolk West primary care trust (PCT) area and 12 patients in Central Suffolk PCT area were awaiting discharge. 41.2 per cent. in Suffolk West PCT had been waiting over 28 days and 41.7 per cent. in Central Suffolk PCT.

Dentistry

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions on a reciprocal agreement to recognise qualifications in dental surgery achieved in

Kenya there have been in the last 30 years with the Kenyan authorities; and if he will make a statement. [96792]

Mr. Lammy: The General Dental Council has statutory responsibility within the United Kingdom for determining which qualifications confer eligibility for admission to the dental register. Discussions about reciprocal arrangements would be a matter for the GDC. Advice for overseas dentists seeking to become eligible to work in the United Kingdom is available from the GDC and the National Advice Centre for Postgraduate Education, Faculty of Dental Surgery of the Royal College of Surgeons.

Dietary Advice

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money his Department has spent on public health programmes targeted at encouraging the consumption of fruit and vegetables in each of the past 10 years. [97104]

Ms Blears: In 2002–03 the Department of Health expects to have spent £783,000 on the Five-a-day programme to promote consumption of fruit and vegetables, including Five-a-day community initiatives and the National School Fruit Scheme. The New Opportunities Fund is also spending £52 million on those schemes: £42 million for National School Fruit Scheme and £10 million for community initiatives over the next two years.

In each of 2001–02 and 2000–01 the Department spent £1.25 million. There was no spending specifically to encourage consumption of fruit and vegetables before 1999.

In addition to the above, initiatives to increase fruit and vegetable consumption have been funded through health action zones, sure start, healthy living centres and through general funding allocations to health authorities and primary care trusts.

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice is given to the public on improving diet. [97322]

Ms Blears: The Government are committed to providing advice and information, based on a sound evidence base, which will help to achieve long-term improvements in the diet and nutrition of the United Kingdom population. It is for this reason that government advice, in general, is for people to consume a healthy and varied balanced diet.

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) and Department of Health are engaged in a wide range of activities aimed at promoting the uptake of a healthy balanced diet as outlined in the FSA's Nutrition Action Plan and the NHS Plan.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the fruit and vegetables that are *(a)* excluded and *(b)* included in the approved lists for the five a day campaign. [96884]

Ms Blears: The Five-a-day message is to eat at least five portions of a variety of fruits and vegetables each day. Fresh, frozen, canned, dried and 100 per cent. juice count.

100 per cent. juice only counts once per day even if more than one portion is consumed. Beans and other pulse vegetables only count once per day even is more than one portion is consumed. A portion of dried fruit counts, but other types of fruits and vegetables should be consumed to meet the rest of the five a day target.

Potatoes and other vegetables that are eaten as the main starchy 'staple', such as yam and cassava, do not count towards the five a day target. Starchy foods are an important part of a healthy, balanced diet.

Nuts and seeds, coconut, marmalade and jam do not count towards five a day. Fruit drinks with added ingredients such as juice "drinks" and squashes do not count towards five a day.

The fruit and vegetables contained in processed foods, such as pasta sauces, soups, stews and puddings can contribute to five-a-day. However, processed foods containing fruit and vegetables which are also high in added fat, salt and/or sugars should only be eaten in moderation.

A Five-a-day logo has been developed as part of the communications programme, to help people recognise the Five-a-day message and introduce consistency in the message in all settings. In the first instance, the logo will only be able to be used to promote products without any added sugar, fat or salt. While the recommendation to eat more fruit and vegetables is an important one, this needs to be considered in the context of an overall balanced diet. We are giving further consideration to developing nutrition criteria for the use of the Five-a-day logo on fruits and vegetable product with added ingredients.

Digital Hearing Aids

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress is being made on increasing the availability of digital hearing aids for patients in York and North Yorkshire. [95201]

Jacqui Smith: Funding has been made available for the years 2003–04 and 2004–05 to ensure that a modernised service, providing digital hearing aids, will be available from all National Hearing Service hearing aids services in England by April 2005.

Those NHS hospital trusts not yet involved in the modernisation project will now need to discuss with their respective primary care trusts whether they wish to modernise in 2003–04 or 2004–05.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will provide digital hearing aids on the NHS in Chorley; and when the next round of allocations for the provision of digital hearing aids on the NHS will be announced. [97693]

Jacqui Smith: Funding has been made available for the years 2003–04 and 2004–05 to ensure that a modernised service, providing digital hearing aids, will be available from all National Health Service hearing aids services in England by April 2005.

Those NHS hospital trusts not yet involved in the modernisation project will now need to discuss with their respective primary care trusts whether they wish to modernise in 2003–04 or 2004–05.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he expects to use non-NHS providers to achieve full coverage of digital hearing aids under the Modernising Hearing Aid Services Programme. [97877]

Jacqui Smith: Following a successful pilot, which provided National Health Service aids via private hearing aid providers, we intend to extend public private partnerships to boost NHS capacity, reduce waiting times and to make it easier for people with hearing impairment to access services—on the high street rather than in hospitals. We are drawing up plans for this work and want to make rapid progress.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many additional audiologists he estimates will need to be recruited to provide digital hearing aids for the target user group within the two year timetable. [97890]

Jacqui Smith: It is currently estimated that an additional two audiological posts will be required by each site as it is modernised to become a service that provides digital hearing aids. As modernised hearing aid services are rolled out across England over the next two years, work will be continuing on skill-mix and involvement of the private sector, which could have an effect on that estimate.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS trusts do not offer digital hearing aids; and what estimate he has made of when each of them will be able to start fitting digital hearing aids. [97891]

Jacqui Smith: All National Health Service hearing aid services will be providing digital hearing aids by April 2005. We plan to modernise 80 in 2004–05 and the remaining services, approximately 70, in 2004–05.

By the end of March, there will be a total of 50 NHS trusts providing digital hearing aids as part of a modernised hearing aid service. In addition, any NHS hearing aid service which has received appropriate training and equipment is able to access the NHS digital hearing aid contract. This represented in the region of 23 additional trusts accessing the contract at the beginning of this financial year, five of which have since joined the modernisation programme. By April 2003, a further 17 services will have received, through the modernisation programme, the equipment and training to enable them to access the contract. We understand that there may be other trusts who supply digital hearing aids outside the NHS contract. Those figures are not held centrally.

Drug Dependency (Treatment)

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average waiting time was for an opiate dependent patient seeking treatment before he or she received treatment in the last year for which figures are available. [97643]

Ms Blears: Opiate dependent patients receive treatment through the different treatment delivery methods as listed, depending on their clinical need. The National Treatment Agency for Substance Misuse (NTA) has implemented a waiting times strategy which is significantly reducing waiting times. The longest waiting times reported to the NTA in drug action team treatment plans are shown in the table.

Weeks

	December 2001	*December 2002*
In-patient detoxification	12	8
Specialist prescribing	14	8
GP prescribing	5	4
Structured counselling	7	5
Day Care	6	3
Residential rehab	9	7

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the proportion of opiate dependent patients seeking treatment who *(a)* proceed to receive treatment, *(b)* complete the course of treatment and *(c)* fail to report for treatment when offered. [97644]

Ms Blears: Information on the numbers of drug misusers in contact with drug treatment agencies in England is available in "Statistics from the Regional Drug Misuse Databases on drug misusers in treatment in England, 2000–01" http://www.doh.gov.uk/public/sb0133.htm. This document is available in the Library.

The Department funded National Treatment Outcome Research Study demonstrates that around half, or 47 per cent., of drug users who have gone through residential programmes, and more than a third, or 35 per cent., of those from methadone programmes are still abstinent from opiates at four to five years. More than a third, or 38 per cent., of all the residential clients were also abstinent from all six illicit target drugs—illicit heroin, non-prescribed methadone, non-prescribed benzodiazepines, crack cocaine, powder cocaine, amphetamines—at four to five years.

The National Drug Treatment Monitoring System collects data on drug users on arrest referral schemes which show that 48,810 individuals were screened between October 2000 and September 2001 in England and Wales, of whom over half were voluntarily referred to a specialist drug treatment service. Of those referred, a quarter made a demand for treatment, a total of 5,520 individuals.

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of methadone is prescribed for *(a)* oral consumption and *(b)* delivery by injection. [97647]

Ms Blears: 96 per cent. of all prescription items for methadone hydrochloride that were dispensed in the community in England in 2001 were for oral consumption. The corresponding percentage for injections is 4 per cent.

It should be noted that methadone is not only prescribed for opioid dependence and may be prescribed as a treatment for other conditions.

Electronic Patient Records

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what targets are in place for the introduction of electronic patient records; [88736]

(2) how many trusts are meeting their targets for the introduction of electronic patient records. [88737]

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for health pursuant to the answer given to the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham on 13 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 488W, when he expects all NHS trusts in the south-east to have introduced electronic patient records. [92598]

Mr. Lammy: The following targets are in place for implementing the Integrated Care Record Service (ICRS) in the Government's '21st Century IT' Strategy for the national health service:

Health Records Infrastructure initial connections by all trusts by March 2005;

December 2005—all primary care trusts and all NHS trusts actively implementing elements of electronic patient records (EPR);

December 2007—full national health record service, with core data and reference links to local EPR systems for full record access; EPR (compliant with new national standard, XML-based specification) systems implemented in all PCTs and all hospitals (to be confirmed during calendar year 2003); and

Unified Health Record (with all appropriate social care information) by December 2010 (to be confirmed during calendar year 2006).

ENT Patients

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has put in place to extend the London pilot scheme on patient choice for *(a)* cataract patients, *(b)* ENT patients and *(c)* general surgery throughout England. [97316]

Mr. Hutton: Choice pilot projects have been approved in the following areas:

Surrey and Sussex, Dorset and Somerset, Berkshire, Greater Manchester and West Yorkshire for certain specialities

Southern England as a whole for ophthalmology.

These projects will help local health services prepare for the implementation of wider patient choice leading to implementation guidance being issued to the national health service later this year.

Evening Primrose

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the withdrawal of Oil of Evening Primrose from the NHS Tariff. [96508]

Ms Blears: The marketing authorisations for two products, Epogam and Efamast, containing gamolenic acid, which is derived from evening primrose oil, were withdrawn in October 2002. This action followed a review by the Committee on Safety of Medicines and the Medicines Commission, who came to the conclusion that the products did not meet the current standard of effectiveness required for authorisation of these products as medicines for the treatment of eczema and breast pain respectively.

Family Doctors

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average ratio of family doctors to patients was in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2000; and what the average is now in *(i)* England and *(ii)* North Yorkshire. [98050]

Mr. Hutton: The average ratio of all practitioner, excluding general practitioner retainers, and unrestricted principle equivalents GPs to patients in England and North Yorkshire in 1997, 2000 and 2001 is shown in the table.

Ratio of all practitioners (excluding GP retainers)[1] and unrestricted principals and equivalents (UPEs)[2] to patients in North Yorkshire health authority and England; 1997, 2000 and 2001

	1997		2000		2001	
	Ratio of: All practitioners: patients (excl. GP retainers)	Ratio of: UPEs: patients	Ratio of: All practitioners: patients (excl. GP retainers)	UPEs: patients	All practitioners: patients (excl. GP retainers)	UPEs: patients
North Yorkshire HA	1:1,512	1:1,660	1:1,439	1:1,605	1:1,443	1:1,594
England	1:1,732	1:1,878	1:1,697	1:1,853	1:1,670	1:1,841

[1] All practitioners (excluding GP retainers) include GMS unrestricted principals, PMS contracted GPs, PMS salaried GPs, restricted principals, assistants, GP registrars, salaried doctors (para. 52 SFA), PMS others.

[2] UPEs include GMS unrestricted principals, PMS contracted GPs and PMS salaried GPs.

Notes:

1. GP retainers were first collected in 1999 and have been omitted from this table for comparability purposes.
2. Data as at 1 October 1997 and 30 September 2000–01.

Source:

General and Personal Medical Services Statistics

Foster Care

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans the Government has to increase *(a)* funding for the foster carer service and *(b)* local authority allowances for children in foster care. [98486]

Jacqui Smith: A £19.75 million choice protects grant will be paid to local authorities in 2003–04 to expand and strengthen their fostering services. The choice protects review is examining placement services for looked after children with a particular emphasis on fostering services. Fostering allowances are being considered alongside issues such as recruitment, retention and methods of supporting foster carers.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much is paid towards foster care allowances in each Social Services Authority. [96091]

Jacqui Smith: This information is not held centrally.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to standardise allowances paid to foster carers throughout the United Kingdom. [96092]

Jacqui Smith: The Department of Health is currently reviewing all aspects of the fostering service, including remuneration and other issues such as training and support as part of the Choice Protects review.

Foundation Hospitals

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures foundation hospitals will be able to use to recruit and retain staff. [97305]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 13 February 2003]*: As set out in "A Guide to NHS Foundation Trusts", paragraph 6.1, National Health Service foundation trusts will have the freedom to recruit and employ their own staff. In developing recruitment and retention policies that recognise local needs they will have flexibility to adopt measures within the framework set out in licence and forthcoming legislation, including the statutory duty of partnership.

Genito-urinary Medicine

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what *(a)* monitoring and *(b)* research has been conducted by or for his Department on long waiting times for genito-urinary medicine services; [97149]

(2) if he will make a statement on the investment by his Department on GUM clinics; and how the investment will be spent; [97148]

(3) what the average waiting times were in GUM clinics for patients referred by general practitioners in the latest period for which figures are available. [97147]

Ms Blears: The average (mean) waiting time for a first out-patient appointment for patients referred to genito-urinary medicine (GUM) clinics by general practitioners is 2.15 weeks as of September 2002. However GUM services are open-access and the vast majority of patients self-refer, so this figure may not be an accurate reflection of waiting times which vary across the country.

Data from clinicians in the field shows that medium time to first appointment in GUM services has lengthened to 12 days for men and 14 days for women. However there is wide variation in waiting times across the country. It is important that people with sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are able to access GUM services quickly. Evidence from the National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles (2000) shows that people with an untreated STI typically pass the infection on to a further one to four partners. If there is a wait for several weeks, there is a high risk that the patient will not turn up for the appointment.

We have invested a total of £5.3 million in GUM services this financial year. This funding was allocated in recognition of the pressure GUM services are facing and in response to concerns from the profession about the possible impact of the new adult sexual health campaign launched in December. We advised this money should be used in line with the priorities highlighted in the sexual health and HIV strategy to increase service capacity and reduce waiting times, develop clinical networks and expand the role of health advisers. The local primary care trust sexual health lead has been asked to monitor that the money has been used effectively.

General Practitioners

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many golden hello payments have been made to general practitioners in *(a)* London and *(b)* West Sussex, broken down by primary care trust level. [96081]

Mr. Hutton: Successful applications from general practitioners are forwarded to the Department by primary care trusts for monitoring purposes. Information on the number of applications received by the Department relating to London and West Sussex, broken down by primary care trust level, is shown in the following table.

Strategic Health Authority/ Primary Care Trust	*Number of applications received*
North West London	
Ealing	12
Hounslow	4
Hammersmith and Fulham	13
Hillingdon	9
Brent	10
Harrow	16
Westminster	5
Kensington and Chelsea	0
North Central London	
Barnet	15
Enfield	10
Haringey	6
Camden	0
Islington	0
North East London	
Barking and Dagenham	1
Havering	5
City and Hackney	16
Newham	9
Tower Hamlets	0
Chingford, Wanstead and Woodford	6
Redbridge	10
Walthamstowe, Leyton and Leytonstone	10
South East London	
Bexley	9
Greenwich	9
Bromley	17
Lambeth	26
Southwark	10
Lewisham	10
South West London	
Kingston	8
Richmond and Twickenham	9

Strategic Health Authority/ Primary Care Trust North West London	*Number of applications received*
Sutton and Merton	16
Wandsworth	11
Croydon	25
Surrey and Sussex (West Sussex PCTs only)	
Adun, Arun and Worthing	8
Western Sussex	13
Crawley	3
Horsham and Chanctonbury	5

Note:

Due to the reconfiguration of primary care groups and trusts in 2002, the information includes applications received from primary care groups and trusts, which merged to form the primary care trusts shown in the table.

Miss Anne McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received concerning the level of GP vacancies; and if he will make a statement. [98049]

Mr. Hutton: I have received 29 representations concerning the level of general practitioner vacancies in recent months.

The increase in GP vacancies reflects the intention of primary care trusts to increase numbers throughout the country. The last GP recruitment, retention and vacancy survey, carried out by the Department for the year ending 31 March 2002, reported that 83 per cent., of vacancies filled in the period of the survey took six months or less to fill.

The Government is committed to recruiting and retaining more GPs. That is why we have introduced a range of measures, including extended flexible working and childcare and financial incentives for GPs new and returning to general practice and for those who delay their retirement.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many vacancies there are for general medical practitioners in the London Borough of Wandsworth. [97532]

Mr. Hutton: The Department of Health does not collect the information in the format requested. However information provided from South West London Strategic Health Authority shows is that there are five general practitioner vacancies in Wandsworth.

Health Care (East Riding)

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* residential care and *(b)* nursing homes have closed in *(i)* Hull and *(ii)* the East Riding in each quarter since 1997 for which figures are available. [97731]

Jacqui Smith: Information on the number of residential and nursing care homes that have closed is not centrally available.

Information on the number of residential and nursing care homes in East Riding and Hull is shown in the table at 31 March for the years 1997 to 2001. Data for 2002 are not yet available.

Number of residential and nursing care homes[1] in East Riding and Hull[2] at 31 March 1997 to 2001

	Residential care homes[2]		*Nursing care homes[2,3]*	
As at 31 March	*Kingston Upon Hull Unitary Authority*	*East Riding Unitary Authority*	*Total for Kingston Upon Hull Unitary Authority and East Riding Unitary Authority*	*East Riding and Hull Health Authority*
1997	106	237	343	49
1998	116	228	344	56
1999	105	259	364	56
2000	100	247	347	52
2001	103	240	343	47

[1] Residential data exclude dual registered homes.

[2] Residential data is shown separately for Kingston upon Hull Unitary Authority and East Riding Unitary Authority, and combined for comparative purposes with East Riding and Hull Health Authority. Nursing data refers to East Riding and Hull Health Authority.

[3] Nursing data includes general nursing homes, mental nursing homes, private hospitals and clinics.

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients contracted a hospital acquired infection in the Hull and East Riding Hospitals Trust in each quarter since 1997. [97727]

Jacqui Smith: Data on hospital acquired infections are not routinely collected. However, collection of methicillin resistant *staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) bloodstream infections data was commenced in April 2001. In the period April 2001 to March 2002 there were 106 cases of MRSA bacteraemias in Hull and East Yorkshire National Health Service Trust.

Source:

Hull and East Yorkshire Hospitals National Health Service Trust (MRSA table).

Health Emergency Planning

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what safeguards he will put in place to maintain existing standards of health emergency planning during the transition of responsibilities from the *(a)* Public Health Laboratory Service, *(b)* National Radiological Protection Board and *(c)* Microbiological Research Authority to the Health Protection Agency. [96590]

Ms Blears: We are working with the Public Health Laboratory Service and the Microbiological Research Authority to provide for a smooth transfer of responsibilities from them to the Health Protection Agency (HPA), which we propose to create as a special health authority from 1 April 2003.

We propose that, at a later stage, the HPA should also take responsibility for functions currently discharged by the National Radiological Protection Board and we shall ensure that that transfer is handled smoothly. We shall expect the HPA to maintain and, where possible, improve standards of health emergency planning.

Health Protection Agency

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment was made of the model adopted by the National Assembly for Wales for a unified infection service for Wales when his Department decided on the establishment of the Health Protection Agency. [95869]

Ms Blears: The Department of Health and the National Assembly for Wales each took the other's proposals into account in developing proposals for England and Wales respectively.

Health Service Ombudsman

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will ask the Health Service Ombudsman to report on the implementation of the Court of Appeal Judgment R *v.* North and East Health Authority (Ex parte Coughlan) (1999) in cases already investigated. [97674]

Jacqui Smith: The Ombudsman is independent of the national health service and government. The Secretary of State is not able to ask the Ombudsman to report on particular issues.

Heart Choice Scheme

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what qualifications are required for a person wishing to become a patient care adviser for the Heart Choice Scheme. [97311]

Ms Blears: Patient care advisers (PCA) are expected to have an appropriate clinical background, and a majority of those in post come from nursing. Beyond this, PCAs need to combine clinical knowledge with excellent organisational and networking skills, and above all to be effective advocates for the patients they are supporting.

Hepatoxicity

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of hepatoxicity have been reported in the United Kingdom in each of the last 10 years. [96175]

Ms Blears: Hepatoxicity may be caused by a number of external sources including the use or misuse of alcohol, certain drugs as well as infection and injury. The Department does not routinely collect figures on the number of cases of hepatoxicity reported in the United Kingdom.

Table 1 provides data on the number of admissions to national health service hospitals in England where the reason for admission was alcoholic liver failure or toxic liver disease in the years 1995–96 to 2001–02. These figures are given in accordance with the derivation of hepatoxicity by NHS clinical coders.

Table 1: Breakdown of hospital admissions related to alcoholic or toxic liver disease

	Alcoholic liver failure	*Toxic liver disease*
1995–96	19,058	652
1996–97	22,881	690
1997–98	27,083	757
1998–99	29,026	787
1999–2000	33,571	676
2000–01	36,923	749
2001–02	39,896	670

The Yellow Card Scheme is a scheme by which health professionals in the UK can report suspected adverse reactions to medicinal products. Data are colleted and reviewed by the Medices Control Agency, with independent advice from the Committee on Safety of Medicines. Approximately 18,000 reports of suspected adverse reactions to medicines are received through the scheme each year.

Table 2 provides a breakdown of the number of reports of hepatoxicity received in association with any medicine through the Yellow Card Scheme by year since 1993. These reports include all levels of severity of liver problems, from mild elevations of liver enzymes to liver failure. It is important to note that a report of suspected adverse reaction through the scheme does not necessarily mean that it was caused by the medicine.

Data from the Yellow Card Scheme cannot be used to calculate the incidence of medicine-related liver injury as not all adverse reaction to medicines are reported.

Table 2: Number of reports of hepatoxicity suspected to be due to medicines reported through the Yellow Card Scheme

Year received	*Number of reports*
1993	671
1994	675
1995	723
1996	712
1997	770
1998	820
1999	847
2000	861
2001	900
2002	785

HIV/AIDS

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of people infected by HIV/AIDS in *(a)* Brighton and Hove City, *(b)* West Sussex and *(c)* East Sussex. [96029]

Ms Blears: Information on the number of people infected with HIV/AIDS attending statutory services for HIV-related care is collected by the Public Health Laboratory Service's annual survey of prevalent HIV infections diagnosed.

In 2001, the latest year for which these data are available, there were 800 HIV-infected residents in the East Sussex, Brighton and Hove health authority, of whom 628 were resident in Brighton and Hove local authority. There were 206 HIV-infected people living in West Sussex health authority.

Hospital Managers

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospital managers there are in the Hull and East Yorkshire NHS Hospitals Trust. [96698]

Jacqui Smith: The information as at 30 September 2001 is shown in the table.

	Whole Time Equivalents	*Headcount*
All Managers	165	170
of which:		
Administration and Estates	136	141
Nursing	23	23
Scientific, Therapeutic and Technical	6	6

Notes:
Figures are rounded to the nearest whole number.
Source:
Department of Health Non Medical Workforce Census (30 September 2001).

Illegal Part-time Employment

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures he is taking to protect children aged 13 to 15 engaged in illegal part-time employment; and if he will make a statement. [98102]

Jacqui Smith: The Children and Young Persons Act 1933, as amended, is the primary legislation covering the employment of all children below the minimum school leaving age. Section 21 of the Act allows for those employing children and young people in contravention of the Act and any byelaws made under it to be prosecuted.

In-patients

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his latest estimate is of the average length of stay for in-patients in an NHS hospital in England; and what the average length of stay was in February *(a)* 2002, *(b)* 2000, *(c)* 1998 and *(d)* 1996. [97839]

Mr. Hutton: The average length of stay for ordinary admissions to national health service hospital trusts in England over years from April to March is shown in the table.

	Average length of stay (days)
2001–02	8.1
2000–01	8.2
1998–99	8.7
1996–97	10.3

Notes:
1. Day cases are excluded. Figures relate to all admissions, including general and acute, mental health and maternity.
2. Data in this table are adjusted for both coverage and unknown/invalid clinical data, except for 2001–02 which is not yet adjusted for shortfalls.
3. The length of stay relates to spells finishing over the period; some bed days may have preceded the start of the year.
Source:
Hospital Episodes Statistics

Internet Medical Companies

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what controls he has introduced to ensure that doctors who service internet medical companies provide patient consultations. [97664]

Mr. Hutton: Doctors who service internet medical companies do so in a private capacity. A doctor has a duty of care towards patients, no matter how the service is provided. The General Medical Council (CMC) advises the profession that, in its view, advice and prescribing by e-mail may seriously compromise standards of care; where the doctor does not previously know the patient, where no examination can be provided and where there is little or no provision for proper patient follow-up care. A doctor in the United Kingdom who fails to discharge the duty of care towards patients is liable to investigation and disciplinary action by the GMC.

Medical Procedures

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many hospitals in the UK are equipped to perform flexible sigmoidoscopies;. [96070]

(2) what the average cost to the NHS for a *(a)* rigid sigmoidoscopy and *(b)* flexible sigmoidoscopy was in the last 12 months. [96072]

Ms Blears: The national average costs of a rigid and flexible sigmoidoscopy are shown in the following table. These procedures can be undertaken in a variety of settings and the table reflects this. The costs shown are for the financial year 2001–02 ending on 31 March 2002.

Full details of these costs can be found in the "Reference Costs 2002", which is available in the Library. They are available to the public via the Department of Health's website.

£

Patient type	*Rigid Sigmoidoscopy*	*Flexible Sigmoidoscopy*
In-patient: Elective	591	591
In-patient: Non-elective	435	435
Day Case	315	315
Out-patient	98	122

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average waiting time is for a flexible or rigid sigmoidoscopy procedure in each hospital trust in England. [96073]

Ms Blears: Information on waiting times for sigmoidoscopy procedures are not centrally available. Waiting times for consultant led inpatient elective admissions and consultant led first outpatient appointments following general practitioner referral are collected on the consultant's main speciality, not by procedure.

Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has for public consultation on the operation of the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency. [97950]

Mr. Lammy: The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency, which is being created on 1 April this year, will have new governance arrangements, designed to ensure that the Agency is responsive to the views of its customers, beneficiaries and stakeholders. The Agency will be led by a Chairman and a Board of directors, including a majority of non-executive directors, which will be responsible for developing the policies of the Agency within the framework set by Ministers. The Agency's Chairman, Professor Alasdair Breckenridge, will be responsible for increasing its public profile and, in particular, for ensuring that the public is well-informed about issues concerning the safety of medicines and medical equipment. The Agency will also publish an annual report on its operations.

Medicines Control Agency

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to act upon the recommendations made in the recent National Audit Office report on the Medicines Control Agency. [97951]

Mr. Lammy: The National Audit Office report was published on 16 January and officials of the Medicines Control Agency (MCA) are currently considering the recommendations of the report. The Board of the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency will take the recommendations fully into account when it considers the operation of the new Agency. Officials from the Department of Health and the MCA will be giving evidence to the Public Accounts Committee on the subject of the report in March.

Mental Health

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessments have been made of the effectiveness of assertive outreach teams on the take up of aftercare services by mental health service users discharged from hospital. [97661]

Jacqui Smith: Although the Department has not undertaken a direct assessment of this, studies have reported that those receiving assertive community treatments were more likely to remain in contact with services than people receiving standard community care. People allocated to assertive outreach teams were less likely to be admitted to hospital than those receiving standard community care and spent less time in hospital, results show a 35 per cent. decrease in hospital admissions, hence reducing the use of in-patient beds.

Studies have also shown that in terms of clinical and social outcome, significant and robust differences between assertive community treatment and standard community care were found on accommodation status, employment and patient satisfaction. More users were maintained in treatment longer than in routine case management, users experienced fewer admissions involving the police and there were fewer involuntary admissions.

Mental Health NHS Trusts

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many new posts of Development Manager have been created in Mental Health NHS trusts in the last year. [97874]

Mr. Hutton: Information is not collected centrally on posts which carry this description or title.

Minor Injuries Units

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the running costs of the *(a)* St Charles Hospital Minor Injuries Unit, *(b)* Soho Walk-In Centre and *(c)* South Westminster Minor Injuries Unit have been in each of the last three years. [95618]

Mr. Hutton: The running costs of the St Charles Hospital Minor Injuries Unit and the South Westminster Minor Injuries Unit are not held centrally. This information would be available by contacting the Chair of Westminster Primary Care Trust directly.

In the first three years of their existence the Department provided specific additional funds to primary care trusts who host national health service walk in centres. For Soho walk in centre the central contribution is shown in the table.

Year	*Contribution*
2000–2001	616,000
2001–2002	683,000
2002–2003	620,000

Mixed Sex Wards

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress he has made over the last year to end the use of mixed sex wards in NHS hospitals in England; how many mixed sex wards there are in NHS hospitals in England; and how many there were in February *(a)* 2002, *(b)* 2001, *(c)* 2000, *(d)* 1999 and *(e)* 1998. [97835]

Mr. Hutton: I refer the hon. Member to the Written Ministerial Statement made on 14 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 24WS.

Information on the number of mixed-sex wards is not available.

National Institute for Mental Health

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the proposed expenditure on each regional centre for the National Institute for Mental Health. [97875]

Jacqui Smith: Each regional development centre for the National Institute for Mental Health has been allocated £500,000 in each of the next three financial years. North Yorkshire and Humberside regional development centre will be getting an additional £100,000 per annum as it has a larger catchment than the others.

Additional funding will be available for time limited projects undertaken by the development centres.

National School Fruit Scheme

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is on the future funding of the national school fruit scheme. [96515]

Ms Blears: The Government have made a commitment to introduce a National School Fruit Scheme for four to six-year-olds across England by 2004. It will be free to schools, parents and children. Region wide pilots for the scheme are being introduced in 2002–03 and 2003–04 with funding from the New Opportunities Fund.

NHS Dental Care (North-West)

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many dental practices are taking on new NHS patients in *(a)* the Ribble Valley and Fulwood, *(b)* Lancashire and *(c)* the North West of England. [97803]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is not available centrally.

Arrangements are in place to ensure that all patients can gain access to National Health Service dental services by calling NHS Direct.

NHS Mental Health Trusts

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the compensation payments to former directors of NHS Mental Health trusts not transferred to new Partnership NHS trusts for mental health. [97873]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is not collected centrally.

NHS Procurement Programme

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the entry in the Guidance to the National NHS Procurement Programme on page 10 which states that contracts will be structured so that payments only start when value has been delivered. [97707]

Mr. Lammy: The guidance to the national National Health Service procurement programme explains the principles the national programme will use in its future contractual relationships with suppliers. It intends to structure contacts so that payment will only start once demonstrable value in terms of goods or services have been delivered.

NHS Senior Managers

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many senior managers employed by the NHS *(a)* had their employment within the NHS terminated rather than being moved to another job within the NHS and *(b)* were sacked and then re-employed in another capacity in the NHS in each of the last three years for which figures are available. [98317]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 24 February 2003]:* The information requested on the termination of employment contracts of senior managers and their re-employment in another capacity in the National Health Service is not collected centrally.

NHS Treatment (Europe)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the health establishments which have treated NHS patients on the Continent; and which other establishments he plans to use. [98155]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 24 February 2003]:* Patients have received treatment in three hospitals in France and eight hospitals in Germany. The French hospitals are Polyclinique de la Louviere, Lille; Institute Calo-Hesdin, Berck sur mer; and Clinique Pasteur, St Chamond. The German hospitals are Lutherhaus, Essen; Eduardus Krankenhaus, Cologne; Henriettenstiftung, Hanover; Das Klinikum, Osnabruck; Gilead, Bielefeld; Endo Klinik, Hamburg; Ostseeklinik, Damp; and a clinic in Celle.

The lead commissioners are currently conducting a procurement process to identify additional overseas capacity. It would be inappropriate to speculate about which other establishments are likely to be used in the future, as this may influence the contracting process.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer of 5 February, *Official Report*, column 316W, on NHS treatment abroad, whether the figure includes payments for search agents identifying suitable health establishments to be used by NHS patients in *(a)* France and *(b)* Germany; and which search agents were used in each case and at what cost. [98157]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 24 February 2003]:* The figure quoted in the answer of 5 February includes some payment for searches undertaken to identify health establishments. This refers to the hospital used in France, which was identified by the lead commissioner at Kent and Medway health authority. Three separate intermediaries were used to identify suitable hospitals in Germany: Guy's and St Thomas' Trust, Germedic and German Medicine Net.

NICE Products

Dr. Francis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many National Institute for Clinical Excellence products increased their price above the accepted rate of inflation in 2002; and whether his Department issues guidelines to NICE on what action to take in such circumstances; [97301]

(2) what provisions the National Institute for Clinical Excellence has in place to prevent the treatment producer from increasing the cost once NICE has conducted a cost qualitative assessment of a treatment and approved it. [97302]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answers 12 February 2003]:* Companies which are members of the Pharmaceutical Price Regulation Scheme may not increase the price of any branded licensed National Health Service medicine Without the prior approval of the Department of Health. The Department's records show that none of the pharmaceutical products appraised by National Institute for Clinical Excellence were increased in price during 2002.

The NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency negotiates contracts for other products on behalf of the NHS in England. The Agency is not aware of any products where the price has increased as a direct result of a positive appraisal by NICE.

Non-UK Nationals (Treatment Costs)

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the cost to the NHS of treating non-UK nationals in each of the last five years. [98841]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Overseas Health Treatment

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what protocols are in place to clarify the responsibility and funding arrangements for the follow-up care of NHS patients sent abroad for treatment; how he has ensured that GPs and consultants are aware of them; and what advice he has given GPs and consultants on measures to take if they identify complications from the treatment or have concerns about the standard of care of those patients. [98104]

Mr. Hutton: The responsibility and funding arrangements for the follow-up care of National Health Service patients referred abroad for treatment are clarified in the contracts held with overseas providers. These contracts define the clinical and non-clinical service to be provided; normally these specify that the overseas provider will provider a complete package of care, requiring no further intervention by the NHS when the patients return to the United Kingdom.

General practitioners and consultants are briefed by their local trust on the arrangements for the follow-up care of patients that have received treatment abroad. If a GP or consultant identifies complications following treatment abroad, or has any concerns regarding standards of care, they are advised to raise their concerns according to the same procedures that would apply to any other NHS patient. This would involve highlighting the concern with the trust, which can then pursue the matter with either the overseas clinician or the relevant lead commissioner.

Oxfordshire Community Health Council

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what organisations will replace the Oxfordshire Community Health Council. [95942]

Mr. Lammy: There will be patients' forums to monitor and review services from the patients perspective and to represent their views, overview and scrutiny committees that scrutinise health and independent support for patients wanting to complain against the national health service.

Patient Care Advisers

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each London NHS trust whether a patient care adviser has been appointed for *(a)* ear, nose and throat patients and *(b)* general surgery patients who will be eligible for the London pilot scheme extending patient choice from spring 2003. [97377]

Mr. Hutton: The London National Health Service trusts with patients on their waiting lists for more than six months who will be participating in the London scheme extending patient choice from spring 2003 are:

Barnet and Chase Farm, Whipps Cross, Royal Free, Barking Havering and Redbridge, Barts and the London Hospital, Ealing, Hammersmith, North West London, Hillingdon, St. Marys, West Middlesex, Kingston, Mayday, St. Georges, Guys and St. Thomas', Hammersmith, Lewisham, Queen Mary's Sidcup, Whittington, Newham, Epsom and St, Helier and Bromley.

The patient care advisers are appointed to manage a number of trusts from the list, rather than particular specialties. However all patients participating in the London patient choice scheme will be allocated an individual patient care adviser.

Penalty Clauses

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the contracts entered into with private sector companies for the provision of goods or services in the NHS since 1998 which have included penalty clauses for non-performance. [97650]

Mr. Lammy: Records are not held centrally for all contracts entered into with private sector companies for the provision of goods or services in the national health service.

Perinatal Deaths

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many perinatal deaths there were in each of the last 10 years; what the most common causes of perinatal deaths are; what figures he has collated on the rate of perinatal deaths in the UK compared to European countries and the USA; and what he is doing to reduce the number of perinatal deaths. [99081]

Jacqui Smith: The number and rate of perinatal deaths (stillbirths plus deaths at ages up to six completed days of life) in each of the last 10 years for England and Wales and also causes of perinatal deaths in 2001, are shown in the tables. Eurostat, the Statistical Office Of European Communities collates statistics across Europe (Eurostat: Key data on health 2000 (1999) pg 170). However, due to differences in the definition of stillbirths, perinatal mortality figures are not completely comparable between the United Kingdom and the rest of Europe, nor with the USA.

As part of the work on the maternity module of the children's national service framework, the Post Birth and Baby Sub Group is developing national standards to ensure the safety and well being of the baby and will cover issues such as resuscitation, need for assessment, and the immediate needs of the new born. The National Institute for Clinical Excellence will also draw up clinical guidelines.

In addition we are increasing the number of doctors and midwives to provide better support for women in established labour and thereby improve outcomes for both mother and child, and we have invested an additional £100 million in refurbishment and equipment for maternity suites.

Perinatal deaths England and Wales 1992—2001

	Number	Rate per 1,000 total births
1992*	5238	7.6
1993	6044	9.0
1994	5958	8.9
1995	5701	8.7
1996	5605	8.6
1997	5380	8.3
1998	5261	8.2
1999	5138	8.2
2000	4956	8.2
2001**	4740	8.0

*For data from 1993, the definition of a stillbirth changed from 28 weeks to 24 weeks gestation.

** Provisional

Perinatal deaths by ONS cause groups England and Wales 2001 (provisional)

*ONS cause group**	*Number*	*Rate*
All causes	4740	8.0
Congenital anomalies	826	1.4
Antepartum infections	53	0.1
Immaturity related conditions	976	1.6
Asphyxia, anoxia or trauma	260	0.4
External conditions	12	0.0
Infections	10	0.0
Other specific conditions	191	0.3
Antepartum stillbirths	2333	3.9
Sudden infant death	1	0.0
Other conditions	78	0.1
Total births	597,694	

*2001 data based on ONS cause groups developed in ICD10.

Source:

Office for National Statistics (ONS)

Pharmacists

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans he has to consult local pharmacists regarding the proposed deregulation of pharmacists; [97703]

(2) what recent discussions he has had with representative bodies of local pharmacies regarding the deregulation of pharmacies; [97702]

(3) if he will make a statement on his plans for deregulation of local pharmacies. [97701]

Mr. Lammy: We are considering the report from the Director General of Fair Trading and its findings and recommendation carefully.

We have invited views on the report and I have met representatives and officers of the Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee, the National Pharmaceutical Association and the Association of Independent Multiple Pharmacies to hear their preliminary views as well as the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain and many of the larger pharmacy contractors. The views of these and other interested parties will help inform the Government response which my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, is co-ordinating.

Protection of Vulnerable Adults List

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the Protection of Vulnerable Adults list. [98725]

Jacqui Smith: The implementation of the Protection of Vulnerable Adults list has been delayed until the Department is confident that the Criminal Records Bureau will be able to implement checks against the list. The list will be introduced at the earliest opportunity.

Public Health Controls (Brazil)

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what analysis he has made of the EU Commission's report DG (SANCO)/8529/2002 on animal and public health controls in Brazil; what assessment he has made of the risk to public health in the United Kingdom from the import of Brazilian meat; and if he will make a statement. [95054]

Ms Blears: The European Commission has so far made no proposals to permit imports of pig meat from Brazil further to this report. If such a proposal were made, we would expect the shortcomings identified in the report to have been addressed before the United Kingdom could support it.

Public Health Laboratory Service

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to maintain the benefits of bulk procurement in the Public Health Laboratory Service when laboratories are transferred to the National Health Service. [95674]

Ms Blears: We plan that the Purchasing and Supply Agency (PASA) should assume responsibility for bulk procurement during 2003–2004, as current contracts are completed. Before these transfers, PASA will be putting in place bulk procurement procedures which will be designed to provide equivalent benefits to the current arrangements for all the national health service microbiology laboratories.

Residential Care

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* local authority residential places, *(b)* independent sector residential places, *(c)* national health service long-stay geriatric and psycho-geriatric beds and *(d)* independent sector nursing home places there were in *(i)* 1973, (ii) 1980, (iii) 1990 and (iv) 2000. [97660]

Jacqui Smith: The information available is shown in the table for England at 31 March for the years 1973, 1980, 1990 and 2000.

Reliable data on the number of residential home places for the years prior to 1980, and nursing home places prior to 1982, are not readily available. Information on national health service long stay mental illness beds is not available for 1973 and 1980.

Number of local authority residential places, independent sector residential places, NHS geriatric and elderly long-stay mental illness beds, and independent sector nursing home places in England at 31 March, for the years 1973, 1980, 1990 and 2000

Rounded As at 31 March	Residential home places[1,2] Local authority	Residential home places[1,2] Independent sector	NHS geriatric beds[3]	NHS elderly long-stay mental illness beds	Nursing home places[1,4] independent sector
1973	[6]—	[6]—	56,180	[6]—	[6]—
1980[5]	125,390	76,130	54,950	[6]—	34,790
1990	121,940	206,010	48,730	16,880	113,260
2000	55,500	273,950	27,860	6,040	193,620

[1] Data include places in dual registered homes.

[2] Data for 1980 do not include places for the client group "other".

[3] Geriatric beds include long and short-stay beds. Long-stay beds are not collected as a separate category.

[4] Nursing home places include beds in general and mental nursing homes, private hospitals and clinics.

[5] Number of independent nursing home places are given as at 31 December 1982. Reliable data for years prior to 1982 are not available.

[6] Data not available

Smoking

David Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimates he has made of the number of people who have died in each of the last five years in England and Wales as a result of exposure to second-hand tobacco smoke. [93623]

Ms Blears: Information in not routinely collected on the number of people who have died as a result of exposure to second-hand tobacco smoke.

The Scientific Committee on Tobacco and Health (SCOTH) in its 1998 Report concluded that, "exposure to environmental smoke is a cause of lung cancer and, in those with long-term exposure, the increased risk is in the order of 20 to 30 per cent. The numbers of people so exposed are not known precisely, but an estimate would suggest about several hundred extra lung cancer deaths a year are caused by exposure to passive smoking".

SCOTH also concluded: "Exposure to environmental tobacco smoke is a cause of ischaemic heart diseases and if current published estimates of magnitude of relative risk are validated, such exposures represents a substantial public hazard".

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have died in each of the last five years as a result of passive smoking; and what measures are being taken to reduce exposure to passive tobacco smoke. [93684]

Ms Blears: Information in not routinely collected on the number of people who have died as a result of exposure to second-hand tobacco smoke.

The Scientific Committee on Tobacco and Health (SCOTH) in its 1998 Report concluded that, "exposure to environmental smoke is a cause of lung cancer and, in those with long-term exposure, the increased risk is in the order of 20 to 30 per cent. The numbers of people so exposed are not known precisely, but an estimate would suggest about several hundred extra lung cancer deaths a year are caused by exposure to passive smoking."

SCOTH also concluded: "Exposure to environmental tobacco smoke is a cause of ischaemic heart diseases and if current published estimates of magnitude of relative risk are validated, such exposures represents a substantial public hazard."

We are working closely with the hospitality trade to implement the Public Places Charter, designed to provide customers with clear information on the type of smoking policy operating in a particular establishment and allow them to make an informed choice.

We are also be increasing the visibility of health messages highlighting to smokers the risks environmental tobacco smoke presents. This is through regulations to transpose into UK law the European Union Directive on the Manufacture, Presentation and Sale of Tobacco Products. These regulations require tobacco products to carry larger and starker health warnings, on both the front and back of the packet. The dangers of passive smoking are highlighted in two of the new warnings, which include "Smoking seriously harms you and others around you" and "Protect children: don't make them breathe your smoke." The contents of tobacco smoke are also highlighted in a warning saying, "Smoke contains benzene, nitrosomines, formaldehyde and hydrogen cyanide" .

We are encouraging all employers to introduce smoke-free work places. All of the Department of Health's headquarter buildings will be completely smoke-free by 31 March 2003 and we are funding local tobacco control alliances across England to carry out projects in close co-operation with local employers to tackle passive smoking and to increase the number of smoke-free environments. These projects vary in nature from the production of smoke-free guides to pubs and restaurants to the provision of advice and support to managers wishing to introduce policies. We hope that many will be suitable for national application.

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many regular tobacco smokers there are *(a)* in the UK and *(b)* in other Council of Europe countries; and how many there were in each case in 1980. [92573]

Ms Blears: The estimated number of smokers in the United Kingdom is shown in table 1. The available data on smokers in other Council of Europe countries as published by the World Health Organisation are shown in table 2.

Table 1: Estimated percentage and number of current cigarette smokers, among adults aged 16 and over, United Kingdom, 1980 and 2000

	1980	*2000*
Percentage of cigarette smokers[1]	39	27
Estimated number of cigarette smokers[1,2,3]	17,200,000	12,900,000

[1] GB data on the prevalence of smoking have been provided for 1980 as Northern Ireland data are not available: these data were used for estimating the number of smokers in the UK in 1980.

[2] The number of smokers has been calculated using the (aged 16 and over), 1971 census based UK population estimates for mid year 1980, and the 1991 census based UK population estimates for mid year 2000 (provided by the Office for National Statistics to the Department of Health).

[3] Estimated number of smokers rounded to the nearest100,000.

Sources:

Data on the prevalence of smoking derived from:

1. Office for National Statistics: General Household Survey 2000, published as 'Living in Britain: Results from the 2000 General Household Survey'. Available from the internet at: http://www.statistics.gov.uk/lib/index.html

2. Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency: Northern Ireland Health And Social Wellbeing Survey 2001. Available from the internet at: http://www.nisra.gov.uk/whatsnew/wellbeing/Smoking%20and%20drinking%20tables.pdf

Table 2: Prevalence of smoking among adults aged 15 and over, Council of Europe countries (other than UK), 1980 and 2000

Percentage *Country*	*1980*	*2000*
Albania	[1]—	39
Andorra	[1]—	[1]—
Armenia	[1]—	[1]—
Austria	[1]—	29
Azerbaijan	[1]—	[1]—
Belgium	[1]—	31
Bosnia-Herceg	[1]—	[1]—
Bulgaria	[1]—	[1]—
Croatia	[1]—	30
Cyprus	[1]—	[1]—
Czech Republic	[1]—	29
Denmark	[1]—	30
Estonia	[1]—	29
Finland	26	23
France	17	27
Georgia	[1]—	[1]—
Germany	[1]—	35
Greece	[1]—	38
Hungary	[1]—	42
Iceland	[1]—	23
Ireland	[1]—	[1]—
Italy	[1]—	25
Latvia	[1]—	[1]—
Liechtenstein	[1]—	[1]—
Lithuania	[1]—	32
Luxembourg	[1]—	30
Malta	[1]—	[1]—
Moldova	[1]—	19
Netherlands	43	32
Norway	31	32
Poland	[1]—	[1]—
Portugal	22	[1]—
Romania	[1]—	[1]—
Russia	[1]—	[1]—
San Marino	[1]—	[1]—
Slovakia	[1]—	[1]—
Slovenia	[1]—	[1]—
Spain	[1]—	[1]—
Sweden	32	19
Switzerland	[1]—	[1]—
FYR Macedonia	[1]—	[1]—
Turkey	[1]—	[1]—
Ukraine	[1]—	34
Yugoslavia FR	[1]—	47

[1] Not available

Source:

WHO 'European Health for all database'. Available from the internet at: http://www.who.dk/hfadb

Surgical Instruments (Sterilisation)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many operations were cancelled last year in England because of a failure of surgical instruments to be properly sterilised. [96052]

Ms Blears: Quarterly data are collected on the number of operations cancelled by the hospital for non-clinical reasons at the last minute (for example, on the day patients are due to arrive or after arrival in hospital or on the day of their operation) and on the day of surgery. These data are available in the Library and on the Department's website at www.doh.qov.uk/hospitalactivity/data requests.htm

These data are not broken down into the reasons for cancellation.

Teenagers

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans his Department has to recognise teenagers as a separate group within the National Health Service for all purposes; and if he will make a statement. [98470]

Jacqui Smith: Current guidance acknowledges that the recognition of teenagers as a separate group is good practice.

The forthcoming national service framework for children, young people and maternity services will endorse this by promoting the need for services that are appropriate to the age and stage of development of the person receiving a service.

Tuberculosis

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of tuberculosis have been reported in *(a)* Lancashire and *(b)* the North West of England in each of the last 36 months. [96726]

Jacqui Smith: The information required to answer the question is shown in the following table.

Former health authority	*Total*	*Jan*	*Feb*	*Mar*	*Apr*	*May*	*Jun*	*Jul*	*Aug*	*Sep*	*Oct*	*Nov*	*Dec*
Year 2002													
East Lancashire	128	9	7	7	11	13	10	20	9	8	16	7	11
Morecambe Bay (Lancaster)	10	0	0	2	1	1	1	1	2	0	1	1	0
NW Lancashire	62	6	12	6	3	4	5	4	3	8	6	2	3
S Lancashire	14	0	0	4	1	2	2	1	1	1	2	0	0
Total	214	15	19	19	16	20	18	26	15	17	25	10	14
Regional Total	648	47	59	55	56	69	58	57	43	47	73	43	41
Year 2001													
East Lancashire	94	6	14	4	5	7	6	11	6	9	10	12	4

Former health authority	*Total*	*Jan*	*Feb*	*Mar*	*Apr*	*May*	*Jun*	*Jul*	*Aug*	*Sep*	*Oct*	*Nov*	*Dec*
Morecambe Bay (Lancaster)	7	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	2	0	1
NW Lancashire	57	6	4	4	5	9	7	2	2	1	5	5	7
S Lancashire	15	0	0	4	0	0	2	2	1	1	1	4	0
Total	173	12	19	12	11	16	16	15	10	11	18	21	12
Regional Total	650	64	59	55	43	61	55	59	57	48	44	67	38
Year 2000													
East Lancashire	117	6	4	12	12	13	10	8	9	14	14	9	6
Morecambe Bay (Lancaster)	7	0	0	0	2	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	1
NW Lancashire	46	4	1	7	12	3	3	0	5	2	5	2	2
S Lancashire	13	2	1	2	0	1	0	0	2	2	2	1	0
Total	183	12	6	21	26	19	14	9	16	18	21	12	9
Regional Total	640	58	32	70	55	72	51	48	53	51	66	41	43

Notes:

1. All data taken from notifications to the enhanced surveillance of tuberculosis programme organised by Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre (CDSC) Colindale and run on a regional basis by CDSC North West.
2. All data are provisional.
3. Data should not be used without express permission from CDSC North West.

Vehicle Fleets

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of vehicles each NHS trust renewed in their vehicle fleets, broken down by volume and percentage for each category of vehicle, type of power unit and/or type of fuel, in each of the last five years. [96594]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 10 February 2003]:* Reducing vehicle emissions is a key transport issue, which has been agreed as a priority across Government. Against a baseline year of 2002–03, all Departments are aiming by 31 March 2006 to reduce road transport vehicle carbon dioxide emissions by at least 10 per cent. and requiring at least 10 per cent. of all fleet cars to be alternatively fuelled.

Progress against these targets will be reported in the "Sustainable Development in Government" annual reports. The first full report against the Framework will be in 2003, reporting against the baseline year of 2002–03.

The National Health Service has a vehicle fleet of more than 40,000 vehicles but information in the format requested is currently not available.

Viagra

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on prescribing practice for Viagra. [97097]

Mr. Lammy: In 1999 we decided to constrain the spend on drug treatments for impotence to the approximate amount that was being spent on these treatments before the first oral treatment became available.

On 1 July 1999, regulations put into effect decisions made by the Government about the availability of drug treatments for impotence on general practitioner (GP) prescription on the national health service. GPs can write NHS prescriptions for patients with specific clinical conditions. These conditions are set out in Health Service Circular HSC 1999/148.

Health Service Circular HSC 1999/177 provides guidance on the identification and management within specialist services of the men diagnosed to be suffering from severe distress on account of their impotence.

Viagra and other drug treatments may be made available on private prescription from GPs for those men who do not meet the conditions specified in HSC 1999/148. As prescription only medicines they are subject to the legal controls on retail sale or supply which are set out in the Medicines Act 1968. They can only be sold or supplied at registered pharmacy premises by or under the supervision of a pharmacist in accordance with a doctor's prescription and they cannot be advertised to the public. The Medicines Control Agency's Enforcement Group investigates alleged illegal activity, including supply of prescription medicines via the internet.

Victoria Climbié

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his statement on 28 January, *Official*

Report, column 740, on the Victoria Climbié inquiry, if the hospital standards for children form part of the national service framework (NSF) for children; and if he will list the remaining standards to be included in the NSF, with the date for their publication. [96704]

Jacqui Smith: The first phase of the national service framework (NSF) for children, young people and maternity services will be published shortly, and will cover hospital services for children and young people.

The remaining areas to be covered in the NSF include services for disabled children, children in special circumstances, child and adolescent mental health, the health of all children and young people, medicines, maternity services and ill children which we are hoping to publish later this year.

Waiting Times (Dewsbury)

Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the *(a)* average waiting times and *(b)* number of people waiting were for referral to *(i)* cancer and (ii) heart specialists in the Dewsbury area in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [98222]

Jacqui Smith: Information on waiting times is published quarterly on the Department of Health website. This is broken down into both inpatient and outpatient waiting times by National Health Service trusts by consultant specialty. This information can be accessed at http://www.doh.qov.uk/waitinqtimes/index.htm

Waiting Times (Hull and East Riding)

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of patients were seen by a doctor or consultant within one hour of their arrival at accident and emergency departments in Hull and the East Riding in each of the last three years. [92910]

Jacqui Smith: The Department does not collect data on the number of patients seen by a doctor or consultant within one hour of their arrival at accident and emergency (A&E).

The NHS Plan set a new target for accident and emergency, to reduce the maximum wait in A&E from arrival to admission, transfer or discharge to four hours by 2004. In line with this target, data on total time in accident and emergency has been collected since August 2001.

In Quarter 2, 2002–03 64 per cent. of patients in Hull and East Yorkshire NHS Trust spent less than four hours total time in A&E.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Belfast International Airport (Security)

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if the Security Co-ordinating Committee at its meeting on 30 January endorsed the changed arrangements in relation to checkpoint 11 and checkpoint 3 at Belfast International Airport; and if he will make a statement. [99118]

Jane Kennedy: The proposal in relation to checkpoint 3 and checkpoint 11 at Belfast International Airport was endorsed by the Security Co-ordinating Committee on 30 January, subject to the outcome of a Department for Transport Cargo Inspection. It would not be appropriate to make any further comment as to the detail of the proposal.

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the distance in a straight line between *(a)* checkpoint 11 and checkpoint 3 and *(b)* Checkpoint 3 and the Airport cargo apron at Belfast International Airport. [99119]

Jane Kennedy: The distance in a straight line between checkpoint 11 and checkpoint 3 is 415 metres. Checkpoint 3 is situated right on the edge of the cargo apron.

Consultancy

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much *(a)* his Department and *(b)* each agency and non-departmental public body spent on external consultancy in each year from 1995–96 to 2002–03 (planned); and if he will make a statement. [92244]

Jane Kennedy: In the Northern Ireland Office the total reported expenditure on the use of consultants in each year from 1995–96 to 2002–03 (planned) is as follows:

Northern Ireland Office expenditure on consultants

£

	Department	*Agencies*
1995–96	403,000	185,000
1996–97	309,000	253,000
1997–98	352,035	99,303
1998–99	479,897	469,271
1999–2000	702,223	604,894
2000–01	463,569	1,040,189
2001–02	2,248,572	639,015
2002–03	2,588,864	[1]93,391

[1] Full year estimate on spend to date.

Note:

Figures for NDPBs are not available.

In the Northern Ireland Administration the total (reported) expenditure on use of consultants in each year from 1995–96 to 2002–03 (planned) is as follows:

Northern Ireland Administration expenditure on consultants

	£
1995–96	26,191,196
1996–97	19,788,714
1997–98	10,458,511
1998–99	10,369,465
1999–2000	9,193,016
2000–01	13,011,780
2001–02	16,958,809
2002–03[1]	14,604,661

[1] Planned

Note:

Agencies and NDPBs are included in the above figures which are based on returns from Departments.

Decommissioning

Stephen Hesford: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on decommissioning of terrorist weapons. [95775]

Jane Kennedy: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington, North (Helen Jones) on 5 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 260.

Operation Ore

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people in Northern Ireland are being investigated as a result of information received from Operation Ore; and how many have been arrested. [97639]

Jane Kennedy: There are currently 39 people being investigated by PSNI as a result of information received from Operation Ore. To date there have been four arrests and one person charged.

Paper Supplies

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland who the suppliers are of his Department's *(a)* paper and *(b)* paper products. [91911]

Jane Kennedy: In the Northern Ireland Office paper and paper products are supplied by the following contractors:

Banner Office Supplies Ltd.

Guilbert Niceday

R. W. Pierce & Co.

In the Northern Ireland Administration paper and paper products are supplied by the following contractors:

Antalis Ltd.

Banner Office Supplies Ltd.

Bunzl Fine Paper (Europe) Ltd.

DMS

Donald Murray Paper

Guilbert UK Ltd.

Premier Paper

Robert Horne Group plc

United Paper Merchants Ltd.

Paramilitary Crime

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, how many crimes have been committed by *(a)* Loyalist and *(b)* Republican paramilitary organisations in Northern Ireland, (i) since the signing of theBelfast Agreement and (ii) since 1 January 2002, broken down by category of crime. [98394]

Jane Kennedy: The following table provide details of the number of crimes carried out by Loyalist and Republican paramilitary organisations since the Belfast Agreement to 12 February 2003 and from 1 January 2002 to 12 February 2003.

Security situation statistics

	By Loyalist	*By Republican*	*Other/Not Known*	*Total*
(i) 10 April 1998 to 12 February 2003				
Number of deaths as a result of the security situation[1]	50	47	1	98
Number of shooting incidents[2]	809	360	146	1,315
Number of bombing incidents[3]	678	134	36	848
Number of casualties as a result of paramilitary style assaults	427	243	N/a	670
Number of casualties as a result of paramilitary style shootings	417	223	N/a	60
(ii) 1 January 2002 to 12 February 2003				
Number of deaths as a result of the security situation[1]	12	4	—	16
Number of shooting incidents[2]	250	116	25	391
Number of bombing incidents[3]	151	48	3	202
Number of casualties as a result of paramilitary style assaults	96	51	N/a	147
Number of casualties as a result of paramilitary style shootings	136	62	N/a	198

[1] Includes all deaths due to the security situation.

[2] The following types of incidents are included:
—Shots fired by terrorists;
—Shots fired by the Security Forces;
—Paramilitary style attacks involving shootings;
—Shots heard (and later confirmed);
—Other violent incidents where shots are fired (e.g. armed robbery).

[3] An individual bombing incident may involve one or more explosive devices. The devices recorded include explosions and defusings. Incidents involving hoax devices, petrol bombings or incendiaries are excluded.

Note:
Statistics which include figures for 2002 and 2003 are provisional and may be subject to minor amendment.

Police Complaints

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many complaints against the police were received by the ICPC and Police Ombudsman in each year since 1994; how many were upheld; how many case papers were sent to the Director of Public Prosecutions; how many prosecutions were initiated; how many were successful; how many internal disciplinary proceedings were initiated; and how many led to action being taken. [94420]

Jane Kennedy: I have asked the Police Ombudsman and the Executive to provide this information and once that is available I will write to my hon. Friend and place copies in the Libraries of the House.

Police Service

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether the Chief Constable of Northern Ireland may recruit differential numbers of Protestants and Catholics if a differential number of applicants succeed through to the final stage of the process; and if he will make a statement. [97892]

Jane Kennedy: Section 46(1) of the Police Northern Ireland Act 2000 requires the Chief Constable to appoint equal numbers of Catholics and non-Catholics from the pool of qualified candidates. This is the case regardless of whether there are differential numbers of Catholics and non-Catholics in the pool.

However, on any occasion where he is satisfied that the number of trainees required by the Chief Constable could not otherwise be appointed, the Secretary of State is empowered, under sections 46(2) and 46(3) of the Act, to set aside the 50:50 arrangement, by order in Parliament. Before making any such order, the Secretary of State is obliged to consult the Northern Ireland Policing Board.

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how the number of applications for employment in the Police Service of Northern Ireland changed in the year after the introduction of the 50/50 rule; what the figures were for the year immediately prior to the introduction of the 50/50 rule; and if he will make a statement. [97893]

Jane Kennedy: Two recruitment competitions for the Royal Ulster Constabulary were run in 1998. Applicant figures were as follows:

Launch date	*Total applicants*
March 1998	2,825
November 1998	3,359

There was no further recruitment to the police until 2001. Applicant figures for the two recruitment competitions for the Police Service for Northern Ireland run in that year, in accordance with the 50:50 recruitment arrangements, were as follows.

Launch date	Total applicants
February 2001	7,518
September 2001	4,915

In their first year of operation, the 50:50 recruitment arrangements enabled the appointment of over 500 police trainees, well in excess of the 370 recommended by the Patten Report.

Written Questions

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he will reply to the questions tabled on 27 January by the hon. Member for Thurrock, refs 94450 and 94503; and what the causes are of the delay in replying. [99116]

Jane Kennedy: The answer to parliamentary question ref. 95540 was issued on 11 February 2003, the named day specified by my hon. Friend, but it was not printed in the *Official Report*. It has now been printed—24 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 8W.

On question ref. 94503 officials are currently endeavouring to trace the relevant records, some of which date back to 1994. I will reply as soon as possible.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 26 February 2003

PRIME MINISTER

Bali Bombing Report

Roger Casale: To ask the Prime Minister when he will respond to the Intelligence and Security Committee's Inquiry into Intelligence, Assessments and Advice prior to the terrorist bombings on Bali on 12 October 2002. [99878]

The Prime Minister: I am today laying before the House the Government's response to the Intelligence and Security Committee's Report.

DEFRA

Combined Heat and Power

Mr. David Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the level of grant which would need to be provided to householders to enable them to install a micro-combined heat and power plant instead of a high-efficiency boiler without incurring additional costs; what the carbon dioxide savings from such an installation would be; and what the savings to the householders' fuel bills would be [98668]

Mr. Morley: At present it is not possible to accurately estimate the level of grant needed or the savings in carbon dioxide or fuel bills as, to date, no manufacturer has brought a fully trialled and tested micro combined heat and power product on to the market.

Energy Generation

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her policy is on encouraging industry to invest in developing *(a)* micro combined heat and power, *(b)* domestic heat pumps and *(c)* other technology that could reduce emissions of CO2 in the long term [98670]

Mr. Morley: Government is keen to encourage the development of low carbon technologies. We are working closely with industry in fora such as the Distributed Generation Co-ordination Group to remove any technical or legislative barriers to the development of micro-CHP. We will also support field trials designed to evaluate the benefits of micro-CHP. In addition, the Carbon Trust supports the development of a low carbon economy in the UK and their Low Carbon Innovation Programme provides loans, grants and financing for a wide range of innovative low carbon projects, which can include domestic heat pumps, micro-CHP and other technologies.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, has also taken vigorous action for the promotion of renewable energy generation, including the introduction of the Renewables Obligation, the setting up of substantial capital grants schemes, expanded provision for research, and the promotion of regional plans and targets.

Agricultural Exports

Mr. Roger Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs pursuant to her answer of 20 January to the hon. Member for St. Ives (Andrew George), *Official Report*, column 93W, on agricultural exports, if she will place a copy of *(a)* the letter from the Minister of State for International Trade and Investment and *(b)* the ERM Consultancy report in the Library. [97925]

Ms Hewitt: I have been asked to reply. I have placed a copy of the ERM Consultancy Report in the Libraries of the House. However I will not publish the letter from my noble Friend, Minister of State. It is not the practice to publish such letters, under Exemption 2—Internal advice anddiscussion, of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Cetaceans

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs with which European fisheries ministers she has had discussions regarding cetacean bycatch in the last 12 months; and what the outcome of each communication was. [96734]

Mr. Morley: I have raised this issue several times with Commissioner Fischler, both in person and in writing. Most recently, I wrote to him earlier this month, reinforcing the intervention made by the UK at the January meeting of the Agriculture and Fisheries Council and pressing in particular for wider observer coverage off the South West coast where a number of other member states' vessels pursue the pelagic fishery. I have also written to the French minister and spoken individually to ministerial colleagues from Spain, Germany and Denmark. The outcome has been, progressively, the inclusion of action on cetacean bycatch firstly in the Commission's roadmap on CFP reform and secondly in the action plan on environmental matters under the CFP, and publication of the Commission's discussion paper on the reduction of cetacean bycatch in December 2002. I shall continue to fund our scientific work and to press for action, with a view to securing concrete proposals from the Commission and then their adoption by the Council.

Flooding

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what financial assistance is available to councils in which areas are flooded in 2003. [98286]

Mr. Raynsford: I have been asked to reply.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has in place financial arrangements known as the Bellwin Scheme to assist Local Authorities, including police and fire authorities, in England in emergencies. (In Wales these arrangements are dealt with by the National Assembly for Wales which operates similar arrangements). Assistance is available to authorities to help with uninsurable clear-up costs following a disaster or emergency in their area which involves destruction of, or danger to, life or property. In March last year the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister wrote to all authorities reminding them of the existence of the scheme and advising them how to go about getting assistance under it.

Under this scheme authorities are themselves responsible for the first tranche of expenditure on emergency work. The amount each authority affected will be expected to find is just 0.2 per cent. of its annual budget. Expenditure above that will be eligible for 85 per cent. assistance from Government.

Radioactive Waste

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the volume of reprocessing radioactive waste that will arise over the next 10 years from the reprocessing of British Energy-owned spent nuclear fuel at Sellafield. [95267]

Mr. Meacher: There are contracts for the reprocessing of about 65 per cent, of the spent fuel from British Energy's advanced gas-cooled reactors. If all of the spent fuel was reprocessed, conditioned waste volumes are estimated to be a maximum of about 28,000 m^3 of low-level waste, 14,000 m^3 of intermediate-level waste and 470 m^3 of high level waste. An estimate of the amounts to be reprocessed in the next 10 years is not available.

Sharks

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the populations of *(a)* white, *(b)* hammerhead and *(c)* thresher sharks in each of the last 15 years; and what measures her Department is taking to protect shark populations. [98001]

Mr. Morley: The Department has made no assessment of populations of white, hammerhead or thresher sharks, as these species are rare in UK waters. I am concerned at the decrease in shark populations, and so have been working to protect sharks at national and international level. In particular I have pressed for early adoption of a strict measure based on the Commission's welcome proposal to restrict shark finning; I have also introduced measures to protect the basking shark under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, and secured improved international protection for basking sharks through strengthened CITES listing.

Tangerine Advertising

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on European Union funding for the advertising of tangerines. [98419]

Mr. Morley: In 2001 a programme for the promotion (including advertising) of oranges, Clementines, and mandarins in Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic, Switzerland, Romania and Bulgaria was approved under Council Regulation 2702/1999 (measures to provide information on, and to promote, agricultural products in third Countries). In 2002 a programme for the promotion, within the European Union, of oranges and Clementines was approved under Council Regulation 2826/2000 (information and promotion actions for agricultural products on the internal market). The Community contribution will have been 50 per cent. of the costs for both programmes.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Iraq

7. **Mr. Huw Edwards:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the humanitarian consequences of war against Iraq, with special reference to medical aid. [98733]

Clare Short: The Iraqi people are already very vulnerable, their coping strategies worn away by years of misrule. Any disruption to their current situation could lead to a serious humanitarian crisis. The Government is committed to minimising the suffering of the Iraqi people. In the event of military action a key priority will be to re-establish critical humanitarian infrastructure as quickly as possible, including the Iraqi hospitals, clinics, sanitation facilities and water treatment plants which already suffer from a terrible lack of maintenance. The medical risks of the use of chemical and biological weapons are horrendous. Most traditional deliverers of medical aid are not adequately prepared for the worst case scenarios.

11. **Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when she last met representatives of the Kurdish people to discuss human rights in Iraq. [98737]

Clare Short: The Foreign & Commonwealth Office regularly meets with representatives of the Kurdish people to discuss a wide range of issues, including human rights.

Southern Africa

8. **Tom Brake** [illegible] ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on humanitarian aid to southern Africa. [98734]

Clare Short: Southern Africa continues to suffer from a major humanitarian crisis. 14.4 million people in six countries receive help from the international community. More than half of these are in Zimbabwe, where UK programmes alone are feeding almost 2 million people.

The international response to this crisis has prevented large-scale deaths and we are now confident that adequate supplies are available until the April harvests and that the position in many of these countries will improve. However, the disastrous economic policies in Zimbabwe mean that massive food aid will still be needed there.

10. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when she next expects to meet Commonwealth colleagues to discuss international aid efforts to Zimbabwe. [98736]

Clare Short: I have no current plans to discuss international aid efforts with commonwealth colleagues. The international community is responding to the humanitarian crisis within the context of a UN coordinated effort. I have recently discussed the crisis with the UN Secretary General's Special Envoy, Mr James Morris. I have also written to OECD colleagues to urge further support.

Afghanistan

12. **Mr. John Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the level of aid pledged by the international community for the reconstruction of Afghanistan. [98738]

Clare Short: The needs assessment done quickly in late 2001 has now been refined in the National Development Framework (NDF). A sustained international effort is required.

At the donor conference held in Tokyo in January 2002, the international community pledged $4.5 billion for the reconstruction of Afghanistan. Pledges covered periods of between 1 and 5 years. Since Tokyo, almost $2 billion has been disbursed. The Development Forum scheduled for mid-March will present the NDF for the coming 2–3 years and provide an opportunity for renewal of international support and multi-year pledges.

At Tokyo the UK pledged £200 million over five years for both humanitarian and reconstruction assistance. We have already disbursed £65 million in the current financial year, and remain committed to Afghanistan in the long term.

Water Supplies (Developing Countries)

13. **Paul Goggins:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what action she is taking to improve the availability of clean and affordable water in developing countries. [98739]

Clare Short: My Department recognises the key role that water plays in poverty reduction and is committed to assisting those in the developing world to assess and manage their water resources in a more equitable and sustainable way. Currently, 1.2 billion people globally have inadequate access to safe water and the situation is likely to worsen by 2025 when nearly two-thirds of the world's population will be living in countries of significant water stress. My Department along with other members of the international community have strongly committed to improving access to drinking water and sanitation while working to strengthen the management of water resources for effective and equitable service delivery and these must now be implemented.

Education Projects

14. **Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much funding her Department is giving to education projects in overseas countries in 2002–03. [98740]

Clare Short: Figures for expenditure for this financial year—2002/03—are not yet available. However, it is expected that they will be comparable to expenditure for 2001/02.

Of DFID's bilateral aid programme allocable by sector, the amount spent on education projects in 2001/02 was £112 million. This figure represents expenditure on projects specific to the education sector but does not capture the full extent of our efforts as it excludes multi-sector projects and programmes, strategic funding to civil society organisations and budget support and balance of payments. Also excluded are activities funded through multilateral channels.

Contingency Reserve

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what her Department's Contingency Reserve was *(a)* in pounds sterling and *(b)* as a percentage of the annual DFID budget for each year from May 1997. [99315]

Clare Short: The size of DFIDs Contingency Reserve for each year since 1997 was:

(a) in pounds sterling (£ million)

1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–00*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
45	47	45	70	100	50

and

(b) as a percentage of DFIDs annual budget

1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–00*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
2.2	2.2	2.0	2.6	3.2	1.5

Fair Trade Fortnight

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what action her Department is taking to support Fairtrade Fortnight. [99360]

Clare Short: My department is providing £120,000 to the Fairtrade Foundation over three years (2001—2003) in support of its efforts to target new groups through its annual Fairtrade Fortnight campaigns. These help to raise consumer awareness of development issues in international trade as well as highlighting ways in which consumers can act to make a difference.

In addition, DFID has provided £168,930 over three years (from 1999 to 2002) in support of Fairtrade Foundation's year round media work, helping it to raise awareness of the "FT mark" and what it stands for.

Last year DFID also approved a project (at a total cost of £300,000) designed to address a recognised bottleneck within Fair Trade—namely the limited number of products for which international Fair Trade standards exist. The project aims to develop new Fair Trade product standards, secure the registration of new producer groups and help bring additional Fair Trade products to supermarket shelves over the next 2 years. The target is to increase the retail value of Fair Trade sales in the UK to over 100m per annum by 2004 and by so doing extend the benefits of Fair Trade to a greater number of producers in developing countries. By expanding the scale of Fair Trade activities, the project also aims to secure a sustainable future for the Fairtrade Foundation, so that its core operational costs (including the cost of subsequent promotional activities) can be fully funded from the income it receives from licensees.

Owing to travel commitments, I am unable to attend the launch of the Fairtrade Fortnight this year. However, the Fairtrade Foundation has invited the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Ministerial Travel

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many times since 2001 she has taken flights on departmental duties in the UK; how many of these were *(a)* charter flights, *(b)* first or club class and *(c)* by helicopter; and who accompanied her on each trip. [95387]

Clare Short: Since January 2001 I have taken three flights on departmental duties in the UK. They were business class. I have not taken any flights by charter or helicopter.

I was accompanied by my departmental Private Secretary in each case.

All travel was undertaken fully in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code and Travel by Ministers, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

DEFENCE

Aircraft Carriers

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions his Department has had with the French government regarding the sale to France of UK aircraft carrier designs; and if he will make a statement. [93348]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 27 January 2003]:* We have made clear to the French Government our view that the best way forward for United Kingdom/French co-operation on a range of carrier issues is at the industry-to-industry level. To facilitate the transition to such industry-to-industry co-operation, three official groups have been established and their work has been carried forward since the France/United Kingdom summit on 4 February 2003 and the UK CVF down-selection decision. This work includes potential future co-operation on procurement issues and information interchange. The last such meeting took place on 13 February 2003. During the course of discussions, we have provided France with some basic design information, to help them decide the best way forward for their own programme.

The carrier is also regularly mentioned in more general discussions between Ministers and other members of our two Ministries of Defence.

Camouflaged Clothing

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the amount of camouflaged clothing that has been issued to members of the Armed Forces that are on standby to go to the Gulf; and what the Government's policy is towards members of the armed forces purchasing driving licences prior to finding out if they will be driving vehicles. [98973]

Dr. Moonie: We are taking measures to ensure that our Armed Forces have all the equipment they need to do any tasks required of them. The specific information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Where a member of the Armed Forces is required to drive as part of his or her duties and does not already hold an appropriate licence, the cost of any licence or permit required will be met or reimbursed from public funds.

Depleted Uranium (Dundrennan)

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many rounds of depleted uranium ammunition are due to be fired during the current testing programme at Dundrennan firing range; over what period of time this firing will take place; what calibre of ammunition the DU rounds will be; what environmental safeguards have been projected and been implemented for this kind of testing; and if he will make a statement. [97046]

Dr. Moonie: 192 CHARM 3 depleted uranium rounds (120 mm anti-tank rounds) were fired at the Dundrennan range on 3–6 February 2003. With regard to environmental safeguards, I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 7 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 463W, to the hon. Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale (Mr. Duncan).

Fleet Readiness

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which Royal Navy warships *(a)* are and *(b)* are due to be placed in a state of extended readiness; and for what purpose in each case. [98232]

Mr. Ingram: HMS Bridport and RFA Sir Geraint are currently in extended readiness. HMS Triumph and HMS Glasgow are currently planned to go into extended readiness in 2004, and HMS Invincible in 2006. Decisions to place vessels in extended readiness reflect the capabilities that are required to meet current and contingent operational requirements. These plans are subject to regular review, and vessels that are in extended readiness may be reactivated periodically to cater for unforeseen contingencies and thus allow efficient maintenance of current fleet outputs.

Procurement

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many helicopters he plans to buy in the next three years, broken down by *(a)* type and *(b)* arm of the armed forces. [98293]

Mr. Ingram: We will take delivery of the outstanding 31 Apache Helicopters for the Army Air Corps during 2003 under an existing contract. In addition, contracts for the RAF to operate four Bell 412s in Cyprus and for the Army to operate three Bell 212s in Belize will come into effect this year, on a commercially owned, military registered basis.

It is likely that a number of further helicopter acquisition programmes will be approved over the next three years, but decisions have yet to be taken on the number and type of platform to be purchased or on their delivery schedules.

Smart Weapons

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions he has had with European allies on collaboration on targeting of smart weapons. [87929]

Dr. Moonie: I assume the hon. Member is referring to the Airborne System for Target Recognition, Identification and Designation (ASTRID), the embryonic European collaborative defence programme involving the United Kingdom, France, Italy and Spain. In September 2002 signature was obtained on the four nation Statement of Intent, this expresses a commitment to create a common programme through the development of a Joint User Requirement Document and a Memorandum of Understanding. Working level discussions to further both these initial objectives are continuing.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Electricity

Norman Baker: To ask the Solicitor-General what changes in unit payments for electricity have resulted from the switch by her Department to purchasing renewable energy which is exempt from the Climate Change Levy. [96483]

The Solicitor-General: A holding reply was given on 11 February 2003.

None of the departments for which the Attorney General is responsible—the Crown Prosecution Service, the Serious Fraud Office, the Treasury Solicitor's Department, HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate and the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers—have yet switched to purchasing renewable energy.

Service Delivery Agreement

Tony Wright: To ask the Solicitor-General when the *(a)* Crown Prosecution Service's, *(b)* Serious Fraud Office's and *(c)* Treasury Solicitor's Department's service delivery agreements for 2003 to 2006 will be published. [94110]

The Solicitor-General: *[holding answer 4 February 2003].*

The Crown Prosecution Service will publish its Strategic Plan for the period 2003–2006, and a Business Plan for 2003–2004, before the end of March 2003. These plans set out what the CPS will be doing to deliver its Public Service Agreement

The Serious Fraud Office will publish agreed service delivery targets before the end of March 2003.

The service delivery agreement for the Treasury Solicitor's Department will be published in April 2003 alongside its Business Plan for 2003–2004. The service delivery targets and how they will be met is a key feature of that Business Plan.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Iraq

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry pursuant to his Answer of 10 February 2003 to the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Prisk), *Official Report*, column 620W, on world oil prices, what estimate he has made of the effect of *(a)* a short conflict in Iraq and *(b)* a prolonged conflict in Iraq on the underlying supply and demand situation for oil. [99133]

Mr. Wilson: No decision has been taken to launch military action against Iraq. Iraqi oil production currently stands at around 2.5 million barrels per day only 3 per cent. of total world oil production and of which only around 1.5 to 2 million barrels per day is exported. There are a number of other factors such as the weather, supply from other countries, etc which affect the underlying demand and supply balance of the oil market: e.g. OPEC producers are likely to increase their production to cover any loss of Iraqi supply; seasonal oil demand is reducing; and the International Energy Agency has general arrangements in place to take international action, including release of stocks, in case of a supply disruption.

Severn Barrage

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what research has been completed on the Severn barrage. [98287]

Mr. Wilson: Between 1978 and 1994 the Government supported a number of studies under its Tidal Energy Research and Development Programme. Specifically, an assessment of the feasibility of a Severn barrage was published in 1981 as Energy Paper 46[1]. Between 1983 and 1985 an Interim Study[2] assessed the technical and financial viability of a Severn barrage leading to a further programme of research reported in 1989 as Energy Paper 57[3].

Between 1990 and 1993 further environmental and regional studies were carried out. In 2001 a study was commissioned to examine the merits for a re-appraisal of the Severn barrage. The report was published in early 2003 and can be seen at www.dti.gov.uk/energy/renewables/severn.shtml

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[1] Energy Paper 46 HMSO 1981 (ISBN 011 4109168 and 410919 2)

[2] Tidal Power from the Severn, STPG, 1986 (ISBN 07277 03587 and 0368 4)

[3] Energy Paper 57 HMSO 1989 (ISBN 0 11 412952 5)

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate she has made of the impact on the environment of the working time directive in respect of carbon dioxide emissions; and if she will seek a derogation from this Directive in respect of the quarrying and construction industries. [99142]

Alan Johnson: I have made no such assessment, having received no representations on the matter, and do not intend to seek any derogations on these lines.

Credit Cards

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures she is taking to ensure transparency in the credit card market. [93835]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarovicz), on 22 January 2003, *Official Report,* column 366W.

Fireworks

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what areas have been targeted for the pilot scheme targeting over-18s throwing fireworks in the street; and how many fixed penalty notices have been issued. [96972]

Mr. Denham: I have been asked to reply.

Penalty notices for 11 disorder offences, including that of throwing fireworks in the street, are being piloted in four police force areas: West Midlands, including the British Transport Police; Essex; North Wales; and Croydon division of the Metropolitan Police. The pilots will be evaluated prior to a decision being made on rolling out the scheme nationally. Detailed data on the numbers of penalty notices issued will be included in this report, which will be published.

Grant Allocations

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list *(a)* the grant schemes operated by her Department, and *(b)* the sums of money made available to stimulate new technology in *(i)* solar power, (ii) heat pumps used for space and water heating purposes, (iii) combined heat and power and micro-chip, (iv) micro-wind power, *(v)* bio-mass driven electricity generation and (vi) other low, or zero-carbon technologies used for generating heat or electricity. [98671]

Mr. Wilson: The technology stimulation schemes being operated by the Department and the sums of money available are set out as follows:

	£ million
Offshore wind electricity generation: (including £10 million from the New Opportunities Fund)	74
Biomass driven electricity and heat generation (including £36 million from the New Opportunities Fund; and £34 million for biomass heat)	66
First phase of Major Solar Photo voltaics (PV) Demonstration Programme	20
"Clear Skies" scheme for community and household projects (including solar water heating, heat pumps, micro-wind and micro-hydro)	10
Wave and Tidal Energy Demonstration Projects	5

The Department is also making available £19 million per year for the New and Renewable Energy programme which provides research grants for renewable energy projects.

DEFRA leads within Government on combined heat and power (CHP) and provides support, as set out as follows:

	£ million
Community Energy to install and refurbish community heating networks, mainly based on CHP	50
Energy Crops Scheme to establish energy crops for biomass heat, CHP and electricity generation and to set up producer groups for growers of short rotation coppice	29
Bio-energy infrastructure scheme to develop biomass supply-chains	3.5

In addition, the Carbon Trust's Low Carbon Innovation Programme can provide, inter alia, grants across a wide range of innovative low carbon projects.

LPG

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has received on the future growth of the market for automotive liquid petroleum gas. [98642]

Alan Johnson: Ministers and officials have regular contact with representatives of the Liquid Petroleum Gas (LPG) industry, (including those concerned with automotive LPG such as the LP Gas Association) vehicle manufacturers, and other stakeholders.

In the UK we have over 75,000 vehicles running on LPG, and the market is currently growing at a rate of some 30,000 vehicles per year.

TRANSPORT

Correspondence

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will respond to the request from the right hon. Member for Wokingham of 17 June 2002 for information held on the right hon. Member by the Department. [98715]

Mr. Spellar: The information requested was sent to the right hon. Member on 21 February 2003.

First North Western

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has collected about cancellations of rail services by First North Western Trains during the past 12 months. [99353]

Mr. Jamieson: In the last 12 months First North Western were scheduled to provide 438,735 train services of which 12,937 or 2.95 per cent. were cancelled. This figure does not include services which were withdrawn as part of a published emergency timetable.

Strategic Rail Authority

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how he reconciles the Strategic Rail Authority's goal of a 50 per cent. growth in passenger traffic between 2000–01 and 2010–11 with the Strategic Rail Authority's planning forecast, as reported in their Strategic Plan, that passenger rail travel will be 25 to 35 per cent. greater in passenger kilometre terms than it was at the beginning of the 10 year plan period. [98978]

Mr. Jamieson: 50 per cent. is a target. The SRA's Strategic Plan gives a snapshot of potential growth. 25–35 per cent. is a current forecast. It is liable to change.

Thames Gateway

Jon Cruddas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what additional allocations for transport infrastructure he has made to support the increase in the numbers of homes and new communities planned for the Thames Gateway London area, as set out in the Deputy Prime Minister's Sustainable Communities Plan. [98621]

Mr. Jamieson: Substantial improvements in transport in the Thames Gateway have already taken place, and significant additional resources are already committed or planned for further improvements.

We are now considering how far and to what timescale we should seek to develop the Thames Gateway further, including the funding implications of the infrastructure required and how those who benefit from new development might contribute to the cost of this infrastructure. We will set out in due course the level of development the Government would like to see in the Gateway and is prepared to support.

WALES

Annual Report

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much producing his Department's latest Annual Report cost; how many copies were printed; how many copies of it were sold at its cover price; to whom copies of the report have been provided free of charge; and how many copies were provided free of charge. [90893]

Peter Hain: The cost of producing the Department's latest Annual Report was £20,200; the number of copies printed is a matter for the Stationery Office; most copies which were sold are believed to have been bought at a discount by libraries and similar institutions with subscriptions for Command Papers; copies of the report have been provided to hon. and right hon. Members representing Welsh constituencies and some hon. and right. hon. Members with particular Welsh interests, some other Government Departments, the Welsh Assembly and internally within my Department; fewer than 100.

Departmental Consultations

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list consultations his Department has conducted since it was established; and when each consultation *(a)* opened and *(b)* closed. [97429]

Peter Hain: I refer the hon. Member to the answer my predecessor gave the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) on 26 September 2002, *Official Report*, column 209W.

Since that date consultations have taken place on:

the Department's draft Welsh Language scheme, opening on 19 August 2002 and closing on 11 October 2002

ombudsmen's services in Wales, opening on 4 December 2002 and closing on 7 February 2003

E-mail Addresses

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales by what e-mail address members of the public may contact *(a)* him and *(b)* each of the Ministers in his Department; and for each e-mail address if he will state *(i)* the date it became active and (ii) the number of e-mails received in each month since activation. [97446]

Peter Hain: Both I and the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State may be contacted at wales.office@wales.gsi.gov.uk

This address has been active since 1 November 2000. Statistics for the amount of mail received are not routinely kept. However in January 2003 it received 131 e-mails.

Gwydyr House

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when and by whom Gwydyr House headquarters were valued for the purposes of the National Asset Register; what his latest valuation of this property is; and if he will make a statement. [91700]

Peter Hain: Gwydyr House was valued on 31 March 2000 by GVA Grimley, Chartered Surveyors; £1.7 million.

Heritage Assets

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what sales of heritage assets and antique assets have been made by his Department since May 1997; if he will list other assets; and if he will estimate the total sales proceeds. [92411]

Peter Hain: No such sales have taken place since my Department was created in July 1999. As a non-executive Department, the Wales Office assets are restricted to its headquarters accommodation (a listed building) and furniture and other office equipment.

IT Contracts

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list IT contracts in his Department and its predecessors above £50 million in each of the last 10 years; what the inception date for each system was; when it became fully functional; when it became fully debugged; and what the cost of over-runs has been. [98998]

Peter Hain: I refer the hon. Member to the answer my predecessor gave my right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) on 17 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 125W.

The total cost will now be £64.4 million, reflecting the growth in the number of users over the life of the system.

Laptops

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many laptop computers were used by *(a)* Ministers and special advisers and *(b)* officials in his Department in each year since 1995; how many were *(i)* lost and (ii) stolen; what their cost was; and if he will make a statement. [98706]

Peter Hain: Since the creation of the Wales Office in 1999 there have been no losses or thefts of laptops. During the time of the Welsh Office, there was the loss of ancillary cabling equipment for a laptop total cost of which was £107.00.

There are currently two laptops allocated to Ministers and special advisers; two allocated to officials and one available for use when the Cabinet Office Briefing Room COBR has been convened.

Ministerial Meetings

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which overseas delegations and overseas ambassadors met Welsh Office Ministers in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [89950]

Peter Hain: Since the Wales Office was established on 1 July 1999, Ministers have met the following overseas delegations or ambassadors:

1999

Japanese Ambassador

American Ambassador

Belgian Ambassador

2000

Belgium Ambassador

Delegation from Lower Saxony, Germany

Delegation from Nigeria

Delegate from the American Embassy

Bavarian State Minister for Euro Affairs

2001

Delegations from the Government of the Czech Republic

Delegate from American Embassy

Hungarian Ambassador

Delegation from the Spanish Government.

Delegation from Slovakia

2002

Spanish Ambassador

Danish Ambassador

Slovakian Ambassador

Delegate from American Embassy

2003

Canadian High Commissioner

Delegation of Polish MPs

There were also receptions and other occasions where informal meetings may have taken place with overseas representatives, but no record of these meetings has been kept.

Ministerial Travel

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what his estimate is of the total expenditure by his Department on ministerial travel *(a)* in the UK and *(b)* abroad, in each year from 1995–96 to 2002–03 (estimated); and if he will make a statement. [92486]

Peter Hain: The information is as follows:

(a) Detailed information requested in respect of UK travel is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

(b) I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by the Minister of State, Cabinet Office on 22 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 334W.

Online Sales /Purchases

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what *(a)* products, *(b)* goods and *(c)* services were *(i)* bought and (ii) sold online by his Department in each of the last five years. [97447]

Peter Hain: None since the creation of my Department in July 1999.

Press Releases

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many press releases have been issued by his Department in each *(a)* year and *(b)* quarter from 1995–96 to 2002–03; and if he will make a statement. [92487]

Peter Hain: The Wales Office does not record its press release count on a quarterly basis.

In 1995–96, the Welsh Office issued 581 press releases; in 1996–97 549 press releases; in 1997–98 650 press releases; in 1998–99 774 press releases; in 1999–2000 776 press releases.

Since its creation in July 1999, the Wales Office has issued 30 press releases in 1999–2000; 100 press releases in 2000–01; 86 press releases in 2001–02; and 129 in 2002–03.

Public Spending

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what his estimate is of the real rise in the total of public spending on the Welsh Office between 1999–2000 and 2001–02; and if he will make a statement. [89959]

Peter Hain: Expenditure at 1999–2000 prices (as measured by the GDP deflator at market prices) was £1.485 million in 1999–2000 and £3.368 million in 2001–02, an increase of £1.883 million.

This increase primarily reflects the fact that the Wales Office was only in existence for three-quarters of 1999–2000 and was still recruiting its staff for much of the year.

Service Delivery Agreement

Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when the Wales Office's Service Delivery Agreement for 2003 to 2006 will be published. [94107]

Peter Hain: Rather than producing a separate Service Delivery Agreement, the Wales Office will cover its main elements in its departmental reports, which are published each spring.

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many statutory instruments have been issued by his Department in each calendar year since 1979. [89843]

Peter Hain: The Wales Office was formed on 1 July 1999. The information from 1999 onwards is as follows:

	Number
1999	1
2000	1
2001	4
2002	2

This excludes a number of Orders in Council the drafting of which is the responsibility of my Department and a number of statutory instruments of which my predecessor was a joint signatory.

Welsh Office Expenditure

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the expenditure of his Department on *(a)* the North Wales Child Abuse Tribunal and *(b)* the expenses of the Lord Lieutenant in the last year for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [89923]

Peter Hain: In 2001–02, expenditure on *(a)* the North Wales Child Abuse Tribunal was £66,000 and *(b)* Lords-Lieutenant's expenses were £17,000.

TREASURY

Aggregate Tax

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which quarries in Northern Ireland are paying aggregate tax, broken down by constituency. [99331]

John Healey: There are 112 quarry companies in Northern Ireland registered for aggregates levy. A breakdown by constituency is not available but these are broken down by county as follows:

Belfast—4

Antrim—14

Armagh—12

Derry—15

Down—23

Fermanagh—9

Tyrone—35

In addition there are quarries in Northern Ireland which are owned by companies in other parts of the UK for aggregates levy.

Life Insurance

Mr. Evans: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what reports he has received on *(a)* the policy of insurance companies regarding people who have recovered from cancer and who are seeking life insurance and *(b)* the impact of such policies on securing a mortgage. [99343]

Ruth Kelly: None. But if the hon. Member has specific concerns perhaps he would he write to me.

Retread Tyre Industry

Norman Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on discussions his Department has had with the retread tyre industry regarding the Climate Change Levy. [99232]

John Healey: As part of the normal process of contact with business, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Treasury ministerial team meet a variety of businesses and business organisations and hear a range of representations. As the Chancellor of the Exchequer said in his answer of 11 February 2003, *Official Report*, columns 114–15, in line with previous Administrations, it is not this Government's practice to provide details of the meetings and discussions they routinely have with a wide range of organisations.

Student Finance

Mr. Brady: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment his Department has made of the additional cost to the Treasury in each of the five years from 2006 if all Universities in England and Wales implemented the proposed graduate contribution at the highest level of £3,000 per annum in respect of all eligible students assuming *(a)* that student numbers remain at the current level and *(b)* that the Government achieves its target of 50 per cent. participation in higher education. [98631]

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to his answer of 6 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 396W, on higher education, what research his Department commissioned to conclude that the proposals included in the White Paper would have a positive impact on the economy; and if he will publish the research. [99127]

Mr. Boateng: The Treasury has not commissioned any external research as part of the formulation of the White Paper proposals. However as part of the process of policy development, the Government makes various analyses. In accordance with Exemption Two (internal discussion and advice) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information such advice is not usually disclosed.

Tax Returns

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment the Inland Revenue has made of the trends in revenues from *(a)* the special investigation, *(b)* late filing, *(c)* company non compliance, *(d)* pre SA intelligence work, *(e)* company aspect enquiries, *(f)* non business SA inquiries and *(g)* section SA investigations, non compliance and full business reviews; and if he will make a statement. [94879]

Dawn Primarolo: The total revenue from the Inland Revenue's work in these areas increased from £865 million in 1999–2000 to £990 million in 2000–01 and again to £1,090 million in 2001–02. The trends in revenue are therefore firmly upwards.

Tobacco Smuggling

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to his answer of 4 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 185W, on tobacco smuggling, what the costs of the research undertaken for *(a)* the 2000 report on tobacco smuggling and *(b)* the 2002 reports were; and if he will make a statement. [97251]

John Healey: A mixture of internal and external research was undertaken for the 2000 report "Tackling Tobacco Smuggling" and the two reports published by Customs and Excise in November 2002. The estimated cost to HM Customs and Excise of the external research used in "Tackling Tobacco Smuggling" is £55,000. The estimated cost to HM Customs and Excise of external research used in the two reports published by HM Customs and Excise in November 2002 is £100,000. No estimate is available of the cost of the internal research. The measures announced in "Tackling Tobacco Smuggling" were expected to yield additional revenues of £435 million (in 2000–01), £1,120 million (2001–02), £1,630 million (2002–03), and £2,015 million (2003–04).

Treasury Stress Audit

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the cost was of the HM Treasury stress audit carried out in 1999; and what plans there are to carry out another such audit. [93449]

Ruth Kelly: The stress audit carried out in 1999 cost 40,901.05. The Department will be carrying out a follow up audit in April 2003.

Unpaid Tax

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the amount of tax unpaid each year since 1995–96, broken down by *(a)* tax avoidance, *(b)* tax evasion, *(c)* late payment and *(d)* other causes; and if he will make a statement. [95429]

Dawn Primarolo: No reliable overall measure is available in relation to tax evasion and avoidance. In the last 10 years, in proportion to the tax involved, tax unpaid at the end of the Inland Revenue's accounting year has approximately halved, and tax remitted or written off has reduced from around 2 per cent. to around 0.3 per cent. The figures for tax unpaid and tax remitted or written off are set out each year in the Inland Revenue's Annual Report, copies of which are in the Library.

Working Families Tax Credit

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the tax burden is on a single earner family on average earnings with two children, claiming the working families tax credit. [98254]

Dawn Primarolo: As set out in Table 13.10 of the 2002–03 Tax Benefit Reference Manual, which is placed in the House of Commons Library, the direct tax burden on a single earner family on male mean earnings with two children was 18.7 per cent. in 2002–03, lower than it was in 1997–98 or any previous year since 1972–73.

Zambia

John Barrett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if it is his policy that increased multilateral debt relief for Zambia be dependent on the privatisation of *(a)* the Zambia National Bank, *(b)* the power utility Zesco and *(c)* the telephone company Zamtel. [98586]

John Healey: Multilateral debt relief for Zambia is provided through the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative. Under the HIPC initiative a country receives interim debt relief on payments due when it reaches Decision Point and subsequently the debt is irrevocably cancelled at Completion Point. The UK supports this internationally agreed policy.

To reach Decision Point and demonstrate its commitment to poverty reduction, a country must prepare an Interim-Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP). To reach Completion Point it needs to develop a full PRSP, and usually make progress in implementing it for one year.

The PRSP is drawn up by the country, with the participation of civil society, to show how debt relief and other resources will be targeted on reducing poverty. The country must also be on track with its IMF programme for which there will be a range of conditions, for example on macro-economic stability or public sector management.The IMF is committed to ensuring that the social impact of key macro-economic reforms is analysed to ensure that reforms are designed appropriately and negative consequences addressed. For example, the IMF carried out an analysis of the possible social impact of the privatisation of the Zambia National Bank and the Zambian Government plans to develop a strategic plan that will consider the future of rural branches and design an appropriate institutional structure for rural services, which might include seeking technical and financial assistance from donors for the purpose.

Hence to reach Completion Point countries must demonstrate a commitment to poverty reduction and economic reform by meeting key conditions (or Completion Point triggers). These conditions may include privatisations or reforms that address the effectiveness and financing of parastatal companies, and thus support the country's strategy for reducing poverty.

For Zambia the key conditions, for multilateral debt relief through the internationally agreed HIPC initiative, include progress in combating HIV/AIDs, education and health sector reform along with macro-economic and structural reforms. The Completion Point triggers in relation to the Zambia National Bank and the power utility Zesco require the issuance of international bidding documents for the sale of a majority (controlling) interest. The telephone company Zamtel no longer has a domestic monopoly, and while the sale of a substantial share is part of Zambia's overall poverty reduction strategy it is not a Completion Point trigger.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Bail Conditions

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many offenders broke the terms of their bail conditions last year and were not recaptured; and what action he is taking to reduce this number. [96007]

Hilary Benn: In 2001, about 77,700 people who had been bailed to appear at court failed to do so, representing 13 per cent. of defendants at magistrates' courts and 10 per cent. of Crown Court defendants (13 per cent. overall). Figures are not available for what proportion of those failing to appear were subsequently re-arrested and brought back to court, or how many defendants broke the terms of bail conditions.

The Government is working with criminal justice agencies to reduce the number of defendants who fail to surrender to bail and to ensure that failure to surrender is dealt with robustly by the prosecution, the courts and the police. In particular we are examining what more can be done to ensure effective enforcement of bench warrants.

It is important that bail should be used appropriately, and the Government keeps the legislation relating to bail under review in order to ensure that it does everything possible to ensure this. The Criminal Justice Bill now before Parliament makes several changes, including extending the prosecution's right to appeal against a decision by magistrates to grant bail.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers whose applications are awaiting determination have received work permits in each of the last three years. [94481]

Beverley Hughes: Where an employer applies for a work permit for an overseas national who is already in the United Kingdom, the Home Office will first consider whether the application meets the criteria of the work permit arrangements before considering whether, under the Immigration Rules, the overseas national may be granted leave to remain for the purpose of work permit employment. If the overseas national has an outstanding application for asylum, the usual course would be to defer consideration of granting leave to remain for the purpose of work permit employment until the overseas national's asylum application was resolved.

However, the outcome of the initial consideration of the application against the work permit criteria is recorded on a separate database to that which holds the immigration application against the work permit criteria is recorded on a separate database to that which holds the immigration status and it is, therefore, not possible to match the data on these separate databases in order to provide the information requested.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will conduct a review of persons granted *(a)* exceptional leave to remain and *(b)* indefinite leave to remain in the last five years; if he will assess whether any such persons have breached the conditions of their leave as part of the review; and if he will make a statement. [98644]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 25 February 2003]*: Grants of exceptional leave to remain (ELR) are not normally subject to conditions, and indefinite leave to remain (ILR) cannot be made subject to conditions. The question of a breach of conditions attached to such leave does not therefore arise.

The cases of those granted ILR are reviewed if they come to serious adverse notice. The cases of those granted ELR are considered when they apply for further leave, or if they come to serious adverse notice in the meantime. It would be impractical to review all grants of ILR and ELR made in the past five years but we will continue to review individual cases where appropriate.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staff in *(a)* his Department and *(b)* other bodies are working (i) full-time and (ii) part-time in connection with the removal of rejected asylum seekers from the UK. [98647]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 25 February 2003]*: The Home Office liaises with a number of different Government Departments and external agencies when dealing with the removal of failed asylum seekers. For example we have links with the Lord Chancellor's Department, Police, Inland Revenue, Department of Works and Pensions and local authorities.

In total, 12,155 staff work within the Immigration and Nationality Directorate. There are 3,969 staff working within the Integrated Casework Directorate, which deals with casework and decision making for asylum, after-entry, nationality and work permits, and 6,213 in the Immigration Service.

We estimate that around 1,220 full time equivalents are working on direct operational activity and 1,260 providing support to operational activity. Around a further 170 full time equivalents are working on intelligence and 160 on contact management.

A breakdown of how many staff both in the Department and in other agencies specifically dealing with failed asylum claims may be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Community Sentences

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of *(a)* men and *(b)* women serving community sentences in the last two years breached the terms of their sentence. [93303]

Hilary Benn: The information requested for England and Wales for the years 2000 and 2001 is contained in the table.

Data for 2002 is not yet available.

Offenders whose breaches[1] of original community sentence or order were proved to the satisfaction of the court by type of sentence or order breached and the proportion breaching original orders—England and Wales

Numbers and percentages

	2000			2001		
	Male	*Female*	*Total*	*Male*	*Female*	*Total*
Number of offenders breaching orders						
Community rehabilitation order[2]	10,699	2,759	13,458	10,512	2,816	13,328
Supervision order	741	142	883	968	170	1,138
Community punishment order[2]	15,956	1,375	17,331	14,805	1,314	16,119
Attendance centre order	1,332	127	1,459	870	105	975
Community punishment and rehabilitation order[2]	6,457	620	7,077	6,279	638	6,917
Curfew order	409	64	473	674	87	761
Reparation order	38	5	43	127	42	169
Action plan order	102	19	121	340	75	415
Drug treatment and testing order	35	3	38	614	109	723
Total community sentences	35,769	5,114	40,883	35,189	5,356	40,545

Offenders whose breaches[1] of original community sentence or order were proved to the satisfaction of the court by type of sentence or order breached and the proportion breaching original orders—England and Wales

Numbers and percentages

			2000			*2001*
	Male	*Female*	*Total*	*Male*	*Female*	*Total*
Number of offenders sentenced						
Community rehabilitation order[2]	44,271	12,188	56,459	46,295	12,022	58,497
Supervision order	9,711	1,845	11,556	9,330	1,753	11,083
Community punishment order[2]	44,517	5,466	49,983	44,052	5,712	49,764
Attendance centre order	6,459	582	7,041	5,364	460	5,824
Community punishment and rehabilitation order[2]	17,300	1,941	19,241	13,199	1,463	14,662
Curfew order	2,325	272	2,597	3,467	396	3,863
Reparation order	3,382	602	3,984	6,746	1,229	7,975
Action plan order	3,678	678	4,356	7,229	1,421	8,650
Drug treatment and testing order	270	51	321	3,566	663	4,229
Total community sentences	131,913	23,625	155,538	139,878	25,119	164,997
Offenders breaching orders as a percentage of offenders sentenced[3]						
Community rehabilitation order[2]	24	23	23	23	23	23
Supervision order	7	7	7	10	9	10
Community punishment order[2]	36	26	35	33	24	32
Attendance centre order	18	20	19	15	20	15
Community punishment and rehabilitation order[2]	36	31	35	41	37	41
Curfew order	22	28	23	23	26	24
Reparation order	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
Action plan order	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
Drug treatment and testing order	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
Total community sentences	28	23	27	28	23	27

[1] Breaches cover the commission of further offences or the breaking of other conditions laid down in the orders. Examples of such "other conditions" include, among other things: Requirements as to residence; to participate in or refrain from specified activities; attendance at probation centre; to undergo treatment for medical condition or drug/alcohol dependency.

[2] New names for these community sentences came into force in April 2001. Community rehabilitation order was previously probation order, community punishment order was previously community service order and community punishment and rehabilitation order was previously combination order.

[3] An approximation to the breach rate because offenders breaching in one year may have been given the sentence or order in an earlier year. The average of the number of sentences for the year indicated and in the previous year has been used as the denominator to provide a better estimate.

[4] not available. (These orders have not been available for a sufficient length of time for a breach rate to be calculated. Such orders have also been excluded from the breach rate for 'Total Community Sentences').

Joint Enterprise (Murder)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to propose amendments to the Criminal Justice Bill to deal with the use of joint enterprise to reduce a charge of murder by parents or carers of children to a charge of child cruelty. [97858]

Hilary Benn: We are considering what measures may be needed to deal with Joint Enterprise, in addition to those already contained in the Bill. The legislative timetable may not permit the measures to be finalised in time for inclusion in the Criminal Justice Bill. If this is the case, we will legislate at the earliest opportunity.

Memorials (Safety)

Mrs. Dean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what guidance has been given to local authorities about the safety-testing of non-monolithic memorials without approved ground anchor fixing; [98951]

(2) what action he plans to take to ensure that new memorials are installed to the code of practice produced by the National Association of Memorial Masons. [98950]

Hilary Benn: As I explained in my reply to the hon. Member for Westbury (Dr. Murrison) on 27 January 2003, *Official Report*, Column 622W, we hope to be in a position to issue appropriate guidance later this year in the light of the consideration currently being given to these matters by a Home Office-chaired group of relevant representative and professional organisations.

Overseas Students

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which overseas students paying the full overseas student fee are required to re-register home addresses under the foreign national rules; and why they are required to do so. [99091]

Beverley Hughes: Overseas students who are "relevant foreign nationals" and who have been granted leave to enter or remain in the United Kingdom for a period exceeding six months are normally required to register with their local police force, and to notify them of any subsequent change to their home address. The purpose of the registration scheme is primarily to provide the Security authorities with information about foreign nationals. Countries whose citizens are "relevant foreign nationals" for the purposes of the scheme are listed at Appendix 2 to the Immigration Rules (HC395), as amended by Cm3953.

Police Authorities

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the budgets of police authorities over each of the last five years. [91884]

Mr. Denham: Information on police authority budget requirements in England and Wales for the last five years and annual percentage changes are set out in the table. Police Authorities have until 1 March 2003 to set their budget requirements for 2003–04.

	1998–99 (£ m)	*1999–2000 (£ m)*	*% change*	*2000–01 (£ m)*	*% change*	*2001–02 (£ m)*	*% change*	*2001–02 (£ m) Adjusted*	*2002–03 (£ m)*	*% change*
Avon and Somerset	164.8	173.3	5.2	181.2	4.6	189.7	4.7	185.6	196.1	5.7
Bedfordshire	61.3	63.4	3.4	66.8	5.4	70.7	5.8	69.2	72.6	4.9
Cambridgeshire	70.8	75.2	6.2	79.5	5.7	84.1	5.8	82.3	90.8	10.4
Cheshire	105.0	111.1	5.8	115.1	3.6	121.8	5.8	119.1	125.0	4.9
City of London	57.3	57.1	-0.3	57.9	1.4	59.7	3.1	58.5	60.4	3.2
Cleveland	79.3	83.3	5.0	86.5	3.8	90.7	4.9	88.8	95.7	7.8
Cumbria	61.9	64.5	4.2	67.4	4.5	70.6	4.7	69.1	72.7	5.2
Derbyshire	98.8	106.5	7.8	111.1	4.3	117.0	5.2	114.4	123.6	8.0
Devon and Cornwall	164.7	175.9	6.8	182.4	3.7	191.1	4.8	186.9	198.4	6.1
Dorset	72.6	77.4	6.6	81.0	4.7	84.6	4.4	82.7	87.9	6.2
Durham	77.0	81.3	5.6	84.0	3.3	87.7	4.3	85.8	89.2	4.0
Dyfed Powys	52.8	55.7	5.5	59.0	5.9	62.9	6.6	62.3	65.3	4.8
Essex	163.6	169.5	3.6	183.1	8	194.8	6.4	190.6	198.5	4.1
Gloucestershire	62.4	66.0	5.8	68.6	3.9	72.2	5.2	70.6	75.0	6.2
Gr. Manchester	365.7	382.5	4.6	393.6	2.9	411.1	4.4	402.3	415.3	3.2
Gwent	67.9	71.4	5.2	76.1	6.6	80.7	6	79.9	84.4	5.6
Hampshire	187.1	196.5	5.0	204.7	4.2	216.2	5.6	211.5	227.5	7.6
Hertfordshire	96.0	101.6	5.8	121.2	19.3	129.3	6.7	126.5	132.7	4.9
Humberside	110.0	114.3	3.9	118.9	4	128.2	7.8	125.4	131.6	4.9
Kent	176.1	184.2	4.6	193.1	4.8	206.7	7	202.2	214.6	6.1
Lancashire	174.4	181.3	4.0	189.6	4.6	198.0	4.4	193.7	202.0	4.3
Leicestershire	101.1	106.3	5.1	110.2	3.7	116.4	5.6	113.9	122.6	7.6
Lincolnshire	65.8	69.7	5.9	72.6	4.2	76.1	4.8	74.4	77.1	3.7
Merseyside	239.6	247.0	3.1	253.7	2.7	271.7	7.1	265.9	268.6	1.0
Metropolitan Police	1,777.5	1,836.2	3.3	1,830.0	-0.3	1,980.1	8.2	1,941.9	2,037.7	4.9
Norfolk	81.0	86.9	7.3	91.5	5.3	98.4	7.5	96.3	104.4	8.4
Northamptonshire	66.1	70.4	6.5	73.4	4.3	76.8	4.6	75.1	81.6	8.6
Northumbria	202.6	212.6	4.9	218.4	2.7	227.6	4.2	222.7	228.6	2.6
North Wales	75.2	79.6	5.9	84.0	5.5	89.5	6.5	88.5	93.5	5.6
North Yorkshire	74.4	78.0	4.8	81.0	3.8	85.9	6	84	93.1	10.9
Nottinghamshire	122.9	129.6	5.5	133.9	3.2	140.3	4.9	137.2	145.2	5.8
South Wales	166.9	170.0	1.8	179.1	5.4	188.9	5.5	187.0	195.0	4.3
South Yorkshire	165.1	173.3	5.0	179.7	3.7	187.2	4.2	183.1	191.4	4.5
Staffordshire	117.2	122.2	4.3	127.0	3.9	134.3	5.7	131.3	137.0	4.3
Suffolk	65.8	69.9	6.2	72.9	4.3	77.6	6.4	75.9	81.2	6.9
Surrey	88.8	93.4	5.2	119.9	28.4	122.4	2.1	119.7	128.6	7.4
Sussex	161.4	168.0	4.1	174.5	3.9	183.9	5.4	179.9	189.8	5.5
Thames Valley	217.4	229.1	5.4	238.3	4	252.1	5.8	246.6	259.3	5.1
Warwickshire	52.8	55.9	5.9	58.9	5.4	62.4	5.9	61.	65.8	7.8
West Mercia	110.3	116.5	5.6	125.7	7.9	133.2	6	130.3	144.4	10.8
West Midlands	367.2	380.9	3.7	394.6	3.6	410.7	4.1	401.8	415.5	3.4
West Yorkshire	278.2	289.1	3.9	301.4	4.3	314.1	4.2	307.3	323.9	5.4
Wiltshire	65.6	68.9	5.0	72.0	4.5	75.6	5.0	74.0	77.6	4.8
Total	7,132.40	7,445.50	4.4	7,713.4	3.6	8,173.0	6.0	8,005.30	8,421.2	5.2

Police Pension Funds

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of the budget of each police force in England was spent on pension funds in 2002–03. [98903]

Mr. Denham: The proportion of Net Spending Requirement of each police authority in England estimated to be spent on police pensions in 2002–03 is as follows. Information on civilian contributions is not held.

Police Pension Expenditure as Proportion of Net Spending Requirement in 2002–03

English authorities	*Proportion (percentage)*
Avon and Somerset	17.6
Bedfordshire	12.8
Cambridgeshire	12.8
Cheshire	14.1
Cleveland	15.6
Cumbria	16.6
Derbyshire	12.9
Devon and Cornwall	14.8
Dorset	15.2
Durham	13.3
Essex	13.4
Gloucestershire	15.5
Hampshire	12.3
Hertfordshire	10.9
Humberside	13.6
Kent	13.8
Lancashire	15.1
Leicestershire	13.6
Lincolnshire	17.5
Norfolk	12.7
Northamptonshire	10.7
North Yorkshire	17.0
Nottinghamshire	16.5
Staffordshire	14.1
Suffolk	15.0
Surrey	11.1
Sussex	15.7
Thames Valley	10.9

Police Pension Expenditure as Proportion of Net Spending Requirement in 2002–03

English authorities	*Proportion (percentage)*
Warwickshire	16.7
West Mercia	13.5
Wiltshire	12.1
Greater Manchester	16.5
Merseyside	17.4
Northumbria	15.3
South Yorkshire	13.4
West Midlands	13.0
West Yorkshire	15.4
City of London	16.5
Metropolitan Police	13.1
Total	14.1

Source:

CIPFA Police Statistics 2002–03 estimates, published September 2002.

Re-registration Fees (Foreign Nationals)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the re-registration fees for relevant foreign nationals are in each police authority area. [99094]

Beverley Hughes: The standard police registration fee of £34 applies to each police authority area. Relevant foreign nationals will generally only be charged a £34 fee for re-registration if they have been absent from the UK for more than one year.

Street Crime

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what proportion of street crime offenders with drug problems are fast-tracked into drug treatment services within 24 hours of their arrest or release from custody; [92111]

(2) what proportion of street crime offenders with drug problems who were fast-racked into drug treatment services within 24 hours of their arrest or release from custody have subsequently re-offended. [92115]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Tackling the causes of offending is an integral part of the street crime initiative. To this end, provision exists for those who are arrested for a street crime offence and who are drug dependent, whose offence is linked to their drug dependency and who are willing to access treatment to do so within 24 hours of release into the community (whether on bail, following release from custody, or on receipt of a community sentence following a custodial remand). Participation is voluntary and not all those misusing drugs make use of the scheme. Delays in accessing treatment beyond 24 hours can be explained in some cases by release occurring over a weekend or by offenders simply not keeping initial appointments.

Of those who have, to date 62 per cent. of the reported individuals entered treatment within 24 hours of release. 15 per cent. were seen within two to three days, and 21 per cent. were seen between four to seven days. The remaining three per cent. were seen between one to two weeks after release from custody.

Information on re-offending by those accessing drug treatment under the Street Crime Initiative is not available.

Work Permits

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to his answer of 10 February 2003, *Official Report,* column 535W, on permits, if he will break down the figures for 1996 to 2001 by applications granted *(a)* in country and *(b)* in the UK; and whether the dates referred to are calendar years. [99115]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 25 February 2003]:* The number of in-country and out-country work permits issued in the last seven years are given in the table:

Year	*In-Country*	*Out-Country*
1996	12,609	25,647
1997	14,219	30,739
1998	18,096	35,866
1999	21,048	39,695
2000	28,982	59,669
2001	47,755	73,072
2002	64,396	71,755

The dates referred to are calendar years.

Young Offenders

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to his Answer of 10 February 2003, *Official Report,* column 542W, on the intensive supervision and surveillance programme, how many young offenders have taken part in the intensive supervision and surveillance programme since 2001; and what the re-offence rate is. [98907]

Hilary Benn: 3,570 young people have started on the programme. Reconviction rates are not yet available. The programme is being evaluated by Oxford University: the final report with reconvictions is due in March 2004.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Education Spending

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the spending per head on pupils in Nottingham, North was in 1997; and what the spending per head was in the latest period for which figures are available [98326]

Mr. Miliband: The information requested is submitted to the Department according to local education authority areas. The available information for Nottinghamshire and Nottingham City local education authorities is contained in the following tables.

Real Terms: net current expenditure (after recharges) [1] *per pupil* [2] *in the pre-primary sector, maintained primary schools and maintained secondary schools in Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire local education authority areas, financial years 1996–97 to 2001–02 (real terms)* [3]

	Local education authority areas	*Pre-primary and primary*[4] *per pupil spend (£)*	*Secondary per pupil spend (£)*	*Total spend (£000s)*	*Total per pupil spend (£)*
Pre-LGR[5]					
1996–97	Nottinghamshire	2,210	2,960	384,590	2,520
1997–98	Nottinghamshire	2,160	2,890	376,180	2,460
Post-LGR[5]					
1998–99	Nottinghamshire	2,250	2,820	289,770	2,510
	Nottingham City	2,440	3,520	104,730	2,770
1999–2000	Nottinghamshire	2,320	2,810	299,410	2,540
	City of Nottingham	2,610	3,160	111,020	2,800
2000–01	Nottinghamshire	2,580	2,890	322,400	2,720
	Nottingham City	2,740	3,510	117,920	3,010
2001–02	Nottinghamshire	2,710	3,170	345,802	2,920
	Nottingham City	3,200	3,880	132,837	3,450

[1] NCE includes expenditure within schools and also that incurred centrally by LEAs.

[2] Financial year pupils are used. These are calculated from Annual Schools' Census data.

[3] The real terms figures have been calculated at 2001–02 prices, using December 2002 gross domestic product deflators.

[4] The spend per pupil figures for pre-primary/primary relates the net current expenditure (after recharges) in the pre-primary sector and maintained primary schools to the total number of financial year pupils who are educated in the maintained nursery and primary schools sector.

[5] Nottinghamshire LEA was subject to the Local Government Re-organisation in April 1998, and therefore, pre-LGR and post-LGR Nottinghamshire are not directly comparable.

Note:

Figures have been rounded to the nearest £10.

Source: 1996–97 to 1998–99 data were drawn from the education Revenue Outturn statements submitted to the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions. 1999–2000 and 2000–01 data were drawn from Section 52 (Table 3) outturn statements, which LEAs submitted to the DfES.

Cash Terms: net current expenditure (after recharges) [1] *per pupil* [2] *in the pre-primary sector, maintained primary schools and maintained secondary schools in Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire local education authority areas, financial years 1996–97 to 2001–02 (cash terms)*

	Local education authority areas	*Pre-primary and primary*[3] *per pupil spend (£)*	*Secondary per pupil spend (£)*	*Total spend (£000s)*	*Total per pupil spend (£)*
Pre-LGR[4]					
1996–97	Nottinghamshire	1,950	2,610	339,210	2,220
1997–98	Nottinghamshire	1,960	2,630	342,040	2,240
Post-LGR[4]					
1998–99	Nottinghamshire	2,110	2,630	270,710	2,340
	City of Nottingham	2,280	3,290	97,840	2,580
1999–2000	Nottinghamshire	2,220	2,690	286,481	2,430
	City of Nottingham	2,490	3,020	106,224	2,680
2000–01	Nottinghamshire	2,520	2,830	315,307	2,660
	City of Nottingham	2,680	3,440	115,330	2,950
2001–02	Nottinghamshire	2,710	3,170	345,802	2,920
	City of Nottingham	3,200	3,880	132,837	3,450

[1] NCE includes expenditure within schools and also that incurred centrally by LEAs.

[2] Financial year pupils are used. These are calculated from Annual Schools' Census data.

[3] The spend per pupil figures for pre-primary/primary relates the net current expenditure (after recharges) in the pre-primary sector and maintained primary schools to the total number of financial year pupils who are educated in the maintained nursery and primary schools sector.

[4] Nottinghamshire LEA was subject to the Local Government Re-organisation (LGR) in April 1998, and therefore, pre-LGR and post-LGR and post-LGR Nottinghamshire are not directly comparable.

Note:

Figures have been rounded to the nearest £10.

Source:

1996–97 to 1998–99 data were drawn from the education Revenue Outturn statements submitted to the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions. 1999–2000 and 2000–01 data were drawn from Section 52 (Table 3) outturn statements which LEAs submitted to the DfES.

Faith Schools

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what his policy is on the establishment of new faith schools; and how many new faith schools within the maintained sector are proposed. [88892]

Mr. Miliband: The Government believes parents should have a range of schools to choose from, including faith schools.

Decisions about opening new schools, including faith schools, are made locally by the School Organisation Committee for the LEA area, or by an independent Schools Adjudicator if the Committee cannot agree. We have been informed of proposals for 12 new faith schools that have been published since September 2001 and approved by School Organisation Committees.

Higher Education

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what evidence was assessed on the effect on credit ratings of increasing levels of graduate debt, in drawing up the proposals in the policy document, The Future of Higher Education; and if he will make a statement. [98135]

Mr. Charles Clarke: In setting the maximum level of the variable fee we considered carefully the level of contribution graduates would have to make after graduation. We did not commission specific research on the effect of credit ratings.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate he has made of the net financial *(a)* gain and *(b)* loss per student of his proposals, for students with family incomes of £10,000 pa, and for each additional £1,000 pa up to £80,000 pa, for each university and higher education institution. [94700]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Since this will depend on decisions by individual institutions over their fee levels and on students' own choices it is not possible to provide this kind of analysis.

We are planning to introduce a Higher Education Grant of £1,000 a year for students from lower income backgrounds starting in autumn 2004. The Government will also continue to provide a grant for tuition fees worth £1,100 in 2002/03 for students with family incomes of up to £20,000 and a proportion of that for those students whose family income is between £20,000 and £30,000.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will estimate the required shortfall in higher education shortfall funding; and if he will assess the impact of expanding the provision of higher education on the funding for higher education. [98630]

Mr. Charles Clarke: I have nothing to add on these matters to my statement on 22 January 2003 and the White Paper published on that day.

IT Training

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will set out the training given for the teaching of IT skills in the Post Graduate Certificate of Education *(a)* for IT specialists and *(b)* for general certificates. [98695]

Mr. Charles Clarke: All teachers should be competent in the use of information and communications technology (ICT). Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools' Annual Report has confirmed that most generalist courses of initial teacher training prepare trainees appropriately to make best use of ICT in the classroom and all newly-qualified teachers are required to pass a skills test in ICT before their qualification is recognised. It is also a requirement that candidates taking specialist courses of initial teacher training for secondary teachers of ICT must achieve degree-equivalent knowledge of that subject before Qualified Teacher Status can be awarded.

On 24 January, the Teacher Training Agency announced that it was making an additional £5 million available to support the training of teachers in ICT offered by schools, colleges and universities.

Online Sales/Purchases

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what *(a)* products, *(b)* goods and *(c)* services were *(i)* bought and (ii) sold online by his Department in each of the last five years. [97451]

Mr. Stephen Twigg *[holding answer 10 February 2003]:* During the last five years my Department has bought the following products, goods and services online:

official publications and books;
travel tickets via the framework contract;
hotel accommodation via the framework contract;
mobile phones;
PC's, laptops and computer servers;
installation of a computer network link;
maintenance of video conferencing equipment;
recruitment of temporary administrative and secretarial staff via the framework contract;
budget air/rail tickets direct from providers.

Additionally 17 per cent. of Departmental publications are ordered by the public via email, although the vast majority of these are free publications.

Secondary Education

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment he has made of *(a)* generic skills and *(b)* specialist learning in 14 to 19 secondary education. [98909]

Mr. Miliband: *(a) Generic skills*

Our recent statement '14–19 : opportunity and excellence' set out our vision for a 14–19 phase where all young people can choose from a range of courses and qualifications covering a wide range of general and specialist subjects and skills. Our statement specifically included the following measures on generic skills.

To help ensure that all young people are well-equipped in literacy, numeracy and computer skills we will introduce (from 2004–05 onwards) an entitlement for them to continue studying up to age 19 until they reach the standard of a good GCSE or the corresponding Level 2 key skill qualification. Those going on to higher education or professional study after 19 should be encouraged to achieve a Level 3 qualification in at least one of these skill areas.

We will invite the 14–19 working group, chaired by Mike Tomlinson, to look at how young people can develop the essential practical skills for life, and how the content of individual subjects and programmes could place a greater emphasis on analysis, problem solving and thinking skills, as well as the presentation and argument of conclusions. Practical and analytical skills are equally essential in adult life and in the workplace. Existing programme and subject requirements do not always sufficiently emphasise these skills.

In addition, "Skills for Life", the Government's strategy for improving adults' literacy and numeracy skills, identifies young adults as a priority group. We are determined to bring young people who leave school with poor literacy, language and numeracy skills back into learning. These skills are important prerequisites for young adults to find and keep work and overcome potential barriers to participating fully in society.

(b) Specialist learning

We have also asked the 14–19 working group to consider the appropriate balance between specialist and general skills in learning programmes for this age group. At present, we believe that for many young people who follow an academic path, particularly at ages 16—18, the range of studies is too specialised and narrow when compared with advanced level students in other countries. We want young people to be able to combine a broad range of studies with more specialist choices that meet their own individual interests and aspirations.

Specialist Schools Programme

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment he has made of the relationship between the specialist schools programme and the aim of diversity of provision; and if he will make a statement. [98906]

Mr. Miliband: Specialist schools are a key driver of the Government's plans to create a more diverse secondary education sector. Schools can currently apply for one of eight specialisms (or they can combine any two). In the secondary strategy document 'A New Specialist System' we introduced two new specialisms—Music and Humanities—and an option for rural schools to add a rural dimension to an existing specialism.

The Specialist Schools Application Guidance encourages headteachers and governing bodies to investigate which specialism is appropriate for them in the context of collaboration with other local secondary schools and their local education authorities (LEAs) in order to increase diversity and maximise the impact of specialist schools in the locality.

A significant number of LEAs have been working with their schools on developing a strategy for increasing their specialist provision. Excellence in Cities partnerships in particular, have played a significant role in nominating and deciding when schools should go forward for specialist status. The Diversity Pathfinders LEAs are developing and implementing models of diversity based on the Specialist Schools Programme.

At the beginning of February, 217 new specialist schools were designated across all eight specialims: 29 Arts, 28 Business & Enterprise, 4 Engineering, 14 Language, 26 Mathematics & Computing, 40 Science, 40 Sports and 29 Technology Colleges, and 7 schools with combined specialisms.

However, our aim of increasing diversity in the secondary sector goes beyond the Specialist Schools Programme. Academies, again with a special curriculum emphasis, will also contribute to diversity of provision. The first three academies opened in September 2002. We expect at least 33 to be open by 2006 and further academies to be opened beyond that. The Department are also encouraging new providers to come forward and offer new types of schools as they are needed. These providers will include: parents and community groups; private and charitable companies; voluntary groups including church and faith communities; those offering distinctive educational philosophies; and existing schools or consortia of schools.

Teacher Numbers (Derbyshire)

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teachers *(a)* left and *(b)* joined the teaching profession in (i) Derbyshire and (ii) England and Wales in each year since 1997. [98886]

Mr. Miliband: The table shows the numbers of teachers leaving[1] full-time or part time[2] service in the maintained schools sector and teachers entering or returning[3] to full-time or part-time teaching in the maintained schools sector.

The National Assembly for Wales is responsible for the supply of teacher data in Wales.

[1] Leavers are those who were in full-time or part-time teaching in the maintained schools sector immediately before the period shown, who were not in service in that sector at the end of the period shown. Teachers leaving are based on pension returns. Some teachers may have moved from known service to service not recorded on the teacher pension return. Some leavers will be taking career breaks and will return to service at a later date.

[2] Around 10 to 20 per cent. of part-timers may not be included.

[3] Those in service in the maintained schools sector at the end of the period shown who were not in service in that sector in England immediately before the period shown. Includes newly qualified entrants, those who deferred entry and those returning from breaks or transferring from outside the maintained schools sector in England.

	Leavers	*Entrants/ returners*
Derbyshire		
1 April 1997 to 31 March 1998[1]	640	500
1 April 1998 to 31 March 1999	340	500
1 April 1999 to 31 March 2000[2]	540	480
1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001	n/a[2]	n/a[2]

	Leavers	*Entrants/ returners*
England		
1 April 1997 to 31 March 1998[1]	39,050	37,900
1 April 1998 to 31 March 1999	31,910	36,470
1 April 1999 to 31 March 2000[2]	34,930	37,030
1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001	35,440	40,260

[1] Higher than usual numbers of premature retirements, following changes to the retirement regulations, contributed to the high levels of leavers in 1997–98.

[2] The most recent data available at LEA level are for 1999–2000.

Note:

n/a = not available.

Truancy

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate he has made of the number of persistently truant schoolchildren in Lancashire in the last year for which figures are available. [90975]

Mr. Miliband: It is not possible to estimate the number of persistently truant school children in Lancashire from the data we have available at present. The data for the national pupil absence survey is collected at school level and there is only one set of figures for each school, so that we cannot identify which children were persistently absent. Information on the characteristics of individual pupils cannot be deduced from this data. However, in 2001/02 there were 17,934 pupils that were absent for at least one half day due to unauthorised absence and the average number of half days they missed was 15.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Arms Exports (Algeria)

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to reintroduce a de facto embargo on the sale of military equipment and arms sales to Algeria. [98820]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Government closely scrutinise all export licence applications for Algeria according to the Consolidated EU and National Arms Export Licensing Criteria, taking into account the circumstances prevailing at the time. In particular, we would be likely to have concerns with any export that might be used for internal repression or affect regional stability.

British Council

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his estimate is of the cost to the British Council of the programmes *(a)* UK Today, *(b)* The Edge, *(c)* Beyond Babel-English on The World Stage, *(d)* London Fashion Week, *(e)* Breaking the Trade—The Abolition of Slavery in the British Empire and *(f)* Elizabeth II and the Commonwealth in the last year for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [99123]

Mr. MacShane: There was no cost to the British Council for these TV programmes.

They were made available to the British Council free of charge in order to use overseas for English language training and for the promotion of the UK.

British Prisoners Overseas

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in how many cases of British nationals convicted abroad since 1997 the Government have intervened to seek release or reduction in sentence; and how many of these people were *(a)* white and *(b)* non-white. [98456]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) changed its clemency policy towards British nationals detained overseas in May 2001. Under the new policy, HMG will now consider supporting appeals on compassionate grounds, where there is prima facie evidence of a miscarriage of justice, or where the prisoner is a minor. An appeal for clemency is a request to the detaining state to release the prisoner unconditionally, not reduce the original sentence. Since the new policy came into effect, we have supported appeals on behalf of 15 British nationals. The FCO does not hold statistics on representations made before the introduction of the new clemency policy. Nor does it record the ethnic origin of those who are offered consular assistance.

As a general rule, HMG will lobby against the death penalty imposed on any British national overseas. In this instance, HMG is not appealing for unconditional release, but for the death penalty to be commuted to imprisonment. We have supported 11 such cases since May 2001.

Other than lobbying against the death penalty, HMG would not normally appeal for a reduction in sentence. This is on the basis that states must recognise the rights of other sovereign states to sentence according to their own laws. However, HMG would consider making representations to a sentencing state if a British national appeared to have been harshly sentenced purely because of nationality. There have been no instances of this since at least May 2001.

The welfare of British nationals detained overseas is of primary concern to the FCO. We ensure that prisoners are visited regularly and we raise any concerns that we, prisoners or their relatives may have about their treatment or the conduct of their trial. As a last resort, when all other options have failed, we will consider supporting an appeal for clemency under the criteria outlined above.

British Victims Overseas

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many cases the British Government have dealt with involving British nationals abroad since 1997 who have *(a)* disappeared, *(b)* been murdered or suspected of being murdered, *(c)* been kidnapped or held hostage and *(d)* been incarcerated, broken down by country. [98458]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The information is as follows:

(a) Data on cases of British nationals who have disappeared abroad since 1997, broken down by country, cannot be easily obtained and the cost of doing so would be disproportionate.

(b) In respect of British nationals murdered overseas, I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my hon. Friend the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign Office (Mr. Bradshaw) to the hon. Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon) on 16 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 318W. This sets out the number of murders by country from 1996 to 2001.

(c) The following table gives details of British nationals kidnapped/held hostage broken down by country since 1997.

(d) In respect of British nationals incarcerated abroad, I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my hon. Friend the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign Office (Mr. Bradshaw) to my hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) on 13 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 456W. This sets out the number of British nationals imprisoned abroad who have asked the local authorities to inform the British Consulate of their arrest and sentence. The figures are broken down by country, and represent the total on 30 April 2002. To obtain similar data for all years since 1997 would incur disproportionate costs.

British nationals kidnapped or held hostage overseas between 1997–2003

Country	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*	*2003*	*Total*
Angola	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	1
Bangladesh	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	1
Cambodia	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	1
Chechnya	2	3	—	—	—	—	—	3
China	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	1
Colombia	—	—	2	—	—	1	1	4
Cyprus	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
Czech republic	—	2	—	—	—	—	—	2
Democratic Republic of Congo	—	1	—	1	—	—	—	2
Ecuador	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	1
Ethiopia	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	1
Gaza (Occupied Territories)	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	1
Georgia	—	1	—	1	—	1	—	3
Greece	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	1
Indonesia	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	1
Liberia	—	—	4	—	—	—	—	4
Nigeria	4	4	18	15	6	—	—	43
Philippines	—	—	—	—	2	—	—	2
Russia	—	—	—	—	—	3	—	3
Sierra Leone	—	—	3	13	—	—	—	16
Slovenia	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	1
Somalia	1	—	—	1	3	—	—	4
South Africa	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	1
Sudan	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	1
Tajikistan	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
Turkey	—	—	—	—	4	—	—	4
Uganda	—	—	6	—	—	—	—	6
Yemen	2	15	4	—	1	—	—	20
Totals	11	28	41	32	20	6	1	141

Correspondence

David Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the hon. Member for Walsall, North will receive a substantive reply to his letter of 10 December 2002 regarding a constituent, ref: GV100/79888/NS. [98396]

Mr. Mike O'Brien *[holding answer 24 February 2003]:* We have learnt that passports were issued to the subjects of the inquiry on 13 December 2002. A substantive reply will be sent to my noble Friend the Baroness Amos shortly.

Ethnic Monitoring

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what ethnic monitoring is undertaken by his Department of the recipients of the delivery of its services to UK citizens abroad. [98453]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I am told we do not monitor the delivery of our services on the basis of ethnicity.

EU Enlargement

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to his answers of 15 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 630W, on EU accession states, and 7 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 136W, on the EU, whether the Government plan to give non-financial support to campaigning groups or individuals within the 10 EU accession states; and if he will make a statement. [93586]

Mr. MacShane: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave him on 7 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 136W.

Gibraltar

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to commemorate 300 years of British sovereignty in Gibraltar. [94866]

Mr. MacShane: The Government of Gibraltar has established a 2004 Tercentenary Committee. We will carefully consider any suggestion for UK Government participation in commemorative events.

International Criminal Court

Tony Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he will resume negotiations with the United States on the proposed Article 98 bilateral agreement concerning the International Criminal Court; and if he will make a statement. [98213]

Mr. Rammell *[holding answer 24 February 2003]:* Officials met at US request on 17 October 2002 for preliminary discussions. We await a further approach from the US side. The statute of the ICC provides for Article 98.2 agreements in specific circumstances. We will not enter into any agreement with the US unless it is in strict conformity with the statute and the guiding principles agreed with EU partners.

Tony Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what mechanism is available for determining the legality of a bilateral treaty concerning the Charter on the International Criminal Court. [98385]

Mr. Rammell: Article 98.2 of the ICC statute provides that the court may not ask a state for surrender of a suspected person if the request would require that state to act inconsistently with its obligations under a relevant international agreement. If the prosecutor nevertheless made such a request, Article 97 would require the state concerned to consult with the court in order to resolve the matter. The statute also makes provision for a case where a state fails to comply with a request from the court, contrary to its obligations under the statute: in such a case the court may refer the matter to the Assembly of States Parties or, where the Security Council has referred the case, to the Council.

Iran

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Iran's announcement that it intends to produce and reprocess nuclear fuel. [98546]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: There are long-standing international concerns about Iran's ambitions to pursue a nuclear weapons programme.

The Director-General of the IAEA has just returned from a visit to Iran to evaluate the concerns that have been raised by a number of reports. We look forward to his report to the IAEA Board of Governors.

Iraq

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the United Kingdom has passed all evidence it has on Iraq's possession of weapons of mass destruction to the *(a)* UNMOVIC and *(b)* IAEA inspectorates in Iraq. [98510]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We have regularly briefed the UN inspection teams on such matters. Such briefings have covered all relevant information.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the trilateral French-German-Russian proposals on Iraq. [98517]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The proposal made by France and Germany, and subsequently endorsed by Russia, has been carefully considered. Its central principal is that inspections should be allowed to continue without a specific time-limit. The UK believes that the key issue with regard to the UN inspections programme is that Iraq must demonstrate a willingness to co-operate fully and actively with the inspectors.

Without that full and unconditional Iraqi co-operation, the mandate of the inspectors, established under UNSCR 1284 and reiterated in UNSCR 1441, would be seriously undermined.

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with his international counterparts on the provision of peacekeeping forces within Iraq in the event of military action being taken against that country. [98953]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: No decision has been taken to launch military action against Iraq. We have been in recent contact (including at the 17–18 February European Council) with all our EU and other major international partners on the role of the international community in the event of military action against Iraq.

IT Contracts

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list IT contracts in his Department above £50 million in each of the last 10 years; what the inception date for each system was; when it became fully functional; when it became fully debugged; and what the cost of over-runs has been. [99000]

Mr. Rammell: The contract for the FCO's telecommunications network (FTN) (signed in 2000) is worth £165 million over 10 years. The main contract for Prism, which provides an integrated world-wide financial and management accounting and human resources system is worth £53 million (and was signed in 2002).

The FTN rollout will be completed in summer 2003. The Prism system is scheduled to go live in the UK in mid-2003. Spend to date on both has been within budget.

Lobsang Dhondup

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what discussions his Department has had with the government of China following the execution of Lobsang Dhondup; and what the outcome was; [98821]

(2) what representations his Department has made to the government of China following the execution of Lobsang Dhondup. [99359]

Mr. Rammell: I issued a statement on 28 January 2003 expressing strong concern at the execution of Lobsang Dhondup. We also supported strongly worded EU demarches and an EU declaration on the case.

We have raised Lobsang Dhondup's case three times with the Chinese MFA. They explained that Lobsang Dhondup was a Chinese citizen who had committed very serious crimes which merited severe punishment. China had the right to put him to trial and to pass verdict on him. The legal proceedings were, according to the MFA, in line with the regulations of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

We shall continue to raise our concerns about this case and the treatment of Tibetans more generally with the Chinese.

Middle East

Mr. Best: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions are taking place with the United States Government about problems of the Palestinian people. [98415]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary, FCO officials and I are in constant touch with US colleagues on Israel/Palestine. The UK Government believe that a secure and stable two-state solution, as called for in President Bush's speech of 24 June 2002 and reached through early implementation of the Quartet roadmap, is the only credible way to deliver to both Israelis and Palestinians the peaceful future they both need.

North Korea

Mrs. Caroline Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent assessment he has made of human rights abuses in North Korea. [98268]

Mr. Rammell *[holding answer 24 February 2003]*: Our diplomatic relations with North Korea and a British Embassy in Pyongyang allow us to express our concerns about reports of widespread and serious violations of human rights in DPRK directly to the North Korean authorities on a regular basis. But a lack of hard evidence and access for independent monitors makes it difficult to substantiate allegations, most of which come from defectors' reports. Freedom of expression is curtailed and criticism severely punished (there are reports of up to 200,000 political prisoners). Freedom of movement is restricted within the country and foreign travel is only permitted for a select few. There are reports of widespread use of the death penalty and detention without trial. The DPRK does not participate in international refugee fora, nor is it in contact with the UNHCR. It is at least six years since a UN rapporteur was allowed into the country. The UK has financed human rights training courses for North Korean government officials, and we will continue to request access for international observers, including UK diplomats, to verify negative reports circulating internationally about the situation in DPRK. We are also pressing North Korea to co-operate fully with UN mechanisms and to fulfil its UN reporting obligations.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the South Korean Government on the heightened security situation facing the Korean Peninsula. [98830]

Mr. Rammell: During the last week I have discussed these issues with a delegation of visiting South Korean MPs. I will also discuss them when I meet the new South Korean President in Seoul on 26 February 2003. We have made clear in all our contacts with the South Korean Government, that we support a peaceful resolution of the security problem on the Korean Peninsula through multilateral dialogue.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made on behalf of the Christian community in North Korea. [98829]

Mr. Rammell: Reports of human rights abuses, including religious persecution, in North Korea are of grave concern to the Government. Diplomatic relations with North Korea and an Embassy in Pyongyang enable us to express our concerns about reports of widespread and serious violations of human rights in DPRK directly to the North Korean authorities on a regular basis. Our Ambassador expressed concern about the situation during his high-level introductory calls in December 2002. The FCO has financed a human rights training course for North Korean Government officials in the UK, and hopes to build on this through further contacts with the DPRK authorities this year.

Robert Mugabe

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what representations Her Majesty's Government have made to the French Government and to President Chirac regarding Robert Mugabe's possible visit to a Franco-African summit in Paris; and if he will make a statement; [94905]

(2) what the policy is of Her Majesty's Government with regard to the attendance by Robert Mugabe at a Franco-African summit in Paris to be held on 19 February 2003; and if he will make a statement. [94906]

Mr. Straw *[holding answer 3 February 2003]:* We did not want Robert Mugabe at the France/Africa summit in Paris on 20 to 21 February 2003. We made this clear to the French Government, at various levels as well as to other EU partners. The meeting took place two days after the EU sanctions on Zimbabwe were due to expire. Our priority then was to ensure a roll-over of those sanctions. The roll-over required a consensus among EU member states. This was achieved on 18 February 2003.

Romania (People Trafficking)

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Romanian authorities regarding the trafficking of women. [98822]

Mr. MacShane: We talk regularly to the Romanians about the problem of organised crime, including the trafficking of women. My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Home Office, (Mr. Bob Ainsworth), visited Romania last week to sign a bilateral Readmission Agreement, part of a wider programme of co-operation between the UK and Romania on tackling illegal immigration and people trafficking across Europe. He also discussed this issue with Ministers and officials at the Romanian Ministry of the Interior.

Surjit Kaur Athwal

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what representations the British Government have made to the Indian Government in the case of Surjit Kaur Athwal; [98457]

(2) if he will make a statement on the delay between the disappearance of Surjit Kaur Athwal and the first representations by the UK Government to the Indian Government on her case. [98459]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Our Consular Division in London were informed of Mrs. Athwal's disappearance on 22 December 1998. The next day, our High Commission in New Delhi made inquiries with the Indian police and immigration authorities. The Indian authorities confirmed, on 22 January 1999, that, according to their records, Mrs. Athwal was still in India. Since February 1999, we have liaised regularly with the UK police and the Punjabi police to facilitate the investigation into Mrs. Athwal's disappearance. On 15 March 1999 our Consul in Delhi met the Director for Consular Matters in the Indian Ministry of External Affairs to discuss the case. We have raised the case with the Indian authorities on a number of occasions since then, most recently on 13 January 2003, when we sent an official note to the Ministry of External Affairs asking for Mrs. Athwal's case to be transferred to the Central Bureau of Investigation. We remain in regular contact with the Indian authorities and will continue to offer Mrs. Athwal's family all the consular assistance that we properly can.

UK Citizens (Disappearance Overseas)

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many cases dealt with by his Department of UK citizens who have disappeared abroad since 1997 were *(a)* white UK citizens and *(b)* non-white UK citizens. [98454]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We do not compile these consular statistics on the basis of ethnicity.

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the standard procedure followed by his Department is in dealing with cases of UK citizens who have *(a)* disappeared and *(b)* been murdered abroad. [98455]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Enquirers concerned about the whereabouts of British Nationals abroad are advised to contact the police in the country concerned, and also to report the missing person to their local UK Police. Consular staff in the UK and overseas keep relatives informed of progress and liaise with local authorities, including to consider institution of a search. When a British National is murdered overseas we would normally liaise with the UK police who would inform the next of kin and appoint a Family Liaison Officer. In the country concerned, we can act as liaison between local authorities and the deceased's relatives, friends and/or legal representatives. Any investigation would be conducted by the local authorities.

United Nations

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his estimate is of the UK's total net financial contribution to the United Nations in each of the last 15 years; and if he will make a statement. [98499]

Mr. Rammell: The UK is fully supportive of the UN and the work it does, and we recognise the need for the organisation to have adequate funding to perform its role. Accordingly, we choose to supplement our annual assessed contributions to the UN regular and peacekeeping budgets and its Specialised Agencies by a significant number of voluntary contributions targeted at a range of UN activities.

The UK has contributed the following amounts to the United Nations in each calendar year since 1992.

Year	*£*
1992	291,770,697
1993	312,116,430
1994	304,969,947
1995	328,855,981
1996	304,577,521
1997	309,260,413
1998	330,058,906
1999	324,407,457
2000	32,500,000
2001	427,458,550

These figures represent both assessed and voluntary contributions, except for 2000, which only represents our assessed contributions to the UN Regular Budget: total figures were not collated for that year.

These figures are taken from the FCO Annual Report, which collates the data on contributions to the UN from all Government Departments. We do not have collated figures prior to 1992, and to obtain them would incur disproportionate cost.

Work Placements

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many university students his Department and associated agencies has supported or sponsored with a work placement in the last year; what his policy is on work placements; what plans he has to develop such schemes; and what his policy is on paying their university fees. [98545]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Foreign and Commonwealth currently employs three students for 12 months, as part of their four-year economics degree sandwich course. This gives them the opportunity to work for one year in the Economic Policy or European Union Department. We support work placements as part of our policy to encourage more students to apply for economist jobs. We also have two unpaid work experience schemes for school pupils and undergraduates. 21 pupils and 40 undergraduates had unpaid work placements in 2002. We do not pay any university fees.

Zimbabwe

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what powers the EU ambassadors meeting has to extend sanctions against Zimbabwe on behalf of the EU. [94729]

Mr. Rammell: Common positions, including the targeted measures against the ZANU-PF regime, have to be agreed by the Council of Ministers, prepared by the Committee of Permanent Representatives (Coreper). When consensus is reached at Coreper, the decision is formally passed to the Council, but not discussed there.

In the Zimbabwe case, Coreper reached consensus for a 12-month continuation of sanctions on 14 February 2003, and the Council formally agreed this on 18 February 2003, from which date the sanctions rolled over. The UK had argued strongly for such a result, and therefore welcomed it.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

English National Opera

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions she has had with the Arts Council about the future of English National Opera. [98373]

Dr. Howells: My right hon Friend the Secretary of State and my right hon and Noble Friend the Minister of State for the Arts hold regular meetings with the Arts Council of England where they discuss all issues relating to bodies funded by the Arts Council of which, the English National Opera is one.

IT Contracts

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list IT contracts in her Department and its predecessors above £50 million in each of the last 10 years; what the inception date for each system was; when it became fully functional; when it became fully debugged; and what the cost of over-runs has been. [98996]

Dr. Howells: My Department has had no IT contracts of £50 million or above in the last 10 years.

Lee Valley Authority

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations she has received from local authorities regarding the funding of the Lee Valley Authority; what recent discussions she has had with the authority; and if she will make a statement. [98207]

Mr. Caborn: This Department has received no representations from local authorities regarding the funding of the Lee Valley Authority and has held no recent discussions with the Authority.

National Lottery

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the spending per head of population for National Lottery grants was in *(a)* the Ribble Valley, *(b)* Lancashire, *(c)* the North West of England and *(d)* Wales, in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [99344]

Mr. Caborn: According to the information supplied to us by the distributing bodies for the National Lottery awards database, the spending per head of population in the 12 months to 31 January 2003 has been £5.92 in the Ribble Valley constituency, £41.39 in Lancashire, £161.15 in the North West of England and £24.56 in Wales.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what proportion of National Lottery grants are spent in *(a)* the Ribble Valley, *(b)* Lancashire and *(c)* the North West of England. [99345]

Mr. Caborn: Lottery funding is awarded on merit and specific proportions are not therefore allocated to particular areas although funding is sometimes targeted at areas of deprivation which have received low levels of Lottery funds. According to the information supplied to us by the distributing bodies for the National Lottery awards database, the Ribble Valley constituency has received a total of £4,603,634 in Lottery funding since the Lottery's inception. Lancashire has received £744,407,272 and the North West of England has received £1,216,246,401 during the same period. The total amount awarded by the Lottery so far is £11,428,664,244.

Wembley Stadium (Timber Sourcing)

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport whether the reconstruction of Wembley Stadium will be covered by government requirements to ensure timber procured is from legal and sustainable sources. [95496]

Mr. Caborn: The National Stadium is a Football Association project whose construction is being delivered by its wholly owned subsidiary company Wembley National Stadium Limited. The Government's policy that its central departments and agencies should actively seek to buy timber from legal and sustainably managed sources does not therefore apply to the reconstruction of the National Stadium.

Wembley National Stadium Limited has agreed under the terms of Sport England's Lottery Funding Agreement to have regard to obtaining materials from sustainable or renewable sources. Wembley National Stadium Limited have confirmed that Multiplex Constructions (UK) Limited, who are building the stadium, have environmental management policies and plans in place, which include specifications for building materials containing clear guidance on their selection and environmental protection. Sub-contractors and suppliers have an obligation to demonstrate to Multiplex the source of materials during manufacture and installation. Multiplex have further confirmed to Wembley National Stadium Limited that they will continue to monitor the source of timber products used throughout the duration of the project.

Work Placements

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many university students her Department and associated agencies has supported or sponsored with a work placement in the last year; what her policy is on work placements; what plans she has to develop such schemes; and what her policy is on paying their university fees. [98541]

Dr. Howells: In 2002 the Department employed 3 university students in summer work placements and 5 undergraduates under the Cabinet Office sponsored scheme for students from under-represented groups for the third year. We are currently reviewing policy on work placements but in view of the limited number of work experience opportunities in a relatively small Department, we shall probably concentrate in future on providing places for the Cabinet Office scheme. We have no proposals to pay their university fees. The Royal Parks had no work placements in 2002.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Asbestos

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions by what means it is proposed that health and safety inspectors will measure the level of asbestos fibres in the air to determine whether the control limit specified in the Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations 2002 has been exceeded; in what circumstances prosecutions will be brought for the offence of contravening the regulations by exceeding the control limit; and if he will make a statement. [98660]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Trained Health and Safety Laboratory (HSL) scientific staff carry out measurements of levels of asbestos fibres in the air on the advice of HSE inspectors when they are seeking to establish the effectiveness of new or modified controls or when they wish to confirm controls stated in the contractor's risk assessments are adequate. Measurements are carried out in compliance with the approved and validated method contained in the "Methods for the Determination of Hazardous Substances" 39/4.

Circumstances that might lead to consideration of a prosecution would include inadequate or no controls, unsuitable respiratory protective equipment (RPE) and airborne fibre levels such that RPE did not reduce the exposure to as low as reasonably practicable and in any event to a level below the control limit.

HSE's approach to enforcement of asbestos legislation follows the Health and Safety Commission's principles of enforcement, namely proportionality in applying the law, consistency of approach, targeting of enforcement action and transparency. Where breaches of the Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations 2002 are encountered, appropriate enforcement action is considered, including prosecution.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the circumstances in which a health and safety inspector may rely on his own opinion rather than making scientific measurements in order to establish that the permitted levels of asbestos under the Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations 2002 have been exceeded; and what defences are available to a person where a breach of the regulations is established by the opinion of the inspector rather than by a measurement. [98661]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: HSE inspectors are given training and instruction and are provided with guidance and information about the types of situations and incidents, which can give rise to release of asbestos fibres. Many HSE publications provide information on the typical exposure levels likely to be generated by certain activities and which of these will exceed the control limit.

Exposure limits and levels are never used in isolation. Inspectors check compliance with the range of controls required by the Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations 2002 to ensure that the hierarchy of control measures has been applied and that exposure has been reduced to as low a level as is reasonably practicable.

In most cases, inspectors will use this information together with their knowledge, rather than arranging for scientific measurements to be taken, to assist in forming an opinion about a risk of serious personal injury and the appropriateness of serving a Prohibition Notice. In cases of doubt, they will often seek a view from a more experienced senior colleague or a specialist inspector.

There is a statutory right of appeal to an Employment Tribunal available to the person who, in the opinion of the inspector, has breached the regulations and to whom an enforcement notice has been served.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how a material is defined as containing asbestos for the purposes of the Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations 2002; what minimum quantity of each relevant mineral is required to be present; and how this minimum quantity is measured; [98662]

(2) if he will make a statement on the definition of the terms *(a)* asbestos, *(b)* asbestos fibre and *(c)* asbestos dust in the Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations 2002; and what the difference between each of the definitions is. [98663]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Regulation 2(1) of the Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations defines asbestos as crociodolite, amosite, chrysotile, fibrous actinolite, fibrous anthophyllite and fibrous tremolite. There is no specific definition of either asbestos fibres or asbestos dust within these regulations since the fibres or dust will be one of the six types listed above.

There is no minimum quantity required to be present because the application of the regulations is dependant upon the nature of the asbestos-containing material and how likely it is to release asbestos fibres.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on how the Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations 2002 apply to debris containing asbestos that is found on a site; and what quantities of such debris are acceptable for the purposes of the Regulations. [98664]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Regulation 10 of the Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations requires employers to prevent the exposure of employees to asbestos or where this is not practicable to reduce exposure to asbestos to the lowest level reasonably practicable.

In order to do this they are also required to ensure the quantity of asbestos and asbestos-containing materials at the premises where work is undertaken, and the spread of asbestos from any place where work under their control is carried out, are reduced to the lowest level reasonably practicable (Regulations 10 (7) and 15 respectively). Where it is not possible to prevent exposure employers must ensure respiratory or personal protective equipment and other control measures are used to reduce exposure to the lowest possible level.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the Health and Safety Executive's review of the science relating to the Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations 2002; and who is in charge of the review. [98678]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Government have agreed to a review to ensure that dutyholders are adequately preparing for the new duty to manage asbestos in non-domestic premises, included in the Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations 2002, by the end of this year. The review will also take account of any new scientific information and, is being undertaken by Health and Safety Executive officials.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many responses were received to the consultation that took place prior to the making of the Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations 2002; how many of the responses objected to the making of the regulations in the form in which they were made; what reasons were given for the objections; and if he will place the responses in the Library. [98683]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 25 February 2003]:* 235 responses were received about the consultation which involved the principle of the duty to manage asbestos in premises, and 268 responses on the two consultations on detailed proposals to amend the Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations. The overwhelming majority were in favour of the amendments. There were 10 responses which objected to the proposals.

A copy of the responses to the detailed proposals-is available in the Library.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what training in the science of asbestos is given to health and safety inspectors *(a)* generally and *(b)* for the purposes of enforcing the Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations 2002; by whom such training is given; and if he will make a statement. [98684]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 25 February 2003]:* As part of their training programme, trainee inspectors new to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) attend occupational health tutorials, which include briefing and discussion on the nature and type of asbestos products, the chemical and physical properties of asbestos, exposure levels and the health effects of asbestos. Specialist HSE inspectors normally deliver these tutorials. Asbestos is also covered in the Occupational Health and Safety Diploma course, run by Heriot Watt University, which all trainee inspectors are required to attend.

Prior to doing any unaccompanied inspections, HSE inspectors, who have been assigned to asbestos work, undergo specific training on the Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations 2002. This training is more in depth and is organised and delivered by HSE's Asbestos Licensing Unit, in conjunction with other experienced HSE personnel.

Demography

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the latest estimates are of the proportion of the population aged *(a)* 50 or over, *(b)* 55 or over, *(c)* 60 or over and *(d)* 65 or over actively engaged in the labour market. [96730]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The information is in the table.

Estimated economic activity rates of individuals in private households—Autumn 2002

	Economic activity rate (percentage)
Aged 50[1]	37.7
Aged 55[1]	27.0
Aged 60[1]	14.0
Aged 65[1]	5.5

[1] or over

Notes:

1. Estimates are not seasonally adjusted and are not subject to an adjustment for census 2001 results
2. Economic Activity is based on International Labour Organisation (ILO) definitions.
3. Figures exclude those living in communal establishments.

Source:

Labour Force Survey, Autumn 2002

Disability Benefits

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his assessment is of the reasons underlying the growth in spending on disability benefits between 1997–98 and 2003–04 (planned); and if he will make a statement. [97353]

Maria Eagle: I refer the hon. Member to the written answer I gave to him on 12 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 801W in the case of disability living allowance. Similar reasons apply also in the case of attendance allowance, which provides a contribution towards the extra costs faced by people who become severely disabled after the age of 65. Spending on both these benefits has increased steadily year on year because more people than ever are receiving them and because their value has been maintained by increasing the rates at which they are paid each year in line with the movement in prices as measured by the retail prices index.

Employers' Liability Insurance

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the number of businesses operating in *(a)* England, *(b)* Scotland, *(c)* Wales and *(d)* Northern Ireland without employers' liability cover; and if he will make a statement. [82828]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* In England, Scotland and Wales the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) enforces the legal requirement for companies to maintain Employers' Liability Compulsory Insurance (ELCI) and to display a valid certificate. The HSE undertakes this enforcement activity during general inspections by HSE Inspectors and through the work of its Workplace Contact Officers who focus on small and medium-size enterprises.

Workplace Contact Officers and Inspectors may ask to see a valid ELCI certificate during a visit. Where the certificate cannot be produced at the visit, HSE will write to the employer, and if no satisfactory response is received within a reasonable time that is 21 days under current instructions, will make a statutory request ('Notice to Produce') for its production. However, there may be circumstances where HSE considers it appropriate to issue a Notice to Produce straightaway where an employer fails to produce a valid certificate. Failure to produce a certificate will result in on-site inquires and prosecution, subject to evidence.

A total of 4,366 contacts were made by Workplace Contact Officers between April and September 2002. Of these, just 14 (or 0.3 per cent.) merited the serving of a statutory notice to produce. In addition, HSE Inspectors carry a large number of issues during regulatory contacts, but because of the varying nature and range of visits undertaken, it is not possible to give exact figures as to how many of these regulatory contacts covered the issue of ELCI. However, during the same period of April to September 2002, HSE inspectors issued an additional 30 Notices to Produce. So the total number of Notices to Produce issued by HSE in this 6-month period was 44.

Of those served notices, 31 employers (70 per cent.) have subsequently produced valid ELCI certificates. Inquiries relating to the 13 employers who have failed to produce ELCI certificates are continuing and may result in prosecution, subject to evidence.

There were four prosecutions in 2002 resulting in penalties being imposed in three cases. Between 1997 and 2001, HSE successfully pursued 25 prosecutions for non-compliance.

The above figures cover England, Scotland and Ireland. There is not available a breakdown for each area.

In Northern Ireland a total of 1,924 visits to work places were made by HSE (Northern Ireland) Inspectors between April and September 2002. Inspectors routinely check on ELCI cover during visits although, as with HSE in England, Scotland and Wales, it is not possible to give exact figures as to how many of these visits covered the issue of ELCI. However, during the time period referred to above, no employers were detected by HSE (Northern Ireland) to be operating without ELCI.

HSE (Northern Ireland) records show one prosecution in recent years relating to ELCI in Northern Ireland. In December 2000, an employer was convicted for non-compliance.

These figures suggest that levels of compliance remain very high. However, the Government are aware of the recent problems being faced by employers in getting ELCI, and we announced in the Pre-Budget Report our intention to undertake a formal review of the operation of ELCI.

European Year of the Disabled

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what projects have been planned for the European Year of the Disabled, broken down by constituency. [97829]

Maria Eagle: The information has been placed in the Library.

IFI/Richardsons Plant

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the impact of the closure of the IFI/Richardsons plant in Belfast on home workers based outside Northern Ireland. [97206]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: As a result of the closure of the IFI/Richardsons plant in Belfast, three sales personnel based outside of Northern Ireland were made redundant. We understand the problems faced by those affected by redundancy, and we have introduced a range of policies to help people who lose their jobs to find another one quickly.

New Deal

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people have participated in New Deal 25 plus; and how many people have left the scheme for work. [93318]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The information requested is in the table.

	Total number of participants	*Total number of people moving into jobs*	*Number of leavers moving into unsubsidised, sustained employment*[1]
New Deal 25 plus (from July 1998 to September 2002)	534,400	126,300	93,600

[1] To have left the programme, New Deal clients must not re-claim Jobseeker's Allowance within 13 weeks. Sustained employment is defined as employment lasting 13 weeks or more. Therefore, all jobs gained by New Deal leavers are sustained jobs.

In April 2001, New Deal 25 plus was re-engineered to provide a flexible, more individually-tailored service to help more people get jobs and remain in them.

Information on the New Deal 25 plus is published quarterly in the Statistical First Release, which is available in the Library.

Source:

New Deal Evaluation Database.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the changes in the proportion of New Deal for Young People leavers entering unsubsidised, sustained employment since the scheme began. [97103]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The New Deal for Young People is continuing to help significant numbers of disadvantaged young people into work. Many of these have moved into jobs more quickly and have stayed there longer than they would have done without the New Deal. Up to September 2002, 313,700 New Deal clients had moved into jobs lasting 13 weeks or more.

Since 1999, the proportion of leavers to known destinations entering unsubsidised, sustained jobs has remained largely constant at around 54 per cent. Research has also shown that people leaving to unknown destinations are just as likely to leave the New Deal for work as those going to known destinations. Further evaluation is planned this year to confirm this position. Jobcentre Plus is working closely with New Deal providers to improve the collection and recording of the destinations of programme participants.

The change in the proportion of leavers from the New Deal for Young People entering unsubsidised, sustained employment is largely due to an increase in leavers going to unknown destinations (from 25 per cent. in 1998 to just under 33 per cent. so far in 2002).

As long-term youth unemployment has been virtually eradicated, we are now also getting feedback from those delivering the New Deal that an increasing proportion of people on the programme are facing greater barriers to moving into sustained employment. That is why we have introduced initiatives such as StepUP and progress2work which build on the New Deal and help the most disadvantaged people overcome the barriers they face and move into work.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many *(a)* young people, *(b)* single mothers, *(c)* disabled people, *(d)* people over 50 and *(e)* other categories for which information is collected have benefited from the New Deal in Nottingham North since its inception. [98321]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The available information is in the table.

New Deal	*Total number of programme participants in Nottingham north*[1]
New Deal for Young People (from January 1998)	2,720
New Deal 25 plus (from July 1998)	1,940
New Deal for Lone Parents (from July 1998)	[2]940
New Deal 50 plus (Employment Credit claim) (from April 2000)	[3]180

[1] Up to the end of September 2002, unless stated

[2] Of these, 880 participants were female

[3] Figure up to the end of November 2002

Source:

New Deal Evaluation Database

The information is not available at constituency level for the New Deal for Disabled People and new Deal for Partners.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many New Deal 50-plus participants were first time claimants of *(a)* the employment credit and *(b)* the training grant, in each month since the scheme went nationwide. [99055]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The information is in the table.

Month	*Number of new training grants*	*Number of employment credit starts*
2000		
April	10	1,730
May	20	2,430
June	30	3,000
July	50	2,560
August	60	2,490
September	100	3,270
October	110	3,290
November	120	3,400
December	120	2,660
2001		
January	130	2,190
February	140	2,720
March	190	3,280
April	150	2,610
May	180	3,290
June	170	3,200
July	160	2,920
August	180	3,160
September	160	3,010
October	230	3,300
November	250	3,670
December	130	1,730
2002		
January	160	1,800
February	160	2,340
March	240	2,920
April	130	2,460
May	220	3,330
June	130	2,540
July	130	2,620
August	190	3,060
September	160	2,480
October	280	2,860
November	270	3,490
December	180	1,940
Total	4,910	91,740

Note:

Figures are rounded to the nearest 10 and may not sum due to rounding

Source:

New Deal evaluation database

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what statistics are routinely collected on the New Deal for Disabled People; [95235]

(2) how many people in each region have *(a)* found work and *(b)* found sustained work, through the New Deal for Disabled People; [96603]

(3) how many people *(a)* have found work and *(b)* have found sustained work through the New Deal for Disabled People, broken down according to the nature of the participants' disabilities. [96606]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: New Deal for Disabled People (NDDP) is the first national programme designed specifically to help people with health conditions and disabilities move into and keep jobs. Statistics on customer registration with Job Brokers, job entries and sustainability of employment are collected and published on a quarterly basis on the New Deal and NDDP websites.

A comprehensive evaluation programme is in place which will enable us to assess the effectiveness of NDDP and ensure that we build on the best of what has been achieved so far. Information about the characteristics of participants, their experiences, views and outcomes of participation in NDDP will be gathered through quantitative research. In addition, qualitative research will examine in greater depth what works for whom, how and why. We will be publishing reports on different elements of the evaluation, as they become available.

The available information is in the table.

Cumulative performance from July 2001 to December 2002

National	*Number registering with an NDDP Job Broker*[1]	*Number helped into work by an NDDP Job Broker*[1]	*Numbers achieving sustained employment following NDDP asistance*[2]
Total	35,316	8,676	2,330

[1] Job Brokers are paid on work/outcomes actually achieved. They are paid for customers registering with them and for customers that are helped into work. The figures quoted represent registrations and outcomes for which the Job Brokers have been paid.

[2] Sustained work is defined as the customer remaining in paid employment for at least 26 out of 39 weeks.

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many and what proportion of those on each option of the New Deal for Young People went into a sustained job in the East Riding of Yorkshire in the most recent quarter for which figures are available. [97732]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Between July and September 2002 (the latest quarter for which figures are available), 45 young people left the New Deal Options for unsubsidised, sustained jobs in the East Riding local authority area. This is 49 per cent. of all leavers from the Options in that period.

Due to the small volumes involved, figures for individual New Deal Options cannot be published because of the risk of identifying individuals.

Pensions

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many employers have informed him that they are willing to co-operate with his Department in issuing combined pension forecasts to their employees. [98518]

Mr. McCartney: The combined pensions forecasting service is open to employers and pension providers. We do not collect information on employers as a distinct group. Currently, 426 private sector pension schemes have expressed an interest in using the combined pension forecasting service. Plans progress to increase take-up, but this is very much dependant on private sector partners' willingness to participate in this voluntary service. We sought views on how to increase coverage, whether on a voluntary or compulsory basis, in our recent Green Paper, "Simplicity, Security and Choice: Working and Saving for Retirement" (Cm5677).

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the number of minimum income guarantee claimants who would cease to be eligible if the basic state pension was increased by *(a)* £5 per week for those below 75, *(b)* £10 per week for those aged 75–79 and *(c)* £15 per week for those aged 80 and above, with the additions for those aged over 75 and over 80 being paid in full regardless of contribution record. [97379]

Mr. McCartney: We estimate that around 350,000 benefit units could cease to be eligible for the Pension Credit if the maximum rate payable of the basic State Pension was increased by £5 per week and age additions of £5 per week were payable for those aged 75 and over and £10 per week for those aged 80 and over in 2003–04.

Notes:

1. The estimate is based on the Department for Work and Pensions Policy Simulation Model for 2003–04.

2. Calculations assume the maximum rate payable of the Basic State Pension is increased by £5 per week and all other payments proportionately and that age additions of £5 per week are paid to all those aged 75–79 and £10 per week to those aged 80 and over.

3. For modelling purposes, Pension Credit is assumed to be in place throughout 2003–04. In fact, Pension Credit will begin in October 2003.

4. The estimate excludes those individuals living in residential care homes.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has for the issue of state pension forecasts; in what sequence different groups will be issued with such forecasts and over what timescale; how many such forecasts he expects to issue for each group; and if he will make a statement. [98519]

Mr. McCartney: State pension forecast information is issued to customers either directly, or via their pension scheme provider as part of a combined pension forecast.

The combined pension forecasting service was launched in October 2001 and to date 426 providers have expressed an interest in using the service. Plans progress to increase take-up but this is very much dependant on private sector partners willingness to participate in this voluntary scheme. We sought views on how to increase coverage, whether on a voluntary or compulsory basis, in our recent Green Paper Simplicity, security and choice: Working and saving for retirement.

State Pension forecasts have been issued to individuals by DWP on request for a number of years. The Department expects to issue around 0.75 million such forecasts in this financial year.

The Green Paper also announced that from May 2003, the Department will commence the automatic issue of State Pension forecasts and supporting information to the self-employed with a view to extending this service across the rest of the working-age population over the next five years. We will evaluate the self-employed exercise and alongside other research this will inform the sequencing and volumes of other automatic forecasts.

Work-focused Interviews

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many *(a)* income support, *(b)* incapacity benefit, *(c)* invalid care allowance, *(d)* bereavement benefit and *(e)* severe disablement allowance claimants have had (i) a new claim refused as a result of work focused interview non-attendance and (ii) benefit reduced as a result of failure to attend a repeat work-focused interview, under the Social Security (Jobcentre Plus Interviews) Regulations 2001; [93917]

(2) what percentage of *(a)* income support, *(b)* incapacity benefit, *(c)* invalid care allowance, *(d)* bereavement benefit and *(e)* severe disablement (i) new claimants in Jobcentre Plus areas have had a claim refused as a result of work focused interview non-attendance and (ii) existing caseload claimants in Jobcentre Plus areas have had their benefit reduced as a result of failure to attend a repeat-work focused interview, under the Social Security (Jobcentre Plus Interview) Regulations 2001. [93919]

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many incapacity benefit claimants have had their benefit entitlement reduced because they have failed to attend a compulsory Jobcentre Plus work-focused interview. [95238]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available, from the 56 Jobcentre Plus Pathfinder offices, is in the table.

The impact work focused interviews on benefit claims 22 October 2001 to 22 October 2002

Benefit type	*Number of initial work focused meetings (WFM) booked*	*Number of claims not pursued*[1] *(percentage of WFM booked)*	*Trigger meetings booked*[2]	*Customers sanctioned (percentage of trigger meetings booked)*
Income Support	11,403	32 (0.3)	672	53 (7.9)
Incapacity Benefit/ Severe Disablement Allowance[3]	16,877	127 (0.8)	48	0 (0)
Invalid Care Allowance	1,900	9 (0.5)	5	0 (0)
Bereavement Benefit	82	0 (0)	2	0 (0)

[1] LMS does not distinguish between those claims not pursued because of failure to attend a work-focused interview and those not pursued for other reasons, eg found other work, sickness, withdrew claim.

[2] Trigger meetings occur after either a specific period of time (eg three years for Incapacity Benefit customers) or when a specified event occurs (eg starting part time work). With Jobcentre Plus Pathfinders only opening in October 2001 very few Incapacity Benefit, Severe Disablement Allowance, Invalid Care Allowance or Bereavement Benefit recipients have been called for a trigger meeting so far.

[3] LMS does not have separate data on Incapacity Benefit and Severe Disablement Allowance claims.

Source:

Labour Market System (LMS)

Youth Unemployment

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what measures are being taken to reduce youth unemployment in *(a)* the Jarrow constituency, *(b)* South Tyneside, *(c)* Tyne and Wear and *(d)* the UK; [96377]

(2) what assessment his Department has made of the effect the New Deal has had on youth unemployment in *(a)* the Jarrow constituency, *(b)* South Tyneside, *(c)* Tyne and Wear and *(d)* the UK. [96378]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Since 1997, youth unemployment has fallen by a third in Jarrow and South Tyneside, by nearly 40 per cent. in Tyne and Wear and by 47 per cent. in the UK. Over the same period, long-term (over six months) youth unemployment has been cut by 86 per cent. in Jarrow and by around 80 per cent. in south Tyneside, Tyne and Wear and the UK.

In 1998 we introduced the New Deal for Young People to tackle the waste of long-term youth unemployment. The programme has played an important part in the massive reductions in long-term unemployment among young people across the country. Almost 400,000 young people have moved into work through the New Deal. Independent research found that the number of young people unemployed for six months or more would be twice as high without the New Deal.

The New Deal has been successful in the north-east of England. By the end of September 2002, in Tyne and Wear, 13,880 young people had moved from welfare into work through the New Deal, 2,390 in south Tyneside, and 1,070 in Jarrow.

We are building on the achievements of the New Deal. Early last year, we started tailored pathway pilots, including one in Wearside, to help young people use the New Deal Options more flexibly and move into sustained jobs. In 2002 we launched StepUp in 20 pilot areas, including Sunderland, to provide transitional jobs for people who have not secured sustained jobs through New Deal. We have introduced progress2work to provide additional support to help unemployed drug misusers into work. The initiative is already up and running in Newcastle, and will be starting in Sunderland very shortly, and will be rolled out across the country later this year. We have also developed ambition initiatives to help unemployed people gain the right skills to meet the needs of employers in key sectors. One such initiative for the retail sector is operating in Gateshead. We are introducing progress2work-LinkUP to help those facing the greatest disadvantages in the labour market, including ex-offenders, homeless people and recovering alcohol misusers. One of the pilots will start in south Tyneside later this year. These initiatives are ensuring that all young people, even those who face great disadvantages in the labour market or who live in the most deprived areas, are given the help and support they need to gain independence through moving from welfare to work.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Work Placements

Mr. Allen: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many university students his Department and associated agencies has supported or sponsored with a work placement in the last year; what his policy is on work placements; what plans he has to develop such schemes; and what his policy is on paying their university fees. [98540]

Mr. Leslie: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister accommodated five undergraduates in 2002 through summer placement schemes organised by the Cabinet Office (three), Windsor Fellowship (one), and Workable (one).

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is keen to participate in work placements for undergraduates and has an ongoing programme. We have ten placements allocated this summer for undergraduates. The office does not pay the university fees of its summer placements.

Warm Front Scheme

Norman Baker: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to discuss the future funding of the Warm Front scheme with the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. [99206]

Mr. Raynsford: Warm Front is the responsibility of the Department of the Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has no plans for bilateral meetings to discuss its future funding. The Ministerial Group on Fuel Poverty is expected to meet during the Spring. The date and agenda for that meeting have not yet been agreed.

HEALTH

Agency Nurses (Developing Countries)

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many agencies, which have recruited nurses from developing countries, have signed the code of practice on international nurses; what steps the Department will take to prevent the use of agencies which have not signed the code of practice; and if he will make a statement; [98391]

(2) how many private recruitment agencies the NHS used to recruit nurses from developing countries in each of the last five years; [98392]

(3) what estimate he has made of the number of agencies involved in international recruitment of health professionals; and how many have not signed the code of practice; [98917]

(4) what mechanisms are in place to ensure that NHS trusts *(a)* are aware of the code of practice on international nurses and *(b)* have received a copy of the Department's list of agencies operating under the terms of the code; and what steps are taken to ensure that trusts use only agencies from the list when recruiting nurses from overseas; [98915]

(5) what mechanisms are in place to ensure that NHS trusts are aware of agencies which do not comply with the code of practice on international nurses, and whether NHS trusts are prevented under legislation from entering into contracts with agencies which *(a)* have not signed the code of practice and *(b)* recruit nurses from developing countries. [98914]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answers 24 and 25 February 2003]:* Active recruitment from developing countries contravenes the code of practice for national health service employers in the international recruitment of healthcare professionals. If a commercial recruitment agency is alleged to be contravening the code of practice, the Department will carry out an immediate investigation to determine whether that agency should be removed from the list of agencies operating under the terms of the code. Data relating to the number of agencies recruiting nurses from overseas is not held centrally but monitoring is carried out on a quarterly basis. To date, we have not discovered any NHS contravention of the code of practice.

The Department has written to all the commercial recruitment agencies it is aware of and has requested references from NHS and other customers confirming the agency's compliance with the code of practice. Details of all agencies working in line with the code of practice appear on the Department's website and is updated regularly. NHS organisations are strongly recommended to refer to the current list of approved agencies when establishing new contracts but there is no legislation requiring them to do so. The list is publicised through regular contacts with the NHS and workforce development confederations.

The Department is aware of 115 recruitment agencies and has invited each of them to sign up to the code of practice. To date 68 of them have signed up to list. The Department is continuing to work with the remainder to ascertain their position.

Ambulance Service (Derbyshire)

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many fully operational ambulances were stationed at each of the ambulance stations in Derbyshire in each year since 1997. [98888]

Mr. Lammy: The information requested is not collected centrally. However, I am making arrangements for the Chairman of the East Midlands Ambulance Service National Health Service trust to provide this information direct to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Asylum Seekers

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he and his Ministers have had with *(a)* representatives of South Stoke PCT and *(b)* North Staffordshire LMC regarding the treatment of asylum seekers. [99100]

Mr. Lammy: None.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is on GPs being paid for registering asylum seekers. [99101]

Mr. Hutton: General practitioners (GPs) who provide general medical services receive a capitation payment for each patient registered with them, either permanently or temporarily. An asylum seeker attracts the same payment as any other patient of the same age.

Barnet Chase Farm Trust

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much *(a)* Barnet PCT and *(b)* other PCTs have contributed, outside the original yearly budget, to the deficits at Barnet Chase Farm, in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [98939]

Mr. Hutton: Information on the level of individual service agreements between primary care trusts and National Health Service trusts is not collected centrally.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the *(a)* current and *(b)* accumulated deficit is of Barnet Chase Farm Trust; and if he will make a statement. [98944]

Mr. Hutton: Barnet and Chase Farm's audited financial position for 2002–03 will be available later this year. The accumulated income and expenditure position of the trust as at 31 March 2002, as reported in its 2001–02 audited annual accounts, was a surplus of £562,000.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what actions in what timeframe at Barnet Chase Farm Trust to bring the costs of their service into line with other comparable trusts; and if he will make a statement. [98945]

Mr. Hutton: Barnet and Chase Farm Trust has made considerable progress in bringing the costs of its services in line with comparable trusts as measured by the National Reference Cost Index. The National Reference Cost Index for Barnet and Chase Farm Trust has reduced from 121 in 1999–2000 to 105 in 2001–02, where 100 represents the national average.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make arrangements to require Barnet Chase Farm Trust to submit reports on performance to the PCTs who commission services from them. [98946]

Mr. Hutton: Arrangements are already in place for Barnet and Chase Farm Trust to submit reports on performance to the primary care trusts (PCTs) which commission services from it. Regular monthly performance reports are received by Barnet and Chase Farm Hospitals National Health Service Trust's Board and are sent to the PCTs. There are also regular review meetings with PCTs to discuss progress on plans.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health to what extent Barnet PCT is permitted to switch the commissioning of services from Barnet Chase Farm Hospital to other hospitals; and if he will make a statement. [98947]

Mr. Hutton: Primary care trusts (PCTs) have the freedom to commission services from wherever they believe appropriate based on the needs of their local population. Barnet PCT already commissions services for its residents from a number of hospitals other than Barnet and Chase Farm Hospitals National Health Service Trust.

Any significant changes in provider would affect local partners and would occur with the agreement of those partners within the context of the local delivery plan. Changes would be expected to result from public and patient involvement and where significant change is planned, from public consultation.

Barnet Hospital

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of capacity at Barnet hospital; and if he will make a statement. [98932]

Mr. Hutton: Services at Barnet hospital are improving, but there is much more which needs to be done. Inpatients and outpatients are waiting for shorter periods and recent improvements in practice in the accident and emergency department will also ensure shorter waits. Public and staff are being involved in the further development of services locally.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps are being taken to reduce accident and emergency waiting times at Barnet Hospital; and if he will make a statement. [98934]

Mr. Hutton: Improving the patients experience of emergency care is a top priority for the National Health Service. In light of this, Reforming Emergency Care was launched in October 2001, supported by a £118 million investment. It sets a long term programme of reform supported by extra investment and new capacity to address one of the public's key concerns about the National Health Service—waiting in accident and emergency (A &E).

After successful introduction of the see and treat initiative at Chase Farm Hospital A & E, which has had a significant impart on the number of patients being seen within four hours, this is now being introduced at Barnet Hospital.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps are being taken to improve the cleaning services at Barnet Hospital; and if he will make a statement. [98949]

Mr. Hutton: Improving the cleanliness of hospitals is the responsibility of local national health service trusts.

The "National Standards of Cleaning for the NHS" were launched by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in April 2001. All hospitals are required to ensure that their cleaning services meet these standards. In addition hospitals are inspected annually by patient environment action teams (PEATs) who assess environmental standards across a range of factors including cleanliness. The Commission for Health Improvement also considers hospital cleanliness as part of Clinical Governance reviews.

The last PEAT assessment of Barnet and Chase Farm Hospitals NHS Trust judged the environmental standards, including cleanliness, as acceptable.

Bushmeat

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action the Food Standards Agency is taking on the risks posed by toxins in illegally imported bushmeat. [97708]

Ms Blears: The Food Standards Agency has advised local authorities that all illegally imported food products, including bush meat, should be removed from sale. This is because these products have evaded official controls designed to verify compliance with food safety standards and could pose a danger to human health. The Agency is also working closely with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and Her Majesty's Customs and Excise to inform the targeting of enforcement work to detect illegal imports.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received on the potential health risks from toxins in illegally imported bushmeat. [97709]

Ms Blears: I am advised by the Food Standards Agency, which has responsibility for food safety matters, that it has received representations about potential public health risks from illegally imported meat, including bush meat. Illegally imported food has evaded official controls designed to verify compliance with food safety standards and therefore poses a potential danger to human health. Such food is destroyed without undue delay and without the requirement for laboratory examination to identify toxins, micro-organisms or other contamination dangerous to human health.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has made to other Government Departments about the level of policing at ports of entry relating to the smuggling of bushmeat. [97755]

Ms Blears: The Food Standards Agency (FSA), which has responsibility for food safety matters, is in frequent contact with other Government Departments, in particular the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and Her Majesty's Customs and Excise, about controls on the illegal import of meat.

Further to a study by the Cabinet Office last year, co-ordination arrangements between the FSA, Her Majesty's Customs and Excise and DEFRA are being strengthened to achieve a step-change improvement in controls on the illegal import of meat. DEFRA is running a six month pilot study into the use of dogs for detecting illegally imported foodstuffs, Her Majesty's Customs and Excise is taking the lead responsibility for detection of smuggled imports of meat, and the FSA is putting in place arrangements with port health and local authorities to improve inspection arrangements for legitimate imports.

The Organisation of the Government's Controls of Imports of Animals, Fish, Plants and their Products' is published on the Cabinet Office website at http://www.cabinet-office.qov.uk/reports/pdf/Illegal%20Imports%20paper.pdf

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about the level of toxins in illegally imported bushmeat. [97756]

Ms Blears: The Food Standards Agency, which has responsibility for food safety matters, has advised that information is not available on the level of toxins in illegally imported bush meat. All illegally imported food has evaded official controls designed to verify compliance with food safety standards and could pose a danger to human health. Such food may therefore be destroyed by local authorities without the need for sampling to detect micro-organisms, toxins or other contamination.

Cancer Treatment

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many young people under the age of 25 were *(a)* diagnosed with cancer and *(b)* died of cancer last year; and if he will make a statement. [98472]

Ms Blears: There were 2,453 new cases of cancer (excluding non-melanoma skin cancer) diagnosed in people under the age of 25 in 1999 in England (latest year for which we have data). 527 people under the age of 25 died from cancer in England in 2001.

Charge Income

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what he estimates his Department's total income from charges will be in *(a)* 2003–04, *(b)* 2004–05 and *(c)* 2005–06. [92789]

Mr. Hutton: Total income to the Department from charges in 2003–04, 2004–05 and 2005–06 is estimated to be around £944 million, £967 million and £992 million respectively.

Choice Programme Pilot Scheme

Andy Burnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the choice programme pilot scheme announced on 11 February. [99065]

Mr. Milburn: On the 11 February I announced a major set of initiatives to introduce more choice for patients into the National Health Service. I gave my hon. Friend an outline of the benefits for patients in Greater Manchester on 11 February, *Official Report*, column 752–753.

In Greater Manchester patients waiting six months for orthopaedic; ear, nose and throat; or general surgery will be able to choose to have their treatment in an alternative hospital. Around 3,400 patients are expected to be offered this choice.

Delayed Discharges

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place a copy of the most recent Quarter 3 delayed discharge and emergency readmission figures in the Library; what assessment he has made of the information collected; and how many times the way the information is collated has been altered in the last five years. [97079]

Jacqui Smith: The information on Quarter 3, 2002–03, delayed discharge and emergency readmission figures has been placed in the Library. Between September 2001 and December 2002, more than 2,000 fewer people were waiting to be discharged from hospital on any single day. The rate of 28-day emergency readmission for patients of all ages has increased very slightly over last quarter from 5.35 to 5.4 per cent. In the last five years, the basis of the information collection has changed to patients of all ages, rather than only patients over 75 years, and from April 2002, the data have been collected by primary care trust area instead of the former health authorities.

Digital Hearing Aids

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when patients of the Epsom and St Helier NHS Trust will have access to digital hearing aids. [97706]

Ms Blears: Funding has been made available for the years 2003–04 and 2004–05 to ensure that a modernised service, providing digital hearing aids, will be available from all National Health Service hearing aids services in England by April 2005.

Epsom and St Helier Hospitals NHS Trust is discussing with their respective primary care trusts whether they wish to modernise in 2003–04 or 2004–05.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects patients will be able to receive digital hearing aids at the Worthing and Southlands NHS Hospitals Trust. [97879]

Ms Blears: Funding has been made available for the years 2003–04 and 2004–05 to ensure that a modernised service, providing digital hearing aids, will be available from all National Health Service hearing aids services in England by April 2005.

NHS hospital trusts not yet involved in the modernisation project will now need to discuss with their respective primary care trusts whether they wish to modernise in 2003–04 or 2004–05.

DIY Genetic Tests

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the availability of DIY genetic tests. [97516]

Ms Blears: In February 2002, Health and Science Ministers asked the Human Genetics Commission to review the matter of genetic testing services supplied direct to the public.

The Commission has publicly stated that they will make their formal recommendations to Ministers in the early spring.

Drug Dependency (Treatment)

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the recommendation in the 2002 Drug Strategy for an increase in the availability of heroin prescription to all those who have a clinical need is intended as guidance that heroin is preferable to other maintenance treatments for opiate addiction. [97646]

Ms Blears: The Updated Drug Strategy 2002 recommendation, that heroin should be available on prescription to all those who have a clinical need for it, does emphatically not mean that heroin is preferable to other treatments. Heroin prescribing may be a valuable supplement to other treatment but only in a limited number of cases, usually where oral methadone has not proved successful. It is for individual clinicians to make a decision about this on a patient by patient basis.

Prescribing oral methadone as a substitute for illicit opiates has proven benefits for both the individual and for society, particularly in terms of reducing injecting behaviour and criminal activity. Methadone can be prescribed for a range of treatments including detoxification, stabilisation and longer-term therapies. Additional guidance for practitioners on the use of heroin as a treatment option is due to be published shortly by the National Treatment Agency for Substance Misuse.

E-mail Addresses

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health by what e-mail address members of the public may contact *(a)* him and *(b)* each of the Ministers in his Department; and for each e-mail address if he will state (i) the date it became active and (ii) the number of e-mails received in each month since activation. [97442]

Ms Blears: Members of the public can contact Ministers at the Department of Health through the email address on the website at dhmail@doh.gsi.gov.uk. This site was introduced in October 1999 and the numbers of emails received are as follows.

1999	
October	320
November	371
December	294
Total	985
2000	
January	487
February	490
March	592
April	868
May	648
June	679
July	777
August	755
September	647
October	977
November	1,035
December	804
Total	8,759
2001	
January	1,391
February	1,289
March	1,618
April	1,517
May	1,651
June	1,460
July	1,653
August	1,716
September	1,563
October	2,204
November	2,210
December	1,616
Total	19,888

2002	
January	2,494
February	2,406
March	2,312
April	2,425
May	2,148
June	1,829
July	2,804
August	2,313
September	2,224
October	2,801
November	2,612
December	1,768
Total	28,136
2003	
January	3,003

Electronic Yellow Card Scheme

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many adverse drug reactions were reported by nurses to the electronic yellow card scheme in January 2003. [97138]

Ms Blears: In January 2003, the Medicines Control Agency and the Committee on Safety of Medicines received two reports of suspected adverse drug reactions (ADRs) submitted by nurses using the electronic yellow card, out of a total of 24 electronic reports of suspected ADRs from all health professionals during this time.

Foundation Hospitals

Ms Drown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information foundation hospitals will cease to need to provide to their strategic health authority, his Department and other regulatory bodies. [99032]

Mr. Hutton: Paragraphs 3.22 and 3.23 of "A Guide to NHS Foundation Trusts" set out our proposals for the provision of financial and statistical information by national health service foundation trusts. Forthcoming legislation will set out the process for defining information requirements for NHS foundation trusts.

Ms Drown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether foundation trusts can choose not to have modern matrons. [99033]

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy to ensure that foundation hospitals cannot disestablish modern matron posts. [98592]

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether foundation hospitals will have the right to remove modern matron posts. [98710]

Mr. Hutton: National health service foundation trusts will have freedom to put in place the staffing and management structures that ensure the necessary mix of skills to provide the best standard of care to patients. Modern matron posts have been a very successful innovation and I would expect foundation trusts to take this into account.

Gender Reassignment Surgery

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what recent information he has collated on waiting lists for gender reassignment surgery; [93435]

(2) how many tertiary level consultants and sessions were devoted to *(a)* male to female psychiatric assessment, *(b)* female to male psychiatric assessment, *(c)* male to female gender confirmation surgery and *(d)* female to male gender confirmation surgery, in respect of each specialist centre providing medical treatment of gender dysphoria, including transsexualism, within the national health service, in the most recent week for which figures are available and in the same week in each of the previous three years; how many patients there were to whom treatment was provided in each category listed above during the preceding 12 months; and how many patients were on the waiting list for each category of such treatment; [93721]

(3) if he will list the locations of providers of gender reassignment surgery that have done NHS commissioned work in each of the last five years; and how many FTE staff, broken down by category, worked at each facility in each year. [93436]

Mr. Hutton: Gender reassignment surgery consists of a series of different surgical procedures, for example, female to male gender reassignment may require a mastectomy and a hysterectomy and a series of operations to construct a phallus. The Department collects Hospital Episode Statistics (HES) from national health service trusts on operations specifically for sexual transformation, but those procedures such as mastectomies or hysterectomies are collected separately and it is not possible to identify if these were carried out as part of a gender reassignment operation. Details of the NHS trusts who have undertaken any operations for sexual transformation in the past five years are listed in the table.

The HES data shows that 89 operations were undertaken for male to female gender reassignment surgery in 2001–02. No operations for female to male gender reassignment were recorded during this period.

Information on the numbers of psychiatric assessments undertaken for gender dysphoria are currently not collected centrally. The mental health minimum dataset will collect data for the first time on psychiatric assessments from April 2003.

Information on waiting lists and the number of full time equivalent staff and sessions per week devoted to treating patients with gender dysphoria and those working in gender dysphoria clinics is not collected centrally.

Trusts that undertake gender reassignment operations 1997–98 to 2001–02

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
The Freeman Group of Hospitals NHS Trust	[1]—	—	—	—	—
The Royal Victoria Infirmary NHS Trust	[1]—	—	—	—	—
The Newcastle upon Tyne Hospital NHS Trust	—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
United Leeds Teaching Hospital NHS Trust	[1]—	—	—	—	—
Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust	—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
North Manchester Healthcare NHS	—	—	—	[1]—	—
Central Manchester and Manchester University NHS Trust	—	—	—	—	[1]—
Leicester General Hospital NHS	[1]—	—	—	—	—
University Hospitals of Leicestershire NHS Trust	—	—	—	[1]—	—
Guy's and St. Thomas' NHS Trust	—	—	—	—	[1]—
The Hammersmith Hospitals NHS	—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
University College London Hospital NHS Trust	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
East Somerset NHS Trust	—	—	[1]—	—	—
The United Bristol Healthcare NHS Trust	—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
St. Helens and Knowsley Hospitals NHS Trust	—	—	—	—	[1]—
Liverpool Womens Hospital NHS	—	[1]—	[1]—	—	—
Addenbrooke's NHS Trust	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	—	[1]—
Brighton Health Care NHS Trust	—	—	[1]—	—	—
Southampton University Hospital NHS Trust	—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	—
Pilgrim Health NHS Trust	[1]—	—	—	—	—
City Hospitals Sunderland NHS	—	[1]—	—	[1]—	[1]—
Dudley Group of Hospitals NHS	—	—	—	[1]—	—
Mid Sussex NHS Trust	[1]—	[1]—	—	—	—
Pinderfields and Pontefract Hospital NHS Trust	[1]—	[1]—	—	—	—
University Hospital Birmingham NHS Trust	—	[1]—	—	—	—
Oxford Radcliffe Hospital NHS Trust	—	—	[1]—	—	[1]—
East Kent Hospitals NHS Trust	—	—	[1]—	—	—

[1] Denotes a trust who have at least one recorded case for the given year.

Note:

A null value has been given where there has either been no cases for the given year or the trust did not exist.

General Practitioners (Derbyshire)

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps are being taken to meet patient demand for GPs in Derbyshire. [98889]

Mr. Lammy: Provision of access to general practitioner services is a matter for primary care trusts (PCTs). A number of initiatives are being taken by PCTs across Derbyshire to improve access to GPs.

For example a £1.1 million public finance initiative build project has been approved by Chesterfield PCT to provide a GP practice in Staveley. Greater Derby PCT is using local investment finance trust funding to develop three new primary care resource centres and to enable Greater Derby practices to upgrade and extend their services in line with the NHSPlan.

GP Vacancies

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many GP vacancies there are at the latest available date; and how many there were in February *(a)* 2002 and *(b)* 2001. [97840]

Mr. Hutton: In the 2002 general practitioner recruitment retention and vacancy survey, health authorities (HAs) reported 2,615 GP vacancies outstanding at any time during the period March 2001 to February 2002, compared with 2,464 in the period April 2000 to March 2001. There were four non-responding HAs in 2001–02 and two in 2000–01.

Health Employees

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer of 12 February to questions refs. 96102 and 93640, what proportion of these employees are *(a)* administrators or managers and *(b)* clinical staff. [99136]

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer of 12 February to question ref. 93640, if he will break down the posts by grade, indicating whether they are *(a)* clinical and *(b)* managerial. [99137]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 25February 2003]:* The information available centrally has been placed in the Library. These figures cannot be broken down by grade.

Health Services (Nottingham)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what improvements have been made to local health services available to people in Nottingham North since June 1997. [98324]

Mr. Lammy: In March 1997 there were 3,653 patients at acute trusts in Nottingham waiting over 26 weeks for outpatients appointments. In December 2002 there were none. Similarly, there were 1,718 patients waiting over 12 months for inpatient appointments. In December 2002, there were only 28.

At Queen's Medical Centre, £5.5 million of capital expenditure has been invested in modernising accident and emergency services. Meanwhile, the primary care trusts covering Nottingham will each receive increases in funding of over 28 per cent. over the next three years, to help further increase life expectancy at birth and reduce premature deaths from cancer. This is just a small sample of investment in local modernisation.

Health Staff

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* general practitioners, *(b)* nurses and *(c)* consultants are employed in (i) Derbyshire and (ii) England and Wales. [98890]

Mr. Hutton: The available data is shown in the table. Information relating to Wales is a matter for the devolved administration.

General medical Practitioners and Practice Nurses, Consultants and NHS HCHS QualifiedNurses in England and Derbyshire Health Authorities as at 30 September 2001

		Numbers (headcount) of which:	
	England	North Derbyshire HA	South Derbyshire HA
All General Medical Practitioners [1]	31,835	234	347
of which:			
Unrestricted Principals and Equivalents (UPEs) [2]	27,843	192	315
Qualified Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting staff [3]	330,535	1,859	3,035
Practice Nurses	19,846	128	223
Consultants	25,690	110	188
Notes:			

Notes:

[1] All practitioners includes: GMS unrestricted principals, PMS contracted GPs, PMS salaried GPs, restricted principals, assistants, GP Registrars, GP retainers, salaried doctors (Para 52 SFA) and PMS others

[2] Unrestricted principals and equivalents (UPEs) includes GMS unrestricted principals, PMS contracted GPs and PMS salaried GPs.

[3] Excludes learners

Source:

Department of Health Non-Medical Workforce Census

Department of Health Medical and Dental Workforce Census

Department of Health General and Personal Medical Services Statistics

Healthy Start Scheme

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the healthy start scheme will reduce the value of benefit to mothers who bottle feed their babies. [99017]

Ms Blears: Decisions on the future of the Welfare Food Scheme will not be taken until the results of the public consultation on the proposed reforms have been assessed.

A report on the outcome of the "Healthy Start" consultation will be published in March 2003. The Department of Health's response to the consultation will follow in the spring.

Hospital Accommodation

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance on the provision of hospital accommodation his Department has issued since December 2000. [98925]

Mr. Hutton: The Department of Health has issued no further guidance on hospital accommodation for doctors in training since the issue of Health Service Circular 2000/036 in December 2000.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what types of hospital accommodation are covered by the guidelines issued by his Department in December 2000. [98926]

Mr. Hutton: The December 2000 guidelines cover accommodation provided to doctors, either because of statutory or contractual requirements or where doctors are voluntarily resident and are required to provide an on-call service from their accommodation. Other accommodation is covered by the Houses in Multiple Occupancy Regulations and other local authority standards to ensure basic habitability.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much the Government spent on improving *(a)* residential and *(b)* on-call hospital accommodation in England and Wales in 2002. [98927]

Mr. Hutton: Improvement of residential accommodation in hospitals is the responsibility of the individual trust concerned and no details are held centrally on expenditure. However, in addition to that spent by trusts, the Department provides a further £2 million annually to support capital improvements to junior doctors' living and working conditions, much of which is used to improve accommodation.

We are unable to provide information for Wales, as healthcare there is the responsibility of the National Assembly for Wales.

Hospital Hygiene

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) of 22 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 392W, on hospital hygiene, how many cases of gastro-enteritis were reported by NHS hospital trusts in each year since 1999. [96045]

Mr. Lammy: There are no definitive data sources for cases of gastro-enteritis in hospitals but the information available is shown in the table.

The Public Health Laboratory Service (PHLS) has voluntary reporting systems for a range of pathogenic organisms but as these systems do not distinguish between cases acquired in hospital and those acquired elsewhere the requested data are not available.

In addition the PHLS also has a voluntary reporting system for outbreaks (these involve two or more related cases) of infectious intestinal disease and a report "General outbreaks of infectious intestinal disease (IID) in hospitals, England and Wales, 1992–2000" was published in the Journal of Hospital Infection (2003) 53:1–5.

Hospital Episode Statistics has the following information which includes cases where the patient was admitted with gastro-enteritis.

Finished consultant episodes (FCE) of diarrhoea and gastro-enteritis in NHS hospitals, England

Year	Number
1999–2000	13,498
2000–01	11,812
2001–02	11,257

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) of 28 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 810W, on hospital hygiene, what the recommendations on the number of wash-hand basins for specific situations are; and if he will make a statement on infection controls teams. [96082]

Ms Blears: Infection control teams play a vital role in promoting good infection control. They will be actively involved in auditing key policies such as hand washing and will help develop trust policy on building services such as hand basins.

Frequency of hand decontamination is governed by many factors, of which sufficient wash hand basins is only one. For new buildings, NHS Estates has made recommendations on hand basins.

The exact number of hand-wash basins in a particular situation depends on the design and configuration of the room.

HPA

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the post of chief executive for the Health Protection Agency will be readvertised. [90079]

Ms Blears: The original timetable for appointing the Health Protection Agency (HPA) shadow Chief Executive Officer (CEO) had been for the end of October 2002, to enable the incoming shadow Chair of the HPA to participate in the appointment procedure. Following advertisements in the national press and professional journals, it was felt that the field of responses could be strengthened and that, given the importance of the role of the new HPA, the assistance of executive search consultants should be sought to advise on and co-ordinate the appointment. This was undertaken during November and December 2002, enabling competitive interviews to be held in early January. The result of that process has been the announcement of the CEO appointment (Dr. Pat Troop) on 27 January 2003 and there is therefore no need for this post to be re-advertised.

Ill Health (Contributory Factors)

Andy King: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimates have been made of the costs to the NHS of *(a)* the potential lifetime ill health of a low birthweight baby, *(b)* obesity and *(c)* indoor winter temperatures below 15 degrees centigrade. [96288]

Ms Blears: The National Audit Office report, 'Tackling Obesity in England', puts the cost of obesity to the National Health Service at £0.5 billion a year. Information is not collected on the other costs.

Source:

Tackling Obesity in England
Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General
HC220 Session 2000–2001: 15 February 2001

In-Patient Waiting Lists

Mr. Simon Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people were waiting in England for in-patient treatment at the latest date for which figures are available. [97837]

Mr. Hutton: The number of patients waiting for elective inpatient admission at National Health Service trusts and primary care trusts in England at 31 December 2002 was 1,056,600.

Influenza

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many pensioners in England received immunisation against influenza in *(a)* the last 12 months for which figures are available, *(b)* the previous 12 months to that and *(c)* 1996. [97826]

Ms Blears: From data collected by the Public Health Laboratory Service on behalf of the Department, we know that as at 31 December 2002, 5,487,645 people aged 65 years and over were immunised against influenza. This compares to 5,135,760 people in 2001–02.

Prior to 2000, the policy on flu immunisation was to offer vaccine to people aged 75 years and over, and not to people aged 65–74. At this time, there was no systematic collection of uptake data for this age-target group of people.

International Fellowship Scheme

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the cost of the NHS International Fellowship Scheme. [94050]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 29 January 2003]:* Expenditure on the national health service international fellowship scheme up to the present is £1,171,847.30.

The Fellowship Scheme is designed to attract experienced, senior consultants from abroad in specialties in high demand worldwide to practise in the NHS for two year fellowships. The number of offers accepted so far is 40 and the overall target is 450 fellows over the lifetime of the scheme.

International Nurses (Code of Practice)

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether agencies which have not signed the code of practice on international nurses have been contracted by the Department. [98916]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer Tuesday 25 February]:* The Department has not contracted with any agency involved in the international recruitment of nurses and therefore subject to the code of practice for National Health Service employers.

Irwell Mill, Bacup

Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost is of the proposed development by the Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale primary care trust on the site of Irwell Mill, Rochdale Road, Bacup; who will be responsible for the demolition and at what cost; and what payments in connection with the purchase of this site will be made to Stylegleam Ltd. [91935]

Jacqui Smith *[pursuant to her reply, 28 January 2003, Official Report, c. 811W]:* I regret my previous response was incorrect. The firs sentence of the second paragraph should read as follows.

"Most of the mill will be demolished, with the Rossendale Borough Council acting as the agents."

IVF

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what estimate he has made of the percentage of children born through IVF born with a recognised disability; and if he will make a statement; [97934]

(2) what research is being conducted into the possible links between intracytoplasmic sperm injection and Angelman syndrome; and if he will make a statement. [97935]

Ms Blears: A number of international studies have raised questions about some in vitro fertilisation (IVF) techniques such as intracytoplasmic sperm injection. The studies show a small increase in the number of babies with health problems. The Medical Research Council and the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority have established a working group that is reviewing current research and will provide advice on any further research needed in assisted conception. Information is not routinely collected on children conceived using an assisted conception technique that are born with a disability or other medical condition.

Kava-kava

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what criteria the Medicines Control Agency set for the Committee on Safety of Medicines and the Medicines Commission in their investigation into kava-kava; [96047]

(2) in what form the conclusions of the Committee on Safety of Medicines and the Medicines Commission into the safety of kava-kava were presented. [96048]

Ms Blears: The Medicines Control Agency (MCA) consulted the Committee on Safety of Medicines (CSM) on the safety of kava-kava, as this falls within its statutory terms of reference which are: "to give advice with respect to safety, quality and efficacy in relation to human use of any substance or article (not being an instrument, apparatus or appliance) to which any provision of the Medicines Act 1968 is applicable; to promote the collection and investigation of information relating to adverse reactions for the purpose of enabling such advice to be given."

The CSM convened an expert working group with the following remit.

> To consider the currently available evidence on the issue of hepatotoxicity suspected to be associated with the use of the herbal remedy kava-kava (piper methysticum).
>
> To assess the risks to public health and whether these can be quantified or prevented and to advise on the risk/benefit balance.
>
> To consider the possible regulatory actions and provide advice on a recommended course of action including how the information should be distributed to healthcare professionals and consumers.

The CSM received the working group's recommendations, considered the available evidence and arguments and gave preliminary advice that the most appropriate regulatory option was the revocation of the marketing authorisations for the three licensed products containing kava-kava and prohibition of the supply of the unlicensed products under section 62 of the Medicines Act. Other options considered were label warnings about hepatic adverse reactions; restrictions of strength, dosage or type of formulation; restricting the status of kava-kava to a prescription only medicine or no regulatory action.

Following preliminary advice from CSM the MCA undertook a public consultation on the prohibition of kava-kava. The MCA sought advice on the responses to the consultation both from the CSM and the Medicines Commission, whose terms of reference are broadly to advise Health Ministers on matters relating to the execution of the Medicines Act 1968. Both bodies were asked to advise on the regulatory options in light of the latest scientific evidence and the responses to public consultation. Both advised that kava-kava should be prohibited in unlicensed medicines and that the marketing authorisations for the licensed products should be revoked.

The advice of the CSM and Medicines Commission on the safety of kava-kava is contained within the minutes of the meetings, which are available in the Library, together with copies of the assessment reports.

In the light of this advice and having considered all the evidence the Minister considered that the sale, supply and importation of kava-kava should be prohibited.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what case reports of liver damage suspected to be associated with the consumption of Kava-Kava he has received from countries other than Switzerland, Germany, Australia, Canada, France, USA and the UK; and whether evidence of such cases was sought; [96502]

(2) if he will list member states of the EEA in which products containing Kava-Kava are not prohibited; [96501]

(3) when the 70 case reports of liver damage suspected to be associated with the consumption of Kava-Kava received by the MCA occurred; and of the 70 cases, how many included a biopsy taken from the patient's liver. [96503]

Ms Blears: The regulatory position of kava-kava in Europe has continually changed over the last 12 months as member states completed their regulatory action. The Medicines Control Agency (MCA) has requested this information from all European Economic Area member states. A report has been placed in the Library. It is known that when the various national expert committees considered this issue, kava-kava has been prohibited, suspended or had never been marketed in the following member states: Denmark, Finland, France, Ireland, Italy, Germany, Greece, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and Sweden.

The MCA has received no case reports of hepatotoxicity associated with kava-kava from countries other than the United Kingdom, Germany, Switzerland, France, Australia, Canada and the USA. The MCA has requested this information from all EEA member states as well as Australia, Canada and the USA.

The following table provides a breakdown of the number of cases of suspected liver damage associated with kava-kava submitted to regulatory authorities with information relating to the onset date of the hepatic reactions. Information relating to the date of onset of the hepatic adverse reactions suspected to be associated with the use of kava-kava has not been provided in 20 of the 70 cases. Three of the case reports state that a liver biopsy was completed.

Year reaction occurred	**Number of cases of hepatotoxicity*
1990	1
1991	0
1992	1
1993	1
1994	2
1995	1
1996	0
1997	1
1998	4
1999	4
2000	8
2001	23
2002	4

A report of a suspected adverse reaction does not necessarily mean that it was caused by the medicine and the number of reports received cannot be used as a basis for determining the incidence of a reaction, as neither the total number of reactions occurring nor the number of patients using the herbal medicine is known.

Legal Actions

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many legal actions have been taken against *(a)* general dental practitioners, *(b)* specialist dental practitioners and *(c)* health authorities in England and Wales by patients who have received retrograde amalgam fillings and whose general health was adversely affected as a result; how many of these actions were successful; and what was the total amount of damages awarded by the courts in respect of such actions; [98354]

(2) what *(a)* testing and *(b)* assessment was made of the (i) efficacy and (ii) safety in relation to the recipient's health of retrograde amalgam fillings for teeth before their use in England and Wales; [98355]

(3) when the use of retrograde amalgam fillings was discontinued in England and Wales; and for what reasons. [98353]

Mr. Lammy: Amalgam has been used for over 150 years to fill billions of teeth and is still in general use in England and Wales for dental restorations, including retrograde restorations. Apart from rare instances of hypersensitivity, no adverse reactions have been proven. Alternative dental restorative materials are not so easily, quickly and reliably placed. Neither are they so durable. The 1998 European Union expert report concluded that currently available data indicate that mercury from dental amalgam restorations will not cause an unacceptable health risk to the general population. Information is not held centrally on legal actions involving dental treatment, but the Department is not aware of any recent cases about the use of amalgam.

Medical Doctors

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what figures he has collated on the percentage of those who qualify as a medical doctor who choose to work part-time *(a)* immediately after qualification, *(b)* after five years in the profession and *(c)* after 10 years in the profession, broken down by gender. [97581]

Mr. Hutton: The most recent data from the Medical Careers Research Group shows that as a percentage of the 1999 qualifiers surveyed in summer 2000, part-time working as a pre-registration house officer (PRHO) was undertaken by 1.8 per cent. of women and 0 per cent. of men.

Data from 1996 qualifiers in 2001–02, shows that a total of 4.7 per cent. of male and 17.1 per cent. of female respondents were working in the national health service five years after qualification.

Data from 1998 qualifiers in 1998–99 shows that a total of 4.5 per cent. of male respondents and 45.8 per cent. of the female respondents were working part-time in the NHS 10 years after qualification.

The detailed information is shown in the tables.

The latest data from the Medical Careers Research Group of Oxford University, on part-time working and working in the NHS, by gender, immediately after qualification and five and 10 years after qualification, are as follows.

Table 1: Immediately after qualification
Numbers and percentages of 1999 and 2000 qualifiers who began their PRHO year in 1999–2000 and 2000–01 respectively and numbers doing so who worked part-time

	Men	*Women*
1999 qualifiers		
Not starting PRHO year	0	2
Working part-time as PRHO	6 (0.6%)	19 (1.3%)
Working full-time as PRHO	966	1,389
PRHO—work pattern not given	5	9
Total PRHOs	977	1,417
2000 qualifiers (25% sample)		
Not starting PRHO year	1	0
Working part-time as PRHO	0	7 (1.8%)
Working full-time as PRHO	291	381
PRHO—work pattern not given	1	0
Total PRHOs	292	388

Table 2: Five years after qualification[1]
The most recent available data are for the 1996 qualifiers in 2001–02

	Men		*Women*	
	Number	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*
NHS (full-time)	901	85.2	893	71.3
NHS (part-time)	50	4.7	214	17.1
UK medicine (non-NHS)	32	3.0	23	1.8
Medicine abroad	50	4.7	70	5.6
Non-medical	25	2.4	53	4.2
Total	1,058	100.0	1,253	100.0

[1] The most recent available data are for the 1996 qualifiers in 2001–02

Table 3: 10 years after qualification[1]
Numbers and percentages of 1988 qualifiers working in the NHS and elsewhere 10 years after qualification, in 1998–99

	Men	*Women*		
	Number	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*
NHS (full-time)	1,120	81.9	508	41.0
NHS (part-time)	61	4.5	568	45.8
UK medicine (non-NHS)	48	3.5	24	1.9
Medicine abroad	126	9.2	74	6.0
Non-medical	12	0.9	66	5.3
Total	1,367	100.0	1,240	100.0

[1] The most recent available data are for the 1988 qualifiers in 1998–99.

Medical Students (Tuition Fees)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the likely effect on numbers of medical students of the proposed increase in tuition fees; and what steps he is taking to increase the number of medical students. [98072]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 24 February 2003]*: Whilst the proposals contained in the Department for Education and Skills' White Paper include allowing universities to increase tuition fees, there is as yet no clear indication from the higher education sector of the scope or scale of any increased charges. The Department of Health will ensure that any increase in the cost of university courses will not have any adverse impact on the supply of students for health training programmes, including medicine.

We are already making a significant investment in extra places at existing medical schools and in establishing new medical schools. By autumn 2003, United Kingdom medical school intakes are planned to total over 7,050, the highest figure ever. The number of UK applicants to study medicine is at the highest level since 1986, which is the earliest year we have figures for.

Mental Health (Separate Facilities)

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) which NHS trusts have not carried out renovations to provide separate sleeping, toilet and washing facilities for male and female mentally ill patients; when work is expected to start at those trusts to provide such arrangements; and if he will make a statement; [99078]

(2) which NHS trusts are undergoing works to provide separate washing facilities for men and women who are mentally ill; when work is expected to be completed at those trusts; and if he will make a statement. [99079]

Mr. Hutton: The requirement to provide single-sex accommodation was set in 1997 and applies to all trusts providing in-patient services irrespective of the nature of the services they provide. Information on accommodation used for the mentally ill is not kept separately.

The Department is not aware of any trust which has yet to take action to deliver the standards which we have set.

Mentally Ill Patients

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many mental health trusts had reached departmental targets for December 2002 to *(a)* ensure that appropriate organisational arrangements are in place to secure good standards of privacy and dignity for hospital patients, *(b)* activate the Patient's Charter Standard for segregated washing and toilet facilities across the NHS and *(c)* provide safe facilities for patients in hospitals who are mentally ill which safeguard their privacy and dignity. [92551]

Mr. Hutton: I refer the hon. Member to the written ministerial statement made on 14 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 24WS.

The information cannot be provided in the format requested. Information on mental health trusts is not kept separately as mental health services and accommodation are also provided within acute and multi-service trusts.

National Insurance

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the additional employers NI costs for each NHS trust will be in the next financial year. [98824]

Mr. Hutton: Data on national insurance costs for each national health service trust are not held centrally.

NHS Direct

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if it is his policy that NHS Direct retain its responsibility for out-of-hours calls. [99084]

Mr. Lammy: We are working towards implementing the NHS Plan target that by the end of 2004, a single phone-call to NHS Direct will be a one-stop gateway to out-of-hours healthcare, passing on calls, where necessary to the appropriate service provider.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether it is his policy that NHS Direct nurses will be the first point of contact for all out-of-hours calls by the end of 2004. [99089]

Mr. Lammy: We are working towards implementing the NHS Plan target that by the end of 2004, a single phone-call to NHS Direct will be a one-stop gateway to out-of-hours healthcare, passing on calls, where necessary to the appropriate service provider. This first point of contact could be a qualified call handler or NHS Direct nurse.

NHS Finance

Mr Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what financial assistance primary care trusts receive to meet *(a)* Government requirements and *(b)* PSA targets; [98301]

(2) how much financial support his Department gives Strategic Health authorities to meet PSA targets. [98307]

Mr. Hutton: Revenue allocations are made directly to primary care trusts (PCTs). The revenue allocations for 2003–04 to 2005–06 were announced on 11 December 2002. PCTs received growth of £12.7 billion or 30.8 per cent. in these allocations over the three years.

None of the revenue growth money has been identified for specific purposes. PCTs will be able to use these extra resources to deliver on both national and local priorities.

Capital allocations for 2003–04 to 2005–06 were announced on 8 January 2003. These include operational capital allocated to primary care trusts and National Health Service trusts and strategic capital allocated to strategic health authorities. Operational capital increased by £254 million or 33 per cent. and strategic capital by £263 million or 43 per cent. over the three years. £100 million of capital allocations has been earmarked as the access fund to reward organisations making progress towards improving access.

NHS Magazine

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the *(a)* gross and *(b)* net cost is of (i) production and (ii) distribution of NHS magazine; and what its circulation is. [98812]

Mr. Lammy: NHS magazine has two editions; NHS magazine, distributed to 27,000 senior staff in acute and secondary health care teams and primary care magazine, distributed to 30,000 staff in primary health care teams.

Production and distribution costs can be different for different issues, depending on content, advertising revenue and whether any specific staff groups are being sent material of specific interest.

Costs for each issue are reduced by income from advertising. Publications are not subject to value added tax.

The normal average costs of production and distribution are shown in the table.

£

	NHS magazine	*Primary care magazine*
Production	50,386	32,876
Distribution	12,500	13,500
Total (gross)	62,386	46,376
Income from advertising	7,900	7,900
Total (net)	54,486	38,476

NHS Managers (Payment)

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on Agenda for Change in relation to the payment of NHS managers. [98958]

Mr. Hutton: The Department is developing a new framework governing pay and contractual arrangements for national health service chief executives, board-level directors and other senior posts of comparable job weight immediately below board level. The "Agenda for Change" pay reforms that were successfully negotiated last year will apply to other NHS managers. Both the new framework for board-level posts and the "Agenda for Change" reforms will be based on a new system of job evaluation to ensure fair and transparent links between the basic pay that staff receive and the levels of responsibility, knowledge, skills and effort required in their jobs.

NHS Pensions Agency

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) of 23 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 478W, on the NHS Pensions Agency, how many applications for permanent injury benefit for a disorder have been submitted in each year since 1997. [96044]

Mr. Hutton: The number of permanent injury benefit applications in respect of a disorder or injury for the financial years April 1997 to March 2002 is shown in the table.

Applications	*Number of applications*
1 April 1997 to 31 March 1998	1,161
1 April 1998 to 31 March 1999	989
1 April 1999 to 31 March 2000	846
1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001	723
1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002	575
Total	4,294

NHS Project Finance

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding he plans to give to PCTs for extra capital for new hospital projects. [98306]

Mr. Hutton: National health service capital allocations to primary care trusts for the period 2003–04 to 2005–06 were announced on 8 January. These capital allocations will provide funding for new hospital projects along with other capital investments within the NHS.

This investment will be supplemented by capital allocated to strategic health authorities for larger developments, and by investment from the Private Finance Initiative. Nationally, strategic capital increased by 13 per cent., 11 per cent., 14 per cent. in the years 2003–04 to 2005–06. Figures are not available for individual StHAs, but those in the south west received average increases of 15 per cent., 22 per cent., 22 per cent. over this period.

NHS Treatment (Europe)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health *[pursuant to his answer of 10 February, ref 92556]*, what types of operation were carried out on the 190 patients in *(a)* France and *(b)* Germany; and whether the £1.1 million includes travelling costs of patients and accompanying relatives. [98156]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 24 February 2003]:* Of the 190 patients that were referred for treatment abroad as part of the overseas pilot, 109 were treated in France, and 81 were treated in Germany. Of the patients that were treated in France, 37 were ophthalmology patients, and 72 were orthopaedic patients. All of the patients treated in Germany were orthopaedic patients.

The figure of £1.1 million quoted in the answer of 10 February, includes the costs of both treatment and travel for patients. The lead commissioners do not have a general power to fund travel and accommodation costs for companions. Companions can only be funded if it can be demonstrated that it is medically necessary that the patient be accompanied.

NHS Waste Report

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the report on waste in the NHS produced by the head of the Downing Street Delivery Unit. [96066]

Ms Blears: There is no report on waste in the National Health service.

The delivery unit report is produced by the head of the Downing Street delivery unit twice a year and is an internal discussion and advice document which is exempt from publication under the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information (Exemption 2).

NICE

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average length of a technology appraisal has been by NICE since its establishment. [95687]

Ms Blears: The average time taken to complete an appraisal is 13.76 months.

Nursing Vacancies (Derbyshire)

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nursing vacancies there were in each Derbyshire NHS trust in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2002; and if he will make a statement. [98891]

Mr. Lammy: There is no data available on nursing vacancies prior to 1999. Since March that year the National Health Service has regularly conducted a vacancy survey. This survey collects information on the number of posts that the trusts are actively trying to fill which have been vacant for three months or more.

The tables show data collected from surveys that were carried out in March 1999 and March 2002.

Department of Health Vacancies Survey, March 1999
Qualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff (excluding HA staff)

	3 month vacancy rate (percentage)	*3 month vacancy number*
March 1999		
England (excluding HA staff)	2.8	7,147
North Derbyshire HA	1.8	25
Chesterfield and North Derbyshire Royal Hospital NHS Trust	3.5	25
Community Health Care Services (North Derbyshire) NHS Trust	0.0	0
South Derbyshire HA	0.0	0
Community Health Services (South Derbyshire) NHS Trust	0.0	0
Derbyshire Ambulance Service NHS Trust		0
Southern Derbyshire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust	0.0	0
Southern Derbyshire Mental Health NHS Trust	0.0	0

Department of Health Vacancies Survey/ March 2002
Qualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff (excluding HA staff)

	3 month vacancy rate (percentage)	*3 month vacancy number*
March 2002		
England (excluding HA staff)	3.1	8,394
North Derbyshire HA	0.8	13
Chesterfield & N Derbyshire Royal Hospital NHS Trust	1.2	10
Chesterfield PCT	0.0	0
Community Health Care Services (North Derbyshire) NHS Trust	0.8	3
North Eastern Derbyshire PCT	0.0	0
South Derbyshire HA	2.1	54

Department of Health Vacancies Survey/ March 2002
Qualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff (excluding HA staff)

	3 month vacancy rate (percentage)	3 month vacancy number
Amber Valley PCT	5.1	6
Central Derby PCT	0.0	0
Erewash PCT	8.4	10
Greater Derby PCT	4.5	5
Southern Derbyshire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust	0.0	0
Southern Derbyshire Community and Mental Health NHS Trust	4.6	33

Note:
Three month vacancies are vacancies which trusts are actively trying to fill, which had lasted for three months or more (whole time equivalents), expressed as a percentage of three month vacancies plus staff in post
Sources:
Department of Health Vacancies Survey, March 1999
Department of Health Vacancies Survey, March 2002

Obesity

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received concerning obesity and the introduction of national care standards; and what assessment he has made of the impact of care standards regarding obesity on *(a)* private clinics and *(b)* nursing homes. [96891]

Ms Blears: We have not received any representations concerning obesity and the introduction of national standards. We have not made any assessment specifically related to the impact of the standards regarding obesity in care (nursing) homes or private clinics.

However, national standards are designed to ensure care provision is fit for the purpose and meet the assessed needs of the home's residents. Among other things there are standards to ensure that care homes promote and maintain their residents health, that residents are given appropriate exercise and physical activity, and that residents receive a wholesome appealing balanced diet.

Out-Patient Waiting Lists

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average waiting time for an out-patient appointment was in England in 2002. [97738]

Mr. Hutton: The estimated average waiting time for a first consultant outpatient appointment in England in 2002 was 7.25 weeks.

Overseas Nurses

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the 25 countries were from which the highest number of overseas nurses were recruited in each of the last five years; and how many nurses were recruited from each country in each year. [98393]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 24 February 2003]:* This information is not held centrally. The Nursing and Midwifery Council registers all nurses who work in the United Kingdom and holds statistics for the number of overseas nurses who are accepted onto their register.

Pathology Services

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many serious clinical incidents have taken place since Hammersmith Hospital took over the contract to provide pathology services to West Middlesex Hospital and Hounslow Primary Care Trust. [96718]

Mr. Hutton: There have been 167 serious untoward incidents reported to North West London Strategic Health Authority.

In order to ensure patient safety, the change in service provision in north-west London has been closely monitored. Clinicians have been required to use the serious untoward incident reporting system to highlight any incidents of the system not functioning smoothly. This is part of a culture of reporting potential risks, even where there has been no actual harm to patients. The aim is to identify and manage potential risks and therefore encourage their reporting.

Patient Choice

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients in London waiting more than six months for elective surgery had a choice of alternative hospital in *(a)* 1998, *(b)* 1999, *(c)* 2000, *(d)* 2001, *(e)* 2002 and *(f)* 2003. [98924]

Mr. Hutton: The London patient choice project (LPCP) started offering choice on 23 September 2002 to patients with cataracts with the first operation on 1 October 2002. Between 1 October 2002 and 10 February 2003, 2,628 patients were offered choice. Of these, 1,859 accepted.

The LPCP was extended to include a range of surgical procedures in the specialties of general surgery; orthopaedics and ear, nose and throat in the week commencing 10 February 2003. It will be further extended to cover other specialties and procedures this summer.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients in London waiting more than six months for cataract surgery had a choice of alternative hospital in *(a)* 1998, *(b)* 1999, *(c)* 2000, *(d)* 2001, *(e)* 2002 and *(f)* 2003. [98931]

Mr. Hutton: The London patient choice project (LPCP) started offering choice on 23 September 2002 to patients with cataracts with the first operation on 1 October 2002.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients from Hendon he expects to be offered a change of hospital under patient choice in *(a)* this and *(b)* the next financial year; and if he will make a statement. [98933]

Mr. Hutton: Patients in Hendon are eligible for the London patient choice project. Barnet and Chase Farm National Health Service Trust has 1,024 patients who have been offered choice in the financial year 2002–03 and expects that, for the financial year 2003–04, a further 1,100 will be made a choice offer.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what treatments are available to patients in Hendon under "Patient's Choice", at hospitals other than those to which they were originally referred; and if he will make a statement. [98943]

Mr. Hutton: Patients in Hendon are eligible for the London patient choice project. This project started to offer choice for cataract patients who have already waited more than six months for treatment, in October 2002 and from March 2003 will be offering a similar choice in ear, nose and throat, general surgery and orthopaedics. The scheme rolls out to other surgical specialties such as gynaecology, urology and plastic surgery from summer 2003.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many choices of alternative hospital patients in London waiting for six months for cataract surgery have had since 1997, and what has been the average wait between referral and treatment in the alternative hospital. [99092]

Mr. Hutton: Patients are usually offered two alternative hospitals for cataract surgery.

The average wait between referral and treatment would be between two and four weeks, not including the time it may take to contact the patient and for them to make a decision. The contact process usually commences before the patient reaches six months on the list.

Where a patient is found to have a second cataract, they are expected to be treated within one and three months, should they so choose.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many choices of alternative hospital the 100,000 extra patients identified by him in his speech of 11 February will have; and who will determine their eligibility. [99102]

Mr. Hutton: The precise range of choice offered to patients is being designed on a project by project basis. Some projects are offering choice for those patients already on a waiting list for six months, and in others choice is being offered at the point of booking into an out-patient clinic.

For the six month waiting patients, a choice of one alternative treatment centre will be offered. For choice at the point of booking, two alternative treatment centres will be offered.

All projects will produce patient care pathways for each procedure, utilising nationally available guidance and advice. The pathways that cover eligibility criteria will then developed with clinicians. The trust on whose waiting list the patient is held before the start of the choice process.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who will determine whether a patient in London waiting more than six months for elective surgery is eligible to choose an alternative hospital. [99105]

Mr. Hutton: The London patient choice project takes as a starting point that the whole process of choice must be safe and quality assured from the patient perspective. The project has therefore produced patient care pathways for each procedure. These utilise nationally available guidance and advice, such as that published by the Royal Colleges and the Department of Health, as a core foundation. The pathways that cover eligibility criteria have then been developed in conjunction with clinicians in London.

The trust on whose waiting list the patient is held before the start of the choice process, checks whether the patient falls within the eligibility criteria for choice. However the transfer of clinical responsibility does not take place until the patient has been seen and accepted in a pre-admission clinic in the alternative hospital.

Problematic Drug Users

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many problematic drug users were known to the social services as children. [98147]

Ms Blears: We are not aware of any relevant statistics held centrally on how many problematic drug users were known to the social services as children.

Prostate Cancer

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made on the Government's campaign to tackle effectively prostate cancer; and if he will make a statement. [97137]

Ms Blears: Good progress has been made since the national health service prostate cancer programme was launched on 6 September 2000, setting out the Government's approach to improving prostate cancer services in England and Wales.

As part of the prostate cancer risk management programme (PCRMP), evidence-based primary care resource packs were sent to all general practitioners in England from 23 September 2002 to aid them in counselling men who are worried about prostate cancer, ensuring the men make an informed choice about whether or not to have a prostate specific antigen (PSA) test.

Other elements of the PCRMP include ensuring that a systematic and standardised follow-up pathway is available for individuals whose test result is above the PSA threshold and action to improve the quality of laboratory testing of PSA samples. Primary care and laboratories were informed of recommendations from the scientific reference group, which supports the PCRMP, in September 2002.

By 2003–04, the Department will be directly funding £4.2 million of research a year on prostate cancer. This is a 20-fold increase compared with 1999–2000. Two National Cancer Research Institute prostate cancer research collaboratives have been established in Newcastle and London. Funded research includes studies on various treatments for prostate cancer, improving the PSA test and ethnic differences in prostate cancer incidence. The National Cancer Research Institute considered prostate cancer as part of its strategic analysis in 2002, but made no specific recommendations.

The Department is funding a Section 64 grant to the Prostate Cancer Charity to increase further information about prostate cancer. This is supporting the creation, review, provision and dissemination of a range of awareness material, supported by £135,000 over three years. 92.4 per cent. of patients with suspected urological cancers, including prostate, were seen for their first out-patient appointment within two weeks of their general practitioner deciding they should be urgently referred, and the hospital receiving the referral within 24 hours, in April to June 2002.

The cancer services collaborative is modernising cancer care, including prostate cancer, by reducing unnecessary delays in the system for patients throughout the cancer journey.

The number of consultant urologists grew from 382 in 2000 to 427 in 2001, and is set to grow to 504 in 2005. There may be around an additional 100 trained specialists available to take up consultant posts in urology.

The Government welcomed the launch of the prostate cancer charter for action on 29 January 2003. We look forward to working closely with the charter. To ensure better collaboration and communication between the charter members, the Government intend to set up a prostate cancer advisory group, allowing us to combine the expertise of the voluntary sector with the national health service for the benefit of patients.

Public Bodies

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the cost of the reorganisation from the Commission for Health Improvement and the National Care Standards Commission to the Commission for Healthcare Audit and Inspection and the Social Services Inspectorate. [97814]

Jacqui Smith: Work is currently in hand to consider how the Commission for Healthcare Audit and Inspection and the Commission for Social Care Inspection will be established. Estimates of costing have not yet been made but will be undertaken in due course as it becomes clearer how these independent new bodies will carry out their functions.

Subject to legislation, the Commission for Social Care Inspection will bring together the functions of the Social Services Inspectorate and the social care functions of the National Care Standards Commission (NCSC) and the Commission for Healthcare Audit andInspection will encompass the Commission for Health Improvement, the healthcare related functions of the NCSC, the health value for money work of the Audit Commission and, subject to the passage of further legislation, the work of the Mental Health Act Commission.

Redundancy Payments

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS workers, who have received pension payouts or redundancy payouts, have been employed by, or given remunerated services to, the NHS following their pension or redundancy payout in the last three years for which figures are available. [95638]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 5 February 2003]:* The information requested is not collected centrally. The Department of Health issued Health Service Guidance (95)25, NHS early retirement arrangements, which clearly states that offers of re-employment or payments for consultancy work are not expected to be made to former national health service employees who have taken early retirement from the NHS at public expense, unless the offer clearly represents good value for money in relation to alternatives.

Further employment of staff who receive early payment of NHS pension benefits as a result of compulsory redundancy, or who volunteer to retire early with actuarially reduced pension benefits, is not restricted. However, the HSG provides guidelines on the abatement and suspension of NHS pension during re-employment in the NHS.

Renewable Energy

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what changes in unit payments for electricity have resulted from the switch by his Department to purchasing renewable energy which is exempt from the Climate Change Levy. [96482]

Ms Blears: The Department first purchased renewable energy for consumption in its London headquarters buildings from October 2001. The current average unit charge for renewable electricity on the estate, compared to the average unit price charged prior to October 2001, shows a reduction of around 10 per cent.

Spanish Eggs

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent assessment he has made of the risks to health from eggs imported from Spain. [97710]

Ms Blears: During October and November 2002, there was a marked increase in the number of outbreaks of Salmonella Enteritidis. Many of these were linked to the use of eggs in catering and in the majority of these, the eggs appeared to have originated from Spain.

Investigations of eggs linked to outbreaks and of eggs in catering premises, carried out by the Public Health Laboratory Service, have identified a higher level of contamination of Spanish eggs by Salmonella (5 per cent. of pooled samples) than was found in previous surveys of eggs, whether United Kingdom produced (1 per cent. of pooled samples) or non-UK produced (2 per cent. of pooled samples).

Eggs, regardless of their origin, cannot be guaranteed to be Salmonella free. However, the risk to public health can be minimised if eggs are properly handled and cooked. The FoodStandards Agency has reiterated advice to a wide range of food businesses, including those catering for vulnerable groups, on the correct handling and use of raw shell eggs. It has drawn the problem with eggs to the attention of the European Commission and the Spanish authorities and has advised importers and wholesalers of imported eggs to send eggs imported from Spain for commercial heat treatment until further notice. Since this advice was issued, the number of outbreaks has fallen to normal background levels.

Specialist Commissioning

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what reasons underlay his decision to postpone the transfer of specialist commissioning to primary care trusts until April 2004; and if he will make a statement. [95856]

Mr. Hutton: Decisions on the future arrangements for specialist commissioning will be taken shortly.

Speech Therapy

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he plans to ensure that primary care trusts provide speech therapy to meet children's statemented needs. [97180]

Mr. Hutton: "Shifting the Balance of Power" gives primary care trusts (PCTs) the responsibility of improving the health of the community, securing the provision of high quality services and integrating health and social care locally.

We are assisting this by increasing the numbers of speech and language therapists (SLTs). Between September 1997 and 2001, the number of SLTs employed in the national health service increased by 17 per cent., from 4,870 to 5,680. The numbers of SLTs entering training have increased by 21 per cent., from 457 to 553 between 1999–2000 and 2001–02. Also, with the extra investment announced in the 2002 Budget, by 2008 the NHS will have net increases of at least 30,000 scientists and therapists, including speech and language therapists, over the September 2001 staff census.

A children care group work force team was established in December 2001 to take a national view on the health and social care work force pressures and priorities for children and maternity services. It supports the strategy set out in "The HR in the NHS Plan", published in July 2002, which aims to grow and develop the NHS work force.

One of the main priorities for the care group is to support the development of the children's national service framework. This includes action to develop a framework of the skills and competencies needed in the work force to deliver quality person-centred care for children, young people and expectant mothers. This will help to ensure that national educational needs are identified and action taken through the care group, and that at a local level, primary care trusts have the information needed to make adequate provision for children's services. This would include the provision of speech therapy.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will instigate an inquiry into the staffing and funding of speech therapy in *(a)* special schools and *(b)* mainstream schools. [97182]

Mr. Hutton: I have no current plans to do so.

Voluntary Residential Accommodation

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether voluntary residential accommodation is covered by his Department's inspection and enforcement procedures. [98928]

Mr. Hutton: Where accommodation is rented from a hospital on a voluntary basis and there is no contractual requirement to provide on-call duties from that accommodation, the accommodation will not be covered by the inspection requirements of HSC2000/036. It will be covered by the Houses in Multiple Occupancy Regulations and other local authority standards to ensure basic habitability.

Welfare Food Scheme

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the value of benefit under the Welfare Food Scheme is as a proportion of the household food budget, for the poorest 20 per cent. of mothers who bottle feed. [99016]

Ms Blears: The Welfare Food Scheme is primarily targeted at low income families in receipt of income support and income based job seekers' allowance. Certain families in receipt of working families' tax credit are also eligible for specific provisions under the scheme. It is not possible to identify the poorest 20 per cent. of beneficiaries within these groups. The majority of eligible mothers in the scheme with a child under one opt to take-up infant formula.

Bottle-feeding mothers with a child under one in receipt of income support or income based job seekers' allowance are entitled to a benefit which consists of a fixed amount of milk. They receive milk tokens which can be exchanged for seven pints of liquid milk or one 900g tin of infant formula per week. The monetary value of the milk is variable as it is dependent upon the price charged by retailers and manufacturers.

Certain families in receipt of working families' tax credit are entitled to purchase 900g tins of infant formula at a discounted rate from designated national health service clinics.

Sigmoidoscopy

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many hospitals in the UK are equipped to perform flexible sigmoidoscopies;. [96070]

(2) what estimate he has made of the number of patients subject to rigid sigmoidoscopy procedures who could have a flexible sigmoidoscopy; [96071]

(3) what percentage of patients investigated for bowel cancer are subject to *(a)* rigid sigmoidoscopy, *(b)* flexible sigmoidoscopy and *(c)* barium enema and *(d)* colonoscopy. [95993]

Ms Blears: Data is not available on the number of hospitals that are equipped to perform flexible sigmoidoscopies, nor on the percentage of bowel cancer patients that have individual investigations. The decision as to the appropriate diagnostic test for any patient will be for the clinical judgment of the clinician in charge of the patient's care, taking full consideration of the patient's presenting symptoms.

A national health service bowel cancer programme was announced on 5 February 2003. The aim of the programme is to develop a national screening programme for bowel cancer and speed up diagnosis and treatment for patients with the disease.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 27 February 2003

MINISTER FOR WOMEN

Departmental Appointments

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Minister for Women what guidance she gives to departments regarding the setting of departmental targets for the appointment of women; and if she will make a statement. [99039]

Ms Hewitt: This Government are committed to achieving an even balance of men and women on boards of public bodies. Responsibility for making these appointments lies with individual Ministers supported by their Departments. Each Department sets out its target for increasing diversity in public appointments in "Public Bodies: Opening up Public Appointments 2002–2005". The DTI is committed to between 45 and 55 per cent. of appointments made each year to be women.

The Cabinet Office has lead responsibility for public appointments. It is committed to helping Departments achieve the targets they have set, while upholding the principles of selection on merit.

EU Equality Advisory Committee

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Minister for Women if she will make a statement regarding conclusions reached at the EU Equality Advisory Committee meeting on 9 October 2002. [99049]

Ms Hewitt: The purpose of the meeting of the EU Advisory Committee on 9 October was to exchange information and experience. The minutes of the meeting are not yet available from the European Commission.

Public Appointments

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Minister for Women how many regional seminar series in each region were hosted by the Women and Equality Unit to attract women to public appointments in each of the last two years; and if she will make a statement. [99040]

Ms Hewitt: During 2002 the Women and Equality Unit hosted eight regional seminars. The seminars were held in the following places:

Abingdon
Canterbury
Norwich
Nottingham
Scunthorpe
Leeds
Greenwich
North Tyneside

One national seminar was held in Leicester.

The practical guide "Get A Public Life", published in December, enables others to run similar events.

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Minister for Women how much has been spent on regional seminars by the Women and Equality Unit on attracting women to public appointments; and if she will make a statement. [99041]

Ms Hewitt: The National Outreach Campaign consisted of eight regional seminars and five national seminars; the total cost of holding these seminars was £57,551.21 (excluding VAT).

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Embryo Research

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many embryos the Medical Research Council envisages requiring per year for its embryo stem cell bank; and what their planned budget is for the bank. [97989]

Ms Hewitt: The bank will store adult, foetal and embryonic stem cell lines derived by the research community in the UK and overseas. Such lines will be ethically sourced and quality controlled. Embryonic stem cells will be supplied to the bank from IVF embryos donated for research. The MRC does not know how many embryos will be so donated.

However, it is a condition of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority licence that all embryonic stem cell lines derived in the UK must be deposited in the bank. It will be a condition of MRC funding for stem cell research that adult, foetal and embryonic stem cell lines generated with such funding must be deposited in the bank. Other UK funders are likely to adopt the same terms and conditions. Deposition in, and access of lines from the UK bank will be overseen by the Steering Committee chaired by Lord Patel. Since the UK bank will provide standardised stem cell lines for research purposes, the need for individual research groups to derive their own stem cell lines will be reduced, thereby minimising the overall number of embryos used.

The UK stem cell bank is being funded at a level of £2.6 million over three years. MRC will contribute 75 per cent., and the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council 25 per cent. of these costs.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much the MRC has spent on research using human embryos in each the past 20 years. [97990]

Ms Hewitt: The majority of the research on embryos supported by the Medical Research Council involves material collected from animal models; only a small number of projects involve human embryos. Human embryonic tissue is currently used in the study of developmental biology and research on the treatment of disease. MRC does not keep historical figures for spend on such research, but estimates that in the last financial year (2001–02) it spent £0.6 million on research involving or related to human embryos.

E-Mail Addresses

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry by what e-mail address members of the public may contact *(a)* her and *(b)* each of the Ministers in her Department; and for each e-mail address if she will state (i) the date it became active, and (ii) the number of e-mails received in each month since activation. [97458]

Ms Hewitt: The e-mail addresses are as follows:

(a) Secretary of State for Trade and Industry—Patricia Hewitt—mpst.hewitt@dti.gsi.gov.uk

(b) Minister of State for Employment Relations, Industry and the Regions—Alan Johnson—mpst.johnson@dti.gsi.gov.uk

Minister of State for E-Commerce and Competitiveness—Stephen Timms—mpst.timms@dti.gsi.gov.uk

Minister of State for Energy and Construction—Brian Wilson—mpst.wilson@dti.gsi.gov.uk

Minister of State for Trade—Baroness Symons—ministersymons.action@fco.gov.uk

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Small Business—Nigel Griffiths—mpst.griffiths@dti.gsi.gov.uk

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Competition, Consumer and Markets—Melanie Johnson—Melanie.Johnson.mpst@dti.gsi.gov.uk

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Science and Innovation—Lord Sainsbury—mpst.sainsbury@dti.gsi.gov.uk

(i) Each e-mail address became active upon the appointment of the Minister;

(ii) This information could not be obtained except at disproportionate cost.

Euratom Research

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which United Kingdom companies or organisations have benefited from the European Council Decision 668/2002/Euratom of 3 June 2002, which estimated a European funding area for the sixth framework programme for Euratom research and training activities. [98497]

Ms Hewitt: The United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority's Culham Science Centre is the only organisation in the UK to receive funding for nuclear fusion research. Some of this funding is used for research by UK universities and the Rutherford-Appleton Laboratory.

UK research contractors, regulators and industry will benefit from the fission programme by participating in FP6 research projects supported by Euratom. The first call for proposals for these research projects is currently underway and two further calls will follow during the course of FP6.

Renewable Energy Exporters

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry pursuant to her answer of 30 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 984W, on renewable energy exporters, if she will provide a breakdown of the renewable energy technologies represented by the three applications for support under the renewable energy initiative of the ECGD. [99333]

Ms Hewitt: ECGD has received applications that could be considered under this initiative in respect of the following renewable energy technologies:

Mini-hydros

Offshore wave energy

Waste to energy

The initiative comes into effect in April 2003 making ECGD cover available for at least £50 million of projects that meet the minimum risk standards.

TRANSPORT

Belfast City Airport

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the ability of runway facilities at Belfast City airport to accommodate an increased use by large passenger planes. [99417]

Mr. Jamieson: In licensing civil aerodromes in the UK, the Civil Aviation Authority does not specify the type or number of aircraft that can operate from a particular aerodrome. Instead, it ensures that national and international operating and safety standards are complied with. Provided that these standards are met it is a matter for aircraft operators and the aerodrome licensee to be satisfied that the facilities and manning levels match their requirements.

Stretch Limousines

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the environmental impact, with particular reference to *(a)* emissions and *(b)* fuel consumption of (i) a stretch limousine and (ii) other types of road vehicle. [99249]

Mr. Jamieson: No specific assessment has been made of the environmental impact of stretched limousines. However, indices for regulated pollutants (CO, HC, NOx and PM) and for C02 are given for various classes of road vehicles in Table 2.6. of the Departmental publication "Transport Statistics: Great Britain—2002 Edition".

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many stretch limousines have been registered for use on British roads in each year since 1992; and if he will estimate the average distance travelled by each of these vehicles in each of these years. [99224]

Mr. Jamieson: The information held by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency on body types does not distinguish between different categories of limousine. No information is held on the distances travelled by these vehicles.

Air Quality

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy to establish a national standard for local authority low emission zones restricting the entry of highly polluting vehicles into air quality management areas; and if he will make a statement. [98699]

Mr. Jamieson: The latest guidance issued by DEFRA to support local authorities with their air quality management duties under Part IV of the Environment Act 1995 includes recommendations made by the National Society for Clean Air's Cleaner Transport Forum on proposed standards in low emission zones.

Air Transport (EU Regulations)

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what representations he has received concerning the European Commission's Air Transport Draft Regulation COM (2002) 521; and if he will make a statement; [100035]

(2) what assessment he has made of the impact of Draft Regulation COM (2002) 521; and what the Government's policy is on the draft regulation. [100036]

Mr. Jamieson: On 21 October 2002 the Minister for Transport submitted an Explanatory Memorandum on the draft Regulation to both Houses of Parliament. On 11 December 2002 the Minister submitted a Supplementary Explanatory Memorandum to Parliament including a partial regulatory impact assessment assessing the likely effect of the proposal as drafted. The assessment listed eight organisations that, in response to a request by officials, made representations to the Department. They are: the British Air Transport Association, the Board of Airline Representatives in the UK, the General Aviation Manufacturers and Traders Association, the British Helicopter Advisory Board, the Royal Aero Club of the UK, the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association, the International Union of Aviation Insurers and the Civil Aviation Authority.

Whilst the Government supports measures to harmonise insurance requirements across the European Community, it has expressed concern that the introduction of mandatory requirements for non-commercial aircraft operators would impose unwarranted costs on that sector of civil aviation. We have also questioned the legality and practicality of the provisions in proposal to overflying aircraft.

Air Travel (Demand)

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether it is his policy to allow anticipated increased demand for air travel to be met. [99201]

Mr. Jamieson: This is one of the central questions to which we are seeking responses in our current consultation on the future development of air transport in the United Kingdom. We will set out our policy conclusions in the air transport White Paper later this year.

Congestion Charge

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport in cases where regional strategic guidance includes congestion taxes for a particular town or city, what requirement will be placed on the Council in that place to introduce a congestion charge. [93604]

Mr. Spellar: Decisions on whether to introduce such measures and the form they take, are a matter for individual local authorities.

Driver Fatigue

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures he is taking to raise awareness among drivers of the dangers of fatigue with *(a)* the general public, *(b)* operators of motor fleets and *(c)* companies using commercial vehicles and employing travelling salespersons. [99635]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department raises awareness of the dangers of falling asleep at the wheel among all drivers by means of national publicity campaigns and advertising. Local authority road safety officers support our campaigns and provide relevant publicity materials to employers within their areas.

Full details of the Department's driver tiredness campaigns were given in answer to a question from the hon. Member for Bath (Don Foster) on 9 December 2002 [*Official Report*, column 31W].

We will be running new radio commercials this Easter. Motorway variable message signs will again carry the "Don't Drive Tired" slogan again. We will also be using lorry back advertising for the first time to remind drivers to take a break. A new public information film will be produced in the spring.

Oil Pollution

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he will take to ensure that local authorities have up to date oil spill contingency plans in line with the National Contingency Plan following the second report of the Public Accounts Committee. [98698]

Mr. Jamieson: The responsibility for responding to pollution at sea lies with the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) and certain ports and harbours, as laid out in the Merchant Shipping Regulations 1998. However, local authorities will respond to shoreline pollution and have detailed contingency plans to address potential incidents.

The MCA provides two accredited training courses for local authority emergency planners and operational staff. 'Oil pollution, Contingency Planning and Response' is a five-day course for local authority management staff, run four times a year across the UK. 'Oil Pollution Response', run eight times a year, is a two day hands-on training course in counter pollution for local authority staff, who would expect to be involved supervising beach clean-up operations and protective booming operations.

The MCA actively encourages local authorities to maintain and update their oil spill contingency plans. The MCA maintains a database of all local authority oil spill plans, and monitors the updating procedures of individual authorities. In addition, local authorities are encouraged to submit their plans for formal review by the MCA's Counter Pollution and Response Branch.

HOUSE OF COMMONS PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES (HANSARD) ● 2002-03

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INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Iraq

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the humanitarian consequences of war against Iraq, with special reference to medical aid. [98733]

Clare Short: The people of Iraq are already suffering a humanitarian catastrophe. 60 per cent. of the people in this naturally wealthy and highly educated country are dependent on handouts from the Oil for Food Programme and one-third of children in Baghdad-controlled Iraq are chronically malnourished.

If the UN authorises military action to force Saddam Hussein to comply with his disarmament obligation, it is essential that great care is taken to minimise any harm to the people who are already very vulnerable. This means very careful targeting of military action, ensuring order is maintained, food distribution is quickly resumed and that health and water and sanitation infrastructure is rehabilitated as soon as possible.

Planning is in hand for all of this. My greatest worry is that there is not yet agreement that the UN should have the lead role in a post conflict Iraq. Without this there would be significant legal and other difficulties for the international humanitarian system to work.

SCOTLAND

Annual Report

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much producing her Department's latest Annual Report cost; how many copies were printed; how many copies of it were sold at its cover price; to whom copies of the report have been provided free of charge; and how many copies were provided free of charge. [90889]

Mrs. Liddell: The cost to the Scotland Office of producing the 2002 Departmental Report was £3,869. The number of copies printed for the department was 150. Copies of the report were provided free of charge to the Scottish Affairs Committee, other Government Departments and for use within the Department.

The Stationery Office determines the number of copies for retail sale and meets the costs of printing and publication. I understand that TSO has sold approximately 300 copies of the report.

Departmental Consultations

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will list consultations her Department has conducted since 1997; and when each consultation *(a)* opened and *(b)* closed. [97432]

Mrs. Liddell: The information requested is as follows:

a consultation on the size of the Scottish Parliament was launched on 18 December 2001 with responses invited by 29 March 2002.

a consultation on Sunday working in Scotland was launched on 19 December 2002 with a deadline for comments by 14 March 2003.

Online Sales/Purchases

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what *(a)* products, *(b)* goods and *(c)* services were (i) bought and (ii) sold online by her Department in each of the last five years. [97455]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999. Since that date, no products, goods or services have been bought or sold on-line by the department.

Sickness Absence

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many days were lost due to sickness absence in the Department in 2002. [90545]

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many working days were lost due to illness in her Department in *(a)* 2002 and *(b)* each of the preceding five years. [90743]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999.

Details of working days lost due to illness in my department are given in the table below.

Dates	*Working days lost due to illness*
1 January 2002–30 November 2002	651.0
1 January 2001–31 December 2001	746.5
1 January 2000–31 December 2000	442.5
1 July 1999–31 December 1999	299.0

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Coronation Anniversaries

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what events and programmes were arranged for previous anniversaries of the Coronation of Her Majesty the Queen in *(a)* 1978 and *(b)* other years. [98832]

Tessa Jowell: Any events to mark the Anniversary of the Coronation in 1978 and other years were arranged as part of The Queen's normal programme of engagements. Similarly, any events to mark the 50th Anniversary of the Coronation this year will be part of The Queen's programme arranged by Buckingham Palace.

Horseracing

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations she has received regarding the decision by the British Horseracing Board to alter the charges levied on bookmakers relating to receiving pre-race data; and if she will make a statement. [99548]

Mr. Caborn: We have so far received about a hundred letters on this matter. Decisions by the British Horseracing Board about charges to bookmakers for the use of its data are commercial matters as between the parties; and it would not be appropriate for me to comment on them.

Hospitality

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what criteria Ministers in her Department use when determining whether to offer hospitality in restaurants to interest groups at public expense; and if she will make a statement; [99508]

(2) what hospitality has been offered at public expense in the last 12 months, by each Minister in her Department to outside interest groups, broken down by *(a)* restaurant, *(b)* recipient and *(c)* cost in each case; [99509]

(3) how often Ministers in her Department have received hospitality in restaurants from outside groups in the last 12 months. [99584]

Dr. Howells: All offers of hospitality are made in accordance with published departmental guidance on financial procedures and propriety, based on the principles set out in Government Accounting. The giving and receiving of hospitality is conducted fully in accordance with the guidance set out in the Ministerial Code, and Guidance on Contacts with Outside Interest Groups including Lobbyists. The detailed information requested is not held centrally, and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Olympics Bid

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what her estimate is of the potential benefits to non-London tourist centres of holding the 2012 Olympics. [97930]

Tessa Jowell: The additional tourism benefits of the Olympics and Paralympics outside London and the South East have been estimated at between £100 million and £190 million, reflecting the expected increase in expenditure by overseas and domestic visitors during the period of both the Olympics and Paralympics.

The estimates do not include any wider or longer-term effects outside London that hosting an Olympics would have on inbound and domestic tourism. Nor have we sought to break down the estimate by individual region. However, as the BTA said in its recent submission to the CMS Select Committee, there can be little doubt that the staging of a successful Olympics would be beneficial in the longer-term for inbound tourism, providing an unparalleled opportunity to showcase the wider UK as well as London. This is a view that has been endorsed by a number of organisations, including Advantage West Midlands and the South West Regional Assembly.

Tourism

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many people are employed *(a)* part-time and *(b)* full-time in the British tourism industry. [99680]

Dr. Howells: Since the tourism sector is formed of parts of a diverse set of industries whose businesses serve both tourists and non-tourists, the number of jobs supported by tourism can only be estimated. The latest estimate of total employment in tourism-related industries in Great Britain is 2.2 million in June 2002, of which 1.1 million jobs were part-time.

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what estimate she has made of expenditure on domestic tourism in 2002. [99681]

Dr. Howells: Domestic tourism expenditure on trips with an overnight stay is estimated to have been 22.6 billion for January to October 2002. Data to the end of 2002 will be published in April 2003.

Data on domestic tourism day trips will be available in summer 2003.

Both sources will be published on the website *www.staruk.org.uk*.

DEFENCE

Asylum Accommodation (Daedalus)

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consultations there were between the MoD and the Home Office prior to the announcement by the latter of its interest in developing asylum facilities at Daedalus. [98626]

Dr. Moonie: Since November 2002 there has been a variety of contact between the Home Office and the Ministry of Defence about the Daedalus property.

The Home Office contacted Defence Estates in late November 2002 requesting details of sites that might be available for an inter-governmental transfer to the Home Office.

In December 2002, the Home Office requested information, together with a site plan, in regard to an area of the Daedalus property, which MOD were considering for potential future disposal. Home Office representatives visited the site on 22 January 2003 and subsequently indicated that a portion of the site was could be of interest to them. My Home Office colleague, Beverly Hughes MP, wrote to me on 10 February 2003 to say that the Daedalus site was potentially suitable for an asylum accommodation centre for up to 400 single men and that the Home Office intended to make an announcement to this effect on February 11.

Decommissioning

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy to postpone the proposed decommissioning dates for *(a)* HMS Splendid and *(b)* HMS Sovereign pending the completion of the first Astute class submarines. [98249]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon Member to the answers I gave on 3 February 2003, *Official Report*, columns 52W and 67W.

Nerve Gas

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the *(a)* effectiveness and *(b)* appropriateness of disabling nerve agents in conflict situations. [98106]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence assesses the range of threats that the armed forces may face in conflict, including those from chemical weapons. The use of all chemical weapons is prohibited by the Chemical Weapons Convention, which entered into force in April 1997. The Convention also prohibits the use of riot control agents (i.e. temporarily disabling agents) as a method of warfare.

Nuclear-Powered Submarines

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the locations of each paid-off SSN and former Polaris submarine. [95886]

Mr. Ingram *[pursuant to his reply, 12 February 2003, Official Report, column 747W]:* I mistakenly referred to HMS Dreadnought as a Polaris submarine. She is, of course, a Dreadnought Class submarines and never carried Polaris missiles.

RAF Continuous Attitude Survey

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Army personnel indicated in the latest analysed Army continuous attitude survey that they were *(a)* very satisfied, *(b)* satisfied, *(c)* neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, *(d)* dissatisfied and *(e)* very dissatisfied when asked about (i) how much they felt valued by the army, (ii) general job satisfaction, (iii) how satisfied they were with management by superior NCOs/WOs, (iv) how satisfied they were with management by officers, (v) working conditions on operations, (vi) working conditions non-operations, (vii) confidence in abilities of immediate superiors, (viii) satisfaction with army life in general, (xi) satisfaction with quality of life, (x) satisfaction with workload, (xi) satisfaction with amount of leave entitlement, (xii) overall amount of training received, (xiii) overall pay, (xiv) army pension arrangements, (xv) welfare arrangements on operational tours and (xvi) welfare support for families; what percentage of those responding to each question each option represents; when the survey was completed; and if he will make a statement. [99185]

Dr. Moonie: The questions raised were covered in two separate Continuous Attitude Surveys (CAS), SP2 distributed in August 2001 and SP3 distributed in May 2002 as indicated. Questions asked in SP 2 were not repeated in SP3. The details have been placed in the Library.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many RAF personnel in the latest analysed Royal Air Force continuous attitude survey indicated they *(a)* strongly agreed, *(b)* agreed, *(c)* neither agreed nor disagreed, *(d)* disagreed, *(e)* strongly disagreed and *(f)* didn't know to the statement 'Overstretch is causing serious problems in my working group'; what percentage of those responding to this question each option represents; when the survey was completed; and if he will make a statement. [99190]

Dr. Moonie: The latest analysed survey was issued o 2000 RAF personnel on 1 February 2002, and completed by them during February to April 2002. It was published in September 2002.

In this survey, the responses to the statement 'Overstretch is causing serious problems in my working' are set out in the table below. It is not possible to separate the 'Don't know' from the 'not applicable' responses.

	Airmen	*Officers*	*Total*
Strongly agree			
Number[1]	347	70	417
Percentage	36.6	32.0	35.7
Agree			
Number[1]	333	77	410
Percentage	35.1	35.2	35.1
Neither agree nor disagree			
Number[1]	170	37	207
Percentage	17.9	16.9	17.7
Disagree			
Number[1]	75	27	102
Percentage	7.9	12.3	8.7
Strongly Disagree			
Number[1]	10	1	11
Percentage	1.1	0.5.	0.9
Don't know/not applicable			
Number[1]	13	7	20
Percentage	1.4	3.2	1.7
Total:			
Number[1]	948	219	1,167
Percentage	100	100	100

[1] Number of people who responded with this answer

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many RAF personnel in the latest analysed Royal Air Force continuous attitude survey indicated they *(a)* strongly agreed, *(b)* agreed, *(c)* neither agreed nor disagreed, *(d)* disagreed, *(e)* strongly disagreed and *(f)* didn't know to the statement 'Overstretch is causing serious problems in the RAF as a whole'; what percentage of those responding to this question each option represents; when the survey was completed; and if he will make a statement. [99191]

Dr. Moonie: The latest analysed survey was issued to 2,000 RAF personnel on 1 February 2002, and completed by them during February to April 2002. It was published in September 2002.

In this survey, the responses to the statement 'Overstretch is causing serious problems in the RAF as a whole' are set out in the table. It is not possible to separate the 'Don't know' from the 'not applicable' responses.

	Airmen		*Officers*		*Total*	
	Number[1]	*Percentage*	*Number*[1]	*Percentage*	*Number*[1]	*Percentage*
Strongly agree	458	48.3	120	54.8	578	49.5
Agree	372	39.2	80	36.5	452	38.7
Neither agree nor disagree	87	9.2	13	5.9	100	8.6
Disagree	10	1.1	2	0.9	12	1.0
Strongly disagree	1	0.1	—	—	1	0.1
Don't know/not applicable	20	2.1	4	1.8	24	2.1
Total	948	100	219	100	1,167	100

[1] The number of people who responded with this answer.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many RAF personnel in the latest analysed Royal Air Force continuous attitude survey indicated they *(a)* strongly agreed, *(b)* agreed, *(c)* neither agreed nor disagreed, *(d)* disagreed, *(e)* strongly disagreed and *(f)* didn't know to the statement 'In the past 12 months I have had more than my fair share of separated service/detached duty'; what percentage of those responding to this question each option represents; when the survey was completed; and if he will make a statement. [99192]

Dr. Moonie: The latest analysed survey was issued to 2,000 RAF personnel on 1 February 2002, and completed by them during February to April 2002. It was published in September 2002.

In this survey, the responses to the statement 'In the last 12 months I have had more than my fair share of separated service/detached duty' are set out in the following table. It is not possible to separate the 'Don't know' from the 'not applicable' responses.

	Airmen	*Officers*	*Total*
Strongly agree			
Number	76	14	90
Percentage	8.0	6.4	7.7
Agree			
Number	163	30	193
Percentage	17.2	13.7	16.6
Neither agree nor disagree			
Number	297	60	357
Percentage	31.4	27.4	30.6
Disagree			
Number	206	61	267
Percentage	21.8	27.9	22.9
Strongly disagree			
Number	63	28	91
Percentage	6.7	12.8	7.8
Don't know/not applicable			
Number	141	26	167
Percentage	14.9	11.9	14.3
Total			
Number	946	219	1,165
Percentage	100	100	100

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Naval personnel in the latest analysed Royal Navy continuous attitude survey indicated that they were *(a)* very satisfied, *(b)* satisfied, *(c)* neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, *(d)* dissatisfied, *(e)* very dissatisfied regarding (i) adequacy of training for service job, (ii) current minimum time ashore, (iii) effect of their career on the career of spouse/partner, (iv) level of job satisfaction, (v) pay in general (vi), total remuneration package, (vii), amount of annual leave allowance (viii) medical and dental facilities for themselves, (ix) enjoyment of service life, (x) amount of separation from family and friends and (xi) rates and terms of pensions; what percentage of those responding to each question each option represents; when the survey was completed; and if he will make a statement. [99196]

Dr. Moonie: The information requested is provided in the table.

Royal Navy

	Very satisfied		*Satisfied*		*Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied*		*Dissatisfied*	
Adequacy of training for your service job	97	11.2	502	58.2	148	17.1	95	11.0
Current Minimum Time Ashore (MTA)	87	10.1	279	32.3	236	27.3	152	17.6
Effect of your career on the career of your spouse/partner	9	10	132	153	346	40.1	211	24.4
Level of job satisfaction (you expect in the future)	32	37	332	38.5	26.3	30.5	180	20.9
Your pay in general	40	4.6	312	36.2	191	22.1	224	26.0
Your total remuneration package	20	2.3	293	34.0	288	33.4	206	23.9
Amount of annual leave allowance (30 working days)	51	5.9	491	56.9	208	24.1	92	10.7
Medical and Dental facilities for yourself	118	13.7	510	59.1	110	12.7	82	9.5
Your enjoyment of service life	91	10.5	372	43.1	214	24.8	142	16.5
Amount of separation from family and friends	3	0.3	124	14.4	292	33.8	267	30.9
The rates and terms of pensions	48	5.6	313	36.3	325	37.7	95	11.0

Note:

From the General Report of the RN's Continuous Attitude Survey completed in August 2002.

	Very dissatisfied		*Nil response*	
	Number	*% age*	*Number*	*% age*
Adequacy of training for your service job	17	2.0	4	0.5
Current Minimum Time Ashore (MTA)	84	9.7	25	2.9
Effect of your career on the career of your spouse/partner	87	10.1	78	9.0
Level of job satisfaction (you expect in the future)	48	5.6	8	0.9
Your pay in general	89	10.3	7	0.8
Your total remuneration package	46	5.3	10	1.2
Amount of annual leave allowance (30 working days)	17	2.0	4	0.5
Medical and Dental facilities for yourself	41	4.8	2	0.2
Your enjoyment of service life	39	45	5	0.6
Amount of separation from family and friends	154	17.8	23	2.7
The rates and terms of pensions	44	5.1	38	4.4

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Naval personnel in the latest analysed Royal Navy continuous attitude survey indicated that they *(a)* strongly agreed, *(b)* agreed, *(c)* neither agreed nor disagreed, *(d)* disagreed and *(e)* strongly disagreed with the statements (i) in your own opinion the service is more sexist than society as a whole, (ii) in your own opinion the service is more racist than society as a whole and (iii) I trust my senior officers to do the right thing; what percentage of those responding to each question each option represents; when the survey was completed; and if he will make a statement. [99197]

Dr. Moonie: The information requested is provided in the table below:

Royal Navy

	Strongly agreed		*Agreed*		*Neither Agreed nor Disagreed*		*Disagreed*		*Strongly Disagreed*		*Nil Response*	
Question	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*
In your opinion the service is more sexist than society as a whole[1]	41	4.8	178	20.6	191	22.1	295	34.2	150	17.4	8	0.9
In your opinion the service is more racist than society as a whole[1]	11	1.3	72	8.3	157	18.2	369	42.8	245	28.4	9	1.0
I trust my senior officers to do the right thing[2]	20	2.3	305	35.3	205	23.7	248	28.7	65	7.5	21	2.4

Notes:

[1] From the General Report of the RN's Continuous Attitude Survey completed in August 2002.

[2] From the Collective Performance section of the RN's Continuous Attitude Survey completed in November 2002. (The General Report for this survey has yet to be analyzed).

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many RAF personnel in the latest analysed Royal Air Force continuous attitude survey said their work load was *(a)* too high, *(b)* about right and *(c)* too low; what percentage of those responding to this question each option represents, when the survey was completed; and if he will make a statement. [99186]

Dr. Moonie: The latest analysed survey was issued to 2,000 RAF personnel on 1 February 2002, and completed by them during February to April 2002. It was published in September 2002.

The responses to the question in which individuals were requested to assess their current work load (excluding secondary duties) are set out in the following table.

Work load (excluding secondary duties) is assessed as:

	Airmen	*Officers*	*Total*
Too high			
Number[1]	240	78	318
Percentage	25.8	35.9	27.7
About right			
Number[1]	620	130	750
Percentage	66.6	59.9	65.3
Too low			
Number[1]	71	9	80
Percentage	7.6	4.1	7.0
Total			
Number[1]	931	217	1,148
Percentage	100	100	100

[1] The number of people who responded with this answer.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many RAF personnel in the latest analysed Royal Air Force continuous attitude survey said they worked each week on average *(a)* 30 hours or less, *(b)* 31–35 hours, *(c)* 36–40 hours, *(d)* 41–45 hours, *(e)* 46–50 hours, *(f)* 51–60 hours and *(g)* over 60 hours, what percentage of those responding to this question each option represents; when the survey was completed; and if he will make a statement. [99187]

Dr. Moonie: The latest analysed survey was issued to 2,000 RAF personnel on 1 February 2002, and completed by them during February to April 2002. It was published in September 2002.

In this survey, the responses to the question 'Over the last three months, approximately how many hours have you worked each week on average, including lunch breaks?', are set out in the following table:

Hours	*Airmen*	*Officers*	*Total*
30 or less			
Number[1]	19	4	23
Percentage	2.0	1.8	2.0
31–35			
Number[1]	36	4	40
Percentage	3.8	1.8	3.4
36–40			
Number[1]	188	20	208
Percentage	19.9	9.2	17.9
41–45			
Number[1]	342	71	413
Percentage	36.3	32.6	35.6
46–50			
Number[1]	223	68	291
Percentage	23.6	31.2	25.1
51–60			
Number[1]	87	40	127
Percentage	9.2	18.3	10.9
Over 60			
Number[1]	48	11	59
Percentage	5.1	5.0	5.1
Total			
Number	943	218	1,161
Percentage	100	100	100

[1] Number of people who responded with this answer

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many RAF personnel in the latest analysed Royal Air Force continuous attitude survey indicated that they intended to opt for further service if they had the opportunity; what percentage of those responding to this question each reply option represents; when the survey was completed; and if he will make a statement. [99194]

Dr. Moonie: The latest analysed survey was issued to 2,000 RAF personnel on 1 February 2002, and completed by them during February to April 2002. It was published in September 2002.

In this survey, the responses to the question 'Do you intend to opt for further service if you have the opportunity?' are set out in the following table.

	Airmen	*Officers*	*Total*
Yes			
Number[1]	347	35	382
Percentage	36.5	15.9	32.6
Perhaps			
Number[1]	335	61	396
Percentage	35.3	27.7	33.8
No			
Number[1]	210	41	251
Percentage	22.1	18.6	21.5
N/a—already committed to a full career to age 55			
Number[1]	58	83	141
Percentage	6.1	37.7	12.1
Total			
Number[1]	950	220	1,170
Percentage	100	100	100

[1] The number of people who responded with this answer.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many RAF personnel in the latest analysed Royal Air Force continuous attitude survey indicated that life in the RAF *(a)* was much better than expected, *(b)* was better than expected, *(c)* was as expected, *(d)* was worse than expected, *(e)* was much worse than expected and *(f)* has no expectations; what percentage of those responding to the question each option represents; when the survey was completed; and if he will make a statement. [99195]

Dr. Moonie: The latest analysed survey was issued to 2,000 RAF personnel on 1 February 2002, and completed by them during February to April 2002. It was published in September 2002.

In this survey, the responses to the question 'Overall, how has your life in the RAF been, compared to what you expected?' are set out in the following table:

	Airmen	*Officers*	*Total*
Much better than I expected it to be			
Number[1]	59	14	73
Percentage	6.2	6.4	6.2
Better than I expected it to be			
Number[1]	253	59	312
Percentage	26.7	26.8	26.7
As I expected it to be			
Number[1]	367	104	471
Percentage	38.7	47.3	40.3

	Airmen	*Officers*	*Total*
Worse than I expected it to be			
Number[1]	185	36	221
Percentage	19.5	16.4	18.9
Much worse than I expected it to be			
Number[1]	35	2	37
Percentage	3.7	0.9	3.2
I had no expectations			
Number[1]	50	5	55
Percentage	5.3	2.3	4.7
Total			
Number[1]	949	220	1,169
Percentage	100	100	100

[1] The number of people who responded with this answer.

Royal Fleet Auxiliary

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list *(a)* the date of original build completion, *(b)* the date of acceptance into service, *(c)* the anticipated date of decommissioning, *(d)* the number of crew, *(e)* the stores carrying capacity where appropriate and *(f)* the ownership of (i) RFA Diligence, (ii) RFA Grey Rover, (iii) RFA Gold Rover, (iv) RFA Black Rover, (v) RFA Brambleleaf, (vi) RFA Bayleaf, (vii) RFA Orangeleaf, (viii) RFA Oakleaf, (ix) RFA Fort Rosalie, (x) RFA Fort Austin, (xi) RFA Fort Victoria, (xii) RFA Fort George, (xiii) RFA Argus, (xiv) RFA Sir Bedivere, (xv) RFA Sir Geraint, (xvi) RFA Sir Percivale, (xvii) RFA Sir Tristram, (xviii) RFA Sea Crusader and (xix) RFA Sea Centurion. [99147]

Mr. Ingram: The information requested is contained in the following table:

Ship	*Build completion date*	*Date of acceptance into service*	*Planned decommission date*	*Crew complement*	*Approximate stores capacity*	*Ownership*
Diligence	1981	1984	2006	53 RFA 77 Embarked force	Fuel: 1,400 sq m	MOD
Grey Rover	1970	1970	2007	54 RFA	Fuel: 6,000 sq m Fresh water: 300 sq m Oil: 66,000 litres	MOD
Gold Rover	1974	1974	2007	54 RFA	Fuel: 5,500 sq m Fresh water: 300 sq m Oil 66,000 litres	MOD
Black Rover	1974	1974	2007	53 RFA	Fuel: 6,000 sq m Fresh water: 300 sq m Oil: 66,000 litres	MOD
Brambleleaf	1976	1980	2009	58 RFA	Fuel: 31,000 sq m Fresh water: 1,400 sq m	MOD
Bayleaf	1982	1982	2009	58 RFA	Fuel: 28,700 sq m Fresh water: 1,400 sq m	Lombards Leasing Services
Orangeleaf	1975	1984	2008	58 RFA	Fuel: 31,000 sq m Fresh water 1,400 sq m	Lloyds Industrial Leasing Ltd.
Oakleaf	1981	1986	2015	36 RFA	Fuel: 38,700 sq m Fresh water: 1,300 sq m	James Fisher Ltd.
Fort Rosalie	1978	1978	2013	106 RFA 12 RN 28 Civilian	Ammunition, food and general Naval stores: 10,100 sq m	MOD
Fort Austin	1979	1979	2014	106 RFA 12 RN 26 Civilian	Ammunition, food and general naval stores: 10,100 sq m	MOD
Ford Victoria	1993	1994	2019	96 RFA 13 RN 23 Civilian	Fuel: 12,000 sq m Fresh water: 370 sq m Oil: 137,000 litres Ammunition, food and general Naval stores: 6,400 sq m	MOD
Fort George	1993	1994	2019	95 RFA 13 RN 28 Civilian	Fuel: 12,000 sq m Fresh water: 370 sq m Oil: 136,000 sq m Ammunition, food and general Naval stores: 5,900 sq m	MOD
Argus	1981	1988	2008	82 RFA 69 Embarked force	Fuel: 3,700 sq m	MOD
Sir Bedivere	1967 Ship Life Extension Programme 1998	1967	2011	59 RFA 352 Embarked force	Ammunition and cargo: 660 sq m vehicles: 12 Challenger tanks, 31 large vehicles, 56 Land Rovers or 26 cargo containers on tank deck; 19 large vehicles, 50 Land Rovers or 20 cargo containers on vehicle deck	MOD
Sir Geraint	1967	1967	2004	52 RFA 250 embarked force	Ammunition and cargo: 600 sq m vehicles: 14 Challenger tanks, 23 large vehicles, 62 Land Rovers or 20 cargo containers on tank deck; 34 large vehicles, 63 Land Rovers or 30 cargo containers on vehicle deck	MOD

Ship	*Build completion date*	*Date of acceptance into service*	*Planned decommission date*	*Crew complement*	*Approximate stores capacity*	*Ownership*
Sir Percivale	1968	1968	2005	52 RFA 301 Embarked force	Ammunition and cargo: 600 sq m vehicles: 14 Challenger tanks, 23 large vehicles, 62 Land Rovers or 20 cargo containers on tank deck; 34 large vehicles, 63 Land Rovers or 30 cargo containers on vehicle deck	MOD
Sir Tristram	1967	1967	2004	51 RFA 238 embarked force	Ammunition and cargo: 600 sq m vehicles: 12 Challenger tanks, 56 Land Rovers or 26 cargo containers on tank deck; 26 cargo containers on tank deck; 31 large vehicles, 67 Land Rovers or 33 cargo containers on vehicle deck	MOD
Sea Crusader	1996	1996	2003	18 RFA	2,300 lane metres capacity	Nouvelles Orientations

Note:
Sea Centurion was leased from Ocean Arrow and was returned to her owners in 2002.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to *(a)* replace and *(b)* add to vessels in the RFA fleet; and if he will make a statement. [99293]

Mr. Ingram: The Royal Navy decommissioned two O-class RFA Fleet tankers during financial year 2000–01: RFA Olwen (commissioned in 1965) and RFA Olna (commissioned in 1966). Two new Wave-class Auxiliary Oilers (AO) RFA Wave Knight and RFA Wave Ruler are expected to enter service in early spring this year.

On current plans four of the five Landing Ships Logistics, RFA Sir Geraint, Sir Tristram Sir Percivale and Sir Galahad are expected to be replaced by four larger and more capable Bay Class vessels in 2004 and 2005.1 also refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 10 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 514W, to the hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr. Lewis).

Ships (Decommissioning)

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what navy ships have been decommissioned since 1997; and what their final destination was. [97286]

Mr. Ingram: A total of 31 Navy ships have been decommissioned since 1997. This figure includes three Royal Fleet Auxiliary ships.

Navy ships decommissioned since 1997	*Final destination*
HMS Peacock	Philippines
HMS Plover	Philippines
HMS Starling	Philippines
HMS Birmingham	Scrap (Commercial Sale)
HMS Battleaxe	Brazil
HMS Boxer	Not yet known
HMS Beaver	Scrap (Commercial Sale)
HMS Brave	Not yet known
HMS London	Romania
HMS Bicester	Greece
HMS Berkeley	Greece
HMS Orkney	Trinidad and Tobago
HMS Orwell	Guyana
HMS Blackwater	Brazil
HMS Spey	Brazil
HMS Arun	Brazil
HMS Itchen	Brazil
HMS Herald	Commercial Sale
HMS Shetland	Bangladesh
HMS Alderney	Bangladesh
HMS Intrepid	Not yet known
HMS Bulldog	Commercial Sale
HMS Cromer	Renamed Hindostan and redesignated for training use
HMS Coventry	Romania
HMS Beagle	Commercial Sale
HMS Fearless	Not yet known
HMS Sheffield	Not yet known
HMY Britannia	Exhibition, Port of Leith, Edinburgh
RFA Olna	Scrap (Commercial Sale)
FRA Olwen	Scrap (Commercial Sale)
RFA Resource	Commercial Sale

Sierra Leone

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many British service personnel are stationed in Sierra Leone; what changes in numbers have taken place in the last month; and if he will make a statement on the current military situation in Sierra Leone. [99453]

Mr. Ingram: On 31 July 2002 the security situation in Sierra Leone was judged to be benign enough to end Operation Silkman (the overarching operation for United Kingdom forces in Sierra Leone), leaving a self-sustaining UK-led International Military Advisory and Training Team (IMATT). The IMATT currently involves some 120 personnel, comprising 108 UK personnel plus a number of internationals. Six additional UK personnel have been assigned to IMATT within the last month.

To display our continued commitment to the settlement process in Sierra Leone on 21 February we deployed a Company Group from 2nd Battalion The Royal Gurkha Rifles plus HQ and supporting elements (eg logistics and medical)—in total around 310 people. HMS Iron Duke and RFA Black Rover are also planned to deploy to Sierra Leone waters in the next few weeks as a further demonstration of UK commitment.

The security situation in Sierra Leone is satisfactory. This deployment demonstrates the UK's continued support to the Government of Sierra Leone, and our ability to conduct such deployments rapidly and at short notice, notwithstanding our involvement in operations elsewhere in the world.

The UK also provides the Chief Of Staff, six HQ staff officers and 15 Military Observers to the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL).

ENVIRONMENT FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Combined Heat and Power

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what financial help is available to producers who wish to *(a)* supply and *(b)* use combined heat and power. [98901]

Mr. Morley: The Government's draft Strategy for combined heat and power (CHP) to 2010, consulted on last year and available in the Library to the House, details the range of Government support measures currently in place for CHP. The main measures include:

Climate Change Levy exemption on fuel inputs and, pending the outcome of a State Aid application, on all Good Quality CHP electricity outputs;

Eligibility for Enhanced Capital Allowances;

The £50 million, two-year, Community Energy grant programme; and

Reduction in VAT on certain grant-funded domestic micro-CHP installations.

The Energy White Paper, published on 24 February, set out the following further range of measures to support CHP.

Requirement for significant evidence that power station consent applicants have considered all economically viable options for CHP and community heating.

Emphasise the benefits of CHP and community heating whenever planning or sustainable development guidance is introduced or reviewed.

Work with Ofgem to ensure a level playing field under NETA for smaller generators, including CHP.

Set targets for use of CHP in the Government Estate.

Explore incentivising CHP within any expansion of the domestic Energy Efficiency Commitment from 2005.

Support field trials designed to evaluate the benefits of micro-CHP.

Invite the Energy Saving Trust and the Carbon Trust to review their current and future programmes to ensure they reinforce delivery of our CHP target.

Work on a framework for pilot projects under the UK Emissions Trading Scheme for which CHP projects may be eligible.

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the change in use of CHP by companies covered by climate change agreements; and if she will make a statement. [87880]

Mr. Meacher *[pursuant to his answer, 18 December 2002, Official Report, c. 800W]:* My answer was sent in error, referring to HFC as opposed to CHP. The answer below corrects the original.

There has been no assessment made of the change in use of CHP by companies covered by climate change agreements. The agreements set targets for improvements in energy efficiency, which in some cases take account of the potential for CHP in the facility. In other cases, operators are required to make an assessment of the potential for CHP, which may result in a change to their targets. Operators are free to meet their targets in a range of ways.

Big Cats

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many sightings there have been since June 2001 purporting to be of big cats, broken down by county; what steps have been taken to investigate these; and on how many occasions it has been concluded that a big cat probably was present. [99220]

Mr. Morley: Big cats, such as tigers, lions, cheetahs, leopards or puma, are not native to the UK and are not naturally found in the wild in this country. There are widespread and frequent reported possible sightings but, despite investigations, the Department is not aware of any confirmed instances of big cats of unknown origin being found out of captivity in England in the last 20 years. The lack of hard evidence (such as captured animals, corpses or photographs) is hard to reconcile with the number of reported sightings, unless people are genuinely but frequently mistaken with their identification.

The Department does investigate claims of big cat sightings where there is a potential risk to possible livestock predation. Where livestock deaths are involved and it is likely that hard evidence could be obtained to identify the predator, a field visit may be conducted. However, the Department does not systematically record all alleged sightings.

Since June 2001, the Department's Rural Development Service (RDS) have had 22 cases of alleged big cats reported to them connected to possible livestock predation and where there was potentially hard evidence to follow up. There have been two field visits in relation to these reports. The counties for these reports were: Buckinghamshire; Cornwall; Devon (three); Essex (three); Kent; Norfolk; North Somerset (two); North Yorkshire; Oxfordshire; Shropshire; Staffordshire; Suffolk; Surrey (two); Warwickshire; West Midlands; and Wiltshire. In many cases the details of the report provide insufficient circumstantial evidence to justify the expense of a field visit. However, should a field visit be deemed necessary, a trained wildlife biologist carries out detailed searches for various types of evidence such as examining the body in the field for evidence of how it had been killed or checking for footprints. In none of the field visits could any evidence be found to confirm the presence of big cats.

Release of big cats into the wild is prohibited under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and possession of these species is regulated under the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976. If there is believed to be a public safety issue, for example from an escaped big cat, then this is a matter for the police.

Departmental Budget

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the principal components of the changes in the budget of her Department from 2002–03 to 2005–06; and if she will make a statement. [99289]

Alun Michael: Defra's budgets for 2002–03 and the 2002 Spending Review years (2003–04 to 2005–06) are as follows:

£ million

	2002–03	*2003–04*	*2004–05*	*2005–06*
Resource budget	2,185	2,492	2,452	2,496
Capital budget	241	316	344	354
Total departmental expenditure limit[1]	2,426	2,808	2,796	2,850

[1] Full resource budgeting basis, net of depreciation.

Spending by the Department in 2005–06 will be more than £400 million higher than in 2002–03, supporting a programme of reform. It fulfils the Government's pledge to introduce a significant programme of measures to move the food and farming industries to a long-term sustainable basis, to create thriving and prosperous rural economies and communities and to improve the environment. And it takes full account of the Department's lead role in promoting sustainable development across Government for the good of our citizens, both now and in the future.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her total departmental budget is under the Department Expenditure Limit set in the Comprehensive Spending Review of 2002 in each year from 2001–02 to 2005–06; and how much within each year has been allocated by activity and to each executive agency, broken down by *(a)* resource and *(b)* capital. [99287]

Alun Michael: The results of the 2002 Spending Review for Defra are as follows:

£ million

	2003–04	*2004–05*	*2005–06*
Resource Budget	2,492	2,452	2,496
Capital Budget	316	344	354
Total Departmental Expenditure Limit[1]	2,808	2,796	2,850

[1] Full resource budgeting basis, net of depreciation.

Details of allocated budgets for 2003–04 to 2005–06 will be published in the spring 2003 Departmental Report. The information will include how budgets are allocated to deliver the Department's functions and objectives.

The Departmental budgets for 2001–02 and 2002–03 do not form part of Spending Review 2002. However, budget information for these two years, by business area, is provided in the following table.

Departmental expenditure limit

£000

	Resources	*Capital*
Core-Defra by business area		
2001–02		
Animal Health and Welfare	163,664	9,946
Environment	319,463	264,569
Food, Farming and Fisheries	89,059	11,373
Finance, Planning and Resources	10,260	522
Legal Services	6,562	30
Land Use and Rural Affairs	287,615	155,784
Operations and Service Delivery (inc foot and mouth eradication)	499,133	4,403
Policy and Corporate Strategy	3,182	0
Science	143,616	10,944
Agencies		
Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science	-3,226	13,130
Central Science Laboratory	-2,453	1,953
Pesticides Safety Directorate	-2,712	210
Veterinary Laboratories Agency	-7,375	2,206
Veterinary Medicines Directorate	-691	200
Rural Payments Agency (inc foot and mouth eradication)	449,536	19,510
Total	1,955,633	494,780
2002–03		
Animal Health and Welfare	169,907	17,226
Environment	409,767	297,685
Food, Farming and Fisheries	106,949	12,014
Finance, Planning and Resources	10,288	1,954
Legal Services	8,318	19
Land Use and Rural Affairs	291,060	170,993
Operations and Service Delivery (inc foot and mouth eradication)	290,643	24,368
Policy and Corporate Strategy	5,081	0
Science	142,624	13,036
Agencies		
Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science	-3,253	10,135
Central Science Laboratory	-1,413	1,846
Pesticides Safety Directorate	-2,781	332
Veterinary Laboratories Agency	-9,540	13,819

Departmental expenditure limit

£000

	Resources	*Capital*
Veterinary Medicines Directorate	-1,057	300
Rural Payments Agency (inc foot and mouth eradication)	436,117	37,789
Total	1,852,710	601,516

Drinking Water

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what *(a)* percentage and *(b)* gross volume of water intended for drinking purposes was tested for (i) mineral content and (ii) chemical content in the last year for which figures are available, broken down by water company supplier. [99244]

Mr. Morley: All public water supplies are tested for the most important minerals, namely calcium and magnesium and for 34 other chemicals or group of chemicals. All of the results are required to be put on public records by water companies, and a summary is published in the Annual Report of the Drinking Water Inspectorate.

Farmers (Administrative Workload)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to reduce the administrative burden on farmers. [98227]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 24 February 2003]:* The Government's Regulatory Reform Action Plan issued in February 2002 included 59 entries covering all aspects of Defra's responsibility. Many of these will be implemented over the next two years; others will be more long term. They involve changes to EC legislation, major reviews of whole areas of enforcement, inspection and information handling to ease the burden on farmers. We have already had some success, for example from April 2002 inspectors have been carrying out combined bovine risk analysis inspections required by the four IACS cattle schemes. We have introduced simpler rules for sheep producer groups making them easier to understand.

Some regulation of agriculture is unavoidable if Defra is to safeguard the environment, public and animal health and public funds. However, our goal is to keep regulation to the minimum and find ways of streamlining the bureaucratic burden that regulation often imposes. We have a long-term strategy (2007) to introduce risk-based environment regulation across all sectors including agriculture. New risk- assessments, standardised permits better reporting arrangements will keep charges down and reduce the bureaucracy of regulation.

We are working towards an integrated solution to the problems of regulation and agriculture by developing a whole farm approach. This is a strategy that will be developed in close consultation with industry and other stakeholders and will maximise the benefits of major investments in new IT systems, by bringing together all information held by Defra and other agencies. This will be available to farmers and growers for business planning, and to government to streamline enforcement and tailor advice and guidance to farmers' individual circumstances.

Sustainable Energy Projects

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the progress made by Government assisted projects to develop area based *(a)* sustainable energy projects and *(b)* domestic energy savings and health initiatives. [96955]

Mr. Morley: We are making good progress with these projects. The majority of them operate on a national basis, providing assistance to households and communities across the country.

To encourage sustainable energy projects:

We are spending £50 million over two years on the UK wide Community Energy programme which promotes community heating. So far £8.5m of grants have been approved. Two of these grants have been for innovative energy from waste schemes.

The Energy Crops Scheme has allocated £650,000 of grants to promote the establishment of energy crops in England.

We fund the Countryside Agency's Community Renewables Initiative, which promotes the establishment of local renewable energy schemes in England.

The DTI fund both the UK wide Bio Energy Capital Grants Scheme and the UK wide £10 million Clear Skies initiative. Both are relatively new initiatives. The Bio Energy Capital Grants scheme aims to ensure the development of 100MW biomass heating provision at all scales, whilst Clear Skies provides advice and support for the installation of household and renewable community renewable schemes.

To encourage domestic energy savings and health initiatives:

We fund the Warm Front grant scheme which assisted over 400,000 households living in Fuel Poverty by installing energy efficiency measures. This indicates that the Government is making good progress toward meeting its target of assisting 600,000 homes by 2004.

The Government has established the Energy Efficiency Commitment. The Commitment requires electricity and gas suppliers to achieve targets for the promotion of improvements in energy efficiency, with an emphasis on helping lower income customers. The overall target on all suppliers is a combined saving of 62 fuel-standardised terawatt hours.

Defra and DTI are funding a pilot Warm Zones initiative in five areas in England. The zones attempt to identify all fuel poor households in an area, and ensure that existing schemes are used to improve the energy efficiency of those homes. The pilot is being evaluated at present and an interim report is expected shortly.

Waste Inspections

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many inspections were carried out at industrial and waste sites by each individual Environment Agency office in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2001; and if she will make a statement. [93707]

Mr. Meacher: Until recently, the Agency has required its regions to report only the annual inspection total for the region as a whole. The regional inspection figures for 1997 and 2001 are as follows:

	Industrial		*Waste*	
Region	*1997–98*	*2001–02*	*1997–98*	*2001–02*
Anglian	978	616	17,432	13,919
Midlands	850	571	24,895	17,237
North East	1,211	1,150	23,278	17,784
North West	806	646	20,530	13,503
Southern	418	298	11,487	5,515
South West	394	238	15,410	10,206
Thames	343	308	18,950	11,967
Wales	583	413	8,228	6,826

These figures reflect the Agency's move towards a more risk based approach to inspection, with fewer, more in-depth visits targeted on those sites with the greatest potential to harm the environment.

Water Management

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what percentage of significant consents to discharge trade effluent to watercourses were reviewed by the Environment Agency in *(a)* 2001 and *(b)* 2002. [98700]

Mr. Morley: The Environment Agency reviewed 10 per cent. of significant trade effluent consents for discharges to watercourses in 2001 and 8 per cent. in 2002.

Water Pollution

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many recorded incidents of pollution caused by leaking sewerage pipes there have been, broken down by statutory undertaker in each year since 1992. [99272]

Mr. Morley: Defra does not hold figures on sewage pollution incidents, and while the Environment Agency's database contains figures for pollution incidents for the last two years, it is not possible to identify separately those attributable to leaking sewers.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment has been made of the environmental impact of *(a)* fat, *(b)* oils, *(c)* fuel and *(d)* other pollutants being poured into drainage and sewerage systems. [99273]

Mr. Morley: The environmental impact will depend on the quantity of substance entering the drainage or sewerage system, and in the case of sewerage systems the extent to which the treatment plant can accommodate the load. Depending on the individual circumstance the impact can range from nil to significant, depending on what degree of intervention, prevention or mitigation is possible or achieved.

The Environment Agency records and reports on incidents of pollution. It also collects and publishes data on annual releases via authorised discharges of some 150 individual pollutants to the environment and to sewerage systems.

The Agency has worked with the Water Industry to identify and quantify sources of releases into sewerage systems. The environmental impact arising from these releases is not currently systematically assessed. However, work is underway that could enable the potential impact of emissions on environmental systems to be recorded. The research is expected to be completed in early 2004.

The Environment Agency has published a report on Oil in the Environment (Oil and Gas in the Environment. 1998). This gives an assessment of the significance of oil as an environmental pollutant.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Medical Students (Debt)

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate he has made of the average debt level that a medical student would incur during his or her training as a result of the Government's proposals for higher education. [98842]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The level of loan taken out by medical students will depend on their individual circumstances and choices, including the extent to which they work while in higher education.

A-Levels

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average A level points score was for *(a)* school sixth forms, *(b)* sixth form colleges and *(c)* general further education colleges in each of the last three years. [98860]

Mr. Miliband: The average GCE/VCE A/AS and AGNVQ point scores achieved by 17 year old students in 1999–2001 (the most recent three years for which data are available):

	2001[1]	*2000*	*1999*
All schools	19.9	18.7	18
Sixth form colleges	19.3	17.4	17.4
Other FE Sector colleges	14.2	11.2	11.3
All FE Sector colleges (sixth forms and other FE)	16.9	14.3	14.4
Schools and FE Sector colleges	18.9	17.2	17.2

[1] Figures for 2001 are not directly comparable to 1999 and 2000 as they include changes introduced as part of the Qualifying for Success reforms in September 2000. Under these reforms, students are encouraged to take a wide range of subjects in their first year of post-16 study, with students taking between one and five Advanced Subsidiaries and progressing three of these on to full A levels in their second year. These changes have resulted in an increase of students' average point scores in 2001.

Adult Education Courses

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what extra contribution will be sought from fees for adult education courses with the new learning and skills funding formula for further education colleges. [99562]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The operation of the Learning and Skills Council's funding system is the responsibility of the Council. John Harwood, the Council's Chief Executive, will write to the hon. Member providing the information requested and a copy of his reply will be placed in the Library.

Higher Education (Top-up Fees)

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment his Department made of the deterrent effects to students of imposing top-up fees on shortage subjects in drawing up the proposals in the policy document, "The Future of Higher Education"; and if he will make a statement. [98130]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The Government are not imposing fees on any higher education institution, course or subject—rather, we are giving universities the freedom to set their own fees, between £0 and £3,000.

Higher Education (Academic Merit)

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what guidance he is issuing to higher education institutions on the assessment of academic merit without reference to social or cultural factors affecting an individual. [99560]

Mr. Charles Clarke: It is not for Government to prescribe university policies for which universities are themselves responsible. We look to them to ensure that they admit on the basis of merit, taking into account appropriate factors which may well go beyond simply using pre[illegible] A-level scores. We have asked the Higher Education Funding Council to look at best practice and disseminate it throughout the sector so that all universities have admissions processes which are fair and transparent.

Higher Education (Drop-out Costs)

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what research his Department has commissioned into the relationship between student costs and drop out rates for each university and higher education institution. [94765]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Figures published in 2002 by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) show that the UK as a whole has one of the lowest non-completion rates among OECD countries.

Up to date research, the UNITE/MORI "Student Living Report 2003", found that 96 per cent. of students consider that going to university is a worthwhile experience and that the major reason for drop out is dissatisfaction with the course rather than financial issues. 87 per cent. of students interviewed agreed that the money they were spending on higher education was a good investment in their future.

These findings on drop out are backed up by research commissioned by the Department "Dropping Out: A Study of Early Leavers from Higher Education" by Peter Elias and Rhys Davies at the Institute of Employment Research at Warwick University, published January 2003 that shows that the most common cause of non-completion was poor choice of course. Financial problems and personal problems were also cited by respondents to the survey. However, a relatively low response rate to the survey underpinning the research implies the quantitative results are only indicative.

The National Audit Office report "Improving Student Achievement in English Higher Education" published in January 2002 showed that students who drop out tend to have lower prior academic qualifications. Most of them cite personal reasons (feeling unprepared for higher education, changing personal circumstances or financial matters) or withdraw because of academic failure.

Higher Education (Operating Deficits)

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many universities and colleges in the English and Welsh higher education sector have operating deficits; and if he will make a statement. [98504]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Information about higher education institutions in Wales is for the Welsh Assembly to provide. The Higher Education Funding Council for England published 'Outcomes of 2002 financial forecasts and annual operating statements' in January 2003. This report is based on information provided by higher education institutions in July 2002. The forecasts were based on assumptions reflecting the prevailing general economic climate and the funding announcements made at the time and so do not take account of the Spending Review settlement for 2003–04 to 2005–06. Projected levels of surplus are significantly affected by exceptional items, such as gains or losses on property transactions.

The forecast income and expenditure position for the sector as a whole is set out in Table 1 of the report, which is shown.

Table 1: Actual and forecast income and expenditure

£ million

	Actual 1999–2000	*Actual 2000–01*	*Forecast 2001–02*	*Forecast 2002–03*	*Forecast 2003–04*	*Forecast 2004–05*	*Forecast 2005–06*
Total income	10,465	11,069	11,585	12,237	12,796	13,280	13,799
% Increase	—	5.8	5.5	5.6	4.6	3.8	3.9
Total expenditure	10,370	11,100	11,598	12,250	12,754	13,213	13,711
% increase	—	7.0	5.9	5.6	4.1	3.6	3.8
Surplus after							
Depreciation of assets of valuation and tax	125	44	13	(10)	143	109	94

Table 1: Actual and forecast income and expenditure

£ million

	Actual 1999–2000	*Actual 2000–01*	*Forecast 2001–02*	*Forecast 2002–03*	*Forecast 2003–04*	*Forecast 2004–05*	*Forecast 2005–06*
Surplus as % of total income	1.19	0.40	0.10	(0.09)	1.10	0.81	0.67
Historical cost surplus as % of total income	1.95	1.25	0.92	0.51	2.11	1.37	1.02
Exceptional items	—	77	26	3	101	41	6

The only year where there is a forecast deficit for the sector as a whole is 2002–03 when the deficit is estimated at £10 million or 0.9 per cent. of the total budget of over £12 billion.

The number of universities and colleges forecasting deficits is shown in table 2 of the report.

Table 2: Actual and forecast surpluses and deficits

	Number of HEIs forecasting operating deficits	*Number of HEIs forecasting historical cost deficits*
2000–01	47 (35%)	35 (26%)
2001–02	55 (41%)	35 (26%)
2002–03	60 (45%)	35 (26%)
2003–04	44 (33%)	24 (18%)
2004–05	39 (29%)	21 (16%)
1005–06	33 (25%)	22 (16%)

As a result of the latest Spending Review announcements, Government spending on higher education will rise by more than 6 per cent. a year above inflation over the next three years.

NUT Annual Conference

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will arrange for a Minister from his Department to attend the National Union of Teachers' annual conference this Easter. [99157]

Mr. Miliband: No Minister will attend the NUT's annual conference this year.

Research Authorities

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans he has to reflect greater selectivity in the research authorities of the higher education sector, with particular reference to those rating above 5. [99561]

Mr. Charles Clarke: In "The Future of Higher Education" we announced our intention to identify the very best of the Departments rated 5* in the last Research Assessment Exercise and give them an uplift in funding over the next three years in order to focus resources on the strongest performers. We are asking the Higher Education Funding Council for England to consider how best to implement this proposal.

St James School, Colindale

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when he expects to make a decision on the application by St. James School, Colindale for consent to build an all-weather pitch on its playing fields. [99615]

Mr. Miliband: The Secretary of State expects to make a decision on this application within the next few days.

Student Drop-Outs

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will list those universities with over 20 per cent. of students expected to drop out of their courses without finishing their degrees, using the latest figures compiled by the Higher Education Funding Council; if he will estimate the cost to public funds for each student; what initiative he is taking to reduce drop outs; and if he will make a statement. [90465]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The latest information is shown in the table. The cost to the Exchequer of students who drop out from UK universities depends on factors such as the timing of drop outs within academic years, the level of public funding associated with individual courses, whether or not students transfer to other HE institutions and whether or not students return to HE at a later date. Figures for the cost are not compiled centrally.

The UK has one of the best completion rates in the world. The latest Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) Performance Indicators (Pis) put the national rate of non-completion at 17 per cent. This rate has stayed broadly the same since 1991–92, a period of considerable expansion of student numbers. But there is room for improvement. That is why we have asked HEFCE to "bear down" on non-completion, in particular by identifying examples of good practice in student retention and disseminating them across the sector; by working more closely with those institutions whose performance indicator for non-completion fails to meet expectations; and by working with the Department in establishing a sector target for non-completion.

HE Institutions in the UK with non-completion rates of more than 20 per cent. Full-time students starting first degree courses in 1999–2000

	Non-completion rate	
Institution	*Projected*[1]	*Benchmark*[2]
England	—	—
Anglia Polytechnic University[1]	27	21
Bolton Institute of HE[1]	30	25
University of Central Lancashire[1]	33	26
Coventry University	22	21
Dartington College of Arts	24	17
University of Derby	24	22
University of East London[1]	33	26
University of Greenwich	26	23
University of Huddersfield[1]	25	20
Kingston University	21	21
Liverpool Hope University College	23	23
Liverpool John Moores University[1]	22	19
London Guildhall University[1]	30	25
University of Loton[1]	26	21
Middlesex University	22	23

HE Institutions in the UK with non-completion rates of more than 20 per cent. Full-time students starting first degree courses in 1999–2000

Institution	Non-completion rate Projected[1]	Benchmark[2]
University College Northampton[1]	29	20
University of North London[1]	45	27
School of Oriental and African Studies[1]	29	17
South Bank University	28	26
Staffordshire University	23	20
University of Sunderland[1]	28	21
University of Teeside[1]	27	22
Thames Valley University[1]	29	22
Trinity College of Music[1]	39	17
University of the West of England	21	19
University of Westminster	23	23
Scotland		
University of Abertay Dendee[1]	24	17
Glasgow Caledonian University[1]	29	17
University of Paisley[1]	31	17
Wales		
University of Glamorgan	25	23
University of Wales, Lampeter	26	21
University of Wales College, Newport[1]	26	21
North East Wales Institute	26	23
Swansea Institute of Higher Education[1]	30	19

[1] The projected outcomes are calculated on the assumption that the progression paths of new entrants will be the same as those for students currently in the system. Those institutions whose projected value is significantly worse than their benchmark are marked with an asterix.

The benchmark is an expected value which allows for the entry qualifications of the students and the subject mix of the institution.

Source:

"Performance Indicators in Higher Education" published by HEFCE.

Top-up Fees (Brunel University)

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what representations he has received from Brunel University about the impact of top-up fees on the socio-economic background of applicants; and if he will make a statement. [98979]

Mr. Charles Clarke: We have received a number of representations from a variety of sources since the launch of the White Paper and expect to receive more during the period for comment.

University Entrants

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many UK students have entered universities in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales, *(c)* Northern Ireland and *(d)* Scotland in each academic year since 1990. [91638]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The latest available figures are shown in the table. Figures for Scotland and Wales are the responsibility of the devolved Administrations of these countries.

UK domiciled entrants to undergraduate courses[1]

Academic year	England[2]	Wales[2]	Scotland[3]	Northern Ireland[2]
1990–91	328,500	18,000	46,200	9,200
1991–92	377,700	20,500	49,300	9,900
1992–93	415,600	23,600	56,800	10,800
1993–94	437,200	24,300	59,000	11,300
1994–95	460,700	27,200	75,000	12,100
1995–96	477,900	31,200	82,600	15,300
1996–97	476,100	31,400	91,000	15,400
1997–98	483,700	30,700	95,700	17,600
1998–99	471,300	31,000	97,600	18,300
1999–2000	485,000	32,200	98,700	18,900
2000–01	490,500	34,300	98,800	20,600
2001–02[4]	504,300	36,800	106,200	19,800

[1] Entrants to full-time and part-time courses at HE and FE institutions. Excludes students at the Open University.

[2] Census count as at 31 December in years up to 1993–94, and as at 1 December in subsequent years.

[3] Census count as at 31 December in years up to 1993–94, whole year session counts in subsequent years.

[4] Provisional. Includes estimates for HE students in FE colleges.

Note:

Figures have been rounded to the nearest hundred.

Work Experience

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what his plans are for the provision of structured and accredited work experience schemes for 14 to 16 year olds. [99624]

Mr. Miliband: As I said in my answer to the hon. Member on 10 February over 95 per cent. of pupils currently undertake work experience placements in their last years of compulsory schooling, and we want all pupils to benefit from high quality placements. A range of guidance and support is already provided by the Department, the Learning and Skills Council and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority. This seeks to ensure that placements are safe, well structured, integrated into the curriculum and suited to the needs of the individual, with activities and outcomes captured within pupils' records of achievement.

We also intend to make work-related learning a statutory requirement for all pupils at Key 4 from 2004–05. We have asked the QCA for further advice on work-related learning as part of their overall advice on Key Stage 4 curriculum change. While delivery will vary according to pupils' needs and circumstances, integrating work experience more closely into the curriculum will be one of the means by which this requirement may be fulfilled. In many cases the experience will be distinct and practical, providing opportunities for assignments and project work that will contribute directly to qualifications such as the new GCSEs in vocational subjects or NVQs.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Gibraltar

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which Government officials are responsible for liaison with officials from Gibraltar. [99752]

Mr. MacShane: The Government is in regular contact with the Gibraltar Government on a broad range of issues. This involves contact between officials in a number of Whitehall departments and the Gibraltar Government.

British Council

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his estimate is of the cost to the British Council of funding arts events abroad in 2001 to support UK creative industries; and if he will make a statement. [99120]

Mr. MacShane: The British Council expenditure on the arts and creative industries programme in Financial Year 2001–02 was £24.9 million, including £8.1 million of staff costs in the UK and overseas. This funding leveraged a further £27.2 million from partners, sponsors and other revenue sources.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to the information given on page 91 of the FCO Departmental Report 2002, whether the event attended by Mr. Fidel Castro, including a performance by the Manic Street Preachers, was funded by his Department through the British Council; and if he will make a statement. [99121]

Mr. MacShane *[holding answer 26 February 2003]:* The costs of the concert were borne by the band and their record company, with the venue, local staffing, logistics and security provided by the Cuban Ministry of Culture and the Cuban Institute of Music. The British Council's role was to facilitate contact between the band and the Cuban authorities.

Common Foreign and Security Policy

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the Government's policy is with regard to recent proposals by the French and German governments that decisions over European Common Foreign and Security Policy be taken by qualified majority vote; what discussions he has had with the two governments concerning this matter; and if he will make a statement. [93438]

Mr. Straw *[holding answer 27 January 2003]:* Her Majesty's Government will not come to final decisions on the matter until it has had, in due course, the opportunity to study the Reports of the Convention as a whole. The right hon. Gentleman will wish to note that in the Convention Working Group, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales proposed the following: "While noting that there was no consensus yet on the further extension of QMV, the Group could agree that the future Treaty should include a provision, which would provide for the possibility of the European Council agreeing to extend (on the basis of unanimity) the use of QMV in CFSP.".

Convention on the Future of Europe

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to his Answer to the right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) of 7 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 479, on the Convention on the Future of Europe, what plans he has to submit the draft constitutional treaty to Parliament before it is discussed at the inter-governmental conference; whether it is his policy that Parliament will have a chance to vote on the draft treaty *(a)* before and *(b)* after the inter-governmental conference; and whether the draft constitution will be put to a referendum of the British people. [99341]

Mr. MacShane: The Praesidium's draft Constitutional Treaty is a public document which can be accessed through the Convention website at *www.european-convention.eu.int*. The UK Parliament is already a party to the discussions in the Convention, beingrepresented by four official members, one of whom is on the Convention's Praesidium. As with all previous EU treaties, a Constitutional Treaty would be submitted for scrutiny by Parliament before the UK would ratify it. The Government has no plans to hold a referendum on any new EU treaty.

Krishna Maharaj

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects to decide on further official action and approaches to the United States authority seeking remedies, relief and an order for a new trial for Krishna Maharaj. [99688]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Officials in London, and the Consulate-General in Atlanta remain in close and regular contact with Mr Maharaj's legal representatives, and continue to take an active interest in the on-going legal proceedings. It is for Mr Maharaj's lawyers to pursue the legal avenues open to him, including the possibility of a re-trial. We will, however, look to see what else HMG could properly do.

Kurdistan

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Kurdistan Regional Government regarding means to assist Kurdish citizens in the event of a military attack on Iraq. [99697]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: No decision has been taken to launch military action against Iraq. Ministers and officials regularly meet representatives of the northern Iraq Kurdish administrations, as well as other Iraqi oppositionists, to discuss a wide range of issues. Most recently, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister met Massoud Barzani and Jalal Talabani, leaders of the Kurdistan Democratic Party and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan respectively, in December 2002.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Travelling to the UK on False Documentation

Mr. Malins: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many persons during the last 12 months for which figures are available have been prosecuted for travelling to the UK on false documentation; how many were legally represented; how many raised the defence under section 31 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 that they wished to claim asylum; how many were convicted; and how many were sentenced to imprisonment of *(a)* less than six months and *(b)* more than six months. [98646]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 25 February 2003]:* I have been asked to reply.

The information required to answer this question is not collected and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Services

Simon Hughes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what proportion of the set-up costs for CAFCASS was spent on the new IT system. [99529]

Ms Rosie Winterton: In the year preceding CAFCASS's launch, a total of £10.2m was spent on set up costs of the new organisation; this included capital expenditure of £7.7m. Over £5m of this total, i.e. some 50% was spent on the IT service for the new organisation.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many of the records of children who are known to CAFCASS had been transferred onto the new IT system by the end of 2002; and how many will be transferred by the end of *(a)* 2003, *(b)* 2004 and *(c)* 2005. [99530]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) is currently considering how to record cases in a standardised electronic format. Meanwhile the full case papers are held in the existing methods of storage.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how much has been spent by CAFCASS on new accommodation since 1 April 2001; and what proportion of this came *(a)* from the CAFCASS annual budget and *(b)* from initial start-up costs. [99531]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Since 1 April 2001 CAFCASS has been implementing a strategy to ensure its accommodation is suitable for its needs. This has involved disposing of some properties inherited from the predecessor organisations and acquiring new properties. Overall the number of properties has reduced from 184 to 146. Costs of £3.76 million in 2001–02 were met from set-up funding which was provided to CAFCASS for this and other purposes. Costs in 2002–03 are likely to be £1.34 million and have been met from their 2002–03 operating budget.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many CAFCASS offices comply with all health and safety legislation; and how many will comply by the end of *(a)* 2003, *(b)* 2004 and *(c)* 2005. [99532]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) aims to complete, by the end of 2003–04, an internal safety audit for each office. This will give a clear indication of progress. In addition, a number of topic-specific national safety procedures have been developed, addressing a range of legislative requirements and duties, including emergency actions, induction training, first aid, workplace inspections, accident reporting, lone working and display screen use. CAFCASS had in any event adopted the inherited Health and Safety policies and procedures of its predecessor organisations.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the cost is of CAFCASS staff based in *(a)* headquarters and *(b)* regional offices in 2002–03; and what proportion this represents of the overall budget. [99533]

Ms Rosie Winterton: CAFCASS salaried staff costs for 2002–03 are forecast to be £2.9 million for headquarters, 3.5 per cent. of the overall budget, and £46.4 million for staff in the regions, 55.9 per cent. of the overall budget. These figures (including London) include the costs of CAFCASS employed guardians, but not self-employed guardians or other agency or contract staff.

Domestic Violence

Margaret Moran: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what steps she is taking to ensure that judges and the judiciary receive training to recognise and deal with cases of domestic violence. [97744]

Ms Rosie Winterton: My Department continues to work closely with the Judicial Studies Board to develop training for judges and magistrates that takes account of the growing body of knowledge about domestic violence.

All newly appointed part time judges, and all judges who are authorised to hear family cases, are required to attend a residential "Induction Course" in the relevant jurisdiction. Thereafter, both full and part time judges attend residential continuation seminars every three years in each jurisdiction they exercise. The amount of training time provided on domestic violence in JSB courses and seminars is shown in the annexed table. Many judges also attend locally organised conferences.

In addition all full and part time judges sitting in the Crown Court attend an annual one-day Circuit Seminar on sentencing issues, for which the theme last year was Domestic Violence. This provided, on average, up to five hours of additional training on this subject in 2000–01.

Training of Magistrates is the statutory responsibility of individual Magistrates' Courts Committees. But the JSB assists by producing generic training materials, and is currently working on a training package specifically on domestic violence.

I also launched a guide on 21 February to inform service providers of the current remedies available to victims of domestic violence in the civil and criminal courts. It is my hope that the magistrates and the professional judiciary will also find this a useful source of information.

We will continue to identify further action in every area of our responsibilities, and in those areas of responsibility that we share with other Government Departments, to make sure that tackling domestic violence and protecting its victims (adults and children) are given the priority they deserve.

Refurbishment

Norman Baker: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department whether a building research establishment environmental assessment method document has been prepared for the refurbishment of *(a)* GKN House, *(b)* Steel House and *(c)* Clive House. [96408]

Ms Rosie Winterton: *(a)* There are no plans to undertake a BREEAM assessment on the partial refurbishment of GKN House. *(b)* An assessment has not yet been carried out for Steel House but it is a requirement of the contract, soon to be awarded, that such an assessment is undertaken. *(c)* A BREEAM method document has been prepared for Clive House.

TREASURY

Anti-poverty Targets

18. **Mr. Neil Turner:** To ask Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, If he will estimate the cost of meeting the anti-poverty targets of the millenium development goals. [99479]

John Healey: The UN estimates that global aid flows will need to be doubled in order to meet the Millenium Development Goals by 2015. This means that an extra $50 billion is needed per year.

The UK is seeking to develop the proposal for an International Finance Facility in partnership with the international community. The facility would borrow on the international capital markets to raise the amount of development aid for the years to 2015 from $50 billion a year to $100 billion dollars per year.

Pension Credit

19. **Helen Jones:** To ask Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many pensioners in Warrington North will be eligible for the pension credit. [99480]

Dawn Primarolo: As at November 2002, over 2,700 pensioners in Warrington North were receiving the Minimum Income Guarantee. They and others besides will benefit from the Pension Credit. Nationally, the Department for Work and Pensions is aiming to ensure that at least three million pensioner households receive their entitlement by 2006.

National Insurance

20. **Sir Sydney Chapman:** To ask Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, what his estimate is of the effect of the impending national insurance increases on UK competitiveness. [99481]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Gentleman to my response in the Chamber earlier today to the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham.

Bioethanol

21. **Mr. Kidney:** To ask Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, If he will reduce the duty on bioethanol used as fuel for motor vehicles. [99482]

John Healey: In the Pre Budget Report, we announced a reduced rate of duty for bioethanol, to be set at 20 pence per litre less than the prevailing rate for ultra low sulphur petrol. The date of implementation of this new rate will be announced at the time of the Budget.

Debt

22. **Phil Hope**: To ask Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, what arrangements he is proposing to write off the debt of the world's poorest countries. [99483]

John Healey: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer the Chancellor gave the hon. Member for Gloucester earlier today.

EU Economic Policies

23. **Alan Howarth:** To ask Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, what his policy is on the European Union's co-ordinating the economic policies of the member states [99484]

Ruth Kelly: The Government has consistently made clear its support for a prudent interpretation of the Stability and Growth Pact, which takes into account the economic cycle, sustainability and the important role of public investment.

The Government is committed to economic reform in Europe, building on the Lisbon agenda. The progress report on European economic reform, "Meeting the Challenge; Economic Reform in Europe", was published on 17 February 2003, and describes progress made in meeting the Lisbon objectives.

ACT Dividend Credit

24. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, what estimate he has made of the amount of extra revenue he has received since 1997 from the abolition of ACT dividend credit. [99485]

Ruth Kelly: I take it that the hon. Gentleman is referring to tax credits paid on dividends received by investors.

When we announced the changes to dividend tax credits in July 1997 we estimated that they would increase revenue by amounts of £2.3 billion in 1997–98, £3.95 billion in 1998–99, and around £51.5 billion each year thereafter.

But it is misleading to look at these figures in isolation. The abolition of payable tax credits was part of a wider package of CT reform that reduced rates of corporation tax and encourages re-investment of profits for growth. These reforms will have partly offset the effects of changes to tax credits.

There has been no estimate made of the Exchequer effects since those Budget forecasts.

Child Trust Fund

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list each Government consultation that has included information on the Child Trust Fund. [99028]

Ruth Kelly: Proposals for the Child Trust Fund (CTF) were first published in April 2001 in the consultation document, Saving and Assets for All. A follow up consultation document, Delivering Saving and Assets, which asked specific questions about the delivery model for the CTF, was published in November 2001. The result of this consultation was published in the 2002 Pre-Budget Report. As part of the consultation launched on 5 February 2003 on the product specifications for the 'stakeholder' products recommended by the Sandier review, the Government is seeking views on whether explicitly linking the CTF to the other products in the Sandier suite would be helpful.

Gold Reserves

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the outcome of the policy of instructing the Bank of England to sell gold reserves; and what percentage of total gold reserves have been sold. [99462]

Ruth Kelly: As recommended by the Public Accounts Committee, the Treasury undertook a review of the gold sales programme once it was completed. Copies of the Treasury's "Review of the Sale of Part of the UK Gold Reserves", issued in October 2002, have been placed in the House of Commons' Library. It is also available on the Treasury's website.

As a result of the portfolio restructuring the Government has reduced the United Kingdom's gold holdings from the 715 tonnes (held in May 1999) to 320 tonnes at the end of the programme, a reduction of around 60 per cent. The United Kingdom now holds around 23 per cent of its net reserves in gold.

Government Assets

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the total *(a)* market value and *(b)* same use value of land and buildings owned by the UK Government; and if he will make a statement. [98378]

Mr. Boateng: The National Asset Register (CM 5221) shows that, at March 2000, the value of land and buildings owned by central government departments and their sponsored bodies in the public sector was £160 billion. Land and buildings are valued in accordance with the relevant UK accounting standards. Further information is available in departmental resource accounts and the accounts of their sponsored bodies.

Government Finance

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his forecasts are for the Government's *(a)* budget deficit and *(b)* PSBR, (i) in absolute terms and (ii) as a proportion of GDP, for the next five financial years; whether these will be compliant with the terms and conditions of euro membership and the stability pact; and if he will make a statement. [99600]

Mr. Boateng: Projections of public sector net borrowing as a proportion of GDP and in £ billion for the next five financial years are shown in the 2002 Pre-Budget Report, in Tables B2 and B5 respectively. The public sector net cash requirement, formerly known as the public sector borrowing requirement (PSBR), is shown in Table B22 of the 2002 Pre-BudgetReport for 2001–02 and 2002–03.

Table B2 of the 2002 Pre-Budget Report also shows the Treaty measures of deficit and debt used in the excessive deficits procedure. The reference levels of 3 per cent. of GDP for the deficit and 60 per. cent of GDP for gross debt are comfortably achieved throughout the period. The projections are consistent with the Government's prudent interpretation of the Stability and Growth Pact, which takes into account the economic cycle, sustainability and the important role of public investment (as specified in Article 104 of the EC Treaty).

Iraqi Residents (UK)

Mr. Walter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the latest estimate is of the number of Iraqi nationals resident in the United Kingdom. [99689]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from L. Cook to Mr. R. Walter, dated 27 February 2003:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question about the number of Iraqi nationals resident in the United Kingdom. (99689)

The latest available estimate of the number of Iraqi nationals resident in the United Kingdom is 21,000. This estimate is obtained from averaging the results from the Labour Force Survey over the twelve month period ending November 2002 and is subject to sampling error.

Ministerial Travel

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many times since 2001 he has taken flights within his departmental duties in the UK; how many of these were *(a)* charter flights, *(b)* first or club class and *(c)* by helicopter; and who accompanied him on each trip. [95383]

Ruth Kelly: The Chancellor of the Exchequer has taken four flights, including two return flights, within the UK on departmental business since 2001. One of these flights was in club class. He has taken no charter or helicopter flights.

On one occasion he was accompanied by two special advisers, a press officer and a private secretary; on another by a special adviser, a press officer, a private secretary and an official; on one occasion by a special adviser, a press officer and two private secretaries; and on another occasion by a special adviser and two private secretaries. All travel was undertaken in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code and Travel by Ministers, copies of which are available in the Library.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will answer Written Question 92347 tabled for answer on the named day of 28 January. [98923]

Ruth Kelly: My Private Secretary provided this information by letter on 17 February in response to an enquiry from the hon. Gentleman. I am placing a copy of the letter in the Library of the House.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Amnesic Shellfish Poisoning

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what scientific evidence the UK Government has collated to suggest that amnesic shellfish poisoning in scallops represents a threat to human health. [94154]

Ms Blears: There have been no recorded instances of amnesic shellfish poisoning (ASP) in humans in the United Kingdom due to the consumption of scallops. However, ASP is a recognised neurotoxin, which has caused severe illness and even death in other countries through consumption of shellfish and is therefore a serious threat to human health.

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the European Commission intends to respond to the appeal from the Food Standards Agency for a review of the current internationally accepted action level of 20 mg/kg in scallops; and what scientific evidence the Commission has collated to suggest that amnesic shellfish poisoning represents a threat to human health. [94155]

Ms Blears: The Food Standards Agency wrote to the European Commission on the question of the action level, seeking their views on how further research may be taken forward. The Commission has acknowledged receipt of a project proposal for the assessment of scallop portion size as a contribution to the assessment of the risk to consumer health. This proposal will be evaluated and, if considered valid, submitted to the Commission's Scientific Committee for Scrutiny.

The current European Union controls are based on evidence drawn from an incident in Canada which resulted in cases of severe illness and several deaths. Details of this or any ongoing research can be obtained from the Commission's Directorate General SANCO.

Police Service of Northern Ireland

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what procedures, tests, and exercises constitute the process by which PSNI officers reclassify in relation to use of firearms; and if he will make a statement. [98568]

Jane Kennedy: The training comprises of an introductory Health and Safety input, a refresher handling class, a live fire qualification shoot and an interactive lesson on Human Rights and Police Use of Firearms.

Scallop Fishery

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland for what reason the whole Irish Sea scallop fishery has been closed. [94151]

Ms Blears: I am advised by the Food Standards Agency, which has responsibility for monitoring shellfisheries for the presence of algal biotoxins as required under EC Directive 91/492, that closures of scallop fisheries are based on sample test results above the statutory limit.

PRIME MINISTER

Director of Communications

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Prime Minister (1) what rules govern speeches made to external organisations by his Director of Communications; and if he will make a statement; [100018]

(2) if he will place in the Library a copy of the speech made to the Freight Transport Association by his Director of Communications on 18 February. [100019]

The Prime Minister: Speeches made by special advisers in an official capacity are governed by the requirements of the Model Contract for Special Advisers. In line with the terms of his contract, my Director of Communications occasionally carries out speaking engagements. His speech to the Freight Transport Asociation was one of a number he is doing in a personal capacity to raise funds for charity. He spoke about his experience in the media and in politics, and then did a Q&A session. There is no record of his remarks.

Iraq

Mr. Graham Allen: To ask the Prime Minister (1) what plans Her Majesty's Government has to present the government of Iraq with a formal written ultimatum before it enters a state of armed conflict with that Government; [99491]

(2) what the maximum length of time is in which Iraq is required to comply with the terms of UN Security Council Resolution 1441; and if he will make a statement; [99493]

(3) if he will make it his policy to publish, in advance of entering a state of armed conflict with Iraq, a statement indicating why he considers that all peaceful means of settling the disputes between the United Kingdom and Iraq have been exhausted. [99665]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the statement I gave in the House on Tuesday 25 February 2003.

Lord Lieutenant for Cambridgeshire

Mr. Paice: To ask the Prime Minister when he expects the announcement of the new Lord Lieutenant for Cambridgeshire to be made. [99606]

The Prime Minister: The former Lord-Lieutenant for Cambridgeshire, James Crowden, retired in November last year. The process of identifying a successor is well in hand and we hope to announce an appointment shortly.

CABINET OFFICE

Capita

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office pursuant to his answer of 13 January 2003, *Official Report,* columns 367–368W, on Capita, if he will give the *(a)* start and finish date, *(b)* value, *(c)* evaluation mechanism for successful delivery and *(d)* penalty charges for failure to deliver for each contract; whether penalty charges have been incurred; what the service level agreements were; what the contract numbers were; and if he will make a statement. [97337]

Mr. Alexander: The information requested is as follows:

Contract for Fast Stream Recruitment Support

(a) Started 1 April 2001, ends 30 September 2003

(b) The contract is part fixed cost and part variable cost. The fixed cost is £1,224,000 and the variable cost to date is £1,980,000

(c) Successful delivery is achieved through careful contract management, including regular monitoring.

(d) The contract contains a default procedure that has not been used. The contract number is F060.

Contract for Provision of Civil Service and Judicial Pensioner Payroll and Associated Services

(a) Started 1 October 2002, the contract is for 5.5 years extendable up to 10.5 years.

(b) The current value is some £3.6 million per annum, however the contract price is subject to annual indexation and changes in live and preserved caseloads—either up or down.

(c) Successful delivery is achieved through careful contract management, including regular monitoring.

(d) The contract provides for a reduction in the contract price if performance standards are not achieved. The contract does not have a number.

Contract for Recruitment of Assistant Parliamentary Counsel

(a) Started 4 October 2001, ended 11 November 2002

(b) £19,000

(c) Successful delivery was achieved through contract management, including regular monitoring.

(d) The contract provided for termination in the event of a material breach which was not remedied. The contract did not have a number.

I have put a copy of the service levels for each contract in the Library.

All costs exclude VAT.

Civil Defence

Gregory Barker: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office pursuant to his answer of 10 February 2003, *Official Report,* column 495W, what further steps have been taken by his Department since 11 September 2001 to ensure that local authorities in England and Wales work in conjunction with the *(a)* St John's Ambulance and *(b)* other voluntary organisations to update local civil defence plans and increase civil defence (i) planning and (ii) readiness in the event of an NBC terrorist attack in (A) London, (B) South East, (C) England and (D) UK; and when the most recent guidance was given. [98641]

Mr. Alexander: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to him on 10 February 2003, *Official Report,* column 495W.

Mr. Peter Gershon

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office when Sir Andrew Turnbull will reply to the letter of 22 January 2003 from the hon. Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton regarding the conduct of Mr. Peter Gershon CBE. [99772]

Mr. Alexander: Sir Andrew Turnbull replied to the hon. Member on 26 February 2003.

Written Questions

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many named day written questions were tabled to the Department between 15 October 2002 and 24 February 2003; how many that received a holding answer were given a substantive answer *(a)* within three days, *(b)* within seven days, *(c)* within 14 days, *(d)* within 28 days and *(e)* over 28 days later; and what procedures the Department has in place to monitor performance on answering (i) Parliamentary Questions and (ii) ministerial letters. [99458]

Mr. Alexander: Seventy five Named Day questions were tabled to the Cabinet Office between 15 October and 24 February, of these nine had holding replies. All were answered within three parliamentary sitting days.

Cabinet Office parliamentary questions are recorded on a parliamentary database, and progress of all parliamentary questions are monitored closely.

As far as ministerial correspondence is concerned, the Cabinet Office, on an annual basis, publishes a report to Parliament on performance of departments in replying to Ministerial correspondence. The Report for 2001 was published on Friday 24 May 2002, column 674W. The Report for 2002 will be published in due course.

HEALTH

Age-related Macular Degeneration

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what action his Department will undertake to ensure that primary care trusts fund the treatment of patients suffering from predominantly classic CNV associated with age-related macular degeneration (AMD) within the context of the clinical studies recommended in the Final Appraisal Determination of photodynamic therapy for AMD issued by NICE; [98632]

(2) when his Department returned photodynamic therapy for age-related macular degeneration to NICE; and when final guidance is expected; [98633]

(3) what his Department's estimate is of the number of patients who, according to the product licence, should have been eligible for treatment for AMD during the clinical studies. [98634]

Mr. Lammy: We have asked the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) to carry out an appraisal of photodynamic therapy (PDT) as a treatment for age-related macular degeneration. It has not yet published any guidance to the National Health Service on this topic. NICE prepared its Final Appraisal Determination on Photodynamic Therapy and circulated it to consultees on 16 January. We understand this document has been appealed against. NICE will now consider any appeals before publishing its final guidance.

Once guidance has been published, NHS bodies are obliged to make the ncessary funding available so that patients can receive treatments recommended by NICE, if recommended by the clinician.

A recent study sponsored by the Macular Disease Society estimated that there were currently 182,000 suffering from age-related macular degeneration with a best eye visual acuity below that judged appropriate for certification as blind or partially sighted. The study forecast that this number would increase to 194,000 by 2008. We are unable to estimate exactly how many patients may benefit from photodynamic therapy until NICE has completed its appraisal of the therapy.

Agency Nurses

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the cost of agency and bank nurses in *(a)* York and *(b)* North Yorkshire; and what assessment he has made of the impact of these costs on the respective primary care trusts. [98052]

Jacqui Smith: Figures for the costs of agency and bank nurses are not available. The table sets out the costs of all agency staff and other staff not directly employed by individual health authorities, national health service trust and primary care trusts—including agency nurses. Figures for the cost of bank nurses are included in the cost NHS nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff.

Analysis of expenditure on non-NHS nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff, within the North Yorkshire Health Authority Boundary: 2001–02

Organisation name	*Expenditure on non-NHS nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff (£)*
North Yorkshire Health Authority	0
Selby and York Primary Care Trust	83,388
Northallerton Health Services NHS Trust	133,482
York Health Services NHS Trust	766,850
Scarborough and North East Yorkshire NHS Trust	201,422
Harrogate Health Care NHS Trust	500,903
Tees East and North Yorkshire Ambulance Services NHS Trust	0

Sources:

1. Annual financial returns of health authorities.
2. Annual financial returns of NHS trusts.
3. Annual financial returns of primary care trusts.

Source of information:

Department of Health

Cancer Treatment

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many teenage cancer patients since 1997 spent the majority of their cancer treatment in *(a)* adult and *(b)* children's wards in (i) England and (ii) the North East of England; and if he will make a statement. [98466]

Ms Blears: No statistics are available centrally which allow distinction between adult and children's wards.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the locations of teenage-specific cancer wards *(a)* in 1995, *(b)* in 2003 and *(c)* that are planned to be completed by 2010; and if he will make a statement. [98471]

Ms Blears: We do not routinely hold details of all the teenage cancer wards provided in the National Health Service in 1995 nor those that are provided at the present time. However, we are aware of eight units currently dedicated to teenage cancer patients in the following NHS trusts:

Middlesex Hospital, University College Hospitals NHS Trust, London;

University College Hospital, University College Hospitals NHS Trust, London;

Queen Elizabeth Hospital, University Hospital Birmingham NHS Trust;

Christie Hospital NHS Trust, Manchester;

Weston Park Hospital, Sheffield Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust;

St James's University Hospital, Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust;

Royal Victoria Infirmary, Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Trust;

Alder Hey Hospital, Royal Liverpool Children's NHS Trust

It is for primary care trusts to decide exactly which health services their local population need now and in the future. We have asked the National Institute for Clinical Excellence to develop guidance on children's and adolescent cancers. This will help primary care trusts in the planning and delivery of future teenage cancer services.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the effectiveness and provision of cancer wards for teenagers in England. [98511]

Ms Blears: The particular needs of adolescents in the health service are being considered as part of the national service framework for children, young people and maternity services. In addition, we have asked the National Institute of Clinical Excellence to develop guidance on children's and adolescent cancers. This guidance will take account of the national service framework and will help primary care trusts (who have responsibility for assessing the health service needs of the local population) determine the most effective way to deliver services that meet the particular needs of this group of cancer patients.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many beds have been available in specialist teenage cancer wards in England each year since 1997. [98513]

Ms Blears: Information on bed numbers is not collected centrally at the level of detail requested.

Care Commissioning

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what regulations govern local authority care commissioning; and what measures are in place to ensure transparency. [98071]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 24 February 2003]:* Councils should base their commissioning decisions on the principles of Best Value. They should focus on what will deliver the optimum outcome for service users. Whether councils' commissioning arrangements are fair and open is the subject of Best Value service reviews and reviews by the Audit Commission and the Social Services Inspectorate. These judgements are then published in reports.

We expect local social services and health authorities to adopt the Building Capacity and Partnership in Care Agreement. We published this in October 2001 with the endorsement of local health and social care commissioners and providers. This document provides clear guidance on how to bring about improvements in the planning and commissioning of services in ways that brings confidence and stability to the whole system.

Care Standards Act

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will make a statement on proposed changes to the Care Standards Act 2000 regulation following the consultation at the end of last year. [97883]

Jacqui Smith: The consultation document issued on 16 August 2002 set out proposals to change certain national minimum standards for care homes for older people and care homes for younger adults (18–65) which relate to the physical environment. The consultation did not propose making any changes to the Care Homes Regulations 2001 issued under the Care Standards Act.

The consultation exercise ended on 8 November 2002 and the revised national minimum standards were published on 18 February 2003.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to relax the regulations relating to communal space in care homes as a result of his consultation exercise on the Care Standards Act 2000. [97884]

Jacqui Smith: The consultation document issued on 16 August 2002 set out proposals to change certain national minimum standards for care homes for older people and care homes for younger adults (18–65) which relate to the physical environment. The consultation did not propose making any changes to the Care Homes Regulations 2001 issued under the Care Standards Act.

The consultation exercise ended on 8 November 2002. The revised standards, published on 18 February 2003, include the standards relating to communal space.

Child Protection

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what communications to GPs regarding procedures for dealing with children suspected of suffering harm at the hands of their carers have been issued by his Department since 25 February 2000. [96039]

Jacqui Smith: There were no communications directly to general practitioners regarding procedures for dealing with children suspected of suffering harm at the hands of their carers in this period.

I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on Wednesday 12 February, *Official Report*, columns 810–11W.

Clinical Consent

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on his policy regarding consent for *(a)* clinical experimentation, *(b)* research and *(c)* trials on babies born in the NHS with life-threatening conditions. [98119]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 24 February 2003]:* The principles of consent remain broadly the same in all these settings. These are set out in the Department of Health's guidance published in March 2001 "A Reference Guide to Consent for Examination or Treatment" which explains the current English law on consent to treatment.

Correspondence

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to the letter of 29th November from Mrs.A C Phillips of Benfleet, a constituent. [95213]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 3 February 2003]:* A reply was sent to the hon. Member on 25 February 2003.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will substantively reply to the letter of the hon. Member for the Isle of Wight dated 8 October 2002, ref. PO 1017307, concerning Mr.Wardrop. [98813]

Mr. Lammy: A reply was sent to the hon. Member on 18 February 2003.

Departmental Land (Ashford)

Matthew Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what land has been sold by his Department in the Ashford area in the last five years. [98171]

Ms Blears: One site in Ashford, Kent has been sold by the Department over the last five years; that of Pinewood Nursing Home in 1997.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people were employed in the departmental filestores in each year since 1997; how many have been transferred to the private sector; and if he will make a statement. [98856]

Mr. Lammy: The Department of Health filestore services have been contracted out since April 1996. Since that date the contractors have employed staff in the following numbers:

1 April to 31 March	*Number employed (whole time equivalent)*
1996–97	5.5
1997–98	4.5
1998–99	4.5
1999–2000	5.5
2000–01	5.5
2001–02	6.5
2002–03	5.5

These numbers include a manager on-site two to three days a week, but do not include casual staff recruited to help out with occasional peaks of work.

No records management or filestore staff have been transferred to the private sector since 1996.

Departmental Website

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the total expenditure on the Department of Health website was in each of the last five years. [95689]

Mr. Lammy: The cost of the Department's website from 1998–99 to 2002–03 is shown in the table.

Financial Year	*Hosting and maintenance (£000)*	*Website development (£000)*	*Estimated staff costs[2] (£000)*	*Total costs (£000)*
1998–99	20.9	20	178.9	219.8
1999–00	54.3	30	229.4	313.7
2000–01	49.3	130.7	277.1	457.1
2001–02	73.32	[1]245.9	407.6	726.8
2002–03 (to 01/02/03)	[1]103.36	46	426.2	575.5

Notes:

[1] This includes £16,840 in migration and set-up costs incurred on switching Internet Service Providers in June 2002.

[2] Based on agreed civil service staff costs (including salaries, common services, etc.)

The website was set up in 1996 and has grown from 100 pages to over 80,000 pages since then. The number of databases made available online has increased from one at thebeginning of 1998 to 60 in 2002.

In 2000, the Department embarked on a major redevelopment of the website in response to user feedback, the introduction of the Guidelines for UK government websites and an increase in use of the Internet as a vehicle for departmental publications. This was completed by the end of March 2002.

The website regularly receives in the region of five million hits per month and is consistently placed in the top six most-visited Government websites.

Dietary Advice

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress the Government is making in increasing the average daily consumption of fruit and vegetables from three to five portions a day. [87323]

Ms Blears: National trends in fruit and vegetable consumption, since the beginning of the Five-a-Day programme in 2001, cannot as yet be fully ascertained, due to the considerable time it takes to undertake dietary surveys and their analyses. However, monitoring systems are in place. At a national level, trends in consumption will be assessed through the annual Health Survey for England, through which data on fruit and vegetables was collected for the first time in 2001.

At a local level, evaluation of five local Five-a-Day pilot initiatives—one-year interventions targeting one million people between 2000 and 2001—demonstrated that they have produced important changes in people's knowledge, access and intake of fruit and vegetables. Overall, the intervention was found to have had a positive effect in people with the lowest intakes. Those who ate less than five a day at baseline increased their intakes by one portion over the course of the study. Sixty six new local five-a-day initiatives, funded by the New Opportunities Fund, will begin this year. A tool has been developed to ensure effective evaluation of the local Five-a-Day initiatives.

Following successful piloting, the National School Fruit Scheme is now being extended throughout England on a region by region basis. The Scheme currently reaches 425,000 children in 3,500 schools across the whole of the West Midlands and London. A tool for assessing the impact of the National School Fruit Scheme on children's diets is currently being developed.

Domestic Violence

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research her Department has carried out regarding the link between child physical abuse and domestic violence. [99036]

Jacqui Smith: The Department of Health's policy research programme is currently funding a research project which focuses on existing child protection practices and procedures and explores their ability to respond to children who have experienced domestic violence, or drug or alcohol misuse within their families.

In addition, Government funding has, over the last few years, been used to support the following two studies, which are now complete: A health needs and health-care assessment of a population of children resident in refuges for women victims of domestic violence (Dr Elspeth Webb, 2000), a project which focussed on the children of women who were victims of domestic violence, within the refuge setting; and Children's Needs—Parenting Capacity, the impact of parental mental illness, problem alcohol and drug use, and domestic violence on children's development (H Cleaver, I Unell and J Aldgate, 1999), a study which examined how factors such as domestic violence, alcohol and drug misuse and mental illness, may impact on children and may affect a parent's capacity to respond to their child's needs.

Drug Appraisals (NICE)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will set out the way in which *(a)* NCCHTA, *(b)* TAG, *(c)* TAR, *(d)* universities, *(e)* his Department, *(f)* NICE and *(g)* the joint working group work together to decide which drugs NICE should appraise; and if he will make a statement. [97140]

Ms Blears: A paper describing new arrangements for selecting topics for referral to the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE), including new pharmaceuticals, was sent to interested parties at the end of last year. A copy has been placed in the Library.

Drug Dependency (Treatment)

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what targets he has set for improving the waiting times for treatment for opiate dependency *(a)* in prison and *(b)* in the community. [97645]

Ms Blears: Drug treatment services in prisons are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department. I understand that the Prison Service has not set a specific target for improving the waiting times for treatment for opiate dependency in prison. All prisoners referred to the counselling, assessment, referral, advice and throughcare service should receive an initial assessment within a target of five days from the point of referral.

In December 2001, the National Treatment Agency for Substance Misuse (NTA) developed a programme to tackle the growing problem of waiting times for drug treatment in the community. As part of this process, the NTA set targets on the maximum acceptable waiting times for treatment. The targets are defined by treatment modality, not by the patient's drug of dependence. Opiate dependent patients may be receiving treatment through any of the modalities shown in the table, according to their individual clinical need.

Weeks

	2002–03	*2003–04*
In patient detoxification	4	2
Specialist prescribing	6	3
GP prescribing	4	2
Structured counselling	4	2
Day Care	4	3
Residential rehab	4	3

DXA Scans

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many DXA scans were completed in each hospital trust in 2002. [97725]

Jacqui Smith: Information on the number of dual energy X-Ray absorptiometry scans is not collected centrally.

Firefighters' Dispute

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether costs were incurred by his Department as a result of the fire strikes. [98387]

Mr. Lammy: Some minimal costs were incurred. These were contained within the Department's normal budgets which allow for contingencies of this nature.

Health Care (East Riding)

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nurses work in hospitals in the East Riding of Yorkshire; and how many of them are employed from an agency. [97729]

Jacqui Smith: On 12 February 2003, the following number of nurses were employed by Hull and East Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust.

Nurses	*Headcount*	*Whole time equivalent*
Qualified	2,230	1,927.8
Unqualified	894	737.9

There is no record of the number of agency staff employed.

Source of information:

Hull and East Yorkshire NHS Trust

Heart Choice Scheme

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether it is a requirement for NHS hospitals to employ an independent patient care adviser to advise patients on the Heart Choice Scheme. [97309]

Ms Blears: All trusts engaging in cardiac surgery and cardiac tertiary centres are now required under the patient choice initiative to employ a patient care adviser, who is accountable at the local level to the head of the parent trust's patient advice and liaison service.

HIV/AIDS

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the HIV/AIDS infection rate is in the United Kingdom. [99156]

Ms Blears: The HIV/AIDS infection rate for adults aged between 15 and 49 years and living in the United Kingdom in 2001 is estimated to be 0.13 per cent.

Source:

Public Health Laboratory Service

Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has received on the reasons of the resignation of the former Chief Executive of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority. [97992]

Ms Blears: In November 2002 Dr. Maureen Dalziel's appointment as Chief Executive of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority was terminated, following a vote of no confidence by the members of the authority. This was entirely a decision for the members of the authority. However the Chair, Ms Suzi Leather, has confirmed there was no question of any impropriety nor was Dr. Dalziel's departure connected with any incident at a licensed treatment centre.

IT Contracts

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list IT contracts in his Department above £50 million in each of the last 10 years; what the inception date for each system was; when it became fully functional; when it became fully debugged; and what the cost of over-runs has been. [99001]

Ms Blears: The only information technology contracts let by the Department of Health in the last 10 years in excess of £50 million are confined to centrally funded projects for the national health service.

The Department does not retain centrally, detailed records of when NHS systems became fully debugged and the cost of any over-runs. This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Information on the IT contracts for 1993–2002 is shown in the table.

£ million

	Contract	*Costs*	*Inception date*	*Fully functional*
1993–94	—	—	—	—
1995	NHSNet central framework contract with BT and Cable and Wireless	129.6	1995	7–10 year contract. 1996 for BT 1997 for Cable and Wireless
1996–99	—	—	—	—
2000	Clinical Messaging	50.0	2000	7 year contract. Gradual rollout from 2000
2001	Microsoft software enterprise agreement	138.6	2001	3 year contract. This is a software purchase enabling contract
	Electronic Staff Record	325	2001	10 year contract. Gradual rollout from 2001
2002	NHSNet purchase of additional bandwidth	96.5	2002	5 year contract. Gradual rollout from 2002
	Email and directory services	326.2	2002	10 year contract. Scheduled for March 2003

IVF Treatment

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many licensed clinics offer single ovum IVF; and how many couples have been offered the option of this procedure; [97987]

(2) what the take-home-baby rate has been for IVF in unstimulated cycles (single ovum IVF). [97988]

Ms Blears: The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA) does not record centres routinely offering treatment involving unstimulated cycles. For this reason it is unable to provide information on the exact number of centres that have provided this service. However, if a patient requests a natural cycle for medical or other reasons, the HFEA has advised that the clinic would consider providing this treatment.

Information on total number of live births resulting from an unstimulated in vitro fertilisation treatment cycle is shown in the table.

Natural IVF Cycles—fresh, unstimulated cycles using the patient's own oocytes[1,2]

Time period	*Cycles*	*Live births*	*Birth rate percentage*
1 August to 31 December 1991	358	23	6.4
1 January to 31 December 1992	823	52	6.3
1 January to 31 December 1993	827	37	4.5
1 January to 31 December 1994	628	16	2.5
1 January to 31 December 1995	387	7	1.8
1 January to 31 December 1996	196	4	2.0
1 January to 31 December 1997	91	2	2.2
1 January to 31 December 1998	94	4	4.3
1 January to 31 March 1999[3]	28	—	—
Erroneous cycle dates[4]	4	—	—
Total	3,436	145	4.2

[1] Data as recorded on the HFEA register.

[2] As cycles are unstimulated (natural), single embryo transfers are routine. Where two oocytes are produced and both fertilise, two embryos could be replaced.

[3] January to March 1999 is the most recent period for which figures are available.

[4] Four cycles where year not correctly recorded.

Source:

Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority

Lieutenant Commander R.W.J. Cansdell

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he will reply substantively to the letter of the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) dated 21 November, acknowledged on 25 November, ref P01020175, concerning Lieutenant Commander R. W. J. Cansdell. [95076]

Jacqui Smith: A reply was sent to the hon. Member on 24 February.

Maternity Patients (Drug Misuse)

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many incidences of drug misuse by maternity patients there have been in England since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [98467]

Ms Blears: The information requested is not available centrally. Information on numbers entering drug treatment services is available via the national drug treatment monitoring system. This provides a breakdown by gender, but does not identify maternity patients as a separate group. Information on the number of women entering drug treatment services can be found from the statistical bulletin "Statistics from the Regional Drug Misuse Databases on drug misusers in treatment in England, 2000/01", published in December 2001 at http://www.doh.gov.uk/pubNc/sb0133.htm.

Hospital Episode Statistics (HES) provide information about maternity in national health service hospitals. No data is collected relating to the provision of ante natal services.

Maternity data is available at http://www.doh.gov.uk/public/sbQ211.htm.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures are in place to help pregnant women who are addicted to drugs; and if he will make a statement. [98468]

Ms Blears: Pregnant women are considered a priority group and are therefore fast tracked into treatment.

Midwives provide the majority of care for pregnant mothers as well as advice and support on healthy lifestyles including substance misuse.

If a woman, as part of her ante natal care, is assessed as requiring treatment for drug misuse she will be referred to appropriate drug treatment services.

Obstetric and substance misuse services exist throughout the country. The Department of Health's "Drug Misuse and Dependence—Guidelines on Clinical Management" (Clinical Guidelines) recommends the following:

> "Different approaches have been tried to deliver care to pregnant drug misusers, such as specialist midwives, or drug dependence staff attached to the antenatal clinic. Each method should try to involve the primary health care team, particularly if prescribing substitute medication. The type of service in each area will depend on local circumstances, the number of

> pregnant drug misusers presenting for care, expertise of the obstetric and primary care services, and availability of specialist or shared-care support."

Further information is available at http://www.doh.gov.uk/drugs/pdfs/dmfull.pdf.

Medicines

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what steps he is taking to ensure that claims for the benefits of medicines advertised to health professionals are investigated; [97952]

(2) if he will make a statement on the assessment by the Medicines Control Agency of the advertising for the oral contraceptive Yasmin; [97953]

(3) what assessment he has made of the benefits of Yasmin in relation to other oral contraceptives. [97955]

Ms Blears: In April 2002, at the time of launch of Yasmin, a combined oral contraceptive authorised in the European Mutual Recognition procedure in June 2000, the Medicines Control Agency (MCA) identified advertising for the product through its routine monitoring of published advertising materials. The company—Schering Health Care Limited—was asked to provide the references quoted in the advertising material. At this stage, the evidence in the references was not examined as closely as it would have been, and subsequently was, in the event of a complaint from a health care professional from the perspective of the clinical usage of the product.

Following specific complaints from health professionals in August and September 2002, the MCA conducted an assessment of the claims made in advertising for Yasmin and concluded that the quality and extent of the evidence provided was not sufficiently robust to support the claims made and that the Yasmin advertising was in fact misleading. The MCA requested that the company, Schering Health Care Limited, withdraw the material and it did so in October 2002.

The company was subsequently required to submit all its advertising for Yasmin to the MCA for review prior to publication. The MCA has also required Schering Health Care Limited to issue a corrective statement concerning advertising for Yasmin. This will be sent to health professionals who received previous advertising material from 21 February 2003 and also published in all medical journals where previous advertisements had appeared.

The Agency makes an assessment of the safety, quality and efficacy of applications for a marketing authorisation. The data assessed in the Yasmin application included efficacy studies versus other licensed oral contraceptives as comparators. However, the comparative benefits of a particular product in relation to other products are not relevant to the Licensing Authority decision under the terms of the Medicines Act 1968, so long as there is acceptable evidence of efficacy.

The control of medicines advertising in the United Kingdom is based on a long established system of self-regulation, underpinned by statutory powers administered by the MCA under the Medicines (Advertising) Regulations 1994 and the Medicines (Monitoring of Advertising) Regulations 1994. The MCA undertakes a range of duties, set out in a published guidance note, to ensure that claims for the benefits of medicines in advertising comply with the statutory requirements. These include preventing of advertising prior to publication in certain circumstances, monitoring of medicines advertising in medical and other journals and investigation of complaints about advertising from any source, including health professionals and the public.

National Institute for Mental Health

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* clinical and *(b)* non-clinical staff work for each regional centre for the National Institute for Mental Health. [97876]

Jacqui Smith: The table shows the numbers of clinical and non-clinical staff currently working in each development centre of the National Institute for Mental Health (NIMHE). Further staff may be employed in the future for short-term specific projects. These will in most cases be clinically trained. Development centres will also be engaged in supporting and facilitating networks of clinical staff to undertake region wide developing activity. The majority of people involved in the work of NIMHE's Development Centres will therefore be clinically trained and engaged in clinical activity.

Regional Development Centres	*Clinical staff*[1]	*Non-clinical staff*[1]
Eastern	2.8	3.6
West Midlands	3.8	5
East Midlands	—	1.5
London	1.1	5.8
South West	2.5	5.5
North West	2	3
North East/Yorkshire and Humberside	7.8	11
South East	—	7.2

[1] Whole time equivalent

NHS Dentistry

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS dentists *(a)* are practising in south-west Hampshire and *(b)* have left the NHS in south-west Hampshire in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [99034]

Ms Blears: The latest information available is for the general dental service (GDS) for Southampton and South West Hampshire Health Authority (HA) area at 30 September 2002. 206 dentists were working in the GDS in Southampton and South West Hampshire HA area at 30 September 2002, six more than in September 2001. Eleven dentists previously practising in the HA area left the GDS in the 12 months to 30 September 2002.

Information is not collected centrally on dentists leaving and joining other dental services, including the personal dental service, community and hospital dental services.

NHS Direct

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many calls were made to NHS Direct between *(a)* 15 October 2000 and 10 February 2001, *(b)* 15 October 2001 and 10 February 2002 and *(c)* 15 October 2002 and 10 February 2003. [97821]

Mr. Lammy: 1,279,200 calls were made to NHS Direct between 15 October 2000 and 10 February 2001. 1,862,500 calls were made between 15 October 2001 and 10 February 2002 and 2,000,500 calls made between 15 October 2002 and 10 February 2003.

Nurse Recruitment (Portsmouth)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on nurse recruitment in the Portsmouth area in the last three months. [98348]

Ms Blears: In addition to undertaking a tender procurement exercise to set up a national health service e-recruitment project, the Department of Health is launching the 2003 national recruitment campaign for the NHS in February. The purpose of the national campaign is to provide a national brand for the NHS that is flexible and can be adapted at a local level to increase the impact of local recruitment activities.

I am advised that at local level within Hampshire & Isle of Wight, recruitment initiatives are also on going. These include; restructuring recruitment functions to form specialist teams working on long term and short term needs, implementation of a recruitment and retention strategy group, local and national advertisements, targeted advertisements in RGN student handbook, RCN Bulletin, and Nursing Times, roadshows, events in the hospitals, and other promotional events.

The Portsmouth City Primary Care Trust has recently launched its own website, which includes a job shop page advertising all vacancies including qualified nurses and there are a limited number of secondment opportunities to Southampton University to undertake qualified nurse training in adult mental health.

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost to the NHS was from April to December 2002 of prescribing *(a)* Yasmin and *(b)* Marvelon. [97954]

Ms Blears: During the six months April to September 2002, the net ingredient cost of the hormonal contraceptive pills Yasmin and Marvelon prescribed and dispensed in the community in England was £786,400 and £1.71 million respectively. The number of prescription items of Yasmin and Marvelon that were dispensed in the community over this time was 44,800 and 162,300 respectively.

Net ingredient cost refers to the cost, which the dispenser is reimbursed, of the drug before discounts and does not include any dispensing costs or fees. Data have been provided from the prescription cost analysis (PCA) system and data to September 2002 are the latest available. PCA does not cover items dispensed in hospitals or private prescriptions. PCA only covers drugs that are on a prescription. Therefore contraceptive pills dispensed in family planning clinics are not included in these data.

Parkinson's Disease

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will ban the use of tissue from aborted foetuses in research for Parkinson's disease; and what assessment he has made of the side-effects caused to patients by its use in research. [97986]

Ms Blears: There are no plans to ban the use of foetal tissue in therapeutic research programmes. In accordance with the Polkinghorne guidelines research ethics committees need to examine all such proposals. Research or innovative therapy involving foetal tissue must be assessed on the merit of the individual proposal and the ethical issues involved. Any adverse effects observed would need to be reported through the appropriate systems in accordance with the Research Governance Framework for Health and Social Care (2001).

Pompe's Disease

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what trials are taking place on methods of treatment for Pompe's disease; and if he will make a statement. [98819]

Jacqui Smith: We recognise and are sympathetic to the problems experienced by people who have Pompe's disease, and understand the difficulties and distress caused for them and their families. Current treatment consists of symptomatic management of cardiac and respiratory failure, provided through mainstream health services. We are aware that some trials are taking place overseas of the effectiveness of enzyme replacement therapy with a view to producing specialist effective therapy over the next few years.

The main Government agency for research into the causes of and treatments for disease is the Medical Research Council (MRC), which receives its funding via the Department of Trade and Industry. The MRC is not currently funding any treatment trials into Pompe's Disease. However, the MRC always welcomes high quality applications for research into any aspect of human health and these are judged in open competition with other demands in funding. Awards are made according to their scientific quality and importance to human health. As a rule, the MRC does not earmark funds for particular topics.

Rohypnol

Rev Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans there are to reclassify Rohypnol; and how many doses of Rohypnol have been prescribed in each country of the United Kingdom in each year since 2000. [98364]

Ms Blears: Rohypnol, the proprietary name for the substance flunitrazepam, is one of the benzodiazepine family of drugs, and is controlled as a Class 'C' drug. There are no plans to reclassify it. Rohypnol has not been dispensed in the community in England since 1985.

Information relating to Wales and Scotland are for the devolved administrations to respond to. Whilst institutions in Northern Ireland are dissolved, responsibility rests with Ministers in the Northern Ireland Office.

Stroke Units

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of stroke patients were treated in a stroke unit for the minimum effective time in the last three months. [99318]

Jacqui Smith: We do not routinely collect the information requested. The most comprehensive source of information on stroke services is the National Sentinel Stroke Audit, carried out by the Royal College of Physicians. The results can be found at http://www.rcplondon.ac.uk/pubs/strokeaudit01-02.pdf.

Sustainable Communities

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what provisions he has made in his departmental budget for the spending entailed in the Sustainable Communities plan on healthcare in Ashford; and if he will make a statement. [98635]

Ms Blears: Sustainable Communities Plan is an initiative of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and has indicated a sum of £164 million available over the next three years for Milton Keynes/South Midlands, Ashford, London-Stanstead and Cambridge.

Ashford Borough Council and strategic partners have been working for some time on an "Ashford's Future" study, and I am advised that in December 2001, key capacity issues were examined including a health profile of Ashford together with a health and modernisation plan produced by Ashford Primary Care Group. The study addressed current deficits and the vision for primary and community care looked at how many general practitioner surgeries would be needed over the growth period. "Ashford's Future The Overarching Report", published December 2002, included an indication of the number of primary care centres that would be required, phased over time.

Ashford Primary Care Trust and the Kent & Medway Strategic Health Authority will be key partners in the planning process as action planning becomes more detailed. The PCT will use the local delivery plan process and the StHAs capital funding process to progress development in Ashford.

Vaccinations

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children under the age of five years received immunisation against *(a)* polio, *(b)* pertussis, *(c)* tetanus, *(d)* diphtheria and *(e)* MMR in (i) the last year for which figures are available, (ii) the previous 12 months and (iii) 1996. [97811]

Ms Blears: Information about coverage rates for children who have completed primary immunisation courses against polio, pertussis, tetanus and diphtheria by their first and second birthday and MMR by their second birthday for the years 1996–97, 2000–01 and 2001–02 are shown in table 1.

Information about booster and second MMR immunisations by age five is shown in table 2.

Table 1: Completed primary courses: percentage of children immunised by their first birthday and second birthday

			Number of children			
Year	*Thousands*	*Diphtheria*	*Tetanus*	*Polio*	*Pertussis*	*MMR*[1]
Year of first birthday						
1996–97	609	93	93	93	92	—
2000–01	578	91	91	91	90	—
2001–02	556	91	91	91	90	—
Year of second birthday						
1996–97	620	96	96	96	94	92
2000–01	592	94	95	94	94	87
2001–02	573	94	94	94	93	84

[1] Immunisation is recommended between 12 and 15 months of age

Source:

Department of Health, Statistics Division SD3G, Cover data

Table 2: Percentage of children immunised by their 5th birthday

		Diphtheria, Tetanus and Polio		*Pertussis*	*MMR*	
Year	*Number of children age five*[1]	*Primary*	*Primary and booster*	*Primary*	*First dose*	*First and second dose*
1996–97[2]	—	—	—	—	—	—
2000–01	616	94	80	92	92	75
2001–02	608	94	81	93	91	74

[1] Thousands

[2] Information about uptake age five was collected for the first time in 1999–2000

Source:

Department of Health, Statistics Division SD3G Cover data

HOME DEPARTMENT

Children's Rights Commissioner

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letter sent to him by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West on 27 September 2002 regarding a Children's Rights Commissioner; and for what reasons he has not yet replied. [95290]

Mr. Denham: I replied to the hon Member's letter on 12 February. The reply was delayed due to the original response being lost in transit between Departments.

Departmental File Stores

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were employed in the departmental filestores in each year since 1997; how many have been transferred to the private sector; and if he will make a statement. [98859]

Hilary Benn: The details of the departmental and agency staff numbers, over the years in question, across the Home Office Group are set put in the following table:

	Department		*Agencies*				
	Other directorates Staff posts	*Immigration and nationality directorate Staff posts*	*Prison service Staff posts*	*Passport service Staff posts*	*Forensic science service Staff posts*	*Criminal record bureau Staff posts*	*Total Staff posts*
1997–98	10	11	14	12	10	N/a	57
1998–99	11	11	14	9	10	N/a	55
1999–2000	9	11	14	10.5	9	N/a	53.5
2000–01	9	11	13	17.5	8	N/a	58.5
2001–02	10	11	15	15.5	8	N/a	59.5
2002–03	10	11	19	15.5	8	0	63.5

No posts have been transferred out to the private sector during the period in question.

Drug Rehabilitation Funding (Derbyshire)

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much funding was made available for the rehabilitation of drug offenders in Derbyshire in each year from 1997 to 2002. [98894]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Information is not available in the form requested.

The pooled treatment budget, introduced in 2001–02 provides funding for the treatment and rehabilitation of people with drug problems, including offenders. Drug Action Teams use their pooled treatment budget allocations, together with additional resources from health and local authorities and other sources to fund treatment provision in their areas.

The level of pooled treatment budget funding allocated to Derbyshire in 2001–02 was £1.376 million. This was increased to £1.8496 million in 2002–03. In 2003–04, Derbyshire's pooled treatment budget allocation will increase by 29 per cent to £2.395 million.

Drugscope

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what funding from *(a)* his Department and *(b)* any other government department has been provided to Drugscope in (i) 1997–98, (ii) 1998–99, (iii) 1999–2000, (iv) 2000–01, *(v)* 2001–02 and (vi) 2002–03; and what funding is planned for future years. [99701]

(2) what discussions he has had about future funding for Drugscope. [99699]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Drugscope and its predecessor organisations the Standing Conference on Drug Abuse and the Institute for the Study of Drug Dependency received the following funds from the Home Office and other Government Departments (Department of Health, Department for Education and Skills and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister):

£

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
Home Office	0	0	104,209	371,708	440,490	106,000
Other Departments	590,000	774,000	1,091,753	843,480	739,500	600,511
Total	590,000	774,000	1,195,962	1,215,188	1,179,990	706,511

These figures are based upon information available from Departmental accounting systems and include Government payments for services/consultancy that contribute to Drugscope's costs. There may be small in-year payments for one-off projects that do not appear in these figures. Funding for future years is currently under consideration.

Probation Service

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average number of offenders on supervision per probation officers caseload. [98190]

Hilary Benn: The average number of offenders on supervision per probation officer as at 31 December 2001 was 40.7. However, staff other than probation officers are involved with the supervision of offenders, chiefly probation service officers. The average number of offenders on supervision per probation officer and probation service officer grades combined was 27.0 as at 31 December 2001.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Bereavement Payments

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to change the bereavement payments system for those leaving no dependants; and if he will make a statement. [98990]

Malcolm Wicks: We have no plans to change Bereavement Benefits. The current scheme was introduced on 9 April 2001 in order to focus help where it is most needed; on immediate needs and on families with children and to provide equal access to men and women for the first time.

The Bereavement Payment is a lump sum payment of £2,000 payable immediately to help with costs arising on bereavement. Widowed Parent's Allowance is a weekly benefit payable to widowed parents who satisfy the qualifying conditions. In addition Bereavement Allowance is a weekly benefit payable, for 52 weeks following widowhood, to widows and widowers aged 45 and over without dependant children.

Corporate/Shared Services

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions for what reasons spending by his Department on corporate and shared services has increased between 1998–99 and 2003–04; and if he will make a statement. [97345]

Mr. McCartney: The Department for Work and Pensions came into being on 1 April 2001. Consequently there are no comparable figures prior to this date. The final actual expenditure for 2002–03 has yet to be confirmed and therefore a comparison with actual expenditure for 2001–02 or planned expenditure for 2003–04 cannot be made. The current expenditure plans of the Department for Work and Pensions are contained in Tables 1–11 of the Departmental Report: The Government expenditure plans 2002–03 to 2003–04, Command 5424.

Correspondence

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he will reply to the letter of the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam, reference Smith/PostOfficeCard/140203/MP. [99454]

Malcolm Wicks: I have replied to the hon. Member today.

Crisis Loans

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many and what value of crisis loans were paid to benefit recipients experiencing delays in the administration of their benefits in each year since 1997. [99559]

Malcolm Wicks: We recognise that many people making a claim to benefit will be in need of immediate financial support. To avoid unnecessary hardship, discretionary payments on account of benefit (interim payments) can be made where a claim has not been determined but the decision maker is satisfied that the basic conditions of entitlement for the benefit are likely to be met. The amount of any interim payment is automatically recoverable from the main benefit when it is awarded.

Crisis Loan alignment payments can be made to people awaiting their first payment of benefit which is paid in arrears, or their first payment of wages. Crisis Loans made to people awaiting benefit payments will cover their needs until their first benefit pay-day, following which full or interim payments of benefit can be made. In the main, these payments are made to people of working age (as pensioners are generally paid in advance). Information is not collected separately on the number or value of alignment payments made to people awaiting a first payment of benefit.

The available information is in the table. The figures show the total number and value of Crisis Loan alignment payments made, including those made to people awaiting payment of their first wage.

Social Fund Crisis Loan Alignment Payments

	Number of payments	*Expenditure (£million)*
1997–98	398,731	17
1998–99	433,851	20
1999–2000	474,076	23
2000–01	476,936	24
2001–02	486,031	27

Notes:

1. Expenditure figures are rounded to the nearest £million.
2. Awards including alignment payments may include other items.
3. Technical problems with the Social Fund Policy, Budget and Management Information System mean that figures for 1997–98 and 1998–99 may be subject to a margin of error of 5 per cent. to 10 per cent. and should therefore be treated as a guide only.

Sources:

Annual Reports by the Secretary of State on the Social Fund 1997–98 to 2001–02; and the Social Fund Policy, Budget and Management Information System

Industrial Action/Sickness Absence

Mr. Roger Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many working days have been lost in his Department and its predecessors due to *(a)* industrial action and *(b)* illness in (i) 1997–98, (ii) 1998–99, (iii) 1999–2000, (iv) 2000–01, (v) 2001–02 and (vi) 2002–03. [97844]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 12 February 2003]:* I refer the hon. Member to the written answer I gave the hon. Member for Yeovil, Mr. David Laws, on 12 February 2003, *Official Report,* column 803–04W.

Widowers' Benefits

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on widowers' benefits. [97546]

Malcolm Wicks: Bereavement Benefits were introduced on 9 April 2001, and for the first time extended support to both widows and widowers following the death of a spouse. These new benefits concentrate the help available where it is most needed; on immediate needs and on families with children.

The Bereavement Payment is a lump sum payment of £2,000 payable immediately to help with costs arising on bereavement. Widowed Parent's Allowance is a weekly benefit payable to widowed parents who satisfy the qualifying conditions. In addition Bereavement Allowance is a weekly benefit payable, for 52 weeks following widowhood, to widows and widowers aged 45 and over without dependant children.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Civil Servants

Mr. Laws: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many civil servants have been employed by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* each of its agencies and non-departmental bodies in each year from 1994–95 to 2002–03; and if he will make a statement. [92412]

Mr. Leslie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley South on 22 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 333–4W).

Computer Crime

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many cases of computer *(a)* hacking, *(b)* fraud and *(c)* theft his Department recorded in 2001–02; and on how many occasions computer systems have been illegally accessed by computer hackers (i) within and (ii) outside his Department. [97564]

Mr. Leslie: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister was established on 29 May 2002. During the period 29 May 2002 to 31 December 2002 there were: *(a)* no recorded cases of computer hacking, *(b)* no recorded cases of computer fraud, and *(c)* one reported case of computer theft.

Computer Misuse

Mr. Webb: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many cases of computer misuse there were in his Department in each of the last five years, broken down by each category of misuse; and how many of those cases resulted in disciplinary action. [93041]

Mr. Leslie: Coinciding with the creation of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister on 29 May 2002, a new policy was introduced dealing with the use/misuse of the Office's ICT resources. This policy was brought to the attention of staff in an Office Bulletin and is contained within the staff handbook.

No cases of misuse have been raised since the introduction of the new policy.

Council Housing

Mr. Wray: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what proposals he has to increase the standard of living conditions in areas of council housing. [98463]

Mr. McNulty: As set out in "Sustainable communities: building for the future" launched by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister on 5 February (copies of which are available in the Library) the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is investing £2.8 billion over the next three years to improve council housing and reforming the way targets are delivered to make all social housing decent by 2010.

Alongside this, funds have been provided for 'liveability' (£201 million), neighbourhood wardens (£50 million), groundwork (£40 million) and 'Community Enablers' (£27 million), all of which will contribute to improving living conditions in areas of council housing. Proposals for tackling anti-social behaviour will be set out in a White Paper and Bill planned for this year.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what improvements have been made to council houses since 1997; and how much has been invested in council housing in each year since 1997. [98464]

Mr. McNulty: The resources provided by central government to support housing investment by local authorities in England since 1997–98 are tabled below. The table also gives figures for the amount of capital expenditure by authorities on the council housing stock. The number of council houses which failed to meet the decent standard fell from 1.9 million in 1996 to 1.2 million in 2001. Around half of this reduction resulted from transfers to housing associations, where extensive improvement programmes will have been agreed as part of the transfer, Right to Buy sales and demolitions.

£ million

	Central Government support for housing capital[1]	*Capital spend by authorities on council housing*
1997–98	926	1,563
1998–99	1,211	1,660
1999–2000	1,252	1,569
2000–01	1,891	1,816
2001–02	2,377	2,120
2002–03	2,474	[2]2,505
2003–04	2,686	Not yet available

[1] Includes housing credit approvals, the Major Repairs Allowance, Arms Length Management Organisation resources and support for Disabled Facilities Grants and Cash Incentive Schemes.

[2] Planned expenditure

Mr. Wray: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many council houses have been sold since 1997; and how many council houses there are in the UK. [98465]

Mr. McNulty: Information on the total number of council house sales in the United Kingdom up to March 2002 is currently incomplete. However, between April 1997 and March 2002 it is estimated that there were approximately 706,000 council house sales in Great Britain, about 380,000 of which were transfers to registered social landlords. Latest available estimates of dwelling stock in the United Kingdom are as at 31 March 2001, when some 3,684,000 dwellings were rented from local authorities; the corresponding estimate for Great Britain was 3,558,000.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what proportion of and how many council stock properties are classified as non decent in *(a)* Hull, *(b)* the East Riding and *(c)* North East Lincolnshire. [99059]

Mr. McNulty: Local authorities provide estimates of the number and proportions of homes they own that are non decent in their Business plans. The figures provided in the plans submitted in July 2002 are as follows.

	*Non-decent dwellings**	*% of stock non-decent*
Kingston upon Hull	27,640	80
East Riding of Yorkshire	5,260	43
North East Lincolnshire	3,000	33

* Estimates rounded to the nearest 10

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what steps he is taking to *(a)* provide funding and *(b)* allow councils to tackle repair and improvement backlogs, if tenants vote to stay with the council. [99056]

Mr. McNulty: There are two routes—Arms Length Management Organisation and the Private Finance Initiative—through which local authorities can access additional resources to bring their council housing up to a decent standard by 2010. Substantial increases in the resources available for both these programmes were announced earlier this month in our action programme "Sustainable communities: building for the future". The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has just completed a Review which identified ways of making these programmes more effective. The main findings were set out in the publication Sustainable Communities: Building for the Future.

External Consultants

Mr. David Laws: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much *(a)* his Department and *(b)* each agency and non-departmental public body spent on external consultancy in each year from 1995–96 to 2002–03 (planned); and if he will make a statement. [92225]

Mr. Leslie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the Hon. Member for Buckingham, for information on external consultancy spend by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister since it came into being on 29 May 2002.

The Executive Agencies:

	£
The Rent Service (since it started in October 1999)	
1999–00	1,001,920
2000–01	2,068,656
2001–02	1,787,271
2002–03	2,038,000 (estimated)
The Planning Inspectorate	
1995–96	721,000
1996–97	698,000
1997–98	197,000
1998–99	292,000
1999–00	1,945,000
2000–01	1,750,000
2001–02	3,454,000
2002–03	3,884,000 (estimated)
The Fire Service College	
1995–96	35,917
1996–97	215,190
1997–98	151,687
1998–99	100,246
1999–00	99,900
2000–01	77,696
2001–02	121,786
2002–03	135,000 (estimated)
The QE II Conference Centre	
1995–96	33,848
1996–97	8,737
1997–98	Nil
1998–99	Nil
1999–00	Nil
2000–01	2,250
2001–02	Nil
2002–03	2000 (estimated)
The Non Departmental Public Bodies	
The Housing Action Trusts	
1995–96	3,406,000
1996–97	2,242,000
1997–98	3,736,000
1998–99	2,490,000
1999–00	2,020,000
2000–01	2,550,000
2001–02	2,400,000
2002–03	3,300,000 (estimated)
The Audit Commission	
1995–96	150,000
1996–97	240,000
1997–98	280,000
1998–99	630,000
1999–00	1,300,000
2000–01	1,120,000
2001–02	640,000
2002–03	700,000 (estimated)
The Standards Board for England is only able to provide information for the last two years	
2001–02	151,000
2002–03	70,000 (estimated)
English Partnerships since it started in 1999 the figures are as follows	
1999–00	3,000,000
2000–01	1,870,000
2001–02	950,000
2002–03	1,130,000 (estimated)

Fraud and Theft

Mr. Laws: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much money has been lost by his Department and its agencies and non-departmental public bodies through *(a)* fraud and *(b)* theft in each year since 1996–97. [92424]

Mr. Leslie: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister was created in May 2002.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Buckingham on 27 February 2003, *Official Report*, Hansard.

Heritage Assets

Mr. Laws: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what sales of heritage assets and antique assets have been made by his Department since May 1997; if he will list other assets; and if he will estimate the total sales proceeds. [92414]

Mr. Leslie: No heritage or antique assets have been sold by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister since it was created on 29 May 2002. There have been, consequently, no sale proceeds.

There are no heritage or antique assets held on the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's asset register.

Housing

Mr. Wray: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many new homes have been built since 1997; where they are located; and what proportion *(a)* are council houses and *(b)* have been transferred to housing associations. [98461]

Mr. McNulty: Table 1 shows how many new homes have been built in each region since 1997–98 and what proportion were council houses. Table 2 shows the number of Large Scale Voluntary Transfers of local authority stock and an estimate of the total number of dwellings transferred. It is not possible to provide data on what proportion of new homes have been transferred.

Table 1

			Financial year		
	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
All dwellings built					
North East	7,581	6,665	7,428	6,764	6,390
North West	19,201	18,969	18,922	18,317	15,892
Yorkshire and the Humber	15,464	13,085	13,418	13,446	13,239
East Midlands	14,549	14,755	16,378	13,602	14,062
West Midlands	13,392	14,031	15,297	14,213	13,459
East	21,301	18,986	18,745	16,002	15,617
London	13,623	12,864	12,480	14,280	14,170
South East	25,441	23,346	23,175	22,086	21,895
South West	19,003	15,929	15,912	14,979	15,575
England	149,555	138,630	141,755	133,689	130,299
Local authorities (percentage)					
North East	0.12	0.11	0.05	—	—
North West	—	—	—	—	0.01
Yorkshire and the Humber	0.10	0.01	0.02	—	0.03
East Midlands	0.71	0.54	0.04	0.06	—
West Midlands	0.13	—	0.21	0.55	—
East	0.17	0.03	—	—	0.23
London	0.38	0.27	—	1.11	0.37
South East	0.12	0.12	0.13	0.55	—
South West	0.31	0.23	0.16	0.15	0.08
England	0.22	0.14	0.07	0.29	0.08

Table 2

			Financial year		
	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Number of large scale voluntary transfers					
North East	—	—	1	1	—
North West	2	2	5	4	—
Yorkshire and the Humber	—	—	—	1	—
East Midlands	—	1	2	1	2
West Midlands	—	1	2	3	1
East	—	—	1	—	3
London	1	1	—	2	—
South East	2	2	2	3	1
South West	1	5	3	3	—
England	6	12	16	18	7
Estimated total dwellings transferred					
North East	—	—	3,500	36,400	—
North West	5,600	4,700	25,000	19,100	—
Yorkshire and the Humber	—	—	—	12,800	—
East Midlands	—	5,000	8,800	3,400	9,100
West Midlands	—	13,000	15,700	28,900	5,500
East	—	—	6,700	—	15,400
London	8,200	1,200	—	7,100	—
South East	5,000	5,600	9,700	13,500	4,800
South West	5,500	26,200	9,900	10,500	—
England	24,300	55,800	79,300	131,700	34,800

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on the link between housing land shortages and the house price increase of the late 1990s; and if he will make a statement. [98864]

Mr. McNulty: In developing Sustainable Communities: building for the future, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister officials have taken note of a range of evidence concerning potential imbalances between housing supply and demand.

Housing (Kirklees)

Ann Taylor: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what capital resources for housing investment have been allocated at 2002–03 prices to Kirklees Council in each year since 1990–91. [98221]

Mr. McNulty: The information requested is the following table:

£ million

Year	*Actual allocations*[1]	*In 2002–03 prices*[2]
1990–91	10.4	14.3
1991–92	10.6	13.6
1992–93	11.7	14.6
1993–94	11.8	14.3
1994–95	9.0	10.8
1995–96	9.4	11.0
1996–97	9.6	10.9
1997–98	8.3	9.1
1998–99	9.6	10.3
1999–00	10.7	11.1
2000–01	16.1	16.5
2001–02	21.3	21.3
2002–03	20.7	20.2
2003–04[3]	19.7	18.8

[1] Covers housing annual capital guidelines (which include an element to be financed from authorities' capital receipts); the major repairs allowance; support for disabled facilities grants; the Capital Receipts Initiative; and ring-fenced support for a number of housing schemes, e.g. Cash Incentive Schemes. Estate Action scheme funding is excluded.

[2] Allocations have been converted to 2002–03 prices using the GDP Deflator.

[3] The reduction in 2003–04 mainly reflects a change in the local government capital finance system, which means the allocations no longer include an element assumed to be financed from authorities capital receipts.

Housing Provision

Lynne Jones: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what account he took of the High Court decisions in the cases of R v Islington LBC ex parte Reilly and Maunix (1998) and R v Westminster CC ex parte Al-Khorshan (1999) in drawing up his code of guidance on allocation of accommodation; and if he will make a statement on the balance between his encouragement of choice-based lettings and the legal requirement to give preference to those identified as having urgent housing needs. [98382]

Mr. McNulty: A new Code of Guidance on the Allocation of Accommodation, revised to take account of the changes to Part 6 of the Housing Act 1996 contained in the Homelessness Act 2002, was issued in November 2002.

The new Code takes account of the Court of Appeal judgment in the conjoined cases of R (on the application of A) v Lambeth London Borough Council and R (on the application of Lindsay) v Lambeth London Borough Council on 23 July 2002 which upheld the High Court decisions in R v Islington LBC, ex parte Reilly and Mannix (1998) and R v Westminster, ex parte Al-Khorsan (1999). The covering letter which was sent with the Code to all housing authorities and other interested parties specifically mentioned the Court of Appeal judgment. It is for housing authorities to take account of the implications of the judgment for their allocation schemes, and to take account of the Secretary of State's guidance in the Code.

The revised Code provides (at paragraph 5.9) that, in framing their allocation scheme so as to secure that reasonable preference is given to certain categories of persons, housing authorities must have regard to the fact that the reasonable preference categories should not be treated in isolation from one another; and must provide a mechanism for identifying applicants who qualify under more than one category and for taking this into account in assessing their housing need.

The Government believe that all housing authorities should adopt more choice-based, customer-focussed, lettings policies, while continuing to meet housing need. This is the best way to ensure sustainable tenancies and to build settled and stable communities. We believe that there is sufficient flexibility within the existing statutory framework to enable housing authorities to offer applicants a choice of accommodation and to ensure that reasonable preference is given to those with the most urgent housing need.

The Code advises (at paragraph 5.11) that, when considering how to reconcile choice and housing need, housing authorities should consider adopting a simplified system of applicant prioritisation in place of a complex points-based approach. An appropriate approach might include systems that:

(a) "band" applicants into a number of groups reflecting different levels of housing need, with prioritisation of applicants within these groups being determined by waiting time, and/or

(b) give people in the most urgent housing need priority over other applicants (often by using a time-limited "priority card").

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister will be providing more detailed good practice guidance on this issue towards the end of this year, once the funded choice based lettings pilot scheme has been properly evaluated.

Industrial Action/Illness

Andrew George: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many working days have been lost in his Department and its predecessors owing to *(a)* industrial action and *(b)* illness in (i) 1997–98, (ii) 1998–99, (iii) 1999–2000, (iv) 2000–01, (v) 2001–02 and (vi) 2002–03 to date. [93573]

Mr. Leslie: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister was established following machinery of Government changes in May 2002.

In the case of working days lost due to industrial action no days have been lost during the requested periods.

In respect of sickness absence, the most recent "Analysis of Sickness Absence in the Civil Service" was published by the Cabinet Office and announced by Ministerial Statement on 19 December 2002. This covered the calendar year 2001 for the predecessor Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions and its executive agencies. Previous reports go back to 1996. Figures for 2002 will be announced in due course.

The Office is committed to managing sickness absence effectively and to meeting its Service Delivery Agreement (SDA) target reductions in sick absence by the end of 2003.

Land Reform

Mr. Drew: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has for land ownership reform in England and Wales; and what discussions he has had with local government and its representative organisations on the subject of land reform. [98602]

Mr. McNulty: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has no general plans for land ownership reform and have held no such discussions, although the Lord Chancellor's Department is currently considering recommendations by the Law Commission for the abolition of remnants of the feudal system in land law.

Government policy is mainly directed towards making the property markets work better through our proposals for a seller's pack for residential transactions; residential leasehold reform; the introduction of commonhold; the promotion of greater choice and flexibility in commercial leasing as well as reform of the law on renewal of business tenancies; and work HM Land Registry is undertaking to improve market information available to buyers and sellers of land and to develop electronic conveyancing. Major reforms to the law of land registration and the law of adverse possession will come into force on 13 October 2003 at the commencement of the Land Registration Act 2002. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has also provided greater rights of public access to rural areas.

The Law Commission is working in accordance with its published programme to make land law fairer and more modern. Current projects include major reviews of housing law and compulsory purchase law as well as work on forfeiture of leases. A project on the law of easements and analogous rights such as restrictive covenants is planned in the near future.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what calculation he has made of the likely impact on land prices in England and Wales of land ownership reform in Scotland. [98610]

Mr. McNulty: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has not undertaken a detailed analysis, but given the changes in Scotland there is unlikely to be any impact in England and Wales.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what discussions he has had with the Scottish Executive on the subject of land ownership reform. [98611]

Mr. McNulty: None, but officials of the Scottish Executive have provided my officials with briefings on the Scottish land ownership reform programme at their regular contact meetings.

Legislation

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many bills his Department and its predecessors have sponsored in each of the past five years; and how many have received Royal Assent. [91628]

Mr. Leslie: Bills sponsored in the last five years by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) and previously by both the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (DTLR) and the Department for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR) are listed in the following table.

Session	*Bill/Act*
DETR Acts/Bills 1997–2001	
1997–98	Local Government Finance (Supplementary Credit Approvals) Act 1997
	Local Government Contracts Act 1997
	Regional Development Agencies Act 1998
	Greater London Authority (Referendum) Act 1998
	Private Hire Vehicles (London) Act 1998 (P)
	Road Traffic Reduction (National Targets) Act 1998 (P)
	Waste Minimisation Act 1998 (P)
1998–99	Water Industry Act 1999
	Rating (Valuation) Act 1999
	Local Government Act 1999
	Greater London Authority Act 1999
	Pollution Prevention and Control Act 1999
	Road Traffic (Vehicle Testing) Act 1999 (P)
	Bills dropped:
	Railways Bill (scrutinised by Select Committee, Bill dropped and proposals pulled into next sessions Transport Bill)
1999–2000	Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000
	Local Government Act 2000
	Transport Act 2000
	Warm Homes and Energy Conservation Act 2000 (P)

Session	*Bill/Act*
2000–01	The Vehicles (Crime) Act 2001 (HO took the lead) The Rating (Former Agricultural Premises and Rural Shops) Act 2001 Bills dropped: Homes Bill—Ran out of time because of general election Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill (LCD took the lead)—Ran out of time because of general election
DTLR Acts/Bills 2001–02 session	
2001–02	Travel Concessions (Eligibility) Act 2002 Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Act 2002 Homelessness Act 2002 Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Act 2002 (LCD took the lead)

ODPM Bills currently in committee stages

Local Government Bill

Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill

Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Bill

Market Renewal Pathfinders

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what criteria will be used to allocate the £500 million earmarked for the nine housing market renewal pathfinder areas in England. [98844]

Mr. McNulty: Market renewal pathfinders are developing schemes to recreate sustainable communities in their areas, requiring long-term commitment from them and Government. Recognising that the problems differ in each area and that the solutions must also, it is intended that funding for the low demand pathfinder projects will be determined by negotiation with each project. Funding will be subject to the quality of plans and to subsequent performance. Independent Scrutiny by the Audit Commission will act as a check on value for money.

New Homes (Milton Keynes)

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will place in the Library a map showing the area covered by the proposed building of new homes in the Milton Keynes area. [98356]

Mr. McNulty: The maps in "Sustainable communities: building for the future" and "Sustainable communities in the South East" indicate the general area covered by the study into the potential growth area around Milton Keynes/South Midlands. There is, at present, no map that shows the proposed location of any new homes in the Milton Keynes area. Further studies are required before such a map can be drawn up. Following publication of the Communities Plan we are supporting local partners in carrying out more detailed studies to inform the RPG alterations later this year. These will indicate strategic areas where development is proposed.

Public Bodies

Matthew Green: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the *(a)* total budget and *(b)* departmental funding for (i) rent assessment panels, (ii) The Ordnance Survey, (iii) The Standards Board for England, (iv) The Housing Corporation, (v) Housing Action Trust, (vi) The Boundary Commission for England, (vii) The Boundary Commission for Wales, (viii) The Property Advisory Group, (ix) The Audit Commission, (x) English Partnerships, (xi) The Rent Service, (xii) the Advisory Panel on Standards for the Planning Inspectorate, (xiii) Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre and (xiv) The Fire Service College in (A) 2000–01, (B) 2001–02, (C) 2002–03, (D) 2004–05 and (E) 2005–06. [94582]

Mr. Leslie: The figures requested for (ii) the Ordnance Survey, (iii) the Standards Board for England (which came into existence in April 2001) (iv) The Housing Corporation, (v) Housing Action Trusts, (ix) the Audit Commission, (x) English Partnerships, (xi) the Rent Service, (xiii) Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre and (xiv) the Fire Service College, for 2000–01 and 2001–02 are published in their annual report and accounts, copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

For 2002–03 the figures are in the following table:

£

	(a) Total Budget	*(b) Departmental Funding*
(ii) the Ordnance Survey	[1]112,000,000	—
(iii) the Standards Board for England	7,900,000	7,900,000
(iv) the Housing Corporation	1,156,887,000	[3]1,158,936,000
(v) Housing Action Trusts	114,800,000	114,800,000
(ix) Audit Commission	[2]207,000,000	21,700,000
(x) English Partnerships	145,650,000	140,000,000
(xi) The Rent Service	42,500,000	42,500,000
(xiii) Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre	7,000,000	426,000
(xiv) Fire Service College	[1]19,000,000	550,000

[1] This includes amounts paid by Government for the provision of data and services.

[2] The Audit Commission's financial year is 1 November to 31 October, this figure is forecast to end October 2003.

[3] The excess in Departmental funding to total budget is due to an accrual difference.

Note:

Budgets for 2004–05 and 2005–06 are not yet available.

The (i) rent assessment panels, (vi) the Parliamentary Boundary Commission for England, (vii) the Parliamentary Boundary Commission for Wales, (viii) the Property Advisory Group, and (xii) the Advisory Panel on Standards for the Planning Inspectorate do not receive Government funding other than costs to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister of sponsoring these bodies.

Publicity and Advertising

Mr. Laws: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much *(a)* his Department and *(b)* each agency and non-departmental public body sponsored by his Department spent on (i) publicity and (ii) advertising in each year from 1995–96 to 2000–03 (estimated); and if he will make a statement. [92231]

Mr. Leslie: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister was created on 29 May 2002. Since then the estimated expenditure up until 31 March 2003 for publicity is £10.97 million of which £5.15 million is for advertising.

Figures for agencies and non-departmental bodies are not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Right to Buy

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether mortgage brokers registered under the Mortgage Code Complaints Board will be permitted to give advice on the Right to Buy Scheme under the proposed changes implemented by the Deputy Prime Minister; and whether other financial institutions registered with the Financial Services Authority will be able to give similar advice. [97396]

Mr. McNulty: Yes. Mortgage lenders and Mortgage Code Compliance Board (MCCB) registered mortgage brokers are permitted to give advice on the suitability of all mortgage loans, irrespective of whether they are for purchases under the Right to Buy scheme or otherwise. These arrangements are not affected by the changes proposed to the Right to Buy Scheme.

Sickness Absence

Mr. Laws: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the rate of staff *(a)* absenteeism and *(b)* sickness was in his Department, its predecessors and each of its agencies and non-departmental public bodies in each year from 1990–91 to 2002–03; what the target set is for his Department; and if he will make a statement. [93506]

Mr. Leslie: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister was established following machinery of Government changes in May 2002.

In respect of sickness absence, the most recent 'Analysis of Sickness Absence in the Civil service' was published by the Cabinet Office and announced by Ministerial Statement on 19 December 2002. This is available in House Libraries. This covered the calendar year 2001 for the Cabinet Office, the predecessor Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions and its executive agencies. Previous reports go back to 1996. Figures for 2002 will be announced in due course.

The executive non departmental public bodies are not staffed by civil servants, and the sickness absence rates for those are not collected centrally. All cases of absence are taken up and dealt with by line management. Separate information on absenteeism is not readily available. The Office will set a target for reducing sickness absence in the context of its current business planning round.

Social Housing

Lynne Jones: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will identify those elements of the resources listed in Annex A of the paper, Sustainable Communities, that will provide funding for investment in *(a)* repairs and improvements to council housing, *(b)* repairs and improvements to housing owned by registered social landlords and *(c)* the provision of new homes for rent. [98159]

Mr. McNulty: From 2004–05 resources that were provided to local authorities for their Housing Investment Programme, and resources provided to the Housing Corporation will be put into a single regional housing pot. Final decisions on the allocation of resources will be made based on advice from the new Regional Housing Boards (RHBs).

The figures shown are those we used in building up the totals and may not be the final figures.

(a) Money for improvements to Council housing includes:

(i) The funding shown in the third line of the table for Arms Length Management Organisations (£1,994 million over the next three years);

(ii) A share of the housing investment programme (HIP) money that forms part of the totals in the first two lines of the table. In 2003–04 HIP amounts to £842 million. Only a proportion of this will be used to support improvements to Council housing. HIP is also used to fund improvements to private housing, and provision of new affordable housing. HIP resources go into the local authority single capital pot for use at the discretion of the LA. But on past trends about one third of HIP funding will be used to support council housing improvements. From 2004–05 this funding becomes part of the single regional housing pot.

(iii) In addition £685 million of new PFI credits were announced in Sustainable Communities: Building for the Future. These are not included in the funds shown in Annex A.

(iv) The Major Repairs Allowance was introduced in 2001 and gives local authorities the funding required to maintain the condition of their stock. This is provided through the housing revenue account and does not appear in the figures in Annex A. It will total over £4 billion over the next three years.

(b) Funding for improvements to RSL housing

RSLs fund the vast majority of their repairs and improvements from rental income or by borrowing privately. But the Housing Corporation's Approved Development Programme provides for some £40 million next year to fund improvements. This funding will be included in the single regional housing pot from 2004–05.

(c) Funding for new homes to rent

The single regional housing pots shown in the first two lines of the table in Annex A include funding for the Housing Corporation for new affordable homes. In addition some of the HIP resources, and some of the funding in the transitional arrangements line, will be used for the provision of affordable homes by RSLs. In total we are providing some £5 billion over the next three years for affordable housing, though the precise figure allocated will depend on advice from the RHBs.

Not all of this funding will support homes to rent—some will support low cost home ownership. Again the precise split will be subject to advice from the RHBs, but the majority will be invested in homes to rent.

Andrew George: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many days on average people were on the waiting list for social housing in *(a)* England and *(b)* each local authority defined as rural by region, who were (i) defined as in priority need and (ii) others, in each year since 1978. [98494]

Mr. McNulty: Information on length of time spent on waiting list for social housing is available from the Survey of English Housing for 2000–01 and 2001–02, but not for earlier years. (Information is not collected that identifies households that were classified as in priority need). In the table data for the two survey years has been combined in order to provide a larger sample size.

Average time waited to be allocated social housing accommodation: England 2001–01 and 2001–02

Type of local authority	*Average length of time waited—days*
Rural	426
Urban	370
All (England)	379

Source:
Survey of English Housing

Special Advisers/Press Officers

Mr. Laws: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many *(a)* special advisers and *(b)* press officers have been employed by his Department in each year from 1994–95 to 2002–03; and if he will make a statement. [92423]

Mr. Leslie: In relation to special advisers, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, South on 31 January 2003, *Official Report,* column 1056W.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister was created on 29 May 2002. On 1 January 2003, the Office employed 23 full-time equivalent press officers.

Stock Transfers

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will reduce the ODPM target of achieving 200,000 council housing stock transfers a year; and what numbers have been achieved in each of the last five years. [99058]

Mr. McNulty: There is no target for transferring council housing to registered social landlords. The December 2000 housing policy statement, "Quality and Choice: The way forward for housing", said that the Government was willing to support the transfer of up to 200,000 homes annually in the period 2001–02 to 2003–04, where a local authority selects the transfer option and has the support of tenants. The number of homes transferring over the last 5 financial years is set out in the table below:

Financial Year	*Number of Units Transferred*
1997–98	32,982
1998–99	73,900
1999–00	97,385
2000–01	134,219
2001–02	*35,390

* Between 1997 and 2000 the duration of each transfer programme was one year. This period was extended to 2 years from 2001. Therefore the final total for the 2001 programme is expected to be 186,777 which comprises 35,390 dwellings which transferred in 2001–02, 86,387 transferred to date in 2002–03, and a further 65,000 that are due to transfer by 31 March 2003.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what contribution the £800 million set aside for 2003–04 to finance stock transfer by writing of overhanging debt makes to the most deprived local authority areas. [99060]

Mr. McNulty: The Government's target is to make all social housing decent by 2010, including that in the most deprived local authority areas. Housing transfer is one route by which this can be achieved. Payments to meet local authorities' overhanging debt are made where the value of the housing stock transferring is less than a local authority's associated housing debt.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) what changes he requested to the National Audit Office report on council housing stock transfers; [99061]

(2) what queries he has raised with the National Audit Office about its report into council housing stock transfers; and whether those changes resulted in the delay in publication. [99063]

Mr. McNulty: In line with normal practice, the National Audit Office's draft report is being discussed and the facts in it agreed with officials in the office of the Deputy Prime Minister. A publication date for the report has always been provisional subject to the work being complete.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what help will be given to councils whose council housing stock is in negative equity to pursue large scale voluntary transfers. [99064]

Mr. McNulty: My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister's action plan "Sustainable Communities: building for the future" published on 5 February says the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister will explore options for gap funding housing transfer where the stock has a negative value.

Supporting People Housing Projects

John Mann: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister which Supporting People housing projects have included drugs treatment. [98528]

Mr. McNulty: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, the supply mapping exercise undertaken by local authorities as part of the preparations for Supporting People showed that there were a total of 3,225 household units for substance misusers with housing related support needs in 265 services, in December 2002.

Sustainable Communities

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many new affordable homes for *(a)* key workers and *(b)* other groups in housing need he expects the funding announced in Sustainable Communities: Building for the Future, to deliver in each Government Office region in 2003–04. [98515]

Mr. McNulty: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister expects to deliver around 21,000 units via the Housing Corporation's Approved Development Programme in 2003/04. This includes units to be delivered under the Challenge Fund, a significant proportion of which will be allocated to key workers in London, the South East and East of England regions.

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether the other relevant organisations identified in paragraph 6.9 of Sustainable Communities: Building for the Future, that may be invited to be involved in the proposed regional housing boards, include representatives of *(a)* tenants and residents associations and *(b)* voluntary sector organisations working with those who are homeless or in housing need. [98529]

Mr. McNulty: Decisions on the precise composition of the board are a matter for agreement within the region. However, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister does not expect the membership to be much wider than the organisations listed. The board will need to work with any existing regional housing forum, tenants and residents representatives and other housing groups, which will need to be closely involved in the development of the Regional Housing Strategy. The involvement of the Regional Assembly in the board will provide a direct link to a wide range of stakeholders, including voluntary and community groups.

Sustainable Communities (North-East)

Vera Baird: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what financial assistance the Department will give to the implementation of the Tees Valley Housing Strategy. [97215]

Mr. McNulty: I refer my Hon. and learned Friend to the answers given my Hon Friend the member for Redcar on 20 February 2003, *Official Report*.

Theft and Fraud

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what his estimate is of the cost of theft and fraud to *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies in 2002. [89900]

Mr. Leslie: Losses between the creation of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister on 29 May 2002 May and 31 December 2002 due to theft and fraud are as follows:

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister	£1,601
Agencies	£11,627
NDPBs	£81,728

Assets have been valued at cost, net book value or replacement cost depending on the circumstances of the individual case. Recoveries from perpetrators or others, e.g. insurance claims, have been netted off. Some incidents are still under investigation and final values may change.

6

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 28 February 2003

CABINET OFFICE

Government Car and Despatch Agency

Norman Baker: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will estimate the total cost in 2002 to the Government Car and Despatch Agency for which departmental reimbursement would have been sought in congestion charge payments if the present scheme in London had been in operation throughout 2002 and the pattern of car use unchanged. [99914]

Mr. Alexander: The responsibility for the provision of ministerial cars and drivers has been delegated under the terms of the Framework Document to the Government Car Despatch Agency. I have asked its Chief Executive Mr. Nick Matheson to write to the hon. Member. Copies of his letter will be placed in the Libraries of the House.

DEFENCE

International Military Services

Mr. Jim Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the *(a)* legal and *(b)* other costs incurred by International Military Services Ltd in the course of its arbitration with the Government of Iran were. [98868]

Mr. Hoon: International Military Services Ltd. is a private limited company, albeit one owned by the Secretary of State for Defence. The company is under the direct control and management of a board of directors who are responsible for the conduct of its affairs. Questions of costs incurred by the company in the course of its business are routinely for the company to address.

Continuous Attitude Surveys

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence who is responsible for deciding which members of the armed forces will be asked to complete the Continuous Attitude Surveys; what methodology is used to select recipients; and if he will make a statement. [99709]

Dr. Moonie: In the Royal Navy the sample groups for each survey are selected entirely at random by Service number. In the Army the selection criterion works on a rolling basis using the last two digits of Service numbers.

The RAF uses a rank stratified, randomly drawn sample. This means that while the number of personnel at each rank to whom the form is issued is determined in advance, taking into account previous response rates, the individuals who actually receive the surveys are chosen at random, using the last three digits of their Service number.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to publish the Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Surveys; and if he will make a statement. [99710]

Dr. Moonie: We are currently reviewing the range of survey material to release and appropriate ways of putting it into the public domain.

Inoculations (Armed Forces)

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what inoculations were given to members of the British armed forces *(a)* prior to and *(b)* during the Gulf War for the purposes of health protection during the conflict. [99676]

Dr. Moonie: The immunisation programme for armed forces personnel in the Gulf conflict involved a number of vaccines. These can be can be divided into three categories: those which were part of the anti-biological warfare (BW) immunisation programme; routine Service health immunisations and travel and specific immunisations against the risks associated with individuals' particular employment. These are listed as follows.

Anti-biological Warfare immunisations

Anthrax

Pertussis

Plague

Routine Service health immunisations

Poliomyelitis

Typhoid and Tetanus (TABT)

Yellow fever

Travel and Occupational immunisations

Cholera

Hepatitis A

Hepatitis B

Meningococcal meningitis

The majority of personnel deployed during Operation Granby whose routine immunisations would have been in date would not have required occupational immunisation.

Details of the anti-BW immunisation programme, including datasheets on the vaccines used, were published in the Ministry of Defence paper: "Background to the Use of Medical Countermeasures to Protect British Forces during the Gulf War (Operation Granby)" in October 1997. A further paper entitled "Implementation of the Immunisation Programme against Biological Warfare Agents for UK Forces during the Gulf Conflict 1990/1991" dated January 2000 provides details on how the anti-BW immunisation programme was implemented, including estimates of the numbers immunised and on the other immunisations given. Copies of both papers are available in the Library of the House and on the Ministry of Defence's website at: www.mod.uk/gulfwar/issues.

JAC Molesworth

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the silos at JAC Molesworth were last inspected under the terms of the INF Treaty 1987; what is stored in the silos; who has control of this; and if he will make a statement. [99261]

Mr. Hoon: RAF Molesworth is an RAF base made available to the United States Visiting Forces under the NATO Status of Forces Agreement of 1951. The United Kingdom Government retain ownership of the base and control over its facilities.

The last inspection of RAF Molesworth under the terms of the INF Treaty was undertaken between 19–21 May 1999. The silos no longer contain equipment which falls under the terms of the Treaty, and are currently used for general storage.

Missile Defence

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish Agreements and Memoranda of Understanding drawn up with the US Government concerning the US Missile Defence System and the US use of RAF Fylingdales. [99208]

Mr. Hoon: Once such arrangements have been negotiated, we will consider whether it is possible to make the texts publicly available, subject to their classification and to discussions with the United States Government.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the Deep Space Tracking Centre and the Near Space Facility at Feltwell are capable of being used in the US Missile Defense System. [99260]

Mr. Hoon: No.

Nuclear Weapons

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy to withdraw British troops from military action where an ally uses nuclear weapons. [99670]

Mr. Hoon: The Government do not comment on hypothetical scenarios involving the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons.

QinetiQ

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to conclude the deal with the Carlyle Group for the partial sale of QinetiQ. [98041]

Dr. Moonie: As is normal in a major transaction of this type, there are a number of conditions that must be satisfied between signing and formal completion. These include:

Laying before Parliament a Departmental Minute describing the contingent liabilities arising from the transaction.

Receipt of EU Commission merger clearance.

Legal formalities relating to property.

Completion of Carlyle's financing arrangements.

We anticipate that all these conditions should be satisfied within the next few weeks with formal completion taking place shortly after this.

Service Providers (MOD)

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the 20 largest external providers of services to the Ministry of Defence, together with their turnover with the Ministry of Defence, in the latest available full year. [99527]

Dr. Moonie: Due to the nature of Ministry of Defence contracting it is not possible to distinguish between suppliers of services and suppliers of equipment in all cases, however the list of organisations which were paid £5 million or more (banded by value) by the Ministry of Defence in financial year 2001–02 can be found in United Kingdom Defence Statistics 2002, Chapter 1, table 1.17, a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

UN Relief Workers Association

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much is being contracted *(a)* this year and *(b)* next year to the UN Relief Workers Association as aid for the Palestinians; what measures are in place to ensure this money is not directed from humanitarian assistance to other purposes, with particular reference to the purchase of arms; and if she will make a statement. [100020]

Clare Short: My Department's contributions to UNRWA in recent years have been £25.6 million (2001) and £21.7 million (2002). This money is used to provide urgently needed health, education and emergency services for Palestinian refugees. This helps to relieve the growing humanitarian crisis resulting from the on-going conflict and closures. We expect our funding to continue at a similar level in 2003. UNRWA has sophisticated and robust financial, accounting and audit systems. There is no evidence of any kind that their funds are used for anything other than intended purposes.

Ebola

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what action her Department has taken in response to the recent suspected outbreak of ebola virus in *(a)* the Congo and *(b)* Gabon. [99296]

Clare Short: My Department has been monitoring the situation in the Congo very closely and is ready to provide assistance if this is deemed appropriate. We provided £150,000 through Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) during the last ebola outbreak in the Congo in February 2002. The current death toll from the latest outbreak is 75, but WHO believes the situation is now under control. The Government of Congo has made available $68,000 to deploy medical teams, and the national authorities are being supported by a team of 10 WHO epidemiologists, medical anthropologists and social mobilisation experts. The Congolese Red Cross are working on raising public health awareness and social mobilisation and an appeal was recently launched. WHO has established isolation wards which have helped to contain the disease: most of the people who became infected have now unfortunately died. My

Department will continue to monitor the situation in close collaboration with WHO, the Red Cross and MSF.

My Department has not received any reports that the recent ebola outbreak has spread to neighbouring Gabon. The Gabonese authorities have responded swiftly to this latest outbreak of the virus by closing the Gabon-Congo border in the north-east of the country and has sent a team of experts from the Health Ministry and the Medical Research International Centre in Franceville to the two areas, near the border with Congo, where there was an outbreak last year. Guidelines have been issued to locals asking them not to touch dead animals in the forest, or those with an unusual behaviour (primates are often carriers of the ebola virus), as well as reporting any suspected cases of ebola to the authorities.

Fair Trade Products

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what her policy is on the purchase, for departmental use, of fair trade products [99223]

Clare Short: Within my Department, Fairtrade products have been available in the staff restaurant since March 1998 and provision of these products is required by the catering contract. All coffee and tea served at official meetings carries the Fairtrade mark.

Liberia/Cote d'Ivoire

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the humanitarian situation on the borders of Liberia and Cote d'Ivoire; and if she will make a statement. [99297]

Clare Short: We are in contact with international agencies and NGOs in the field that are closely monitoring the situation in the Cote d'Ivoire and Liberia border area. We have provided £1 million in humanitarian assistance for Cote d'Ivoire, which is partly focused on the worst affected west of the country and on the area bordering Liberia. We continue to work closely with others in the international community to help bring about a peaceful resolution to the conflict.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what financial resources her Department has allocated for aid for Liberians in refugee camps on the Liberian-Cote d'Ivoire border. [99294]

Clare Short: We have provided £1 million in humanitarian assistance through international agencies and NGOs working in Cote d'Ivoire. Beneficiaries include Liberian refugees, particularly in the west of the country and near the Liberia-Cote d'Ivoire border.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what financial resources have been *(a)* allocated and *(b)* transferred for the provision of (i) shelter, (ii) food and (iii) water for Liberian refugees in the Cote d'Ivoire. [99298]

Clare Short: We have allocated £1 million in humanitarian assistance through international agencies and NGOs working in Cote d'Ivoire. This includes the provision of emergency health services, water services and food supplies to civilians, internally displaced people and refugees, including Liberian refugees, in both government and rebel controlled areas. £0.8 million has so far been transferred.

Sudan

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what reports she has received regarding the civil war in Sudan, with specific reference to the bombing campaign of the Sudanese Government in Southern Sudan; and if she will place a copy of these reports in the Library. [99306]

Clare Short: We have received a copy of the US-led Civilian Protection Monitoring Team's report into the incident at Mundri (Lui), south Sudan. A copy of the report will be placed in the Library.

World Health Organisation (Vaccinations)

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the estimated number of vaccinations required by the World Health Organisation is; and how many vaccines have so far been *(a)* delivered and *(b)* administered in each month since January 2001. [99347]

Clare Short: National Governments rather than the World Health Organisation (WHO) or other international institutions, have responsibility for immunisation programmes in their countries. The WHO's role is in encouraging effective immunisation practise and monitoring national performance. They estimate that by 2001 some 37 million children worldwide did not receive routine immunisation for the six major vaccine preventable diseases during the first year of life.

In recognition of this, DFID are closely involved in the Global Alliance on Vaccines and Immunisation (GAVI), a major international initiative to enhance access to vaccines and immunisation in developing countries. GAVI is a cooperative effort between private and public sectors with a partnership of international organisations, including WHO and UNICEF, national Governments, pharmaceutical companies, research institutions and the Gates Foundation.

Statistics on vaccines delivered and administered are included in data collected by the World Health Organisation on an annual basis from member states but not in the form the hon. Lady has requested. Further information can be found at www.who.int/vaccines-documents/GlobalSummary/ and www.unicef-org/noteworthy/sowvi

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Defence of Provocation

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Solicitor-General what studies she has conducted into the use of the defence of provocation. [95764]

The Solicitor-General: The Attorney-General and I have been actively looking at the current operation of the law on provocation as a partial defence to murder and have discussed the issues with the DPP. The DPP has sought the views of Chief Crown Prosecutors as to whether recent developments in the law, in particular the decision of the House of Lords in R v Smith (Morgan) has had an effect on the prosecution of cases on the ground.

We have also had discussions with the DPP on the issue of the acceptance of pleas to manslaughter by reason of provocation and the DPP intends to issue guidance to prosecutors which emphasises that only in exceptional circumstances should the issue whether or not an offender was provoked not be put before the jury.

As Law Officers we have also considered the defence of provocation in the exercise of our power to refer a sentence to the Court of Appeal by virtue of section 36 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 on the grounds that the sentence was unduly lenient. In 2002 the Law Officers referred two cases of the manslaughter of women by their partners by reason of provocation arising out of jealousy and unfaithfulness to the Court of Appeal, arguing that the current sentencing tariff does not adequately reflect the seriousness of the offences and is out of line with levels of sentencing in other cases of homicide and serious violence. The Court of Appeal indicated that it would be inappropriate to lay down guidelines in this difficult area without the Sentencing Advisory Panel having first been involved. It is too soon to say what the outcome in this area of the law will be. In addition, the Government has given a commitment to publish a consultation paper on domestic violence in the spring.

Departmental Vehicle Fleets

Mr Donaldson: To ask the Solicitor-General what the annual rate is of the Department's and its agencies' vehicle fleets broken down, by *(a)* volume and percentage for each category of vehicle, *(b)* type of power unit and *(c)* type of fuel; in each of the last three years and what progress has been made in replacing vehicles on a lower emissions basis.. [96557]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 11 February 2003]:* The Ministerial cars provided to the Attorney-General and to me are provided by the Government Car Service. My own department, the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers, owns no vehicles.

Of the other departments for which the Attorney-General is responsible, the Treasury Solicitor's Department, the Serious Fraud Office and the HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate own no vehicles.

The Crown Prosecution Service has a fleet of fifteen vehicles but information in the format requested is not available.

Paul Skuse

Tony Baldry: To ask the Solicitor-General if she will make a statement on the Attorney-General's decision not to refer the case of Paul Skuse to the Court of Appeal. [95934]

The Solicitor-General: No convicted parents or carers of children killed while in their care were the subject of unduly lenient sentence applications in 2001 or 2002.

In 2001 no cases involving assaults by parents or carers of children in their care were the subject of unduly lenient sentence applications.

In 2002 the Court of Appeal considered the sentence imposed in one case where the offender, who was the victims' father, faced offences including cruelty to his two children. The Court of Appeal decided to make the sentences imposed in respect of the cruelty offences, run consecutive to the sentences he faced for other offences and increased the total sentence from eight years to 13 years.

Suicide Act

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Solicitor-General, pursuant to her answer of 7 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 468W, on the Suicide Act 1961, if she will answer with reference to section 2(4) of the Act. [99342]

The Solicitor-General: Section 2(1) of the Suicide Act 1961 creates the offence which allows the prosecution of an individual who is found to have assisted another to commit suicide. Section 2(4) provides that the consent of the Director of Public Prosecutions must be obtained before such a prosecution is commenced.

The decision whether to grant consent to a prosecution under section 2(1) is made in accordance with the Code for Crown Prosecutors, following an investigation conducted by the police. The Director does not intend to publish any prosecution policy specific to the Suicide Act.

TRANSPORT

Bottled Water

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the cumulative litre miles undertaken to transport bottled water to point of sale for the last year for which figures are available, broken down by mode of transport. [99255]

Mr. Jamieson: No such estimate has been made.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many parliamentary questions have been answered by his Department since June 2001. [99777]

Mr. Jamieson: Since my Department was formed on 29 May 2002, Ministers have answered 2,776 parliamentary questions.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Embryo Research

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many IVF embryos have been destroyed in Medical Research Council sponsored research in each of the past 20 years. [97991]

Ms Hewitt: I understand that the information requested is not available. The latest available figures from the Human Fertilisation and Embryology

Authority are that, since its establishment in 1991, of 925,747 embryos created through in vitro fertilisation, 53,497 have been donated for research.

Benefit Payment Arrangements

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the financial impact on sub-post offices in Buckinghamshire of the change in payment of benefits from over-the-counter to direct bank transfer. [99910]

Mr. Timms: No such assessment has been made. The migration of benefit payment to ACT begins this year and the Post Office's strategy is to respond to that challenge with a range of banking and other services. How the migration of benefit payments affects the revenue of post offices will depend on a number of factors, not least how benefit recipients and other post office customers respond to change. The income from the various contracts Post Office Ltd. has with the spending Departments and various financial institutions, and the remuneration of sub-postmasters for banking services, is a commercial matter between the parties.

Capital Projects

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will place the evaluations for the Capital Modernisation Fund projects relating to *(a)* MIT/Cambridge, *(b)* venture capital, *(c)* small business service (SBS) Gateway, *(d)* getting SMEs on-line, *(e)* internet access to the employment tribunals, *(f)* incubators, *(g)* novel recycling, *(h)* UK Oil Portal, *(i)* NACAB IT System, *(j)* renewable energy and *(k)* business.gov in the Library; and if she will make a statement. [97027]

Ms Hewitt: All the projects listed are still under way and have therefore not yet been evaluated. The projects will be evaluated on completion in line with CMF rules.

Carbon Dioxide

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the technical ability of gas plants to practise CO_2 capture and storage and her policy thereon. [99793]

Mr. Wilson: The energy White Paper identified the need to produce a detailed implementation plan for carbon capture and storage in the UK within six months. All potential sources of carbon dioxide can be considered, including gas turbine exhaust.

Laptops

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many laptop computers were used by *(a)* Ministers and special advisers and *(b)* officials in her Department in each year since 1995; how many were (i) lost and (ii) stolen; what their cost was; and if she will make a statement. [98708]

Ms Hewitt: The table provides the information available from records on laptop computer usage and losses within my Department since 1995. Prior to 1998, the records available only provide figures for thefts and losses.

Although the Department still retains a number of its own laptop computers (1,338 at 31 December 2002), since 1 April 1999 the provision of a laptop computing service has been the responsibility of my Department's PFI partners. It is expected that most new laptop computer requirements will be met through the PFI service for the life of the PFI contract.

	(a) *Laptops*[1]	*(b)* *Laptops*[2]	*Losses*	*Thefts*	*Cost £*
2003	8	2,738	0	4	6,375
2002	8	2,588	1	24	31,760
2001	8	1,887	1	8	15,080
2000	5	1,733	1	5	5,900
1999	[3]—	1,325	0	5	5,110
1998	[3]—	778	1	5	9,100
1997	[3]—	[3]—	1	7	12,300
1996	[3]—	[3]—	0	2	3,000
1995	[3]—	[3]—	0	15	26,300

[1] Used by Ministers and special advisers.
[2] Used by officials.
[3] Not available.

Recycling

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if the recycling of food waste paper will attract the financial credits available under packaging regulations. [99373]

Mr. Wilson: All waste paper is eligible for Packaging Recovery Notes once recycled.

However, if it has come into direct contact with food, then it is not normally recycled back into the same material due to the excessive amounts of energy required to do this, and possible health risks of the contaminated material.

Food contaminated paper can be 'organically recycled' ie composted, and attract PRNs. Last year less than 1,000 tonnes of packaging were recycled in this way.

It is also possible to use energy recovery methods (incineration for power), for this type of waste and this method will also be eligible for PRNs.

Solar Power

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what level of subsidies for solar power equipment are available. [99233]

Mr. Wilson: Under the 20 million First Phase of the Major Photovoltaics Demonstration Programme the current maximum levels of grants available are as follows:

Small-scale individual applications (500Wp—5kWp)—50 per cent.

Medium and Large-scale applications (5kWp—100kWp)

Public Bodies—65 per cent.

Private Sector—40 per cent.

Under the 10 million Clear Skies programme the current level of grants for solar water heating systems are as follows:

Households—a fixed 500 per installation

Community—50 per cent or 100,000, whichever is smaller

Applicants to both programmes are required to use accredited installers and approved products. More information on www.solarpvgrants.co.uk and www.clear-skies.org

Warm Front Scheme

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans the Interministerial Group on Fuel Poverty has to discuss the future of the Warm Front scheme; and what plans she has to discuss the future funding of the Warm Front scheme with the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. [99205]

Mr. Wilson: The Ministerial Group on Fuel Poverty is expected to meet during the Spring. The date and agenda for that meeting have not yet been agreed. Warm Front is the responsibility of DEFRA, and my Department has no plans for bilateral meetings to discuss its future funding.

Oil Recovery Rates

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, what estimate she makes of *(a)* the potential CO_2 diversion; and *(b)* the potential increase in oil recovery rates from the injection of CO_2 into oil fields. [99790]

Mr Wilson: CO_2 injection techniques have been successfully used in the United States to enhance oil recovery. If such processes can be found to be commercially viable on the UK Continental Shelf (UKCS) then the Government, which aims to maximise economic recovery of UK hydrocarbon resources, would be keen to see these adopted where possible. Studies are being carried out by the Department on the feasibility of CO_2 capture and storage and its use for enhanced oil recovery on the UKCS and findings are due to be published this Spring.

MINISTER FOR WOMEN

Child Tax Credit

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Minister for Women what assessment she has made on the effectiveness of the Child Tax Credit in enabling mothers to return to work; and if she will make a statement. [99046]

Dawn Primarolo: I have been asked to reply.

From April, two new tax credits—the Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit—will enhance choice for mothers.

The Child Tax Credit will provide financial support to families with children, irrespective of the parents' work status. By providing a secure stream of income direct to the main carer, usually the mother, it will assist mothers who choose to return to work.

The Working Tax Credit will support people in low-paid work. In particular it will improve work incentives for second earners compared to WFTC, make it easier for couples to share work in a way that suits them best, and improve the flexibility of child care support. The child care element of the WTC will also be paid to the main carer,usually the mother.

The child care element of WFTC has been a great success. It is estimated that around 85 per cent. of those families receiving WFTC and incurring eligible child care costs, claiming the child-care element of the tax credit.

Public Appointments

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Minister for Women what initiatives she has planned during the next year and what budget has been proposed to attract more women into public appointments; and if she will make a statement. [99044]

Ms Hewitt: We have a target that between 45 per cent. and 55 per cent. of all appointments made will be women. Advertisements for vacancies arising during the year will be disseminated widely including in the national and regional press, in professional journals, trade press and women's magazines, and on the Department's website, to ensure the widest possible audience. We will also be using the practical guide 'Get a Public Life', recently produced by the Women and Equality Unit, to develop ways of encouraging more women to apply for public appointments.

The Women's National Commission have committed £15,000 to continuing the e-network. This provided details of national appointments and a mentoring scheme aimed at encouraging more women to apply for national appointments.

The Women and Equality Unit are due to publish research that will identify the barriers and possible solutions that can be fed into future government policy in the spring of this year. The cost of this research in the next financial year will be £7,000.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Flood Management

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to amend the levels of grant to local authorities to take account of the work on flood management and flood defence that will arise from his plans for new development in *(a)* Ashford, *(b)* the Thames Gateway, *(c)* the M11 corridor and *(d)* Milton Keynes and the South Midlands. [97636]

Margaret Beckett: I have been asked to reply.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister provides significant funding for the management of flood risk through its local authority Revenue Support Grant mechanism to support local authority levies to the Environment Agency and internal drainage boards and local authorities' own spend on flood and coastal defences. However, responsibility for estimating the requirement for central Government support in this area falls to Defra. Additionally, capital investment in new or improved flood defences by the flood and coastal defence operating authorities, including local authorities, would be eligible for Defra capital grant, subject to meeting the Department's criteria.

No specific provision has been made over the Spending Review period (to 2005–06) for investment in flood defences to protect new development in the areas mentioned. I would also refer the hon. Member to my answer to his related parliamentary question 97637 with respect to investment in capital defence works, which explains that many of these developments, for example the Thames Gateway, will be defended to a high standard by existing defences which would anyway be subject to a renewal programme.

Housing Account Surpluses

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the local authorities in housing account surplus, stating for each *(a)* the surplus and *(b)* the number of tenancies in the last year for which information is available. [98609]

Mr. McNulty: I have placed in the Library a table listing the 209 local authorities with an assumed surplus on their Housing Revenue Account (HRA). These assumed surpluses are currently offset against any subsidy due to the authority in respect of rent rebates. The information is taken from the latest HRA subsidy claim forms for 2002–03.

Local Government

Mr. Maude: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what estimate he has made of the costs of *(a)* audit and *(b)* inspection of local government in each year since 1997. [98406]

Mr. Raynsford: The Audit Commission is responsible for the audit of local authorities. Inspection of local authority functions is undertaken both by the Commission and by other inspectorates.

The costs of financial and other forms of audit (including the audit of best value performance plans from April 2000) by Commission financial year (currently 1 November to 31 October) at constant 2001–02 prices, are as follows.

Year	*Cost (£ million)*
1996–97	80.4
1997–98	90.0
1998–99	90.1
1999–2000	109.0
2000–01	116.2
2001–02	133.3

The costs of inspection incurred by the Inspectorates that make up the Local Services Inspectorate Forum are as follows:

Cost of inspection (£ million at 2001–02 prices)

Year[1]	*Audit Commission*	*Benefit Fraud Inspectorate*	*HM Inspectorate of Constabulary*[2]	*HM Fire Services Inspectorate*[3]	*Ofsted*[4]	*Social Services Inspectorate*[5]
1997–98	0.8	3.9	0	n/a	n/a	6.7
1998–99	3.9	6.3	0	n/a	n/a	6.6
1999–2000	15.9	5.7	0	1.5	1.6	9.0
2000–01	41.3	6.0	0.5	1.4	2.7	9.5
2001–02	50.4	5.5	0.6	1.6	2.7	10.2

[1] April-March, except for the Audit Commission, whose financial year is currently November-October.

[2] Costs for best value inspections of police authorities. There was no duty to inspect police authorities before April 2000.

[3] Figures for 1997–99 could be given only at disproportionate cost. Figures for 1999–2002 are estimates. HMFSI carry out inspections, and other work, in addition to the inspection of local authorities, and historically the costs have not been recorded separately.

[4] The Ofsted costs include the inspection of local education authorities (LEAs), but not schools, and do not include overhead costs. Figures for 1997–99 could be given only at disproportionate cost. The Audit Commission's costs of joint inspections of LEAs (approximately £1 million a year from1999–2000) are included in the Audit Commission's inspection costs.

[5] The Audit Commission's costs of joint Audit Commission / SSI reviews(approximately £2 million a year from 1999–2000) are included in the Audit Commission's inspection costs.

Both audit and inspection costs include those arising from new responsibilities acquired under the Local Government Act 1999 and other legislation.

Press Releases

Mr. Laws: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many press releases have been issued by his Department in each *(a)* year and *(b)* quarter from 1995–96 to 2002–03; and if he will make a statement. [92422]

Mr. Leslie: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister was created on 29 May 2002. As at 26 February the Office has issued 192 press releases.

Quarterly information is as follows:

Quarter	*Number of releases*
29 May to 30 June 2002	23
1 July to 30 September 2002	67
1 October to 31 December 2002	75
1 January to 26 February 2003	27

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Countryside and Rights of Way Act

Mr. Keith Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she intends to publish her Department's guidance to the Planning Inspectorate on the hearing of appeals against the inclusion of land on the maps of open country and registered common land under Part I of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. [98113]

Alun Michael: I expect to receive draft guidance for consideration shortly and wish to publish final text as soon as possible. The Planning Inspectorate Executive

Agency will then deal with the appeals against the showing of land as open country or registered common land on the provisional maps issued by the Countryside Agency as quickly as possible. The Inspectorate has already published information to assist for appellants and third parties and these are available on its website.

Departmental Budget

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the budget from that allocated to her Department under the Department expenditure limit set in the comprehensive spending review of 2002 is for each year from 2001–02 to 2005–06 for *(a)* environmental protection; *(b)* water services; *(c)* support for the agriculture, food and fishing industries; *(d)* flood defence; *(e)* support for hill farming; *(f)* regional/rural development; *(g)* support for countryside and wildlife; *(h)* nature and forestry and *(i)* animal health and disease control, including payments for BSE, FMD, TB and other zoonoses, broken down by (i) resource and (ii) capital. [99288]

Alun Michael: The years 2001–02 and 2002–03 do not form part of the spending review 2002, so the requested information could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Details of allocated budgets for 2003–04 to 2005–06 will be published in the spring 2003 departmental report. The information will include how budgets are allocated to deliver the Department's functions and objectives.

Farmers (Chorley)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will visit Chorley to meet local farmers and the local NFU. [98228]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 24 February 2003]*: My ministerial colleagues and I are always pleased to receive invitations to meet those affected by the work and policies of this Department. As many of these meetings as parliamentary and departmental commitments allow are accepted.

Flood Management

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what provision has been made in the expenditure plans of *(a)* the Environment Agency and *(b)* her Department to cover the costs of flood management and defence arising out of the Government's plans for new development in (i) Ashford, (ii) the Thames Gateway, (iii) the M11 corridor and (iii) Milton Keynes and the south Midlands. [97637]

Margaret Beckett: The Department provides grant aid to the flood and coastal defence authorities—the Environment Agency (EA), local authorities and (in areas with special drainage needs) internal drainage boards to assist with their capital works to manage flood risk. However grant aid is not provided for defences to protect proposed new development, although it is possible for such development to benefit incidentally by defence schemes designed to protect existing assets. In such cases, authorities are expected to seek a commensurate contribution from the developer to the extent that he benefits from the public investment. No specific provision for new development has been made therefore, either by the EA or Defra. It should be noted that many of these developments, for example the Thames Gateway, will be defended to a high standard by existing defences which would anyway be subject to a renewal programme.

Hospitality

Mr. James Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what hospitality has been offered at public expense in the last 12 months by each Minister in her Department to outside interest groups, broken down by *(a)* restaurants, *(b)* recipient and *(c)* cost in each case; [99591]

(2) what criteria Ministers in her Department use when determining whether to offer hospitality in restaurants to interest groups at public expense; and if she will make a statement; [99590]

(3) how often Ministers in her Department have received hospitality in restaurants from outside groups in the last 12 months. [99514]

Margaret Beckett: All offers of hospitality are made in accordance with published departmental guidance on financial procedures and propriety, based on the principles set out in Government accounting. The giving and receiving of hospitality is conducted fully in accordance with the guidance set out in the ministerial code, and guidance on contacts with outside interest groups including lobbyists. The detailed information requested is not held centrally, and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Online Sales/Purchases

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what *(a)* products, *(b)* goods and *(c)* services were (i) bought and (ii) sold online by her Department in each of the last five years. [97457]

Alun Michael: Information held centrally shows that Defra has no products, articles or substances that are manufactured, refined or adapted for sale. In 2002, the core Department began acquiring office stationery, IT consumables and paper online. The portfolio of goods and services available for purchase online is being expanded as part of the Department's e-procurement development and implementation programme.

In 2002, 1,217 e-IACS applications were received out of a total of 69,303 IACS applications. The 2003 e-IACS system goes live on 15 March so there are no figures for 2003 currently.

The number of new animals registered electronically in January 2003 was 60,710 or 31 per cent. of total new animal registrations. The number of animal movements notified electronically in January 2003 was 433,180 or 46 per cent. of total animal movement notifications. Overall, 42 per cent. of total livestock transactions are handled electronically.

At 8 January 2003, the Emissions Trading Registry had 769 account holders and 3,250 open accounts. Between April 2002 and mid-February 2003 there were 1,451 trades covering 6,170,474 allowances. The

Research Policy and International Division of Defra use the Defra internet website to advertise research and development requirements.

The core-department makes electronic BAGS payments to its suppliers. These account typically for 78 per cent. by payments volume and 97 per cent. by value.

The Environment Agency has since the summer of 2002 conducted three electronic auctions for the provision of green electricity; office stationery; and photocopier paper. A further electronic auction for IT consumables is planned for March 2003. The Environment Agency also uses electronic ordering processes for IT hardware.

Sustainable Development Report

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs why copies of the Government's annual report on implementation of its policies on sustainable development were not available to hon. Members in the Vote Office on its publication day. [100118]

Alun Michael: "Achieving a better quality of life", the Government's third annual report on progress towards sustainable development in the UK, was launched on 24 February.

Copies of annual reports are not placed in the Vote Office as a matter of course, but the report was made available in the Libraries on the day of publication. It is also available on the Government's sustainable development website (http://www.sustainabledevelopment.gov.uk) and through the Defra website, and free of charge from Defra Publications on 08459 556000. I am sending my hon. Friend a copy of the document.

Waste Management

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her Answer of 20 January, *Official Report*, column 559–60W, if she will publish figures available to date for the performance of local authorities against targets for waste recycling in 2002–03. [99361]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 26 February 2003]*: Data concerning the performance of local authorities against targets for waste recycling are collected on an annual basis. Such data are too extensive to be published in Hansard, but is available to the public via sources such as Defra Online.

Individual local authority recycling rates for 2000–01 are available on line and in Annex B of the Municipal Waste Management Strategy for 2000–01. Corresponding data for 2001–02 are currently being collected, interim national and regional totals will be published in April. Results for all individual local authorities will be published in the summer. Data for 2002–03 will be collected later this year.

Work Placements

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many university students her Department and associated agencies has supported or sponsored with a work placement in the last year; what her policy is on work placements; what plans she has to develop such schemes; and what her policy is on paying their university fees. [98544]

Alun Michael: Defra and our associated agencies have supported thirty-eight student work placements within the last year.

The Department's policy is to encourage work placements and to advertise opportunities in the Cabinet Office 'Work Experience in the Civil Service' booklet which is circulated to universities.

Within this policy students are paid whilst on a work placement within the Department; university fees are not paid.

EDUCATION

Children Fund (Leeds)

Mr. John Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much funding has been received by Leeds city council from the children fund since its inception; how funds were allocated, broken down by project; what posts have been funded and by how much; and in which organisations these posts arise. [96963]

Mr. Denham: The information requested has been placed in the Libraries.

Community Cohesion

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps are being taken within the education and youth services to ensure community cohesion; and if he will make a statement. [94589]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: We understand the vital importance of education in developing community cohesion, and in recognition of this, the Department of Education and Skills worked closely with the Home Office, the Local Government Association and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister to produce the recent Guidance on Community Cohesion. The Guidance will assist local authorities, along with other local agencies, in identifying the practical steps they can take to build community cohesion at local level. The Guidance sets out the vital role that education, the youth service and the Connexions service can play in building cohesive communities. Equality of opportunity is a basic principle of youth work and a foundation of community cohesion.

The Government want local authorities to deliver substantial improvements to their Youth Services. On 18 December I launched a document entitled "Transforming Youth Work: Resourcing Excellent Youth Services". This document set out, for the first time, the Government's specification for an excellent Youth Service and highlighted the resources available for this task. It recognises that when young people become disaffected the consequences are often a drift into anti-social behaviour and crime. It emphasises the Government's determination to achieve social justice and economic success for all citizens.

Delivery Unit

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) when the Permanent Secretary in his Department last met members of the Delivery Unit; [94356]

(2) when Ministers from his Department last met *(a)* the Prime Minister and *(b)* his officials to discuss targets set by the Delivery Unit; and what plans there are for further meetings; [94360]

(3) which Ministers and officials from his Department have visited areas outside London accompanied by members of the Delivery Unit; [94353]

(4) what targets have been set for his Department by the Delivery Unit since June 2001; and what progress has been made in meeting such targets; [94361]

(5) how many officials in his Department have been assigned to do specific work *(a)* with and *(b)* for the Delivery Unit since June 2001; [94349]

(6) if he will list the reports he has made since June 2001 to the Delivery Unit; [94355]

(7) how many reports his Department has been commissioned to produce by the Delivery Unit in the next *(a)* 12 and *(b)* 24 months; [94347]

(8) when Ministers from his Department last met members of the Delivery Unit; and on how many occasions since its establishment Ministers have met members of the Unit; [94363]

(9) which announcements made by his Department since June 2001 were cleared in advance with the Delivery Unit. [94351]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: I am responsible for meeting the Department's Public Service Agreement targets (PSA) as set out in Cm 5571, copies of which are in the Libraries of the House.

The Delivery Unit was established to strengthen the capacity of Whitehall to deliver the Government's key objectives. It works with the Department to help us deliver our PSA targets, and we are in regular contact with members of the Unit.

Information about internal meetings is not disclosed under Exemption 2 of the "Code of Practice on Access to Government Information".

Education Authorities (Insurance)

Diana Organ: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) if he will make a statement on personal insurance cover for teachers in schools; [88972]

(2) how many education authorities in England and Wales have an insurance policy which covers claims for compensation from a teacher who has sustained a personal assault from a pupil or parent; and which authorities they are. [88973]

Mr. Miliband: Insurance arrangements in schools are determined locally. Local education authorities may fund insurance for schools centrally, and in that case may determine the extent and type of cover, including the extent to which individual teachers will be insured. The Department does not collect details of authorities' insurance arrangements.

We will shortly be publishing an insurance guide for schools. This will contain practical advice for schools about levels and types of insurance cover.

Federations of Schools

Mr. Nick Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether his proposals for federations of schools involve a combined admissions system; and if he will make a statement. [98904]

Mr. Miliband: No, federations of schools will not have a combined admissions system. Federation will not affect parents' admission rights or choices. It will help schools work together and support each other and will be based on local demand not national imposition. The Education Act 2002 specifically excludes admissions from the cases in which federated schools may be treated as a single school. Even where federations involve schools having a single governing body, the schools will still be separate and parents will express preferences for the individual schools.

Printing Costs

Mr. Mark Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the cost was of printing departmental *(a)* Green and *(b)* White Papers in each year since 1997; and how many of each of those papers were printed. [94919]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The costs of printing Green and White Papers are met by the publishers, The Stationery Office (TSO). Information relating to these costs, and the number of copies printed is not disclosed under Exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. An exception to this was the recent White Paper "The Future of Higher Education". Due to extremely tight production schedules, it was agreed with TSO that the Department would manage the print process and meet printing costs, providing TSO with copies for their commercial outlets.

The costs of printing 16,000 copies of "The Future of Higher Education" was £48,600.

Teacher Pensions

Mr. Phil Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans he has to remove the lump sum payment from teachers' final pension package; and if he will make a statement. [100127]

Mr. Miliband: In common with all public service pension schemes, the provisions of the Teachers' Pension Scheme are being reviewed in the light of the Pensions Green Paper, "Simplicity, security and choice: Working and Saving for Retirement". There are, however, no plans to remove the lump sum element of the retirement package available to teachers.

Vehicle Fleets

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what progress has been made, by *(a)* volume and *(b)* percentage for each (i) category of vehicle, (ii) type of power unit and (iii) type of fuel, on an annual basis, over each of the past three years, in renewal of his Department's vehicle fleet on a lower emission basis. [96445]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave on 20 February 2003.

SCOTLAND

Accountancy Profession

Mr. Michael Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent representations she has received from organisations representing the accountancy profession in Scotland as to the use of the term Accountant. [100029]

Mrs. Liddell: I have received no recent representations as to the use of the term Accountant.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Horse and Greyhound Racing

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what action her Department is taking to encourage the greyhound racing industry to make provisions for dogs when they retire. [100380]

Mr. Caborn: While the lead responsibility for the welfare of greyhounds rests with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, we have made clear to the British Greyhound Racing Board our concern that the industry should take proper responsibility for the welfare of retired greyhounds, and support for the action which it has already taken to increase its financial contribution to the Retired Greyhound Trust.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to review the legislation governing *(a)* horseracing and *(b)* greyhound racing. [100381]

Mr. Caborn: We plan to bring forward legislative proposals, when parliamentary time permits, which will enable the Tote to be sold to a racing trust, abolish the horserace betting levy and reform the regulation of betting on horse racing, greyhound racing and all other events.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many racehorses have died *(a)* while flat racing and *(b)* while jump racing in each of the last five years. [100379]

Mr. Caborn: The Jockey Club maintain records of falls and injuries on British racecourses; but the Department does not collect this information.

Written Questions

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many named day written questions were tabled to the Department between 15 October 2002 and 24 February 2003; how many that received a holding answer were given a substantive answer *(a)* within three days, *(b)* within seven days, *(c)* within 14 days, *(d)* within 28 days and *(e)* over 28 days later; and what procedures the Department has in place to monitor performance on answering (i) parliamentary questions and (ii) ministerial letters. [99436]

Mr. Caborn: 124 named day questions were tabled to the Department between 15 October 2002 and 24 February 2003. 72 of these questions were answered on the designated day for answer. 52 questions received holding replies and were answered to the following time scales: *(a)* 25 within two days[1], *(b)* 22 within seven days, *(c)* four within 14 days, and one within 21 days, *(d)* nil within 28 days and *(e)* nil over 28 days.

The Department produces regular statistics to monitor the performance on answering parliamentary questions and ministerial letters. These statistics are produced for review and discussion by the permanent secretary and the management board.

In addition, the Cabinet Office, on an annual basis, publishes a report to Parliament on performance of departments in replying to ministerial correspondence. The report for 2001 was published on 24 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 674W. The report for 2002 will be published in due course.

[1] Figures for those answered within three days are not readily available.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Child Support Agency

Mark Tami: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he expects to announce the time scale for the introduction of revised arrangements for assessment by the Child Support Agency. [97106]

Malcolm Wicks: I refer my hon. Friend to the oral statement made to this House by my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on 27 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 567–68.

Citizens Advice Bureaux

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what percentage of the Department's claim packs refer claimants to Citizens Advice Bureaux. [96374]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 10 February 2003]:* 79 per cent of the Department's claim packs refer claimants to Citizens Advice Bureaux.

In addition to the information contained in the written answer to the hon. Member on 6 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 404W, the following claim forms also include a reference to Citizens Advice Bureaux:

Incapacity Benefit: IB1Y, IB22Y

Income Support: A2

Jobseeker's Allowance: JSA1, JSA1S, JSA3, JSA4, JSA4A, JSA5

Minimum Income Guarantee: MIG1, MIGR

Disability Living Allowance

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many disability living allowance applications were refused at *(a)* initial application, *(b)* reconsideration and *(c)* aural tribunal in each year since 1997. [95626]

Maria Eagle *[holding answer 4 February 2003]*: The available information is set out in the tables below. We are currently unable to supply statistically reliable information on those rejected at appeal. Number of claims for Disability Living Allowance which were unsuccessful in Great Britain in each year since 1997.

	Number of new claims received	*(a) Number of new claims rejected on first application*	*(b) Number of new and existing claims rejected at reconsideration*
1996–97	517,590	276,125	2,450
1997–98	461,360	255,710	2,465
1998–99	398,275	208,195	2,605
1999–2000	392,600	190,390	2,365
2000–01	410,270	206,145	1,600
2001–02	407,810	192,315	970

Notes:
Figures are rounded to the nearest 5.
Figures are for each financial year, April to March.
There is no available breakdown of data for reconsiderations into new and renewal claims.
Source:
IAD Information Centre, data taken from 100 per cent MIS data.

HC2/HC3 Certificates

Sir Archy Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the *(a)* budget and *(b)* outturn for HC2 certificates and HC3 certificates were in (i) cash and (ii) real terms over the last 10 years; how many people have received HC2 certificates and HC3 certificates in each year since 1992; how many people in receipt of HC2 and HC3 certificates have also been in receipt of incapacity or invalidity benefit since 1992; and how many applications for help with health costs have been received in each of the last 10 years. [92627]

Mr. Lammy: I have been asked to reply.

The information available is shown in the tables.

Table 1. NHS Low Income Scheme: estimated applications received and certificates issued in respect of England

Thousand

	1. Applications for help with health costs	*2. Total HC2 certificates issued*	*3. HC2 certificates issued to recipients of incapacity or invalidity benefit*	*4. Total HC3 certificates issued*	*5. HC3 certificates issued to recipients of incapacity or invalidity benefit*
2001–02	721	407	89	250	47
2000–01	811	487	101	255	51
1999–2000	879	532	98	295	63
1998–99	881	528	85	309	55
1997–98	931	569	98	323	63
1996–97	982	552	—	383	—
1995–96	1,110	632	—	431	—
1994–95	1,067	569	—	375	—
1993–94	1,038	544	—	421	—
1992–93	987	502	—	421	—

Notes:
Columns 1, 2 and 4—Data taken from actual claims in respect of GB and estimated for England.
Columns 3 and 5—Data estimated from samples of claims, and refers to claims where either the claimant or their partner (or both) were benefit recipients. Information is not available for years before1997–98.
Columns 2, 3, 4 and 5—Information is only available about the number of certificates issued. These can be used by the claimant and their partner (if they have one), so more than one person may be named on each certificate.
Columns 1, 2 and 3 do not sum as claimants may be otherwise entitled, have capital in excess of the limit or not pursue the claim.

Table 2. Estimated out-turn for HC2 certificates in England

£ million

	Cash	*Real terms*
2001–02	55.8	55.8
2000–01	56.2	57.5
1999–2000	55.5	58.1
1998–99	51.6	55.3
1997–98	51.4	56.6
1996–97	48.5	55.1

Notes:
The above figures are estimates of the total:
1. Prescription charges remitted in respect of items supplied.
2. Dental charges remitted in respect of courses of treatment.
3. Sight test fees paid to ophthalmic opticians.
4. Cost of optical vouchers redeemed.
No estimates are possible for remission of charges for wigs and fabric supports or on costs of travel to hospital, as information is not collected centrally.

It is not possible to estimate out-turn in respect of HC3 certificates, since the amounts remitted vary significantly depending on the amount which the holder of the certificate has been assessed as being able to contribute towards the cost.

There are no separate budgets for income lost and costs incurred as a result of the availability of help under the National Health Service Low Income Scheme.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people in receipt of RPI uprated benefits were awarded HC2 and HC3 certificates in each year since 1992; and what percentage of recipients they represent. [97682]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 13 February 2003]*: I have been asked to reply.

The available information is shown in the table.

NHS Low Income Scheme: estimated number of certificates issued in respect of England to people receiving RPI uprated benefits

	HC2 certificates issued to recipients of RPI uprated benefits (thousands)	*HC3 certificates issued to recipients of RPI uprated benefits (thousands)*
2001–02	300	149
2000–01	302	128
1999–2000	288	148
1998–99	263	158
1997–98	312	160

Notes:

1. Data estimated from samples of claims, and refers to claims where either the claimant or their partner (or both) were recipients of one or more RPI uprated benefits.

2. Information is only available about the number of certificates issued. These can be used by the claimant and their partner (if they have one), so more than one person may be named on each certificate.

3. Information is not available for years before 1997–98.

Maternity Pay

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps he is taking to review the impact of part-year pay on the right to Statutory Maternity Pay; and if he will make a statement. [97656]

Maria Eagle: Maternity benefits are being improved as part of the Government's drive to help pregnant women and parents financially and to achieve a better balance between their work and home lives.

In order to qualify for statutory maternity pay a woman must have average weekly earnings that at least equal the lower earnings limit for National Insurance contributions. The lower earnings limit is currently £75 a week. An average is taken of the gross earnings actually paid to a woman in an eight week period running up to the 15th week before the week baby is due. The period used may vary slightly depending on the woman's own pay period.

Maternity Allowance is available for those women who do not qualify for SMP. From this April we are changing the earnings calculation, so that women will be able to choose the 13 weeks that reflect her best earnings during the test period (the 66 weeks up to the week before the week her baby is expected). This change will, of course, be beneficial to those with part year earnings. It will mean that women's entitlement to Maternity Allowance is maximised so that more will qualify for the standard rate.

Pensions and Benefits

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what plans he has to co-operate with consumer groups to assess the effectiveness of the direct payment literature being sent to recipients of pensions and benefits; and if he will make a statement; [99708]

(2) what plans he has to assess the effectiveness of the direct payments literature being sent to recipients of pensions and benefits; and if he will make a statement; [99707]

(3) what plans he has to use surveys to assess the effectiveness of the direct payment literature being sent to recipients of pensions and benefits; and if he will make a statement. [99706]

Malcolm Wicks: The Department is supplying customers with information about all of their account options, including those that can be accessed at Post Office branches, to help customers choose the account that best suits their needs and circumstances.

Customer information material is routinely tested on representative samples of the Department's customers before it is issued and its effectiveness is continually assessed through ongoing monitoring and review. Customers are being regularly surveyed about the Department's information material throughout the duration of theconversion period.

We have consulted with consumer and special interest groups (including Postwatch and the NFSP) on the development of our customer information material and they have been given several opportunities to comment on our proposals. We will continue to work closely with them throughout the conversion period and as the information campaign progresses.

Benefit Fraud

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many persons were *(a)* convicted and *(b)* acquitted of benefit fraud offences in each of the last three years, broken down by type of offence; how many of those convicted of each type of offence in each year were sentenced to (i) immediate custody and (ii) other dispoals broken down by type of disposal; what the (A) mean average and (B) longest individual custodial sentence imposed in each year was for each type of offence; and if he will make a statement. [88466]

Malcolm Wicks: Information on benefit fraud by type of offence and the length of custodial sentences imposed following conviction are not recorded. The available information is in the table.

Further analysis of investigation data has required revisions to previously published figures. The corrected data is shown in the table.

Outcome of prosecutions following investigations by Departmental Investigators

	Convictions				
	Custodial sentences[1]	*Community sentences*[2]	*Other sentences*[3]	*Acquittals*	*Total prosecutions*
1997–98	551	2,553	8,282	137	11,523
1998–99	643	2,292	7,032	162	10,129
1999–2000	636	2,215	6,274	143	9,268
2000–01	653	2,704	8,313	181	11,851
2001–02	646	3,067	7,470	172	11,355

Notes:

[1] Imprisonment, Young Offenders Institute, custodial and fine

[2] Community Service

[3] Absolute discharge, conditional discharge, compensation only, admonishment, fine, community rehabilitation, suspended sentence, supervision order, Young Offenders Institute, attendance centre, unknown

[4] The fraud database shows completed cases commenced in the relevant period. Due to the elapsed time between commencement of an investigation and completion of a prosecution there are cases that are inserted into previously completed data for earlier periods. All totals are therefore correct at the time when quoted but subject to adjustment at a later date.

Source:

Fraud Information By Sector system and data from Counter-Fraud Investigation Division Operations[4]

Term-time Workers

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps he is taking to decide the employment status of term-time workers; whether he intends to ensure that term-time workers are eligible for Job Seekers' Allowance during unpaid holidays; and whether the actual annual salary of a term-time worker will be the basis for calculating his or her hourly rate for minimum wage purposes. [97655]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Jobseeker's Allowance is paid to support people who are out of work and actively seeking employment. People who are in remunerative work, i.e. averaging 16 hours or more per week, are not entitled to Jobseeker's Allowance.

For term-time workers the average number of hours they work is calculated over the whole academic year, including the school holidays. If this average is less than 16 hours a week then they may be entitled to Jobseeker's Allowance. This calculation would apply if an application was made during term-time or during the vacation period. We have no plans to change the rules on remunerative work.

The National Minimum Wage has to be paid for every hour worked, averaged over the pay reference period, to most people who work in the UK. The calculation to determine if a person is receiving the National Minimum Wage depends on whether the worker is a time worker or a salaried-hours worker.

If the term-time worker is paid a set amount at regular periods (i.e weekly or monthly) throughout the year regardless of whether they have actually worked during that period then they are a salaried worker. For salaried work, the contract between the employer and the worker must set out a basic number of hours for which the worker must be paid at least the minimum wage. If the salaried worker works any hours in excess of their contract, then the National Minimum Wage will also apply to those additional hours.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

EU Directives/Court Orders (Non-compliance)

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the incidences under which the UK has received *(a)* letters of formal notice and *(b)* reasoned opinions for (i) failing to fulfil obligations under EU directives and (ii) failing to comply with court orders since 1992; and which remain outstanding. [99217]

Mr. MacShane: At any given time, the European Commission will have a number of infractions proceedings against any Member State. They will be at different stages of the proceedings.

As of 31 December 2001, the last date for which the Commission has comprehensive public figures, the Commission had 220 infractions cases under examination against the United Kingdom.

Between 1997 and 2001, the Commission issued the UK with 368 letters of formal notice and 151 reasoned opinions. The UK was referred to the European Court of Justice 28 times between 1997 and 2001. In only one of the 220 cases under examination against the UK as of 31 December 2001 was the UK accused of having failed to comply with the judgment of the Court. Figures for the period prior to 1997 are not publicly readily available.

We are working with the Commission to resolve all outstanding cases.

Departmental Properties

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his latest estimate is of the value of British Council property in *(a)* Madrid and *(b)* Barcelona, in terms of (i) market value and (ii) same use market value; what use is made of these properties; and if he will make a statement. [98388]

Mr. MacShane: The British Council is currently reviewing a range of options for its estate in Spain and so regards the current market value of its Spanish properties as commercially sensitive. My noble Friend the Baroness Symons, the Minister responsible for the British Council, will therefore write on a personal basis to the hon. Member with the information he has requested.

The properties in Madrid and Barcelona function as the offices of the British Council in those cities, including school and teaching operations.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his estimate is of the number of full-time staff employed by the *(a)* FCO and *(b)* British Council, in each year from 1995–96 to 2005–06 (planned); and if he will make a statement. [98433]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The number of UK-based staff employed by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the British Council since 1995 is as follows.

Staff in post figures correct on 1 April	*FCO*	*British Council*
1995	5,984	Not available
1996	5,787	Not available
1997	5,539	Not available
1998	5,412	1019
1999	5,485	1025
2000	5,480	1018
2001	5,490	1060
2002	5,680	1049

The FCO's provisional estimate of positions for 2003 is 6,033. We are unable to provide planned staffing figures for 2004, 2005 and 2006 until the spending plans have been finalised. The British Council is unable to provide a projected figure at this time.

Estonia/Latvia

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has on how many non-citizens there are in *(a)* Estonia and *(b)* Latvia; and what reports he has received on the age profiles of these groups. [100024]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Office of the Minister of Ethnic Affairs in Estonia says that there are 164,730 non-citizens in Estonia (January 2003). The age profile of the non-citizens in 2000 (the latest year for which this breakdown is available) was:

	Percentage
24 and under	32.9
25 to 44	32.3
45 to 64	25.2
65 and over	9.6

According to the Latvian Naturalisation Board, there are 504,277 non-citizens in Latvia (January 2003). Their age profile is:

	Percentage
25 and under	20.3
26 to 45	28.8
46 to 65	32.7
66 and over	18.2

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the non-citizens in Estonia and Latvia who hold special passports will be allowed to travel to the UK without visas for *(a)* recreation and *(b)* work following Estonia's accession to the EU. [100025]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The UK requires non-citizens in Estonia and Latvia who hold special passports, in common with other stateless persons, to obtain a visa before travelling to the UK for any purpose. At present there are no plans to change this requirement after Estonia and Latvia join the EU. We are continuing to support the Estonian and Latvian Governments in their moves to encourage social integration and the take-up of citizenship.

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether non-citizens in Estonia and Latvia who hold special passports will enjoy parity of treatment with holders of Estonian and Latvian passports when seeking to travel to EU countries other than the UK, following accession; and if he will make a statement. [100026]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Following accession, member states in the Schengen zone and non-Schengen member states may choose to exempt special passport holders from the visa requirement. The UK will continue to implement its own policy, subject to constant review, in line with applicable national legislation.

Gibraltar (Terrorist Attacks)

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what precautions have been taken to protect against terrorist attacks against British citizens in Gibraltar. [100126]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Governor and his staff work closely with the Government of Gibraltar, the Ministry of Defence and other relevant bodies in the territory to ensure effective contingency planning for a range of eventualities, including terrorist attack. This includes direct contact with relevant authorities and departments in the UK.

Hospitality

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what criteria Ministers in his Department use when determining whether to offer hospitality in restaurants to interest groups at public expense; and if he will make a statement; [99512]

(2) what hospitality has been offered at public expense in the last 12 months by each Minister in his Department to outside interest groups, broken down by *(a)* restaurant, *(b)* recipient and *(c)* cost in each case; [99513]

(3) how often Ministers in his Department have received hospitality in restaurants from outside groups in the last 12 months. [99588]

Mr. Straw: The giving and receiving of hospitality is conducted fully in accordance with the guidance set out in the Ministerial Code, and Guidance on Contacts with Outside Interest Groups including Lobbyists. The detailed information requested is not held centrally, and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the Minister for Europe next intends to visit *(a)* Brussels, *(b)* Strasbourg and *(c)* Luxembourg; and how many visits the Minister has made to those cities since his appointment. [96581]

Mr. MacShane *[holding answer of 10 February]:* I went to Brussels on 24–25 February for a meeting of the General Affairs and External Relations Council (GAERC); and am due to travel to Luxembourg on 14–15 April for a further GAERC meeting. I also hope to be able to visit the European Parliament in Strasbourg during the coming months.

In my three and a half months in this job, I have already travelled twice to Brussels and once to Strasbourg to attend a session of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly.

Written Questions

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many named day written questions were tabled to the Department between 15 October 2002 and 24 February 2003; how many that received a holding answer were given a substantive answer *(a)* within three days, *(b)* within seven days, *(c)* within 14 days, *(d)* within 28 days and *(e)* over 28 days later; and what procedures the Department has in place to monitor performance on answering (i) Parliamentary Questions and (ii) ministerial letters. [99432]

Mr. Straw: Between 15 October 2002 and 24 February 2003, 259 named day written questions were tabled to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, of these 59 received a holding answer. Of those that received a holding answer 43 received a substantive answer within three days, seven received an answer within seven days, five received an answer within 14 days and one received an answer within 28 days. Three questions are still awaiting a substantive answer.

My Department records statistics on a daily basis to monitor performance in answering parliamentary questions. I attach great importance to replying to questions fully and promptly and regularly emphasise this to Ministers and officials.

The Cabinet Office, on an annual basis, publishes a report to Parliament on performance of departments in replying to ministerial correspondence. The Report for 2001 was published on Friday 24 May 2002, column 674W. The Report for 2002 will be published in due course.

TREASURY

Child Care Tax Credit

Mrs. Caroline Spelman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the consequences for women of the introduction of the child care tax credit. [96143]

Dawn Primarolo: It is clear that the child care tax credit is removing an important barrier to work by making child care more affordable. According to the Repeat Survey of Parent's Demand for Childcare, around a quarter of respondents said that the impact of the child care tax credit had an effect on the number of hours they worked; and of those, 80 per cent. said that they had increased their hours. Recent data suggests that among families in receipt of WFTC and using eligible child care, around 85 per cent. claim the child care tax credit. Among lone parents receiving WFTC the figure is higher still, with over 90 per cent. of lone parents who receive WFTC and use eligible child care claiming the child care tax credit. The majority of claims for child care tax credit come from lone parents, for whom child care costs can represent one of the biggest barriers to making work pay.

Capital Modernisation Fund

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place the evaluations for the Capital Modernisation Fund projects relating to *(a)* Inland Revenue E-business gateway, *(b)* Inland Revenue unified reference validation, *(c)* Customs and Excise port surveillance, *(d)* Customs and Excise anti-drug surveillance radar, *(e)* Customs and Excise scanners and *(f)* Office of National Statistics "PAT 18: Better Information" in the Library. [97020]

Mr. Boateng: *(a)* The CMF funding for the Inland Revenue e-business gateway has been integrated into a number of projects, some of which are still in development and none of which have reached the stage when they would be considered for an evaluation review under the department's established criteria.

(b) The Inland Revenue Unified Reference Validation Project is still in its early stages. It is expected that the project will be completed in the 2003–04 Financial Year.

(c) The Customs and Excise Port Surveillance project is not due to be completed until 31 March 2004. No evaluation report is yet available.

(d) The Customs and Excise anti-drug surveillance radar project was terminated in February 2002 because of difficulties in meeting the requirements of the user specification. No further expenditure is planned on this project.

(e) The project to procure x-ray freight scanners for Customs and Excise has not yet been concluded, and a full evaluation report has therefore not been completed.

(f) As the Office for National Statistics' Neighbourhood Statistics project has not yet been concluded, no evaluation report has been completed .

Child Tax Credit

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether payments of child tax credit in April 2003 will be based on earnings data from 2001–02; whether payments of child tax credit will be adjusted during 2003–04 when final earnings data for 2002–03 becomes available; whether amounts of child tax credit payable for 2003–04 will be adjusted after the end of 2003–04 when final earnings data for 2003–04 becomes available; and if he will make a statement. [97843]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 13 February 2003]:* Tax credit awards for 2003–04 are initially based on income for the tax year 2001–02, the last complete tax year for which people will have details of their income already available. Awards will be adjusted to reflect income for the tax year 2003–04 if that is lower or significantly higher than 2001–02 income (only rises of more than £2,500 are taken into account). Once their initial award is made, claimants can ask to have their tax credits payments based on their expected income for 2003–04.

After the first year, tax credits will initially be based on income for the previous tax year and adjusted to reflect current tax year income if that is lower or significantly higher.

Iraq (Reconstruction Funding)

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what financial provision he has made to fund the reconstruction of Iraq in the aftermath of war. [97540]

Mr. Boateng: The Government believe that the role of the United Nations and other multilateral institutions will be vital in addressing the reconstruction of Iraq in the aftermath of any war and are liaising closely with allies on this issue.

Landfill Tax

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to ensure that proposed increases in landfill tax do not disproportionately affect manufacturing industry. [100088]

John Healey: As we announced in the pre-Budget report (PBR), the Government will consult on a revenue-neutral proposal to increase the rate of landfill from 2005–2006 as a way of encouraging more environmentally friendly methods of dealing with waste. Since the PBR, discussions have been held with a wide range of businesses and other groups, including the Confederation of British Industry, on how the additional revenue raised from the landfill tax increases will be recycled. An announcement will be made in the Budget.

Manufacturing Investment

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to introduce higher capital allowances to encourage manufacturing investment. [100086]

John Healey: The Government keep all taxes under review and any changes will be made as part of the normal budget process. Since 1997 the Government have introduced permanent 40 per cent. first year allowances for investments in plant and machinery by small and medium sized enterprises. In addition to this, all businesses can obtain 100 per cent. first year allowances for investments in designated energy-saving plant and machinery.

Meetings

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to his answer of 31 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 419W, for what reason he is unable to list the attendees for each meeting since January 2000; and if he will make a statement. [96203]

Mr. Boateng: It is not usual practice to release detailed attendance records for meetings of advisory non-departmental bodies such as the Public Services Productivity Panel. Exemption 8*(a)* of the "Code of Practice on Access to Government Information" applies.

National Insurance

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment his Department has made of the effect of the increase in national insurance in April on *(a)* disposable incomes, *(b)* consumer spending as a percentage of GDP, *(c)* personal borrowing levels and *(d)* the saving ratio. [99023]

Dawn Primarolo: Government economic forecasts take account of the effects of the increase in national insurance contributions announced in Budget 2002.

Passenger Travel

Norman Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his policy is on the use of economic instruments to discourage passenger travel *(a)* by air and *(b)* by road. [99202]

John Healey: The Chancellor considers all relevant social, economic and environmental factors when deciding taxation policy. Alongside the 2002 pre-budget report the Government published "Tax and the environment: using economic instruments". This document outlined that Government intervention is aimed at tackling market failures.

The Government does not have policies to discourage passenger travel but have introduced a host of policies to encourage more environmentally friendly behaviour by road users including duty incentives for road fuel gases and ultra low sulphur fuels, graduated vehicle excise duty (VED) for cars based on carbon emissions with incentives for the use of cleaner fuels and technologies, restructuring of vehicle excise duty for lorries so that the cleanest, least polluting lorries now pay some of the lowest VED rates in the EU and reforms to company car taxation to account for the levels of carbon emissions.

The 2002 pre-Budget report announced that the Government will discuss with stakeholders the most effective economic instruments for ensuring that the industry is encouraged to take account of, and where appropriate reduce, its contribution to global warming, local air and noise pollution.

Retirement Age

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the net saving to the Exchequer if all public sector employees retired at age 65; and if he will make a statement. [99898]

Mr. Boateng: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Lynne Jones) on 23 January, column 431W.

Working Tax Credit

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 25 February, ref 94024, how many of the recipients of working tax credit will be childless. [100125]

Dawn Primarolo: As a result of the extension of in-work support, 250,000 low-income working households without children are expected to receive Working Tax Credit in 2003–04.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Child Protection

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will establish independent child death review teams to deal with child deaths from abuse and neglect; [98485]

(2) what plans the Government has to set up child safeguarding teams to ensure that professionals involved in the care and protection of children can work together more effectively on the ground. [98484]

Hilary Benn: The Victoria Climbié Inquiry report, published on 28 January 2003, contained 108 recommendations, including several recommendations relating to local and national structures for the provision of children's services and arrangements for child death reviews (referred to in Government guidance as serious case reviews).

We are currently studying the report's 108 recommendations with care, and will make our substantive response to the report as part of the Green Paper on Children at Risk, which will be published later in the spring.

Conviction Rates

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department under what circumstances an offender is classed as having been brought to justice. [99021]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 27 February 2003]:* For the purposes of the Public Service Agreement target to bring 1.2 million recorded offences to justice by 2005–06, an offence is classed as having been brought to justice where an offender has been cautioned, convicted, or has had the offence taken into consideration by the court. (Penalty Notices for Disorder also count towards the target, in the areas where these are being trialled).

Correspondence

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the Minister for Citizenship and Immigration intends to reply to the letter dated 11 December 2002 from the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan regarding his constituent Mrs. S Mitchell of Farnborough. [98218]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 24 February 2003]:* I wrote to the hon. Member on 27 February 2003.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the hon. Member will receive a reply to his letters of 2 December 2002 and 8 January, ref. 3LBR/A076411. [98692]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 25 February 2003]:* I wrote to the hon. Member on 27 February 2003.

Correspondence Tracking System

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the computer-based correspondence tracking system being piloted in his Department. [98408]

Mr. Wills: I am determined to build on the progress we are making on improving our handling of correspondence.

The Correspondence Tracking System's (CTS) ministerial correspondence module is part way through a five week live pilot. CTS is built on a combination of scanning, workflow and document management technology. It will allow all incoming correspondence addressed to Ministers or to the Home Office to be scanned on arrival and transmitted around the department electronically. Its use will ensure that no piece of correspondence ever gets mislaid or delayed in the internal mail, and will enable progress to be monitored at all stages of the process.

Subject to final evaluation of the pilot, the module will roll out across the non-Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) parts of the Home Office over four weeks from 17 March. The public correspondence module will roll out approximately six weeks later, and the e-mail module approximately four weeks after that. A scoping study is currently under way in IND to establish timescales for the roll out of CIS there.

Criminal Justice Bill

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the impact on the prison population of the proposed changes to *(a)* sentencing and *(b)* the double jeopardy rule contained in the Criminal Justice Bill. [99019]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 28 February 2003]:* The sentencing provisions in the Criminal Justice Bill will make it possible to ensure that the most serious violent, sexual and persistent offenders spend longer in prison while allowing other offenders to be dealt with by means of tougher and more effective community sentences. Current projections indicate that the long-term net effect of implementation of these provisions will be a small increase of about 1,000 in the prison population.

The proposal contained in the Bill in relation to retrial for serious offences would only permit a retrial in cases where new and compelling evidence subsequently came to light. Furthermore, to prevent the possible harassment of acquitted persons or where it is not in the public interest, the personal consent of the Director of Public Prosecutions will be required to the re-opening of investigation and an application to the Court of Appeal. Given these safeguards it is estimated that only a very small number of cases are likely to be retried each year and that the impact upon the prison population will be negligible.

Drug-related Crime

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of prison inmates in Britain have access to drugs rehabilitation programmes. [97594]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 12 February 2003]:* The Prison Service does not keep records of the percentage of drug-misusing prisoners in England and Wales that have access to rehabilitation programmes. However, based on research conducted by the Office for National Statistics, the Service estimates that 18,000 prisoners each year would benefit potentially from participation in a rehabilitation programme. The length of treatment courses serves to restrict access to those sentenced to two years or more.

The Service is committed annually to delivering 5,700 places on rehabilitation programmes or therapeutic communities by March 2004. The Service is, therefore, currently resourced only to meet approximately 30 per cent. of the potential rehabilitation needs of drug-misusing prisoners.

As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister explained on 4 December 2002 in his response to the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff), *Official Report*, column 906, the Government are committed significantly to extending drug treatment programmes both within prison and in the community.

Powers of Criminal Courts (Sentencing) Act

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many offenders have been given an extended sentence under section 85 of the Powers of Criminal Courts (Sentencing) Act 2000. [99018]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 27 February 2003]:* 43 cases of extended sentences were notified to the Home Office in 2001.

Figures for 2002 will be published in the autumn.

What Works Unit

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the work programme is of his Department's What Works Unit, and if he will make a statement. [99020]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 27 February 2003]:* Considerable progress has been made in ensuring that interventions with offenders are soundly based on the What Works evidence and are effective in reducing re-offending. A joint prison/probation assessment system (OASys) is being rolled out. We have introduced a range of accredited offending behaviour programmes covering both general offending and specialised areas such as drug abuse and sexual offences.

Work is also progressing on the reintegration of offenders into society by addressing factors such as literacy, numeracy, employment and accommodation; and a system of Enhanced Community Punishment is being introduced this year. An intensive scheme collaborating with police surveillance is being developed in the community for young adult offenders between 18 and 20 years of age.

The Youth Justice Board is also taking forward What Works initiative. It is producing a series of Effective Practice Guidance Notes, and is introducing a quality assurance process within Youth Offending Teams.

Overall, our aim is to reduce re-offending by 5 per cent. by 2004.

HEALTH

Alpha-1 Antitrypsin Deficiency

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what guidelines there are for testing patients for Alpha 1-antitrypsin deficiency; [99139]

(2) how many patients are being treated for Alpha 1-antitrypsin deficiency in the UK; [99138]

(3) what the most common symptoms of Alpha 1-antitrypsin deficiency are amongst patients in the UK. [99140]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 25 February 2002]:* Alpha 1-antitrypsin deficiency is an inherited disorder with a prevalence of approximately one in 5,000 people. It is associated with liver disease among children and lung disease among adults between approximately 30–50. We do not hold data centrally on the number of patients being treated.

While no specific guidelines have been issued by the Department of Health, the British Thoracic Society's 1997 Thorax guidelines advised general practitioners that chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) sufferers under 40 should be referred for a specialist opinion to identify an alpha-antitrypsin deficiency and to consider therapy and family screening. Alpha-antitrypsin deficiency is the most common inherited liver disease in babies and children and it is accepted clinical practice to test for this condition.

Both liver and lung disease may present with a wide variety of symptoms. The main signs are jaundice in respect of liver disease and shortness of breath and cough for lung disease.

Cancer Funding

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will direct to itemise cancer funding and where it has been spent in their annual reports. [98002]

Ms Blears: We have asked strategic health authorities, as part of an exceptional exercise, to identify total additional investment in cancer services in 2001–02 and 2002–03, with a subtotal for cancer drugs and supporting information on new service developments.

We intend to publish the results in late spring 2003.

Computer Fraud

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of computer *(a)* hacking, *(b)* fraud and *(c)* theft his Department recorded in 2001–02; and on how many occasions computer systems have been illegally accessed by computer hackers (i) within and (ii) outside his Department. [97553]

Ms Blears: There have been no reported incidents of illegal hacking or computer fraud on the information technology systems, either within or outside the Department, in the financial year 2001–02.

The Department had computer losses, including thefts, to the value of £70,500 in financial year 2001–02. The Department takes the protection of its IT systems and assets very seriously and its security policy and procedures are kept under constant review.

Correspondence

Sir Brian Mawhinney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the right hon. Member for North West Cambridgeshire will receive a substantive reply to his letter of 21 November 2002 on behalf of his constituent Mrs. Loosemore. [100023]

Mr. Hutton: A reply was sent to the right hon. Member today.

Drug Treatment

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many drug misusers under treatment have had GP involvement since 1 January 2002. [98152]

Ms Blears: This information is not available centrally, in this form. Between 1 April 2001 and 31 March 2002, 16 per cent. of drug users presenting to drug treatment agencies in England were reported as having been referred by a general practitioner. Source: statistical press release "Provisional Statistics from the National Drug Treatment Monitoring System in England, 2001/02"—http://www.doh.gov.uk/public/spndruqsQ212.htm. This document is available in the Library.

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what specific health treatment is recommended under a drug treatment and testing order for *(a)* heroin addiction, *(b)* crack cocaine addiction, *(c)* polydrug use and *(d)* dual diagnosis. [98154]

Ms Blears: The specific health treatment under a treatment and testing order will vary according to the different clinical and social care needs of each individual drug user, based on clinical judgment. The 'Models of Care' document and the Department's 'Drug Misuse and Dependence—Guidelines on Clinical Management' (Clinical Guidelines) outlines the evidence-based best practice that is recommended for the care of all drug users.

Electronic Patient Records

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what targets are in place for the introduction of electronic patient records; [88736]

(2) how many trusts are meeting their targets for the introduction of electronic patient records. [88737]

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer given to the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham on 13 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 488W, when he expects all NHS trusts in the south-east to have introduced electronic patient records. [92598]

Mr. Lammy: The following targets are in place for implementing the Integrated Care Record Service (ICRS) in the Government's '21st Century IT' Strategy for the national health service.

Health Records Infrastructure initial connections by all trusts by March 2005.

December 2005: All primary care trusts, and all NHS trusts actively implementing elements of electronic patient records (EPR).

December 2007: Full national health record service, with core data and reference links to local EPR systems for full record access; EPR (compliant with new National standard, XML-based specification) systems implemented in all PCTs, and all Hospitals (to be confirmed during calendar year 2003).

Unified Health Record (with all appropriate social care information) by December 2010 (to be confirmed during calendar year 2006).

Food Labelling

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to change food labelling regulations. [98838]

Ms Blears: Labelling regulations are agreed at European Union level. The Food Standards Agency is pressing for a number of important changes in EU labelling rules. Its top priorities, which are based on consumer research and consultation, are to achieve more extensive, clearer country of origin labelling, clear nutrition labelling on all foods and tighter controls on use of health claims.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the Food Standards Agency's recommendations for the compulsory labelling of the nutritional content of food; and which foods would be covered if such proposals were enacted. [98839]

Ms Blears: The Food Standards Agency (FSA) recommends that manufacturers provide full nutrition information on all pre-packaged foods to allow consumers to make fully informed choices about the nutritional value of the foods they buy. The FSA is pressing to make this recommendation a legal requirement through changes to the current European Union rules on nutrition labelling.

Contrary to reports in the press the FSA has not recommended introducing legislation requiring the nutritional content of food and drink to be given on menus.

Heart Choice Scheme

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evaluation he has made of the Heart Choice Scheme; and if he will make a statement. [97317]

Ms Blears: Evaluation of the heart choice scheme is being informed by the independent patient choice trustees at a national level through a survey of patient views and with information from patient care advisers in each cardiac centre.

The early indications from the first six months of the scheme are that the initiative is popular with patients, with just under half of those eligible choosing to be treated elsewhere. Patients and their carers have particularly welcomed the continuity, advice and support of patient care advisers. These reforms, combined with substantial investment, are making a dramatic impact, improving patient experience and bringing a rapid reduction in waiting times for heart surgery.

Heart Disease

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance has been provided to primary care trusts on collaborative commissioning for specialist heart services. [99440]

Ms Blears: Primary care trusts (PCTs) are responsible for assessing the health needs of their local community and preparing plans for health improvement, reflecting the diversity of local needs.

Arrangements for shared or collaborative commissioning of services, including specialist heart services, are being made locally between PCTs.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what targets have been set to increase the use of new medical devices used in percutaneous coronary interventions. [99441]

Ms Blears: No targets have been set for the use of new medical devices in percutaneous coronary interventions (PCI). The National Institute for Clinical Excellence published guidance in May 2000 on the use of plain stents in PCI and is currently evaluating the appropriate use of drug eluting stents. Guidance on this is expected to be published later this year.

Hospital Acquired Infection

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many care homes refused to admit NHS patients due to the contraction of *(a)* MRSA and *(b)* other hospital acquired infections, in the last year for which figures are available; [98031]

(2) what steps his Department is taking to ensure that older people are not discharged from hospital into care homes with hospital acquired infections. [98030]

Ms Blears: We are committed to tackling hospital acquired infections and have set standards to ensure that there is a managed environment that minimises the risk of infection to patients, staff and visitors. These standards are now supported by the inclusion of infection control procedures and a methicillin resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) improvement score in the national health service performance management system for 2002–03. In addition, a targeted action plan for healthcare associated infection is being developed as part of our strategy against infectious diseases, "Getting Ahead of the Curve".

Hospital acquired infections range from the serious to the trivial. Although it is good practice[1] to assess residents for risk of infection on admission an infection is not necessarily a contraindication for admission. For example, if basic good hygiene precautions are followed, individuals with MRSA are not a risk to other residents, staff or visitors and should not be excluded.

There are no centrally held statistics on care homes and the admission of patients with MRSA or other hospital acquired infections.

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[1] "Guidelines on the Control of Infection in Residential and Nursing homes"—Public Health Medicine Environmental Group 1996.

Hospital Waste Disposal

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidelines are followed when contracting out disposal of human tissue to hospital waste disposal companies; what outside companies are used by the NHS for disposal of human tissue; what the terms of their contracts are; and for how long they have been doing work for the NHS. [99082]

Ms Blears: It is for National Health Service trusts to determine their local hospital waste contract requirements and specifications, and fulfil all statutory and legal obligations. However, a significant amount of guidance on clinical waste management and disposal is available to the NHS. The Health and Safety Commission guidance, Safe disposal of clinical waste, states:

> "Identifiable human tissue is clinical waste unless it has been rendered safe and non-infectious. After treatment, identifiable human tissue remains an offensive waste. It therefore needs to be dealt with by an authorised waste handling facility. The only appropriate treatment for identifiable human tissue is incineration."

Human tissue has to be disposed of by incineration. Not all waste disposal facilities are licensed or have the appropriate disposal technology to dispose of human tissue. Those companies who only operate alternative non-burn technology plant and facilities are required to sub-contract human tissue clinical waste to other facilities for incineration.

Human tissue is not dealt with under a separate contract but clearly, where non-burn solutions are used for the bulk of the waste, it does require a separate logistical approach. In England, the main clinical waste disposal companies are:

Waste Disposal Companies

White Rose Environmental	Incineration
Eurocare Environmental Services Ltd	Incineration and non-burn
Polkacrest	Non-burn (microwaves and autoclaves)
BFH	Incineration
Grundons	Incineration
Viridor	Incineration
EDW Butler	Incineration
Peake	Incineration
Torgam	Non burn (autoclave)

All contract terms will be individual and specific. NHS trusts are autonomous bodies and as such have local responsibility for all contracts dependent on their needs and specifications. Contracts will differ in terms of requirements and contract period. NHS Purchasing And Supply Agency are currently reviewing their total waste management contract terms and conditions.

Since the introduction of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and the loss of Crown Immunity in 1991, the NHS has moved away from disposing of its own waste to contracting out that service to the private sector. The consequence of legislative changes relating to clinical waste disposal resulted in NHS owned and operated incinerators being shut down and replaced with modern large scale incinerators, provided, in the main, through joint ventures between the NHS and the private sector, or the private sector alone.

The NHS continues to handle some 8 per cent. of clinical waste disposal for England.

Morning-After Pill

Jim Dobbin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance his Department issues to women regarding the potential side-effects of taking the morning-after pill. [97649]

Ms Blears: Guidance about the possible side effects associated with taking the morning-after pill or emergency contraceptive, Levonelle, is routinely provided in the patient information leaflet included with this medicine. The possible side effects of Levonelle are also included in the information that is provided to health professionals, the summary of product characteristics, who are encouraged to discuss these side effects with the individual woman before treatment is provided.

Pharmacists are supplied with a 'Protocol' that contains a checklist of advice that should be given to each woman when she is given Levonelle. This protocol includes the need to inform women of the most common side effects that may occur.

Information about potential side effects of Levonelle has most recently been provided in the Chief Medical Officer's (CMO) newsletter, CMO Update, which is available through the Medicines Control Agency (MCA)/CMO websites.

As with all licensed medicines, the safety of Levonelle is continuously monitored by the MCA, with independent expert advice from the Committee on Safety of Medicines. In the event of any important new safety information emerging, the MCA will take action to ensure that this is accurately reflected in the product information and communicated to health professionals and women using the product.

Paediatric Nurses

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many paediatric nurses are employed by each hospital trust in England; and what the vacancy rates are in each case. [92538]

Mr. Hutton: As a result of organisational changes in April 2002, data reflecting the latest organisation structure are not currently available. The 2003 national health service vacancy survey will be conducted in March and the results will be available later this year. It is intended to publish staff in post data from the September 2002 NHS work force census, which reflects the latest structure, in April this year.

Patient Care Advisers

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patient care advisers work at each heart surgery centre in England. [97310]

Ms Blears: The majority of participating trusts have a single patient care adviser (PCA) in post. A number of the larger bodies, including Brighton Healthcare, University Hospitals Birmingham and University Hospitals Leicester, employ two PCAs, while St. Bartholomew's and the London National Health Service Trust employs three.

The latest available figures, for January 2003, show a total of 38 PCAs in post.

Patients (Home Care)

Mr. Havard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department is taking to encourage the NHS to adopt new medical technologies that are clinically proven to help patients be treated outside hospital. [95574]

Ms Blears: The Department's Modernisation Agency is in place to support new practices and innovative approaches and will help to make a significant contribution in this area.

Clinical effectiveness and patient safety are of course paramount concerns, and before any new medical technology is used it must, as a minimum, comply with United Kingdom and European regulations for medical devices and with clinical protocols agreed with the relevant professional bodies.

Primary Care Trusts

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the funding arrangements for primary care trusts in North Yorkshire. [98060]

Jacqui Smith: Three year allocations to primary care trusts (PCTs) were announced on 11 December. The allocations made to PCTs covered by North and East Yorkshire and North East Lincolnshire Strategic Health Authority are shown in the table.

PCT	*2003–04 allocation (£)*	*2004–05 allocation (£)*	*2005–06 allocation (£)*	*Total three year increase (percentage)*
Craven, Harrogate and Rural District	166,668	181,585	197,111	28.08
Hambleton and Richmondshire	91,187	99,349	107,843	28.08
Scarborough, Whitby and Ryedale	138,792	152,118	166,123	30.31
Set by and York	216,207	235,557	255,791	28.13

Public Health Laboratory Service

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to maintain the work on health and safety carried out by the Public Health Laboratory Service after 1 April. [95697]

Ms Blears: The Public Health Laboratory Service (PHLS) Board will continue to be responsible for the health and safety of its remaining employees after 1 April.

Any wider contribution to health and safety by current employees of the PHLS providing expert advice will continue to be provided as appropriate.

Sexual Health

Dr. Liam Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1)what recent discussions he has had with the representatives of general practitioners regarding *(a)* screening for sexually transmitted diseases; *(b)* counselling for sexually transmitted diseases; and *(c)* the provision of contraceptive services; [99088]

(2) what guidance his Department has issued to primary care trusts regarding GPs' role in screening for sexually transmitted diseases; [99085]

(3) what guidance his Department has issued to primary care trusts regarding GPs' role in screening for chlamydia. [99087]

Ms Blears: The sexual health and HIV strategy recommends that there are a number of service elements for sexual health care that current good practice acknowledges should be available in every general practice setting. These elements include sexually transmitted infection (STI) testing for women and assessment and referral of men with STI symptoms. However we do recognise that these service elements are not available everywhere at present and that development will be gradual. The development of non-invasive STI tests will extend the elements that can be provided in primary care.

Officials have held a number of discussions with representatives of the Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) to discuss implementation of the sexual health and HIV strategy in primary care. The Department is funding a conference being organised by the RCGP and the Royal College of Nurses to take forward a co-ordinated approach to the teaching and accreditation of sexual health skills for primary care. The RCGP will be publishing guidelines for general practitioners on primary care provision of recommended service elements for sexual health later this year.

We have recently published a sexual health commissioning toolkit, which is available in the Library, which provides guidance for primary care trusts (PCTs) and a framework for developing sexual health services across a range of primary and specialist providers.

In addition, the NHS Confederation is taking the lead, on behalf of United Kingdom health Ministers, in developing a new contract for GPs across the UK. The negotiations with the General Practitioners Committee (GPC) of the British Medical Association will have included some discussion of the provision of sexual health services.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 3 March 2003

CABINET OFFICE

Central Office of Information

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will place in the Library a copy of the Service Delivery Agreement for the Central Office of Information; and if he will make a statement. [99391]

Mr. Alexander: A copy of the current Central Office of Information (COI) Service Delivery Agreement (SDA), which was published as part of the Spending Review 2000, is already available from the House Libraries and on-line at the COI's website:.http://www.coi.gov.uk/aboutus/sda.html

However, the COI is currently in the process of revising its Framework Document and preparing its Annual Business Plan for 2003–04. It is anticipated that the COI will announce and publish its revised Service Delivery Agreement (SDA) at the same time as announcing its annual performance targets to Parliament.

The current timetable for the COI to publish its annually agreed external performance targets, which will be done by means of a Written Ministerial Statement, is April 2003. Copies of these will then be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Official Vehicles

Pete Wishart: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office (1) how many official vehicles have been at the disposal of *(a)* the Government, *(b)* the Official Opposition and *(c)* the Liberal Democrats in each year since 1995; and at what cost; [100130]

(2) what the total cost has been for official vehicles for *(a)* the Prime Minister's Office, *(b)* the Official Opposition Leader's Office and *(c)* the Office of the Leader of the Liberal Democrats in each year since 1995. [100131]

Mr. Alexander: The responsibility for the provision of ministerial cars and drivers has been delegated under the terms of the Framework Document to the Government Car Despatch Agency. I have asked its Chief Executive Mr. Nick Matheson to write to the hon. Member. Copies of his letter will be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Written Questions

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many named day written questions were tabled to the Office between 15 October 2002 and 24 February 2003; how many that received a holding answer were given a substantive answer *(a)* within three days, *(b)* within seven days, *(c)* within 14 days, *(d)* within 28 days and *(e)* over 28 days later; and what procedures are in place to monitor performance on answering (i) parliamentary questions and (ii) ministerial letters. [99458]

Mr. Alexander: Seventy five named day questions were tabled to the Cabinet Office between 15 October 2002 and 24 February 2003, of these nine had holding replies. All were answered within three parliamentary sitting days.

Cabinet Office parliamentary questions are recorded on a parliamentary database, and progress of all parliamentary questions are monitored closely.

As far as ministerial correspondence is concerned, the Cabinet Office, on an annual basis, publishes a report to Parliament on performance of departments in replying to ministerial correspondence. The Report for 2001 was published on 24 May 2002, column 674W. The Report for 2002 will be published in due course.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Inland Waterways

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans there are to appoint an independent regulator to oversee the interests of inland waterway users. [100206]

Alun Michael: I am not convinced of the need for a regulator. British Waterways and other navigation authorities are already subject to the general law against anti-competitive practice. I know that the Inland Waterways Association has written to British Waterways suggesting that it would be preferable to set up a new appeal procedure to deal with waterway managers' decisions. I understand that British Waterways is willing to consider this suggestion and I think that it should be fully explored. It may be possible to extend any agreed arrangements to other navigation authorities.

Bovine Tuberculosis

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many confirmed incidents of bovine tuberculosis were identified in the parliamentary constituencies of *(a)* Montgomeryshire and *(b)* Brecon and Radnorshire, in each quarter in (i) 2000, (ii) 2001 and (iii) 2002; and if she will make a statement. [99308]

Mr. Morley: The number of confirmed incidents of bovine tuberculosis in *(a)* Montgomeryshire and *(b)* Brecon and Radnorshire, broken down as requested is shown in the table.

Care must be taken in making comparisons with previous years' figures. The disruption to the TB programme caused by FMD, and the rolling nature of the testing programme means that we are now effectively catching up on two years' testing. Clearance of overdue testing has been targeted on those herds at higher risk first, therefore it will not be possible to interpret the data properly until the testing backlog has been cleared.

TB breakdown statistics

Quarter	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
(a) Number of confirmed incidents of TB in Brecon and Radnorshire			
Q1	8	8	15
Q2	4	1	13
Q3	4	0	13
Q4	4	4	26
Total	20	13	67
(b) Number of confirmed incidents of TB in Montgomeryshire			
Q1	0	3	11
Q2	0	1	4
Q3	1	1	1
Q4	1	11	5
Total	2	16	21

Diffuse Pollution

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many incidents of diffuse pollution have been recorded in each year since 1997; and how many resulted in *(a)* prosecutions and *(b)* fines. [99250]

Mr. Morley: In its records of pollution incidents, the Environment Agency has identified 4,779 incidents since 1999 where urban or rural land run-off was the likely cause and which have been attributed to diffuse sources.

However, by its very nature diffuse pollution often does not manifest itself as an identifiable incident. Much diffuse pollution occurs through repeated low level leaching of pollutants from land or run-off from surfaces that has a cumulative impact on water quality. So, records of pollution incidents only pick up a small part of the problem of diffuse pollution.

It has not proved possible to collate any information on prosecutions and fines in relation to diffuse pollution for this answer.

Most current legislation relating to water pollution is addressed at point sources, such as discharges of industrial effluent or specific pollution incidents, and was not designed to prevent or control more gradual diffuse pollution. This is why the Government have proposed the creation of a new statutory power to prevent and control diffuse pollution as part of action to transpose the provisions of the water framework directive into domestic legislation. This proposal was included in the "Second Consultation Paper on the Implementation of the EC Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC)", published in October 2002.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what changes have taken place or are planned related to tracing the sources of diffuse pollution. [99251]

Mr. Morley: In the past tracing sources of diffuse water pollution has been done as part of catchment campaigns by the Environment Agency to improve compliance with river quality objectives. Such campaigns have been run in various catchments across the country.

As part of action to implement the water framework directive, a more comprehensive approach will be required. The directive requires that reviews are undertaken of the impact of human activity on the status of surface waters and on groundwater, including the identification of significant diffuse source pollution. The Government have proposed that a specific duty should be placed on the Environment Agency to carry out such reviews. This proposal is set out in the "Second Consultation Paper on the Implementation of the EC Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC)", published in October 2002.

Drinking Water

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her estimate is of the number of households using water filter devices for providing drinking water in the UK in each year since 1992. [99231]

Mr Morley: The Department has no direct responsibility for domestic water filters and does not compile or keep records of numbers of users or of sales. Based on information that British water has provided, however, a best available estimated figure for annual sales of plumbed-in water filters is between 20,000–25,000 during the period 1991–2001.

We have no information on numbers of households using jug water filters.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the implications for the environment of adding fluoride to drinking water. [99203]

Mr. Morley: A review of the effect of fluoride on a range of aquatic life was carried out for the Environment Agency when deriving a non-statutory environmental quality standard (EQS) for fluoride in water, which was published in 2000. The review drew on research carried out by a range of recognised scientific laboratories and available data indicated that effects on aquatic life from fluoride occur at concentrations between 9.0—350mg/l. Where fluoridation schemes are in place, fluoride is added to maintain a concentration of 1.0 mg/l in drinking water which is well below these levels. Any discharges will be further diluted upon entry to the aquatic environment through the process of collection and treatment of waste water.

A copy of the review has been deposited in the Library of the House.

Fair Trade Products

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her policy is on the purchase for departmental use, of fair trade products. [99241]

Alun Michael: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 9 December, *Official Report*, column 92W. The Government are committed to supporting ethical trading wherever possible within the boundaries set by the public procurement rules and provides significant support to the Fair Trade Foundation's efforts in promoting the supply and marketing of fair trade products.

This is reflected from Defra's Green Guide for Buyers, http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk/sdig/improving/partf/greenbuy/index.htm, and the work that departmental officials are undertaking with Defra's catering contractors to the purchasing approach within my private office. In consultation with them Defra has produced a catering action sheet that, among other things, calls for promotion of fair trade or ethically produced food by, where appropriate, reflecting such needs in non-discriminatory specifications in line with user requirements. Defra has been negotiating with its catering contractors to put fair trade tea and coffee on their menus and to supply such drinks whenever official hospitality is provided. These arrangements should be in place shortly in Defra canteens in the following locations: Guildford, Reading, York, London and the Central Science Laboratory.

Foxhound Packs

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many foxhound packs there are in England and Wales; and how many hunts have taken place in each of the last five years. [100361]

Alun Michael: According to the Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Hunting with Dogs in England and Wales (The Burns Report), published in June 2000, there were 175 foxhunting packs registered with the Masters of Foxhounds Association in England and Wales. There were also nine fell packs registered with, or affiliated to, the Central Committee of Fell Packs. In addition, there were seven packs of harriers, registered with the Association of Masters of Harriers and Beagles which mainly hunt foxes. There were also another two harrier packs which were registered to hunt foxes.

The position in Wales was found to be less clear. There were 48 foxhunting packs registered with the Federation of Welsh Packs which included 27 Welsh based packs affiliated to the Masters of Foxhounds Association, and 30 registered with the Welsh Farmers' Fox Control Association. At the time of publication of the Burns Report these two bodies had been formed fairly recently and represented only a proportion of the total number of packs in Wales. Some estimates put the number of unregistered packs in Wales at two or three times those of registered packs (Burns, paragraphs 2.10–2.11).

The Burns Report stated that there was a total of some 15,000 meets per season (paragraph 2.12). This figure would have been significantly less in 2001 when all hunting was suspended in England and Wales due to the outbreak of foot and mouth disease.

Hospitality

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her Department's hospitality budget *(a)* is in 2002–03 and *(b)* was in each of the last three years; and how much was left unspent at the end of each financial year. [99515]

Alun Michael: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws) on 24 February 2003; *Official Report*, column 85W.

Illegal Meat Imports

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs pursuant to the answer of 6 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 380W, what additional resources the Government are making available at ports to prevent the importation of substandard meat and bushmeat into the UK. [98372]

Mr. Morley: The Government have made available a total of £25 million over the next three financial years to tackle illegal imports from outside the European Union of any meat, other animal products and plant products. Following the Cabinet Office review of enforcement structures, final decisions on the allocation of this money will be made once consultations with HM Customs and Excise and the FSA have concluded.

Action against illegal imports is not limited to substandard meat and bushmeat, nor will it be limited to ports and airports. It is in addition to the requirement to pre-notify all commercial imports of meat and products of animal origin and present them to a Border Inspection Post for veterinary checks.

In the current financial year, additional measures have been introduced at ports and airports to tackle illegal imports . Additional temporary agency staff have been recruited to carry out checks to detect smuggled goods—teams of six are based at our major airports and teams of two at major seaports. We are also paying for additional checks through overtime elsewhere. Additional inspection resources have also been provided through the detector dog pilot, and a publicity campaign which has targeted both ports and airports and travellers before they leave.

Water Pollution

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what percentage of significant non-water industrial discharges to rivers were reviewed in 2002 by the Environment Agency, broken down by region; and if she will make a statement. [99204]

Mr. Morley: The information shows the percentage of consents for significant non-water company industrial discharges to rivers reviewed by the Environment Agency (the Agency) regions in 2002. Consents are issued under the Water Resources Act 1991 (as amended by the Environment Act 1995). Significant discharges are defined by the Agency as consented discharges of more than five cubic metres per day, some smaller discharges where the type and location of discharge requires monitoring will also be included

	Percentage
Anglian	11
Midlands	7
North East	11
North West	6
Southern	7
South West	3
Thames	5

Overall percentage of consents reviewed in England = 8

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what levels of endocrine-disrupting chemicals are deemed to be safe *(a)* at point of emission and *(b)* within water courses under (i) UK, (ii) EU and (iii) International law; how many water courses there are where the level of endocrine disrupting chemicals exceeded levels deemed safe in the last year for which figures are available; and where they are located. [99238]

Mr. Morley: The Environment Agency for England and Wales currently refers to its own non-statutory standards of 1 microgram per litre as an annual average, and 2.5 micrograms per litre as a maximum allowable concentration, for nonylphenol and octylphenol for the protection of the aquatic environment where appropriate for regulating discharges to water courses. These values were determined in relation to the substances' wider ecotoxicological impact, although data on their endocrine disrupting properties were taken into account.

Under the EU Community Strategy on Endocrine Disrupting Substances, and the Oslo Paris Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North East Atlantic (OSPAR), a number of potentially endocrine disrupting substances have been identified for which an assessment strategy is currently being developed. The European Commission is expected to propose later this year EQS and emission standards for certain substances on the Priority List of Dangerous Substances under Article 16 of the Water Framework Directive which are potential endocrine disrupters.

Nonylphenol ethoxylates and octylphenols are produced at one site only in the UK where monitoring for nonylphenol showed that the Environment Agency standard was not exceeded in 2002. The Environment Agency does not routinely monitor these substances nationally. Other substances, such as ethinyl oestradiol and oestradiol, have been studied in specific water courses and the results of those findings are currently the subject of risk assessment.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the number of *(a)* streams and *(b)* rivers with high microbial loading in each year since 1997; and where each is located. [99252]

Mr. Morley: The Environment Agency does not have any statutory obligations to control the microbial quality of freshwater streams and rivers to specific environmental standards and does not routinely monitor the microbial quality of these waters.

Limited monitoring is undertaken as part of research to investigate causes of non-compliance with bathing and shellfish water standards.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many legal actions have been begun against *(a)* water companies and *(b)* other companies in respect of discharges of endocrine disrupting chemicals in each year since 1992; how many in each case resulted in successful prosecutions; and what fines were levied as a result. [99280]

Mr. Morley: The Environment Agency has not initiated prosecutions against any companies specifically as a result of endocrine disrupting impacts on the environment. Prosecutions may have been initiated in relation to substances which are potential endocrine disrupters but, owing to the large number of such substances and the level of uncertainty surrounding many of them, figures would be difficult to compile and would involve disproportionate cost.

Water Services

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the average monthly cost to consumers is of *(a)* water services and *(b)* sewerage services in each region (i) in total and (ii) broken down by those who are (A) metered and (B) unmetered. [99243]

Mr. Morley: The following is the information for household customers of each water and sewerage company in England in 2002–03.

Table 1: Unmetered water tariffs for household customers, 2002–03

£

Water and sewerage companies	*Average monthly charge*
Anglian	11.1
Northumbrian:	
Essex and Suffolk	10.3
Northumbrian	7.4
Severn Trent	9.4
South West	10.9
Southern	7.6
Thames	8.8
United Utilities	9.3
Wessex	10.0
Yorkshire:	
Yorkshire	9.1
York	7.7
Water only companies:	
Bournemouth and West Hampshire	8.7
Bristol	9.3
Cambridge	8.3
Dee Valley	9.8
Folkestone and Dover	11.3
Mid Kent	11.1
Portsmouth	6.2
South East	10.5
South Staffordshire	7.3
Sutton and East Surrey	10.3
Tendring Hundred	14.6
Three Valleys:	
North Surrey	9.1
Three Valleys	9.9

Table 2: Unmetered sewerage tariffs for household customers, 2002–03

£

	Average monthly charge
Anglian	0.0
Northumbrian	0.0
Severn Trent	0.0
South West	0.0
Southern	0.0

Table 2: Unmetered sewerage tariffs for household customers, 2002–03

£

	Average monthly charge
Thames	0.0
United Utilities	0.0
Wessex	0.0
Yorkshire	0.0

Table 3: Metered water tariffs for household customers, 2002–03

£

Water and sewerage companies	*Average monthly charge*
Anglian	7.8
Northumbrian:	
Essex and Suffolk	7.0
Northumbrian	6.3
Severn Trent	7.6
South West	7.4
Southern	7.1
Thames	7.8
United Utilities	8.3
Wessex	7.9
Yorkshire:	
Yorkshire	7.3
York	6.3
Water only companies:	
Bournemouth and West Hampshire	7.8
Bristol	7.2
Cambridge	6.8
Dee Valley	6.1
Folkestone and Dover	8.6
Mid Kent	8.3
Portsmouth	7.0
South East	9.0
South Staffordshire	6.8
Sutton and East Surrey	9.1
Tendring Hundred	10.1
Three Valleys:	
North Surrey	6.6
Three Valleys	7.0

Table 4: Metered sewerage tariffs for household customers, 2002–03

£

Water and sewerage companies	*Average monthly charge*
Anglian	10.8
Northumbrian	8.4
Severn Trent	7.4
South West	12.1
Southern	10.9
Thames	6.9
United Utilities	9.5
Wessex	9.3
Yorkshire	9.6

Table 5: Metered and unmetered water tariffs for household customers, 2002–03

£

Water and sewerage companies	*Average monthly charge*
Anglian	9.4
Northumbrian:	
Essex and Suffolk	9.3
Northumbrian	7.3
Severn Trent	9.0
South West	9.6
Southern	7.5
Thames	8.7
United Utilities	9.1
Wessex	9.4
Yorkshire:	
Yorkshire	8.7
York	7.5
Water only companies:	
Bournemouth and West Hampshire	8.4
Bristol	8.8
Cambridge	7.5
Dee Valley	8.7
Folkestone and Dover	10.4
Mid Kent	10.6
Portsmouth	6.3
South East	10.1
South Staffordshire	7.2
Sutton and East Surrey	10.1
Tendring Hundred	12.2
Three Valleys:	
North Surrey	8.6
Three Valleys	9.3

Table 6: Metered and unmetered sewerage tariffs for household customers, 2002–03

£

	Average monthly charge
Anglian	13.1
Northumbrian	9.4
Severn Trent	8.0
South West	17.6
Southern	12.7
Thames	7.8
United Utilities	10.2
Wessex	11.1
Yorkshire	9.3

Water Supply

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much water was supplied by water companies to consumers in the last year for which figures are available; what this represents per household; and what percentage of tap water supplied is estimated to be used for drinking purposes. [99275]

Mr. Morley: In 2001–02 a total of 8,622 million litres of water per day were delivered to households. This represents an average consumption of 150 litres per person per day. Further details are contained in the Ofwat report "Security of supply, leakage and the efficient use of water 2001–02", a copy of which is in the Library of the House. It is estimated that around 4 per cent. of water supplied to households is used for drinking and cooking purposes.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much water was used by *(a)* domestic, *(b)* business and *(c)* industry sectors, in each year since 1992; and what the total water use was in each of these years. [99276]

Mr. Morley: As a proportion of water put into the public supply, about 56 per cent. is delivered to domestic customers, 14 per cent. to businesses and 11 per cent. to industrial users. Total water use since 1992, shown in megalitres per day, is as follows:

Year	*Megalitres per day*
1992–93	10,807
1993–94	10,686
1994–95	10,799
1995–96	11,327
1996–97	11,117
1997–98	12,511
1998–99	12,208
1999–00	12,370
2000–01	12,333
2001–02	12,493

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many *(a)* homes and *(b)* businesses are fitted with water saving devices, with particular reference to (i) hippos and (ii) cistern and flush controls. [99277]

Mr. Morley: Since 1999, 840,287 cistern devices, including Hippos, have been installed in households by water companies or their customers. Since 1996, 29,542 water audits of commercial premises have been completed by water companies, but no data are available on specific measures implemented as a result. These activities were carried out as part of water companies' legal duty to promote the efficient use of water by their customers. Further details are contained in the Ofwat report 'Security of supply, leakage and the efficient use of water 2001–02', a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMISSION

Saudi Arabian Airforce

Harry Cohen: To ask the Chairman of the Public Accounts Commission where copies of the 1992 National Audit Office report on the Saudi Arabian Airforce Project are located. [98181]

Mr. Alan Williams: Copies of the 1992 National Audit Office Report on the Saudi Arabian Airforce Project—known as Project Al Yamamah—are held by the National Audit Office and the Ministry of Defence.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Domestic Violence

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Solicitor General if she will make a statement on the role of the Crown Prosecution Service in domestic violence cases. [99404]

The Solicitor-General: I will write to my hon. Friend with my answer shortly.

TRANSPORT

Aircraft Seating Arrangements

Mr. Roy: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had with scheduled tour operators in relation to seating arrangements on aircrafts over the last 12 months. [99984]

Mr. Jamieson: We have had no specific discussions with airlines over seating arrangements on aircraft, but we have been in close and regular contact with airlines in relation to the information they provide to the public on seat pitch and width.

Airlines

Mr. David: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to improve protection for individual airline passengers against the failure of scheduled airlines. [99913]

Mr. Jamieson: This is not a matter for Government. Some passengers are protected by virtue of the way they pay for their tickets. For others, insurance against scheduled airline failure is readily available.

Air Transport (Insurance)

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the viability of creating a third party insurance cover relating to British air transport. [100052]

Mr. Jamieson: Following 11 September 2001, when commercial insurance cover was partially withdrawn, the Government provided temporary third-party war risk insurance cover for UK airlines and other air service providers. Such intervention is a form of state aid and the terms upon which the UK, and other EU member states, assisted their aviation industry during the crisis was strictly regulated by the European Commission. The Government discontinued their support for third party war risk insurance on 31 October 2002, and we see no case for further intervention.

Airport Development

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which airport development options assessed at SERAS Stages 2 and 3 were considered by the SERAS consultants to meet private sector funding criteria in terms of an acceptable internal rate of return. [99522]

Mr. Jamieson: The financial appraisal undertaken in the SERAS study indicates that, using airport charges at the time the analysis was undertaken, achieving a high target rate of return (12.5 per cent.) might be difficult for any major airport development. Chapter 15 of the Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom: South East, a second edition of which was published on 27 February (including some minor revisions to this chapter) discusses how major new airport capacity might be funded.

The principal results of the financial appraisal of different airport options are presented in the "SERAS Stage two Appraisal Findings report (section 14.4)."

ATOL Protection

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will extend the requirement to provide ATOL protection to all airlines and booking facilities offering bundled flight and accommodation services; and if he will make a statement. [R] [100261]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government have no plans to extend the requirement to provide ATOL protection in this way.

Some airlines selling air tickets through the Internet provide links to other services such as accommodation and car hire. Purchasing such services by this method involves separate contracts with, and separate payments to, different companies for the individual services. This does not constitute a package under European law. It is for individual consumers to decide whether to purchase disaggregated services in this way or to purchase a package deal offered by an ATOL holder.

Central Railway

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the Government's policy is on the provision of public money *(a)* to support the Central Railway project and *(b)* to meet claims for compensation arising out of the Central Railway project. [99490]

Mr. Jamieson: Central Railway's proposal is for an entirely privately funded project. We understand that it includes provisions for compensation of property owners in the event of compulsory purchase

Child Pedestrian Training

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on progress of the pilot network of child pedestrian training schemes in primary schools in deprived areas. [99769]

Mr. Jamieson: Projects are being rolled out in three tranches. The first 38 English projects were awarded to 38 local authorities in September 2001. The next 39 projects were awarded to 36 local authorities in September 2002. Each project will run for three years. Invitations to bid for the final round of projects will be issued shortly.

By the end of the summer term 2002, 703 of the volunteers who themselves train children had undertaken their own training. Also, in total, 3,882 children have received some training with an average of 105 children per project and 24 per school.

Congestion Charging

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what *(a)* guidance has been issued and *(b)* requests have been made by the Department to the DVLA with regard to congestion charging over the last 12 months; [99875]

(2) what discussions he and his Department have had with the DVLA regarding congestion charging in London in the last year; and if he will make a statement. [99767]

Mr. Jamieson: DVLA has worked closely with Transport for London to develop the systems needed to meet the legal obligation to supply information from its records to support congestion charging. My Department has asked DVLA for regular reports on progress throughout last year to ensure that the Agency meets its obligations.

Departmental Agency Staff

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many staff were employed by the *(a)* Vehicle Certification Agency, *(b)* Maritime and Coast Guard Agency and *(c)* Driving Standards Agency, in each year since 1997; and how many were inspection staff in each case. [100016]

Mr. Jamieson: The average number of employees and of dedicated inspection staff during each accounting year was:

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Vehicle Certification Agency					
Total staff	80	86	87	92	100
Inspectors	41	43	44	47	49
Maritime and Coastguard Agency					
Total staff	986	1,000	1,064	1,024.5	1,067
Surveyors/inspectors	160	160	149	157	162
Driving Standards Agency					
Total staff	1,785	1,637	1,715	1,742	1,851
Examiners/inspectors	1,202	1,119	1,201	1,196	1,302

Where part of an employee's duties includes inspection they have not been counted in the second row. Only dedicated inspectors are shown.

Driver Fatigue

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what his estimate is of the number of people killed in road crashes caused by driver fatigue on *(a)* motorways, *(b)* trunk roads and *(c)* other roads in the last five years. [99636]

Mr. Jamieson: Research studies indicate that driver sleepiness accounts for 15–20 per cent. of accidents on monotonous roads, especially motorways and for about 10 per cent. of all accidents on the road network in Great Britain.

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy to promote the erection of tiredness kills signs on trunk roads as well as on motorways. [99637]

Mr. Jamieson: Signs have been provided on the approaches to service areas on motorways to remind drivers of the need for regular breaks, because opportunities for drivers to stop on motorways are limited. This is not generally the case on all-purpose trunk roads. We have no plans for the erection of additional signs on approaches to trunk road services, unless there is a specific traffic management need at a particular location.

Future Integrated Transport LINK Programme

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what research has been conducted into the Future Integrated Transport LINK Programme; and if he will place a copy of findings in the Library; [99770]

(2) if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Future Integrated Transport LINK Programme. [99771]

Mr. Jamieson: The Future Integrated Transport Programme provided part funding to academic/industrial collaborative research projects under the Government's LINK framework. From the launch of the programme in September 1999 until its closure to applications in 2002, the Department for Transport and the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council offered support to 18 projects. The LINK projects supported are:

Pedestrian Activity Measurement in the Transport Environment;
The Demand for Public Transport—a Practical Guide;
UK Marine Motorways Study;
Integrating Transport and eCommerce in Logistics Supply Chains;
Rapid Construction of Passenger Interchanges;
Assessing the Potential for Rationalising Road Freight Operations;
Integration of Multi-Modal Reliability in the Assessment of Transport Schemes;
Monitoring of High Occupancy Vehicles;
Inclusive Transport Environment: Colour Design, Lighting and Visual Impairment;
Measuring Demand for an Integrated Inter-urban Public Transport Network;
Evaluating the Success of Urban Cycle Networks;
Enhanced Rail Contribution by Improved Reliability;
Improving the Efficiency of Travel by Improved Household Activity Scheduling;
Co-ordinating Individual Action Programmes in Rural Transport Management;
A Model to Assess Public Transport Reliability;
Multi-Objective Signal Control for Urban Environments;
Computer Based Tools for Streetscape Design and Reallocation;
Dynamic Assistive Information System.

Fuller descriptions of the objectives of these projects are available on the Department's website. As individual projects are completed between 2003 and 2007, summary results will also become available on the website. The industrial and academic partners undertake publication of the results of the individual projects.

Highways Agency

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many *(a)* staff and *(b)* inspection staff were employed by the Highways Agency in each year since 1997. [99760]

Mr. Jamieson: The numbers of civil servants employed by the Highways Agency on the 1 January 2003 for the past seven years are set out in the following table:

Year	*Number of civil servants*
1997	1,628
1998	1,597
1999	1,591
2000	1,634
2001	1,647
2002	1,668
2003	1,720

The Highways Agency has not employed any inspection staff during this period. These duties are carried out on behalf of the Agency by their managing agent contractors.

Hospitality

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how often Ministers in his Department have received hospitality in restaurants from outside groups; [99581]

(2) what criteria Ministers in his Department use when determining whether to offer hospitality in restaurants to interest groups at public expense; and if he will make a statement; [99504]

(3) what hospitality has been offered at public expense in the last 12 months, by each Minister in his Department to outside interest groups, broken down by *(a)* restaurant, *(b)* recipient and *(c)* cost in each case. [99505]

Mr. Jamieson: All offers of hospitality are made in accordance with published departmental guidance on financial procedures and propriety, based on the principles set out in "Government Accounting". The giving and receiving of hospitality is conducted fully in accordance with the guidance set out in the "Ministerial Code", and "Guidance on Contacts with Outside Interest Groups Including Lobbyists". The detailed information requested is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Liquefied Petroleum Gas

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress has been made on allowing motor vehicles powered by LPG to travel through the Channel Tunnel; and if he will make a statement. [99403]

Mr. Jamieson: Eurotunnel's original applications for operating certificates excluded the carriage of LPG and dual-fuelled vehicles. It is for the company to come forward with proposals to extend the range of its services to include these vehicles; Eurotunnel has been keeping its policy under review. If the company does seek to extend the scope of its services to include these vehicles, it will first need the agreement of the Channel Tunnel Intergovernmental Commission, acting on the advice of the independent binational Channel Tunnel Safety Authority, to its proposals.

M6

Mr. David Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what environmental impact assessments he *(a)* has studied, *(b)* has commissioned and *(c)* intends to commission regarding the proposed widening of the M6 motorway between junctions 11 and 20; [99368]

(2) what assessment he has made of the effect of the opening of the M6 toll road in 2004 on the volumes of traffic using the M6 motorway between junctions 11 and 20; [99370]

(3) what proposals he has for widening the M6 motorway between junctions 6 and 11. [99369]

Mr. Jamieson: The environmental assessments carried out in the mid 1990s, at the time of the previous widening proposals, are currently being reviewed and updated by the Highways Agency with a view to a widening scheme between Junctions 11 and 20 being included in the Government's Targeted Programme of Improvements. Should such a scheme be accepted into the Programme as a result, a full environmental impact assessment would be prepared to reflect the new proposals.

The effects of the opened M6 Toll Road on M6 traffic levels were assessed when the toll road was being planned. More recently, the West Midlands to North West Conurbation Multi Modal Study, which gave rise to the present widening proposals between Junctions 11 and 20, also took account of the implications of the toll road opening. The effects will be evaluated in more detail as the widening proposals aredeveloped.

There are no proposals to widen the M6 between Junctions 6 and 11.

Marinair

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport pursuant to his answer of 27 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 525W, what estimate was made of total costs of the former Marinair scheme, during the 'Preliminary Site Search of Options for New Airport Capacity to Serve the South East and East of England'. [94781]

Mr. Jamieson: The "Preliminary Site Search of Options for New Airport Capacity to Serve the South East and East of England" (published June 2001 and available in the Libraries of the House) estimated the total costs of the former Marinair scheme at nearly £20 billion pounds.

The estimate was based on a desk-top study that reviewed proposals submitted by supporters of Marinair in the early 1990s.

Mobile Phones (Accidents)

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent research he has conducted about the number of *(a)* fatalities and *(b)* serious injuries arising from accidents in which a driver involved was using a mobile phone; and if he will make a statement. [100389]

Mr. Jamieson: A wide body of research provides clear evidence of an increased risk of an accident when using a mobile phone while driving. A recent report, "The risk of using a mobile phone while driving", commissioned by the Department from the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents, contains a review of such research. It also summarises 19 cases reported in the UK press between 1988 and 2001 where a death could be attributed to a driver using a mobile phone. The report may be viewed at www.rospa.com/pdfs/road/mobiles/report.pdf.

Two research projects currently under way will help to establish the likely numbers of road traffic accidents involving mobile phones. One involves in-depth analysis of police fatal road accident reports that identify distraction as a possible contributory factor. A report is expected in the summer. The other involves on-the-spot studies of accidents in order to improve the understanding of the influences of human involvement, vehicle and highway design on accident causation and injury mechanisms. A database is expected to be available from the autumn.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many named day written questions were tabled to the Department between 15 October 2002 and 24 February 2003; how many that received a holding answer were given a substantive answer *(a)* within three days, *(b)* within seven days, *(c)* within 14 days, *(d)* within 28 days and *(e)* over 28 days later; and what procedures the Department has in place to monitor performance on answering (i) parliamentary questions and (ii) ministerial letters. [99427]

Mr. Jamieson: In the period 15 October 2002 to 24 February 2003, 318 named day written questions were tabled to my Department, of which 77 (24 per cent.) received a holding answer.

Of the 77 that received a holding answer, 65 (84 per cent.) received a substantive answer within three days; 10 (13 per cent.) received a substantive answer between four and seven days; and two (3 per cent.) received a substantive answer between eight and 14 days.

The effective handling of parliamentary questions and ministerial correspondence is an issue to which I, and ministerial colleagues, attach great importance. The Department has a Service Delivery Agreement Target of responding to 76 per cent. of ministerial correspondence within 15 days and 90 per cent. within 20 days. My Department operates an electronic tracking system to monitor ministerial correspondence and parliamentary question performance. The Cabinet Office, on an annual basis, publishes a report to Parliament on performance of Departments in replying to ministerial correspondence.

Private Sector Businesses (Forms)

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the forms that his Department requires private sector businesses to complete and return. [98091]

Mr. Jamieson: The list of all such forms, as recorded by the Department's Forms Gatekeeper and Survey Control Unit, has been placed in the Libraries of the House. The list makes no distinction between those that are compulsory or voluntary.

Public Service Agreement

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library the technical note underlying his Public Service Agreement; and if he will make a statement. [99393]

Mr. Jamieson: The technical note will be published shortly, and a copy will be placed in the Library of the House.

Railway Property (Birds)

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what his Department's estimate is of the cost to *(a)* local authorities, *(b)* train operating companies and *(c)* Network Rail of cleaning costs relating to the presence of birds on railway property in the last 12 months. [99774]

Mr. Jamieson: My Department has made no such estimate.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport who is responsible for *(a)* erecting netting, *(b)* erecting deterrents and *(c)* cleaning costs, relating to the presence of birds on railway property, with specific reference to bridges over public highways. [99775]

Mr. Jamieson: Network Rail advises that it is under no statutory duty to prevent the fouling of its structures by pigeons or other birds; and that it falls to the local highway authority to maintain the public footways and highways under the company's bridges. In specific cases of the establishment of a statutory nuisance under one of its bridges, the costs of pigeon proofing the structure and cleaning the public footway may be shared equally by agreement between Network Rail and the local authority. The company seeks to work with local authorities to tackle pigeon nuisance and to assess alternative pigeon deterrents to netting.

Railways

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps the Government is taking *(a)* to ensure better value for public money from the railways and *(b)* to prevent rail costs increasing; what is being done to limit the number of contactors and sub-contractors working on the railways; and if he will make a statement. [100297]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority's second Strategic Plan, published in January, sets out the nature of the challenges and the steps underway to control costs and improve value for money. The contractual arrangements for maintaining and renewing the railways are a matter for Network Rail and its customers.

School Transport

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the recommendations to his Department from the School Travel Advisory Group; and what progress has been made towards their implementation in each case. [99768]

Mr. Jamieson: The recommendations of the "School Travel Advisory Group are set out in the "School Travel Advisory Group Report 1998–1999". Copies of the report have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

The recommendations for my Department were for school travel issues to be included in local transport plans; better road safety education; improved enforcement of speed, parking and other traffic regulations; better cycle storage facilities and lockers at schools; affordable bus travel for all children in compulsory education; and special training for bus drivers working with children.

We have asked local authorities to include a school travel strategy, explain how they will work with individual schools to develop school travel plans (STPs) and include targets for reducing the number of children who travel to school by car in their local transport plans. To help local authorities we have provided 57 bursaries to enable them to employ staff to work with schools to develop STPs, and a further 17 for them to employ staff to work jointly with schools and workplaces. Since May 2001 we have been providing up to five days of free site-specific consultancy advice to schools wanting to develop a STP.

We have published free best practice guidance on developing and implementing STPs for both local authorities and schools and a school travel resource pack for schools. (These and other resources are also available on our web site at http://www.localtransport/schooltravel/index.htm). We have held free seminars to disseminate these guidesand to promote partnership working between local highway authorities, Healthy Schools co-ordinators, School Sport co-ordinators, bus operators and others.

To improve child road safety we have published a range of booklets for children and the child road safety pages of our web site include lesson plans for primary and secondary school teachers designed to tie in with the national curriculum; these can be found at http://wuav.databases.dtt.gov.uk/lessonpians/. We are also spending £10 million over five years for local authorities to pilot a network of child pedestrian training schemes in deprived areas.

To reduce child deaths and injuries we have asked local authorities to pay particular attention in preparing their local road safety strategies to roads around schools and the routes children use to get to school; we have asked them to plan specific measures such as 20 mph zones with traffic calming and safe crossing places if traffic calming is not appropriate.

In recent local transport plan settlements we have allocated increased levels of funding to local authorities for small-scale schemes including road safety and programmes to encourage walking and cycling; these can include the provision of lockers and secure cycle parking. We have also set up the Cycling Projects Fund, to which schools can apply for funding for cycle routes, lockers and secure cycle parking.

We have included best practice guidance on setting up successful operator and local authority discount schemes for children on buses in our best practice guidance for increasing bus use for journeys to school and we also included workshops on how to encourage and work with bus operators successfully in our school travel seminars.

In order to improve relationships between bus drivers and young people we commissioned a training programme for bus drivers. New European standards have been established for the knowledge drivers must have before obtaining a licence to driver a bus or a coach. These include the driver's responsibility in respect of the safety and comfort of passengers including children and the appropriate material has been added to Driving Standards Agency publications.

Secure Stations

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library a list of stations which have Secure Station status. [99778]

Mr. Jamieson: The list of the 170 stations currently accredited under the Secure Stations Scheme has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Traffic (East Lancashire)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of likely traffic flows in East Lancashire following completion of the Bingley bypass. [100044]

Mr. Jamieson: I have asked the Chief Executive, Tim Matthews, of the Highways Agency to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Tim Matthews to Gordon Prentice dated 3 March 2003:

I have been asked by the Transport Minister, David Jamieson, to reply to your recent parliamentary question asking what assessment has been made of likely traffic flows in East Lancashire following completion of the Bingley Bypass.

An assessment was carried out ten years ago to calculate the movement in traffic patterns caused by a series of bypass and improvement schemes on the A650, A629 and A65 which were at that time in the National Roads Programme. This showed that the impact on the East Lancashire network would be small. Clearly this assessment was based on data that is now out of date. Following the 1997–98 Roads Review it was decided not to proceed with many of the schemes, but the A650 Bingley Relief Road scheme remained in the roads programme.

I can confirm that no specific assessments have been carried out which looked at the impact of the completed A650 Bingley Relief Road scheme on traffic flows in East Lancashire.

If you require any further information, please contact Peter Scally, the Highways Agency Project Manager for the A650 Bingley Relief Road scheme. He can be contacted on 0113 283 6488 or you can e-mail him at peter.scally@highways.gsi.gov.uk

Work Placements

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many university students his Department and associated agencies have supported or sponsored with a work placement in the last year; what his policy is on work placements; what plans he has to develop such schemes; and what his policy is on paying their university fees. [98535]

Mr. Jamieson: In 2002, my Department organised centrally five summer work placements.

Placements arranged are available to individuals through formal schemes:

the Cabinet Office Fast Stream Summer Development programme—aimed at ethnic minority graduates and undergraduates;

Workable—an organisation which arranges work placements for disabled graduates and undergraduates; and

the Windsor Fellowship—aimed at ethnic minority undergraduates.

My Department is keen to offer placement opportunities through these schemes and will continue to work in partnership with the organisations to encourage able individuals to consider the civil service as a career.

For students on work placements, my Department's policy is not to pay university fees. However, whether the organisations with whom we work pay them, is a matter for them.

MINISTER FOR WOMEN

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Minister for Women what discussions she has had with the Home Office and the Department for Health regarding the availability of health care for female asylum seekers and refugees at dispersal areas. [98073]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 24 February 2003]:* I have had no discussions with the Home Office and the Department of Health regarding the availability of health care for female asylum seekers and refugees at dispersal areas.

Domestic Violence

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Minister for Women what discussions she has had and plans to have with the Home Office about the central collection of statistics regarding domestic violence. [99047]

Ms Hewitt: Domestic violence is a serious and abhorrent crime accounting for a quarter of all violent crime. Currently, any incidents of this crime are recorded through the British Crime Survey and the Police Crime Statistics.

Within these Police Crime Statistics, domestic violence is not a separate category and incidents are recorded across a range of crimes. As a consequence, it can be difficult to identify the prevalence of this serious crime.

I am in correspondence with my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary on this issue.

Public Appointments

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Minister for Women how many women have attended regional seminars by the Women and Equality Unit on attracting women to public appointments; and if she will make a statement. [99042]

Ms Hewitt: 848 women attended the eight regional seminars. In addition, five national seminars took place, targeted at specialist female audiences. In total, 1,328 women, from diverse backgrounds, attended the 13 seminars.

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Minister for Women if she will make a statement on the publication of the Cabinet Office report, "Public Bodies 2002". [99043]

Ms Hewitt: I welcome the publication of "Public Bodies 2002", as announced by the Cabinet Office on 31 January 2003. Although the number of women holding public appointments has remained static at 34 per cent., the figures published are as at March 2002, and therefore do not reflect any changes due to activity since March 2002. I welcome the news that the proportion of those from minority ethnic backgrounds and those with disabilities have increased (from 4.8 per cent. to 6.2 per cent. and from 1.5 per cent. to 3.3 per cent. respectively).

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Minister for Women if she will make a statement on the regional seminar series hosted by the Women and Equality Unit in attracting women to public appointments; and if she will make a statement. [99045]

Ms Hewitt: The national outreach campaign to encourage more women to apply for public appointments included a series of regional seminars and events targeted at specific audiences. The seminars aimed to increase awareness among women, to provide support and to help women realise their potential. On-the-day evaluation showed that 91 per cent. of those attending reported that they were now more likely to apply for an appointment.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Algeria (Controlled Goods)

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the controlled goods which have been granted export licences for use in Algeria for each month since September 2001. [99145]

Nigel Griffiths: I refer the hon Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Moore) on 6 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 389W–390W.

Benefit Claimants

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) how quickly disabled people will be able to change designated individuals authorised to collect benefit payments on their behalf from post offices when card accounts come into operation; [100450]

(2) what plans she has made for assisting disabled people to use the new PIN number key pads for card accounts in post offices when accessing benefits; [100447]

(3) what the procedure is for benefit claimants changing designated individuals to collect payments on their behalf when their carer changes. [100449]

Mr. Timms: This is a matter which falls within the day-to-day responsibility of Post Office Ltd. I have therefore asked the chief executive to reply direct to the hon. Member.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what financial assistance her Department gave to the Greater London Assembly in 2002; and for what projects. [95847]

Alan Johnson: No financial assistance was given to the London Assembly in 2002.

Employers Liability Insurance

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the Office of Fair Trading report on Employers Liability Compulsory Insurance will be published. [100244]

Nigel Griffiths: The Office of Fair Trading is conducting a fact finding study of the UK Liability Insurance Market, including Employers Liability Compulsory Insurance (ELCI). The timing of the study is a matter for the OFT, but I understand that a report is planned for publication in spring 2003. Further details of the OFT study are available at http://www.oft. gov.uk/ market + investigations/investigations/insurance.htm.

The Government are simultaneously carrying out a review specifically of the operation of the ELCI system, led by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and involving other Government Departments, including the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI). Officials working on the ELCI review are also working closely with OFT and the two pieces of work are being conducted to a similar timetable. Further details of the ELCI review are available at www.dwp.gov.uk/publications/dwp/2002/ health-safety/eli-review/index.htm.

Energy Policy Consultation

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she will publish a summary of the responses to the consultation on energy policy. [99674]

Mr. Wilson: The energy White Paper consultation process consisted of two main strands, public consultation and strategic stakeholder consultation.

Three methods were used in consulting the public: focus groups, deliberative workshops, and a touch screen questionnaire used at the BBC Tomorrow's World roadshows in Birmingham, London, Cardiff and Glasgow, and also made available via the DTI website. The results of the public consultation were published on 10 October 2002.

Stakeholders were invited to comment on a variety of themes including security of supply, climate change, international issues, energy efficiency and energy supply and distribution. A summary of the results were published on 27 November 2002.

The consultation results are on the DTI website at http://www.dti.gov.uk/energy/developep/.

Environmental Impact Assessment (North Sea)

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what environmental impact assessment process is in place in respect of oil and gas exploration and production activities in the North Sea. [99795]

Mr. Wilson: Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) became a formal requirement for all offshore oil and gas activities in March 1999, following the introduction of the Offshore Petroleum Production and Pipe-lines (Assessment of Environmental Effects) Regulations 1999. All new developments, and significant exploration and production activities that could have an adverse impact in the receiving environment, require a full EIA that includes consultation with statutory bodies and a period of public notice. Other activities are also assessed to confirm that a full EIA is not required. Activities are additionally considered under the Offshore Petroleum Activities (Conservation of Habitats) Regulations 2001.

Fair Trade Products

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her policy is on the purchase, for departmental use, of fair trade products. [99290]

Ms Hewitt: Departmental policy is to promote the purchase of fair trade products. However, this is set against the background of the need to obtain best value for money, the EC procurement rules and the Department's objectives. Within these guidelines, the Department is committed to supporting ethical trading wherever possible. For example, the Department's catering contractor to its London restaurants makes available fair trade tea and coffee to staff.

Fireworks

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when her Department will publish the firework injury statistics for November 2002; and what plans she has to collect year-round firework injury statistics. [98716]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The firework injury statistics are currently being finalised and it is our intention to publish them by the end of March. I have no plans to collect them year -round.

Hospitality

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what hospitality has been offered at public expense in the last 12 months by each Minister in her Department to outside interest groups, broken down by *(a)* restaurant, *(b)* recipient and *(c)* cost in each case; [99497]

(2) what criteria Ministers in her Department use when determining whether to offer hospitality in restaurants to interest groups at public expense; and if she will make a statement; [99496]

(3) how often Ministers in her Department have received hospitality in restaurants from outside groups. [99572]

Ms Hewitt: All offers of hospitality are made in accordance with published departmental guidance on financial procedures and propriety, based on the principles set out in 'Government Accounting'. The giving and receiving of hospitality is conducted fully in accordance with the guidance set out in the Ministerial Code, and Guidance on Contacts with Outside Interest Groups including Lobbyists. The detailed information requested is not held centrally, and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

House Building

Matthew Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what schemes are in place to increase the number of people in house building professions. [99397]

Mr. Wilson: The Construction Industry Training Board is taking the lead in increasing recruitment into the construction industry. This includes the needs of the house building sector. The Ambition Construction scheme was launched in 2001 with joint CITB and DWP funding to train and place New Deal clients in skilled jobs directly relevant to house building.

In recognition of the importance of this issue to the future health of the industry, the Strategic Forum for Construction has set targets for recruitment and retention in its agenda (as set out in its report "Accelerating Change"). In addition, the Strategic Forum is also looking to improve the productivity of the construction industry through integrated team working and through offsite fabrication which will in turn increase the ability of the industry to meet the demands—both in terms of quality and quantity—of its clients. The Department is working with the Strategic Forum and others, to deliver this agenda.

Manufacturing Investment

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on levels of manufacturing investment. [100085]

Alan Johnson: The level of manufacturing investment as a proportion of manufacturing output in the fourth quarter of 2002 was 9.7 per cent.

Recent difficulties faced by manufacturing are largely the result of the global slowdown, which began in 2001, and increased uncertainty and lower confidence in global conditions have led firms to postpone investment projects.

We are taking action to help manufacturers facing difficult conditions through the Government's Manufacturing Strategy we have developed in partnership with industry. The macroeconomic framework we have established, with low inflation and sound public finances, is creating the right underlying conditions to encourage businesses to increase investment when the global economy recovers.

Minister for Science

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry pursuant to her answer of 24 February 2003, ref 98996, if she will list the official visits to *(a)* companies, *(b)* universities and *(c)* organisations by (i) the Minister for Science and (ii) the Chief Scientific Adviser in each of the last three years. [99985]

Ms Hewitt: Unfortunately this information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

North Sea Oil and Gas Industry

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on her plans to work with Norway to make more efficient the administration of the North Sea oil and gas industry. [99198]

Mr. Wilson: The report of the UK-Norway North Sea Co-operation Workgroup, published in August 2002, sets out a number of recommendations to facilitate closer co-operation and sharing of best practice. This includes a Framework Treaty—designed to facilitate a wide range of potential future trans-boundary oil and gas developments—and a single North Sea suppliers' database. Further work is also proposed to assess the need for a pan-industry Code of Practice.

The report shows clearly that improved co-operation in the recommended areas can improve North Sea effectiveness and will unlock value through lowering investment and operating costs, through economies of scale and through improved safety standards.

A Pilot /Kon-Craft Implementation Group is working closely with relevant parties to ensure that the recommendations of the report are fully realised.

Oil/Gas Reserves

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate she has made of *(a)* oil and *(b)* gas reserves on the UK mainland. [99791]

Mr. Wilson: Current estimates of remaining reserves (proven and probable) on the UK mainland are *(a)* 18.7 million tonnes of oil and *(b)* 4,400 million cubic metres of gas. The gas reserves include associated gas from onshore oil fields, dry gas from onshore gas fields and mine gas from mine vent fields.

Part-time Workers

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she is taking to accord part-time workers the same employment rights as those in full-time work. [100480]

Alan Johnson: Part-time employees in the UK enjoy the same statutory employment rights as full-timers, including protection against unfair dismissal, unlawful deductions from wages and adverse treatment on grounds of sex, race or disability. In addition, the Part-time Workers (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations 2000 require them to be treated no less favourably in their terms and conditions than comparable full-timers, unless different treatment can be justified on objective grounds.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has had with European Union colleagues regarding a Europe-wide approach to securing parity of employment rights between part-time workers and full-time workers. [100482]

Alan Johnson: None. The European Directive on part-time work already requires member states to ensure that part-time workers are treated no less favourably in their terms and conditions of employment than comparable full-timers.

Post Office Closures

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many consultation exercises have been undertaken by Post Office Counters concerning proposed closures of post offices since 1 July 2001; and how many such exercises have resulted in the intention to close being withdrawn. [99916]

Mr. Timms: Proposals for post office closures under the urban network reinvention programme are put out to public consultation in accordance with the code of practice agreed with Postwatch. Final decisions on closure, after consideration of representations received, are an operational matter for Post Office Ltd. I have therefore asked the Chief Executive to reply direct to the hon. Member.

Recycling

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if electricity produced from processes involving the recovery of clean recyclable materials will be classed as a renewable source of energy. [99372]

Mr. Wilson: Under Directive 2001/77/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 September 2001 on the promotion of electricity produced from renewable energy sources in the internal electricity market, "renewable energy sources" are defined to include "biomass," and "biomass" is defined to include "the biodegradable fraction of industrial and municipal waste."

In the UK, the renewables obligation includes the biodegradable fraction of waste only if it is converted to electricity through advanced conversion technologies such as pyrolysis, gasification and anaerobic digestion.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE

Electoral Commission (Expenditure Limit)

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the hon. Member for Gosport, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission what change is planned to the Departmental Expenditure Limit of the Electoral Commission for 2002–03. [100321]

Mr. Viggers: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the Electoral Commission DEL for 2002–03 will be increased by

£1,294,000 from £20,117,000 to £21,411,000. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are set out in the following table:

£000

	Resources	*Capital*
Change	694	600
New Del	20,460	951
Of which:		
Voted	20,460	951
Non-voted	0	0

The change in the resource element of the DEL arises from the take up of end year flexibility for 2001–02 in respect of the payment of policy development grants (£514,528) and public awareness costs (£179,457) and for capital and refurbishment and other fit out costs of Commission offices.

Although the funds had been budgeted for and approved in respect of this expenditure for the year 2001–02, the Commission was unable to make full use of the case provision.

In order to incorporate the carry over into the Electoral Commission's voted resources for 2002–03, the Speaker's Committee, having consulted the Treasury, agreed on 24 February to lay a spring supplementary supply estimate.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development pursuant to her answer of 14 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 564, on HIPC, what response the UK Government has had from the World bank and the IMF to the call for their approach to topping up to be widened to provide additional relief for HIPC countries with unsustainable debts. [99686]

Clare Short: We continue, with others, to press the IMF and the World Bank to change the rules on topping up, so that any HIPC country facing unsustainable debts which has demonstrated its commitment to poverty reduction and economic reform can qualify for this additional debt relief. At discussions on topping up, to be held in the IMF and the World bank boards over the next month we shall press to move this issue forward. We are working with others to achieve this. Topping up is calculated on a case by case basis, depending on the assessment of each country's economic prospects.

Hospitality

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) how often Ministers in her Department have received hospitality in restaurants from outside groups, broken down by *(a)* restaurant, *(b)* recipient and *(c)* cost in each case; [99592]

(2) what criteria Ministers in her Department use when determining whether to offer hospitality in restaurants to interest groups at public expense; and if she will make a statement; [99516]

(3) what hospitality has been offered at public expense in the last 12 months by each Minister in her Department to outside interest groups. [99517]

Clare Short: All offers of hospitality are made in accordance with published departmental guidance on financial procedures and propriety, based on the principles set out in Government Accounting. The giving and receiving of hospitality is conducted in accordance with the guidance set out in the Ministerial Code, and Guidance on Contacts with Outside Interest Groups including Lobbyists. The detailed information requested is not held centrally, and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Meningitis (Nigeria)

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what action her Department has taken in response to the meningitis epidemic in *(a)* the Nigerian state of Zangara and *(b)* Burkina Faso. [99348]

Clare Short: Epidemic Meningococcal Disease (EMD) is a contagious disease responsible for high number of deaths throughout the world, with up to 50 per cent. of victims dying in the developing world. Of those who survive, between 10–20 per cent. suffer permanent brain damage.

Epidemic meningococcal disease imposes its greatest burden on a group of 18 countries that form the so-called "African meningitis belt", stretching from Ethiopia to Senegal. Epidemics can be devastating, sometimes flaring up to as many as 100,000 cases in a very short period of time. In the absence of mass vaccination, an epidemic can last for several months, draining enormous resources, overwhelming hospitals and disrupting routine care.

The strategy to control a meningitis epidemic has three components: early detection of outbreaks, emergency mass immunization campaigns, and careful case management.

The Government of Nigeria has not approached DFID to respond to the epidemic In Zamfara. However DFID supports WHO in all its work. This includes the valuable efforts to support Governments tackle epidemics. WHO are involved in supporting the Government of Burkina Faso in their surveillance and clinical service delivery. In addition, WHO has been working with GSK (vaccine manufacturer) and Gates Foundation to ensure adequate quantities of appropriate vaccine.

Police Training

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the competitive tendering arrangements that culminated in the award of a contract to the Rameses Group for police training in the Balkans region; and if she will make a statement. [99447]

Clare Short: DFID has contracted Atos KPMG Consulting as implementing agents for the United Kingdom Government's programme of assistance to enhance access to justice in the Balkans. The Rameses Group is subcontracted by Atos KPMG Consulting as project director for activities concerned with community-based policing and community safety in Serbia. The Atos KPMG Consulting contract was awarded following an open tender process in line with EC procurement directives.

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development whether *(a)* the OSCE and *(b)* another international agency was invited to fulfil the work in relation to police training in the Balkans that was subsequently contracted to the Rameses Group. [99449]

Clare Short: After an open tender procedure in line with EC procurement directives, DFID contracted Atos KPMG Consulting as implementing agents for the United Kingdom Government's programme of assistance to enhance access to justice in the Balkans. DFID was not involved in the subcontracting arrangements with the Rameses Group.

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development for what purposes the Rameses Group has been awarded a contract in relation to police training in the Balkans region; and if she will make a statement. [99450]

Clare Short: As part of the UK Government's support for enhancing access to justice in the Balkans, the Rameses Group has been sub-contracted by our implementing agents, Atos KPMG Consulting, as project director for activities concerned with community based policing and community safety in Serbia.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Age Diversity

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when her Department completed its diagnostic review for compliance with the Government's Code of Practice for Age Diversity in Employment; and what changes her Department plans to make following the review. [99423]

Dr. Howells: The Department is committed to equal opportunities for all and had already incorporated age into its equal opportunities policy prior to the "Winning the Generation Game" report. The Department is in the process of implementing the final recommendation of the report, with the introduction of a flexible retirement age for those between 60 and 65 years.

Hospitality

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what her Department's hospitality budget *(a)* is in 2002–03 and *(b)* was in each of the last three years; and how much was left unspent at the end of each financial year. [99585]

Dr. Howells: The hospitably budgets for financial years 1999–2003 are laid out in the following table, together with the expenditure incurred on hospitality in financial years 1999–2002.

It should be noted, however, that from 2001–02 onwards the hospitality budgets were subsumed into a larger budget which included conferences and committees, as part of the Department's move to a delegated budgeting system. It is now for Directors to decide how much they would spend on each element, and consequently it is not possible to state a figure for the hospitality element of the aggregated budget and any underspend against that budget element, although it is still possible to identify the expenditure incurred on hospitality.

Year	*Budget*	*Expenditure*	*Underspend/ (overspend)*
1999–2000	51,941	32,533	19,408
2000–01	33,190	50,891	(17,701)
2001–02	—	28,657	—
2002–03	—	—	—

Museums and Galleries

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport in which museums and galleries sponsored by her Department free admission has been introduced; what the annual cost of free admission in lost income from charging was in each year since its introduction; how many more visitors have attended these museums and galleries since free admission was introduced; and if she will make a statement. [99839]

Dr. Howells: Free admission for all to those museums and galleries sponsored by my Department that previously charged was introduced on 1 December 2001 (22 November 2001 for the V&A). In addition, free admission to the National Coal Mining Museum for England was introduced on 8 April 2002, while the Imperial War Museum of the North in Trafford, Manchester opened free on 2 July 2002. In the first 12 months of this policy (1 December 2001 to 30 November 2002), these museums received an additional 5.4 million visitors, an increase of 70 per cent. The cost of free admission to these museums is £28.1 million in 2002–03. Details of the museums involved and of the growth in visitors are given in the following table.

Institution	*Increase in visitors in the first 12 months of free entry*[1]
Imperial War Museum (Lambeth Road)	68,887
Victoria and Albert Museum (free entry introduced 22 November 2001)	1,245,674
Natural History Museum	1,336,457
Science Museum (South Kensington)	1,321,316
National Railway Museum (York)	197,596
National Coal Mining Museum for England (free entry introduced 8 April 2002)	[2]30,307
Museum of London	85,972
Royal Armouries (Leeds)	59,676

Institution	Increase in visitors in the first 12 months of free entry[1]
Royal Armouries (Fort Nelson, Portsmouth)	25,650
National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside	545,195
Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester	183,878
Imperial War Museum of the North, Trafford, Manchester	Opened July 2002
Total	5,408,548

[1] 1 December 2001–30 November 2002.

[2] For the first eight months of free entry since April 2002.

The growth in visitors is a magnificent testament to the success of the Free Access policy and to the important role of our sponsored museums and galleries.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what proportion of visitors to the national museums and galleries sponsored by her Department were visiting the UK from overseas in each year since 1997; and if she will make a statement. [99840]

Dr. Howells: The proportion of overseas visitors to the national museums and galleries sponsored by my Department since 1998–99 is set out in the following table. Figures for 1997–98 are not available.

	1997–98	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01	2001–02
Number of overseas visitors	n/a	10,700,480	10,869,483	10,439,938	10,029,208
Percentage of total visitors	n/a	45	45	36	33

The fall in the proportion of overseas visitors comes against the background of an increase in the total number of visitors from 24 million in 1997–98 to 30 million in 2002–03. It reflects the substantial increase in visitors from the UK attributable to the introduction of full free access.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the total cost to public funds of free admission to Department of Culture, Media and Sport sponsored museums and galleries was in each year from 1999–2000 to 2003–04 (planned); and if she will make a statement. [99841]

Dr. Howells: The total cost of public funding to facilitate free admission to the former charging museums and galleries sponsored by my Department is set out in the following table. Visitors to these museums and galleries increased by 70 per cent. from 1 December 2001 to 30 November 2002, the first full year of free admission for all.

£million

	1999–2000[1]	2000–01[2]	2001–02[3]	2002–03[4]	2003–04[5]
Total	4.2	8.02	13.8	28.1	29.3

[1] Free children from 1 April 1999.

[2] Free children; free over 60s from 1 April 2000.

[3] Free children and over 60s; free to all from 1 December 2001.

[4] Free to all.

[5] Free to all.

Figures have been rounded to nearest £0.1 million.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many visits there were to the British Museum in each year since 1996–97; what changes in the charging regime there have been since 1997; and if she will make a statement. [99844]

Dr. Howells: The British Museum has maintained free admission to its permanent collections since its establishment in the 18th Century. The number of visitors since 1996–97 is as follows.

Year	Total visitors
1996–97	5,525,000
1997–98	5,185,000
1998–99	4,768,578
1999–2000	4,645,565
2000–01	4,687,920
2001–02	4,810,000
April 2002 to January 2003	3,875,140

I welcome the British Museum's commitment to maintaining free access to its permanent collections.

National Lottery

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much money has been distributed by the National Lottery in each year since it was established; and if she will make a statement. [99837]

Mr. Caborn: The following table, which is based upon information supplied to us by the distributing bodies for the National Lottery awards database, shows how much money has been awarded in each calendar year since 1995.

£

Year	Total amount awarded
1995	983,462,994
1996	1,715,239,248
1997	2,380,203,184
1998	1,099,279,154
1999	1,548,634,247
2000	1,242,308,699
2001	1,310,094,043
2002	1,094,087,046

Note:

Although the first National Lottery draw was in November 1994, Lottery award were made from 1995 onwards

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the take-up of National Lottery grants in the Yeovil constituency since 1997. [99842]

Mr. Caborn: According to the information supplied to us by the distributing bodies for the National Lottery awards database, the Yeovil constituency has been awarded a total of £6,974,537 in lottery funding between 1 January 1997 and 31 January 2003.

Playing Field Sales

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will place in the Library a statement of the *(a)* criteria applied and *(b)* circumstances surrounding the playing fields which have been sold since May 1997, and those in relation to which sale was prevented. [100329]

Mr. Caborn: Sport England is a statutory consultee on all planning applications which affect playing fields. I am arranging to place in the Libraries of both Houses, an annex which summarises the legislative measures and criteria applied to proposals to dispose of school playing fields and to planning applications affecting playing fields since 1997.

The collation centrally of information detailing the circumstances surrounding both playing fields sold and those for which sale was prevented would incur disproportionate costs.

Rugby Union

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will meet a delegation from Rotherham Rugby Football Union Club to discuss rugby union. [100242]

Mr. Caborn: I met representatives of Rotherham Rugby Football Union Club at the Don Valley Stadium, Sheffield on 31 October 2002. We discussed matters relating to the rugby club and general rugby union issues.

I would be happy to meet representatives of the club again to discuss any further developments at Rotherham.

Tourism

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many visitors made visits to British tourist attractions in 2002. [99684]

Dr. Howells: Statistics for the number of visits made to visitor attractions in 2002 will not be available until the summer of 2003.

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what estimate she has made of expenditure on non-domestic tourism in 2002. [99755]

Dr. Howells: Expenditure by overseas visitors to the UK in 2002 is estimated to have been £11.8 billion.

Welsh Fourth Channel

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much her Department spent on the Welsh Fourth Channel Authority (S4C) in each year since 1980–81; how many viewers the channel had in each of the last 10 years; what plans there are to transfer the funding of S4C to the Welsh Assembly; and if she will make a statement. [99838]

Dr. Howells: The Department for Culture, Media and Sport was created in 1992, as the Department of National Heritage. Prior to this, grant payments to S4C were made by the Home Office. The amount of grant in aid paid under S4Cs statutory funding formula since 1980–81 was:

£ million

Year	*Amount*
January 1981 to March 1982	2.009
Year ending 31 March	
1983	18.107
1984	25.119
1985	28.000
1986	31.900
1987	33.880
1988	40.000
1989	45.453
1990	51.738
1991	55.902
April to December 1991	43.666
Year ending 31 December	
1992	58.571
1993	55.705
1994	57.971
1995	63.942
1996	68.416
1997	72.223
1998	74.895
1999	77.134
2000	78.218
2001	80.745
2002	81.468

The total number of viewers, based on average weekly reach, for each of the last 10 years for which figures are available, was:

Year	[1]*Total number of viewers*
1992[2]	1,470,720
1993	1,531,860
1994	1,547,040
1995	1,559,240
1996	1,594,560
1997	1,544,320
1998	1,491,450
1999	1,533,260
2000	1,432,020
2001	1,268,370

[1] Viewing figures are based on the average over the year of the total number of viewers in Wales aged four or over who watched S4C for at least three consecutive minutes during the course of each week.

[2] The figure for 1992 is based on data for September to December, due to a temporary HTV viewing panel being used for the period January to August 1992.

Source:

Broadcasters' Audience Research Board figures provided by S4C.

The Government has no plans to transfer the funding of S4C to the Welsh Assembly.

DEFENCE

International Terrorism (British Forces)

16. **Mr. Roy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if he will make a statement on his plans for the

future involvement of British forces in combating international terrorism. [99865]

Mr. Hoon: The Armed Forces have a significant role in the Government's counter-terrorist strategy, which includes the capability to take military action in self-defence when necessary. The New Chapter of the Strategic Defence Review set out the types of tasks which they might be directed to undertake, in terms of prevention, deterrence, coercion, disruption and destruction.

Army Numbers

18. **Bob Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the approved strength of the Army is; and how many vacancies there are. [99867]

Dr. Moonie: As at 1 January 2003, whole Army strength stood at 102,800, representing a shortfall of 4,180 personnel against the current requirement.

United Kingdom armed forces full time strengths and trained requirement figures are contained in the Defence Analytical Services Agency's Tri-Service Publication 3, which is available in the Library of the House.

Deepcut Barracks

20. **Mr. Eric Illsley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if he will make a statement on the deaths which have occurred at Deepcut barracks. [99870]

Mr. Ingram: The deaths of Privates Sean Benton, Cheryl James, Geoff Gray and James Collinson at Deepcut remain the subject of an ongoing investigation by the Surrey police. The Army has always co-operated fully with the police in the course of their enquiries, and continues to do so. It would be inappropriate to comment on the specific circumstances surrounding the deaths, or hold any further inquiry, whilst current investigations continue.

Defence Fire Service

Ms Julia Drown: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what plans he has to pursue a private finance initiative for the Defence Fire Service. [99866]

Mr. Ingram: The Airfield Support Services Project is seeking to achieve the most viable and cost effective solution for the provision of airfield support and wider fire services to the Ministry of Defence world wide without compromising operational effectiveness. It includes both PPP and in-house solutions.

The bids will be compared against a taut public sector comparator. Main Gate approval is planned for October 2003 while the eventual decision will be based on best value for money—no decisions have been taken at this stage.

Red Dragon Project

Mr. John Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, when he next plans to visit the Defence Aviation Repair Agency at RAF St. Athan to discuss the Red Dragon project. [99868]

Mr. Ingram: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence currently has no plans to visit DARA. However, I visited DARA at RAF St Athan last week to launch the Red Dragon project.

Aircraft Carriers

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what he calculates to be the taxpayer's liability under the contractual arrangements he is proposing between his Department, BAE Systems and Thales for the construction of the two new aircraft carriers. [98580]

Mr. Ingram: We are now in discussion with BAE Systems and Thales UK to confirm that the proposed alliance partnership offers the best means of delivering the future aircraft carrier programme and will be capable of operating effectively. We also intend that the Ministry of Defence should take up a formal role within the Alliance. The precise roles and responsibilities of the alliance members will be determined through negotiations. At the conclusion of the negotiations, theMinistry of Defence will be required to demonstrate that it has completely bounded the Government's liabilities under the terms of the prime contract, which we plan to award in the spring of 2004.

Richard Ottaway: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on progress in negotiations on construction of the new aircraft carriers. [99860]

Mr. Ingram: Discussions with BAE Systems and Thales UK on the Alliance structure for the aircraft carrier programme are progressing. Although I cannot go into the detail of the commercial negotiations, both companies are engaging positively in the process and we anticipate moving forward to the next phase of assessment work in the next few months.

Battlegroup Thermal Imaging

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reason the in service date for battlegroup thermal imaging has been delayed; and if he will make a statement. [99799]

Mr. Ingram: The in service date for Battlegroup Thermal Imaging (BGTI) equipment has been revised so that it better aligns with the conversion programme for Bowman. This minimises the disruption to front line units as vehicles that are to receive both BGTI and Bowman will only need to be withdrawn from service for a single period, during which both conversions will be completed.

Biological/Chemical Weapons

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy to withdraw British troops from military action where an ally uses *(a)* biological and *(b)* chemical weapons. [99669]

Mr. Hoon: Our NATO allies are State Parties to both the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC) and have renounced the use of such weapons.

Bowman

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether *(a)* operational field trials for Bowman, and *(b)* the conversion of the first unit to the communications system, are on target to take place this year; and if he will make a statement. [99800]

Mr. Ingram: Yes. We continue to make good progress on the Bowman tactical communications system programme in our aim to introduce it to all three Services as planned between 2004 and 2007. The 1st Battalion Royal Anglian Regiment will begin its Bowman conversion and training programme in July 2003 in advance of operational field trials in November 2003.

Domestic Security

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many reservists participated in domestic security operations in January and February. [99859]

Mr. Ingram: Domestic security in the United Kingdom is primarily the responsibility of the Home Office and the police. Military assistance is, however, provided on a regular basis and contributes significantly towards the security of United Kingdom citizens. No reservists were engaged in providing such assistance during January or February this year.

European Defence Concept

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans there are for the development of a European strategic concept for defence. [100286]

Mr. Hoon: NATO provides the collective defence mechanisms for its Members including those in Europe. This is articulated in the Alliance's Strategic Concept which was agreed at the Washington Summit in 1999. There are no plans to produce an alternative strategic concept.

Fire Dispute

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Royal Navy *(a)* ships and *(b)* personnel are being diverted from other operational tasks to ensure their availability for fire fighting duties in the event of a firefighter strike; and if he will make a statement. [99851]

Mr. Ingram: Almost 3,300 Royal Navy and Royal Marines personnel were used on fire-fighting duties during the last fire-fighters strike. A significant number of personnel used were taken from ships and submarines undergoing periods of refit or maintenance or which had returned from operational deployments and were not programmed to undergo further deployments. Only two of the ships from which personnel had for fire-fighting duties were prevented from undertaking operational tasks.

With the exception of 330 people currently undergoing training, the individuals used for fire-fighting have now returned to their units where, whilst remaining on standby for fire-fighting duties, they have resumed their normal duties. As the Honourable Member will appreciate, the Royal Navy's involvement in fire-fighting duties has not prevented the deployment of a substantial Task Force to the Gulf.

Logistical Support (Gulf)

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the logistical operations in support of the deployment of UK forces to the Gulf. [99861]

Mr. Ingram: Logistic operations in support of the deployment of United Kingdom forces to the Gulf are fully effective. They will result in an equivalent quantity of material to that supplied for the last Gulf conflict being deployed to theatre in half the time. The deployment has required a significant strategic air and sea lift, and is supported by arrangements to sustain and manage continuing supply chain activity.

Nuclear Weapons

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with the USA about their obligations under the Non Proliferation Treaty to *(a)* limit the spread of nuclear weapons and *(b)* actively move towards the elimination of US nuclear weapons. [99672]

Mr. Hoon: I have had no such discussions. However, Ministry of Defence officials have regular contact with their counterparts from the United States and several other states on issues relating to the non proliferation treaty.

Primary Casualty Receiving Ship

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the decision to use a conventional procurement route for the primary casualty receiving ship was made; and if he will make a statement. [99801]

Mr. Ingram: The decision was taken at the end of 2002. Our working assumption had been that some form of private sector involvement would be beneficial. A series of studies, however, demonstrated the absence of a private market for such a ship's facilities and also that a service-provision contract would be incompatible with the operational requirement.

Remote Influence Minesweeping System

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much money was invested in the Remote Influence Minesweeping System before the project was cancelled in April 2002; why the project was cancelled; and if he will make a statement. [99802]

Mr. Ingram: Expenditure on the Remote Influence Minesweeping System amounted to some £2.7 million at out-turn prices. The investment afforded us valuable insights which will be exploited in the future.

The decision to discontinue the project was taken as part of the normal departmental planning process. The same process has freed up resources for a programme of incremental technology insertion which will enhance the Royal Navy's mine countermeasures capabilities from the middle of the present decade and will include, early in the next decade, a remote capability.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Alcohol Abstinence Orders

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many alcohol abstinence orders have been given in each of the last five years. [98176]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave on 25 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 416W.

Angel Group

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what allowances, benefits and support of other kind other than tax credits is provided to employees of the Angel Group and its subsidiaries from public funds. [99704]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 27 February 2003]:* The National Asylum Support Service (NASS) has a contract with the Angel Group to provide accommodation for asylum seekers. The contract price does not include specific payments to the Angel Group in relation to allowances, benefits and other support for its staff.

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will list the contracts which the Angel Group and its subsidiaries have agreed with local authorities for the provision of services for asylum seekers and other specific groups of individuals; [99687]

(2) if he will list the contracts let and the dates on which they were let by his Department and its agencies to the Angel Group and its subsidiary companies; [99702]

(3) for how many contracts the Angel Group and its subsidiary companies applied to the Home Office and its agencies, and with what results, in the last five years. [99705]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 27 February 2003]:* The National Asylum Support Service (NASS) has one contract with the Angel Group which was signed on 3 April 2000 and runs for five years. I am unable to supply information on tenders submitted by the group during the last five years since this is commercial in confidence. NASS is not aware of any contracts the Angel Group has entered into with local authorities and other agencies regarding the provision of services for asylum seekers.

Asylum Centre (Daedalus Site)

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the Minister of State responsible for immigration will visit Lee-on-the-Solent to meet residents in advance of any decision being taken on whether to apply for planning permission for an asylum centre at the Daedalus site. [100158]

Beverley Hughes: I can confirm that I will visit Lee-on-the-Solent to hear the views of local people. The timing of that meeting will be determined in consultation with Gosport borough council.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. James Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps his Department takes to ensure that protection and assistance is given to children separated from their parents who are seeking asylum. [100314]

Jacqui Smith: I have been asked to reply.

Unaccompanied, asylum-seeking children as supported by councils with social services responsibilities, in accordance with the duties laid on them by the Children Act 1989. The Act draws no distinction between such children and other children in need.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seeker applications by country of origin are awaiting first interview after a period of *(a)* three months or less, *(b)* six months or less, *(c)* 12 months or less, *(d)* two years or less and *(e)* more than two years after lodging their case. [99095]

Beverley Hughes: The available data for the number of applications are based on the total number awaiting initial decision, rather than the number awaiting an interview. The number of cases awaiting an initial decision has been at a lower level during 2002 than for 10 years. There were 40,800 applications awaiting an initial decision at the end of December 2002.

The Government's emphasis has been on delivering the challenging targets set for deciding the majority of new substantive asylum applications within two months. Older cases are progressed as resources allow. 76 per cent. of new substantive applications (excluding withdrawals and third country cases) received in the period April to September 2002 had initial decisions made and served within two months. The Home Office's Public Service Agreement target for 2002–03 is 65 per cent.

Information on the number of asylum applications awaiting an initial decision is published quarterly on the Home Office website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html. The next publication will be available from 30 May and will cover the first quarter of 2003 (January to March).

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many dispersal areas there are in England and Wales to which asylum seekers are sent. [99409]

Beverley Hughes: There are currently 71 cluster areas in England and Wales to which asylum seekers may be dispersed. Asylum seekers have been dispersed to 62 of these areas.

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of asylum seekers have failed to comply with reporting requirements while awaiting *(a)* an initial decision and *(b)* removal. [99712]

Beverley Hughes: Information on the number of people who fail to comply with reporting requirements while awaiting initial decision, appeal decision or removal is not available and could be obtained by examination of individual case-files only at disproportionate cost.

Asylum Support

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average *(a)* set-up costs and *(b)* weekly revenue costs of units of accommodation supplied by local authorities under NASS arrangements are; and what projections he has made of annual increases in those costs. [99077]

Beverley Hughes: I am unable to give details of prices paid by the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) for accommodation due to its commercially sensitive nature. Any disclosure of this kind could have an adverse effect on future contract negotiations for accommodation.

Each contract has within it a contract price review mechanism that is linked to the rate of inflation and it is expected that any increases of this type will be offset by efficiency savings made within NASS as a whole. NASS is committed to maintaining unit costs at current levels or below representing an annual efficiency saving equivalent to inflation.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to hold *(a)* tribunals, and *(b)* interview sessions in the region of dispersal for asylum seekers dispersed under NASS arrangements. [99096]

Beverley Hughes: Asylum appeals to an adjudicator are listed into hearing centres around the country based on location of the appellant. Cases are listed by postcode in accordance with a list agreed with the judiciary. When fixing the venue, reasonable travelling distance, ease of journey and waiting times in the area are all taken into account to enable the case to be dealt speedily. The Immigration Appeal Tribunal's workload arises in consequence of hearings at the adjudicator tier. Each claimant is offered the facility to attend a hearing in the same region of the country in which the Adjudicator hearing took place. The claimant's representative may ask for a hearing elsewhere or in London.

Substantive asylum interviews are normally conducted in Croydon and Liverpool taking account, where possible, of the geographical location of the applicant. We have no current plans to extend these arrangements to other NASS dispersal regions.

Case Decision

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to take a decision on the case of Mr. O Z of Aylesbury (reference Z1023416); and if he will make a statement. [99558]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 27 February 2003]:* I am pleased to inform the hon. Member that a decision has now been taken on the case of Mr O Z. The Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) will write to Mr. O Z very shortly to inform him of the outcome of his case.

Correspondence

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letter dated 29August 2002 from the hon. Member for North Southwark and Bermondsey, with regard to the Crime Reduction Fund. [99022]

Mr. Denham: I refer the hon. Member to my letter to him of 14 February on the crime reduction programme.

Crime (Derbyshire)

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many offences were recorded by the Derbyshire police force in each year since 1997, broken down by category; [98897]

(2) how many crimes there were, by major category, in Derbyshire, in each year since 1997. [98902]

Mr. Denham: The number of offences recorded by Derbyshire Constabulary, broken down by main offence group for the years requested, are given in the table.

There was a change in counting rules for recorded crime on 1 April 1998, which would have the tendency to increase the number of offences counted. Numbers of offences before and after this date are therefore not directly comparable.

Recorded crime: number of offences recorded, by main offence groups—Derbyshire

	1997[1]	*1998–99*[2]	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Violence against the person	5,340	8,509	10,019	9,236	9,946
Sexual offences	528	556	546	527	651
Robbery (total)	396	504	584	773	1,029
Burglary (total)	17,302	16,720	15,536	14,997	16,564
Theft and handling of stolen goods	34,668	36,742	36,023	33,780	37,022
Fraud and forgery	1,308	4,200	4,739	4,670	4,719
Criminal damage	13,387	14,316	15,207	14,997	17,125
Drugs offences	[3]—	1,689	1,659	1,374	1,635
Other offences	863	1,223	1,337	1,314	1,150
Total	73,792	84,459	85,650	81,668	89,841

[1] Recorded on a calendar year basis.

[2] The number of crimes recorded in that financial year using the expanded offence coverage and revised counting rules which came into effect on 1 April 1998.

[3] Before 1 April 1998 the only drug offence recorded was "trafficking", which was included in the Other Offences group.

Note:

Numbers of recorded crimes will be affected by changes in reporting and recording. Derbyshire adopted the principles of the National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS) on 1 April 2002, when it was introduced across England and Wales, and therefore will not have affected the 2001–02 figures given in the table.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* incidents of domestic violence were reported and *(b)* deaths resulting from domestic violence there were in (i) West Derbyshire and (ii) Derbyshire in each year since 1997. [98896]

Mr. Denham: Recorded crime figures are generally collected by legal definitions. Recorded crimes involving domestic violence will be recorded in a range of offences, along with offences which have been committed in other circumstances. Numbers of offences involving domestic violence are therefore not available from recorded crime data.

The British Crime Survey (BCS) produced data by region for 2001/02, on the number of crimes of domestic violence recorded by the survey. However it does not provide information on domestic violence at a local level nor for individual police force areas.

The BCS estimates that there were 188 crimes of domestic violence per 10,000 adults in the East Midlands region for interviews conducted in the 2001–02 financial year. This compares with 149 incidents per 10,000 adults in England and Wales as a whole.

The BCS can also provide trend information on the number of incidents of domestic violence for England and Wales.

Number of BCS incidents of domestic violence, 1997 to 2001–02 BSC interviews England and Wales

(Thousands)

	1997	*1999*	*2000*	*2001–02 BSC interviews*
Domestic violence	826	787	514	635

The BCS figures are estimates only. They are derived from a sample and so are subject to sampling error. Also, the context of the face-to-face BCS interview means the estimates are certain to be underestimates of the true extent because some respondents may be unwilling to reveal experience of domestic violence to interviewers. Results from the 1996 BCS self-completion module on domestic violence were published in Home Office Research Study No. 191, deposited in the Library. This more confidential approach to measurement revealed that the proportion of women that were victims in the last year of domestic assault was over three times higher than in the main BCS.

Details of homicides by constituency are not held centrally. The available information relates to currently recorded offences of homicide (murder, manslaughter and infanticide) where the relationship of the victim to the suspect includes current or former spouse, cohabitant or lover. Information for England and Wales is as follows.

Number of homicides by current or former spouse, cohabitant or lover, England and Wales

Year	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
	131	104	112	127	148

As at 8 October 2002; figures are subject to revision as cases are dealt with by the police and by the courts, or as further information becomes available.

Crime Indicators

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the key performance indicators used by his Department to measure crime. [99346]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 26 February 2003]:* The Home Office targets for the period April 2003 to March 2006 were published in the Home Office Targets Delivery Report on 13 February 2003.

The target relating specifically to crime is as follows: Reduce crime and the fear of crime; improve performance overall, including the gap between the highest crime, Crime Disorder and Reduction Partnership Areas and the best comparable areas; and reduce:

vehicle crime by 30 per cent. from 1998–99 to 2004;

domestic burglary by 25 per cent. from 1998–99 to 2005;

robbery in 10 Street Crime Initiative areas by 14 per cent. from 1999–2000 to 2005;

and maintain that level.

A report on progress against the Department's crime targets set in 2000 was published in the same document.

Fylingdales

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he plans to give additional support to North Yorkshire police as a result of the upgrading of the Fylingdales radar station. [97773]

Mr. Denham: Since 11 September, police forces have been able to bid for additional funding for various counter terrorist activities, including the protection of vulnerable sites. Given the nature of the funding, publicity is not being given to the activities it covers or what has been allocated to individual forces.

HMP/YOI Holloway

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he next plans to visit HMP/YOI Holloway; and if he will make a statement. [100231]

Mr. Blunkett: My hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central, the Minister for Prisons, (Hilary Benn) visited Holloway on 23 September last year. My ministerial colleagues and I have an extensive programme of prison visits. I have recently indicated to the Governor of Holloway that I intend to visit that prison in the course of the next few months.

Human Trafficking

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures are in place to encourage victims of human trafficking to collaborate with Home Office immigration and the appropriate law enforcement agencies; and if he will make a statement. [99444]

Beverley Hughes: The White Paper "Secure Borders, Safe Haven: integration with diversity within modern Britain"—published in February 2002—sets out our general proposals for assisting the victims of trafficking.

We are developing a pilot scheme under which victims of trafficking who are willing to come forward to the authorities and help law enforcement against organised criminals will be offered protection and a range of support services such as counselling and health checks in safe accommodation

We will also consider, in the light of individual circumstances, whether it would be appropriate to allow such victims who have co-operated to remain here. Where they are to return home, we will assist them to do so, providing them with initial counselling, ensuring that they have suitable accommodation to return to, and providing help to enable them to re-integrate into their own community and find employment.

We are in discussion with the voluntary sector about the provision of these services.

We plan to make an announcement about the start of the pilot shortly.

Iraq

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Iraqi nationals from *(a)* the area of Iraq controlled by Saddam Hussein and *(b)* the Kurdish autonomous area have applied for asylum in the United Kingdom in each of the last 12 months. [100028]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 28 February 2003]:* 14,940 asylum applications were lodged by Iraqi nationals in 2002 (excluding dependants). Asylum applications are recorded by nationality only and therefore it is not possible to say how many of the applicants originated from particular areas within Iraq. The number of those who applied by the claimed region of origin would therefore only be available by examination of individual case records at disproportionate cost. Information on the region from which applicants claim to originate may not be reliable as some applicants may falsely claim to come from areas where there is conflict.

Information on asylum applications is published quarterly. The next publication will cover the first quarter of 2003, and will be available from 30 May 2003 on the Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate web site at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Mr. Walter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what preparations he has made for the internment of Iraqi nationals in the event of a war with Iraq. [99691]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 27 February 2003]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Salisbury (Robert Key) on 30 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 1041W.

Leave to Remain

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Polish nationals, married to UK citizens, have applied for leave to remain in the UK in each of the last 12 months. [99986]

Beverley Hughes: The latest available statistics are given in the following table.

The information relates to grants of leave to remain on the basis of marriage to a British citizen in each month in 2001. Data for 2002 will be published later this year.

Information on the number of applications lodged or the number of such applications which have been refused are not currently available.

Nationals of Poland granted leave to remain[1] on the basis of marriage to a British citizen, by month, 2001

January	25
February	25
March	30
April	30
May	35
June	30
July	25
August	30
September	30
October	30
November	15
December	10
Total	315

[1] Excludes the outcome of appeals.

Data rounded to the nearest 5

Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the cost of the Office of the Immigration Services Commission in 2002–03 to *(a)* the Home Office and *(b)* other public bodies; and how many (i) public bodies, (ii) private bodies and (iii) private individuals are (A) registered with and (B) registered exempt from registration with the OISC. [98811]

Beverley Hughes: The Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC) is solely funded by Home Office grant-in-aid and was allocated £3,442,466 for 2002–03.

As of 25 February 2003, the OISC had registered 206 immigration advisers acting for profit and exempted 992 acting not for profit. All those registered are private bodies, of which 32 are individuals. Of those exempted, eight are public bodies and the remainder are private bodies (for example charities and voluntary groups) of which six are individuals.

Passport Agency

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for each of the last 12 months the average time a passport application took to be processed by the UK Passport Agency; and if he will make a statement. [98721]

Beverley Hughes: During the last 12 months the United Kingdom Passport Service (UKPS) has delivered passports effectively and securely.

Despite higher than anticipated demand levels for part of the year, UKPS maintained fully satisfactory turnaround times for the delivery of passports. The breakdown of average passport turnaround times on a month by month basis from February 2002 until January 2003 is as follows.

Month	*Days*
February	3.36
March	3.77
April	3.86
May	4.15
June	4.53
July	4.80
August	5.12
September	3.89
October	3.45
November	3.09
December	2.87
January	3.01

These figures are calculated from the date of the mailbag in which the application is received and ending on the date the passport is printed. In this operational year (April 2002 to March 2003), UKPS is processing 99.46 per cent. of all straight-forward properly completed applications within 10 days.

Police

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* police officers and *(b)* police support staff there were in England in each year from 1980–81 to 2003–04 (planned); and if he will make a statement. [99807]

Mr. Denham: Information about the number of police officers and civilian staff for each force can be found in the Annual Reports of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary until 1995–96. Thereafter the data can be found in Home Office Statistical Bulletins on police strength in England and Wales from March 1998 until March 2002, copies of which are in the Library.

Figures for March 2003 are not yet available. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has set a target for there to be 130,000 officers by March 2003 and 132,500 officers in 2004, but he has not set targets for numbers of civilian staff. Forces are on track to achieve the targets for police officer numbers.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the increase in police numbers is in 2003–04, broken down by *(a)* Crime Fighting Fund and *(b)* locally funded additional officers; and if he will make a statement. [99902]

Mr. Denham: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has set a target for there to be 132,500 officers in 2004.

Apart from ring-fenced provision for a particular purpose, such as the Crime Fighting Fund, decisions about police budgets and the allocation of resources, including planned numbers of officers, are matters for Police Authorities and Chief Officers. Details of force plans for locally funded increases in strength are not collected centrally.

Under the Crime Fighting Fund (CFF) recruitment initiative police forces in England and Wales have been allocated 9,000 recruits over and above the forces' previous recruitment plans for the three years to March 2003. Funding for these officers will continue in 2003–04.

The CFF will continue in 2003–04 and we will fund 75 per cent. of the cost of new recruits through CFF rather than 100 per cent. as in the past three years. Funding should be sufficient for forces to recruit a further 650 police officers through this fund.

Police Authorities

Dr. Pugh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what would the financial effect be of a 20 per cent. reduction in the grant allocated to police authorities in each authority in the metropolitan counties. [92317]

Mr. Denham: Police Grant, Revenue Support Grant and National Non-domestic Rate income for the six provincial metropolitan police authorities increased by 4.9 per cent for 2003/04.

The financial effect of a notional reduction of 20 per cent. in the 2003–04 grant would be as follows:

£ million

Police authority	*Grant 2003–04*	*Effect of 20 per cent.*
Greater Manchester	380.8	-76.1
Merseyside	240.5	-48.1
Northumberia	214.3	-42.9
South Yorkshire	172.3	-34.5
West Midlands	386.5	-77.3
West Yorkshire	289.4	-57.8
Total	1,683.6	-336.7

In contrast to the question, Central Government spending in the Police Service will increase by 16 per cent. in cash terms over the Spending Review 2002 period.

Radioactive Material

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what means are used to detect the illegal passage of radioactive, weapons-grade material through British ports. [98851]

Mr. Blunkett: Since the terrorist attacks in the United States on 11 September 2001, the Government has conducted a thorough comprehensive review of all preventative measures to counter terrorism, including the possibility to which the hon Member refers. This has included trials at UK ports of equipment designed to detect such material. For security reasons, I do not want to disclose further details of these measures.

Wheeler Report

Laura Moffatt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the report on airport security by Sir John Wheeler; and if he will make a statement. [99607]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

The position remains as described in my answer of 3 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 659W, to my hon. Friend. Having considered carefully the findings and recommendations in Sir John Wheeler's report, the Government were happy to accept in principle all of them. The Department for Transport and the Home

Office are working closely together on implementation, involving as appropriate the police, other control agencies and the aviation industry.

Work Permits

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the reciprocity in work permit arrangements between the Isle of Man and the UK. [99281]

Beverley Hughes: There are no reciprocal arrangements in place between the Isle of Man and the UK in relation to work permits. The holder of a work permit issued by the Home Office would need to obtain separate authority from the Isle of Man's authorities before undertaking work in the Isle of Man, even if that work was incidental to their employment in the United Kingdom.

Xhevat Murtezi

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when a decision will be made on the case of Xhevat Murtezi of Westcliff-on-Sea, ref M1010576 and ML/LAB 19953. [99144]

Beverley Hughes: I am pleased to inform the hon. Member that a decision has now been made on Mr. Murtezi's case. The Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) will be writing to him very shortly to inform him of the outcome.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Areas of Special Scientific Interest

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which areas of special scientific interest in Northern Ireland are recognised by the European Union. [99354]

Angela Smith: In my response to PQ 438, I listed the sites in Northern Ireland classified under the Birds Directive and proposed for designation under the Habitats Directive. These sites have also been declared as Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSIs) under the Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands (Northern Ireland) Order (1985), with the exception of those sites, or parts thereof, which are subtidal. A full list of ASSIs is published on the website of the Environment and Heritage Service—www.nics.gov.uk/ehs. As ASSIs are declared under domestic legislation, there is therefore no provision for their recognition by the European Union.

Belfast City Airport

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether Government grants will be made available for further development of Belfast City Airport. [99415]

Angela Smith: There are no plans to make grants available for any further development of this airport.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will commission an independent environmental and economic assessment into the proposed development of Belfast City Airport. [99416]

Angela Smith: The Department of the Environment has not received any proposals for development at Belfast City Airport. Any necessary assessments will be considered in the context of any specific proposals put forward to Planning Service by the Belfast City Airport authority.

David Burnside: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the local community consultations procedures being followed in assessing noise consequences of growth in airport operations at Belfast City Airport. [99565]

Angela Smith: The Department for Regional Development is currently undertaking a review of noise pollution at all Northern Ireland airports.

During the course of this study the Department has actively sought to involve and consult local residents' groups as well as the Belfast City Airport Forum.

The Department has also shared with interested groups the findings of the initial scoping study and plans to make the final report available in due course.

David Burnside: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to change the night flights curfew of 9.30 pm to 6.30 am at Belfast City Airport; and whether changes require a full public inquiry. [99566]

Angela Smith: The Department of the Environment's Planning Service and Belfast City Airport have a planning agreement, signed in January 1997, under Article 40 of the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991. This agreement includes controls on operating hours to restrict scheduled flights to between 06.30 hours and 21.30 hours. The agreement makes provision for delayed flights to arrive between 21.30 hours and 23.59 hours.

To date, no formal approach has been made to Planning Service seeking provision to be made for later flights. The need for a public inquiry is a matter for consideration in the light of any changes proposed to operations at Belfast City Airport.

David Burnside: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what estimate he has made of whether Belfast City Airport will exceed 1,500,000 seats for sale on Scheduled Flights in the next 12 months as specified in Article 40 Agreement dated 22 January 1997 between Belfast City Airport, Short Bros and the Department of Environment for Northern Ireland. [99567]

Angela Smith: The Department of the Environment's Planning Service and Belfast City Airport have a planning agreement, signed in January 1997, under Article 40 of the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991. This agreement includes limits on the number of seats offered for sale on scheduled flights to 1,500,000 seats in any 12-month period.

I am not in a position to estimate whether Belfast City Airport will exceed the allocated 1,500,000 seats for sale on Scheduled Flights in the next 12 months.

The agreement requires Belfast City Airport to provide information to Planning Service in order to maintain compliance with the agreement. To date, the information has indicated that the number of seats offered for sale has been within the limit specified. The latest monitoring figures available from Belfast City Airport indicate that the number of seats offered for sale up to 30 September 2002 was 1,479,267 and is therefore close to the 1,500,000 limit. Planning Service has requested information from Belfast City Airport regarding numbers of seats offered for sale for the 12 months up to 31 January 2003, and projected figures for seats offered for sale for the next 12 months taking account of any change to services currently being negotiated.

Planning Service officials have arranged to meet with representatives from BelfastCity Airport shortly to discuss the position.

David Burnside: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether the Department of Regional Development has been consulted by the authorities at Belfast City Airport with regard to the hours of operation of that airport. [99975]

Angela Smith: This is a matter for the Department of the Environment and not the Department for Regional Development. However, no formal approach has been made to either Department.

David Burnside: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what procedures the Department of the Environment intends to follow on receipt of an application to amend the present planning agreement governing the operation of Belfast City Airport. [99976]

Angela Smith: It should be noted that the Department of the Environment has not yet received any request from Belfast City Airport to alter the terms of the existing agreement.

Upon receipt of an application to amend the present planning agreement governing the operation of Belfast City Airport, the Department of the Environment would examine the application on its merits. In particular, this would involve considering whether a new planning agreement was required and the most appropriate method of dealing with the application, including the possibility of holding a public inquiry.

Education Spending

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how this year's allocation to the normal spending plans for the Department of Education is to be distributed between *(a)* state controlled schools, *(b)* Catholic maintained schools, *(c)* integrated schools and *(d)* Irish medium schools; [99414]

(2) how much is to be invested in *(a)* state controlled schools, *(b)* Catholic maintained schools, *(c)* integrated schools and *(d)* Irish medium schools as part of the recently announced investment in Northern Ireland. [99413]

Jane Kennedy: The education element of the recently announced £2 billion investment amounted to £300 million. This is the largest ever announcement of capital investment projects in the Northern Ireland schools estate. It includes £263.1 million in relation to 43 major works projects with the balance comprised of:

Capital costs of development of grant maintained integrated schools, subject to the achievement of full grant maintained status—£16.2 million

Removal of temporary classrooms—£10 million

Schools disabled access—£10 million

Youth Service—£l million.

The major works projects announced for initial release are based on an assessment of educational need and not on school sector. The capital value, including public-private partnership projects, is as follows:

£ million

	Capital value
(a) Controlled schools	135.1
(b) Catholic maintained schools	25.2
(c) Grant maintained integrated schools	7.2
(d) Irish medium schools	Nil
(e) Other voluntary schools (including voluntary grammar)	95.6

Included in the above schemes are projects, which have been funded from the Department of Education's normal baseline resources, amounting to:

	£ million
(a) Controlled schools	11.9
(b) Catholic maintained schools	12.0
(c) Grant maintained integrated schools	5.1
(d) Irish medium schools	Nil
(e) Other voluntary schools (including voluntary grammar)	24.0

The total value of the projects funded from the Department of Education baseline funds amounts to £53 million, of which £39 million is attributed to 2004–05 and 2005–06 financial years.

Health and Social Care Groups

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the operation of Local Health and Social Care Groups in Northern Ireland. [99337]

Mr. Browne: All 15 Local Health and Social Care Groups (LHSCGs) have been established. 195 of the management board positions have been filled and chairs have been elected for each group. Unfortunately, GPs have not to date taken up their places on the groups. However, I recently met with GP representatives and further discussions are planned with the profession.

In their first year of operation, LHSCGs have been attending to internal organisational and personal development needs. They have also been making important decisions about primary care development in their respective areas. They have been allocated more than £ 3million, recovered from the administrative costs following the ending of GP fundholding, to address service gaps which they have identified in primary care, and have provided a boost to the basic primary care infrastructure through the purchase of much needed equipment for health centres, GPs and other primary care providers.

Health Improvement Authority

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the *(a)* setting-up costs and *(b)* estimated running costs for the proposed Northern Ireland Health Improvement Authority are. [99307]

Mr. Browne: The new authority will be known as the Health and Personal Social Services Regulation and Improvement Authority.

The setting-up costs are estimated to be £250,000.

The running costs are estimated to be around £5.6 million per annum.

Hospital Staff (Assaults)

David Burnside: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* verbal and *(b)* physical assaults on staff in general hospitals were reported in Northern Ireland in the last 12 months. [99563]

Mr. Browne: The information is not available in the format requested. However, in the financial year 2001–02, a total of 2,438 assaults (both verbal and physical) were reported in all health and personal social services trusts.

Imported Waste

David Burnside: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what legislation is in place on the importation of waste from another country. [99972]

Angela Smith: The Transfrontier Shipment of Waste Regulations 1994 make provision for the supervision and control of shipments of waste within, into and out of the European Community.

David Burnside: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much waste has been imported from the Republic of Ireland to Northern Ireland by council area in each of the last three years; and what revenue was generated by each council area as a result. [99973]

Angela Smith: The import of waste within, into and out of the European Community is governed by the Transfrontier Shipment of Waste Regulations 1994. Under that legislation, district councils are the competent authorities for the purposes of recording the import of waste. My Department has no statutory responsibility in this area.

David Burnside: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps are being taken to ensure that EU legislation regarding the importation of waste is complied with; and if he will list instances when this legislation has been breached in the last 12 months. [99974]

Angela Smith: The movement of waste within, into and out of the European Community is governed by the Transfrontier Shipment of Waste Regulations 1994. Under that legislation, District Councils are the competent authority for the purposes of recording the import and export of waste, and the provision of powers of enforcement are a matter for HM Custom and Excise. My Department has no statutory responsibility in this area.

Independent Financial Advice

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people are registered in Northern Ireland to provide independent financial advice; how many companies provide independent financial advice in Northern Ireland; how many people are employed in the independent financial advice sector in Northern Ireland; how many companies provide financial advice in Northern Ireland; and how many employees work in the financial advice sector in Northern Ireland. [99324]

Ruth Kelly: I have been asked to reply.

The Financial Services Authority (the FSA) tell me there are approximately 100 firms of independent financial advisers based in Northern Ireland, plus 29 authorised professional firms (lawyers or accountants which are directly regulated by the FSA).

There are also a number of professional firms who may give financial advice who are regulated by the designated professional bodies, such as the Law Society of Northern Ireland, rather than by the FSA.

In addition, many firms based elsewhere in the United Kingdom provide financial advice, whether or not independent, in Northern Ireland. The FSA do not have detailed employment data of the type sought.

Insurance Premium Increases

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will establish an independent review of the effect upon business in Northern Ireland of recent increases in insurance premiums. [99321]

Mr. Pearson: The current difficulties in the insurance market are having a particularly adverse impact on a predominantly Small and Medium Enterprise based economy such as that in Northern Ireland. The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment has conducted a business survey on insurance costs. It indicates an average increase of 28 per cent. in 2001 and further an average increase of 49 per cent. in 2002 particularly (but not exclusively) in employers' liability and property insurance. The results of this survey will be fed into Government's current review in which my officials are participating. The outcome of the review will be reported to Ministers by the end of March 2003.

Mental Health Staff (Assaults)

David Burnside: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* verbal and *(b)* physical assaults on staff in mental health and learning disability centres in Northern Ireland were reported in the last 12 months. [99564]

Mr. Browne: The information is not available in the format requested. I would refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given today to question reference 99563.

Office of Fair Trading Report

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what representations he has received from his policy directorate concerned with consumer affairs on the implications for community-based pharmacists in Northern Ireland, the publication of the Office of Fair Trading report on "The Control of Entry of Regulations and Retail Pharmacy Services in the UK"; and if he will make a statement; [99349]

(2) whether he has plans to make Beta Interferon more widely available in Northern Ireland for treatment of multiple sclerosis; [99317]

(3) whether he has made representations to the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on the recent report by the Office of Fair Trading on "The Control of Entry Regulations and Retail Pharmacy Services in the UK"; and if he will make a statement; [99302]

(4) what assessment he has made of the impact on the recommendations in Investing for Health 2002 of the report by the Office of Fair Trading on "The Control of Entry Regulations and Retail Pharmacy Services in the UK"; [99301]

(5) what discussions he has held with the General Consumer Council (Northern Ireland) on the implications of the report by the Office of Fair Trading on "The Control of Entry Regulations and Retail Pharmacy Services in the UK" for a balanced and sustainable provision of state services; and if he will make a statement; [99299]

(6) how many representations he has received on the Office of Fair Trading report on "The Control of Entry Regulations and Retail Pharmacy Services in the UK"; and if he will make a statement; [99303]

(7) if he will commission a study into the economic impact of the Office of Fair Trading report on "The Control of Entry Regulations and Retail Pharmacy in the UK", with particular reference to the effects upon the rural economy; and if he will make a statement. [99300]

Mr. Browne: The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety is considering the report of the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) carefully, together with the implications the report has for patients and users in both rural and urban areas, for the pharmacy profession and for Health Service policy as a whole.

The Department has invited views and is meeting key interests to hear their reactions to the report in order to help inform the Government response. As of 27 February, 14 written responses have been received. In addition, the Department sought the views of key interests, including community pharmacy, the Health Service, patient groups and the General Consumer Council, at a seminar on 20 February 2003. A written submission from the General Consumer Council is expected shortly.

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry is responsible for co-ordinating a response across Government to reports of this type. Competition and consumer matters are reserved to the United Kingdom Government in Westminster. However, Health Service pharmacy policy is a devolved matter and the regulations imposing controls on pharmacies are a matter for Ministers in each country. They will consider and determine how they wish to respond. That will be reflected in the overall Government response. The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry is therefore working closely with Health Departments and other Government Departments to make sure that Government's response to the report takes account not only of competition and consumer interests, but wider public policy objectives.

In considering the OFT report and its recommendations, the Department will take fully into account the views of all interests. It is too early to say what further economic or other information might be required.

Police Service of Northern Ireland

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how frequently PSNI officers have to undergo sessions to re-classify in relation to firearms; how often Belfast International Airport police officers have to re-classify; and if he will make a statement. [98567]

Jane Kennedy: PSNI officers attend at least twice, preferably three times, a year for refresher firearms training on each respective weapon in which they are qualified.

Following the Key Point Survey at Belfast International Airport in 1993, RUC/PSNI Training Branch recommended that Belfast International Airport police should re-classify in relation to firearms on a basis similar to that of RUC/PSNI officers.

TREASURY

Advertising Campaigns

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to his answer of 27 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 603W, on advertising campaigns, what the costs within the publicity campaign were of *(a)* advertising, *(b)* national and regional public relations and promotions, *(c)* the soaps, *(d)* partnerships, *(e)* the Census and *(f)* Wales counts; and if he will make a statement. [96200]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from L. Cook to Mr. Matthew Taylor, dated 3 March 2003:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question, pursuant to the answer of 27th January, Official Report, column 603W, on advertising campaigns, what the costs within the publicity campaign were of *(a)* advertising, *(b)* national and regional public relations and promotions, *(c)* the soaps, *(d)* partnerships, *(e)* the Census and *(f)* Wales counts. (96200)

For the Office for National Statistics to answer the question above, the costs are not readily available by the categories requested and can only be supplied at disproportionate cost. Please find below the publicity costs for 1997–2003.

Office for National Statistics Publicity costs (£)

1997/1998	3,000
1998/1999	3,00
1999/2000	3,000
2000/2001	*1,272,000
2001/2002	*1,770,000
2002/2003	(estimated) *140,000

Source:
Office for National Statistics

* The large increase in expenditure since 2000/01 is a result of costs associated with the census of population in 2001.

For National Savings and Investments, parts c, d, e and f of the question are not applicable. Information on advertising and national and regional public relations and promotions costs are given in the tables below.

National Savings and Investments advertising costs (above and below the line) (£)

1997/1998	6,186,272
1998/1999	3,922,000
1999/2000	9,962,000
2000/2001	6,191,592
2001/2002	7,779,000
2002/2003	(estimated) 8,174,000

Source:
National Savings and Investments

National Savings and Investments national and regional public relations and promotions costs (£)

1997/1998	135,897
1998/1999	166,340
1999/2000	268,060
2000/2001	243,014
2001/2002	369,449
2002/2003	(estimated) 470,000

Source:
National Savings and Investments

Asbestos

Mr. Heald: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the compatibility of the arrangements for tax relief on work done to remove asbestos with the EU state aid rules. [98658]

Dawn Primarolo: Tax relief for work done to remove asbestos falls within the rules on relief for remediation of contaminated land. It is a general measure as it is available to all payers of Corporation tax and it is not therefore a state aid.

Bank of International Settlements

Mr. David Kidney: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the governance of the Bank of International Settlements, with particular reference to *(a)* member control and *(b)* access to information. [99987]

Ruth Kelly: The Treasury has no formal responsibilities with respect to the governance of the Bank for International Settlements. The membership is comprised mainly of Central Banks. The Bank of England is a shareholder and the Governor of the Bank of England is on the Board of the BIS. Further information about the BIS is publicly available on its website (www.bis.org), in the annual report (published on 8 July) and from the BIS library and archive.

Centenarians (Independent Living)

Mr. MacDougall: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people aged 100 and over are living independently in the UK. [100558]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. John MacDougall dated 3 March 2003:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question concerning the number of persons aged 100 and over who are living independently in the UK. (100558)

The number of persons aged 100 and over living in the United Kingdom in mid-2001 was estimated to be 8,100. It is not possible to say what proportion of these persons are living independently.

Debt Management Office

Mr. Archie Norman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the *(a)* total number of staff and *(b)* number of inspection staff employed by the Debt Management Office was in each year since 1997. [100212]

Ruth Kelly: The DMO was established on 1 April 1998; the average number of staff employed, on a full time equivalent basis, in each of the financial years since then has been:

1998–99—24

1999–2000—31

2000–01—37

2001–02—51

2002–03[1]—73

The DMO does not employ inspection staff. However, it does employ staff engaged in audit and compliance functions; the numbers of these, on a full time equivalent basis[2], have been:

1998–99—1

1999–2000—1

2000–01—1

2001–02—2

2002–03—3

[1] The average number of staff over the 1 April 2002 to 27 February 2003 period. The increase in 2002–03 reflects the integration of the Public Works Loan Board and the Commissioners for the Reduction of the National Debt into the DMO on 1 July 2002.

[2] Until 2000–01 the audit function was carried out by HM Treasury internal audit staff and not DMO staff employees.

Earnings Statistics

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the average earnings of *(a)* male, *(b)* female and *(c)* male and female at age 60 were in each year since 2000. [99155]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Howard Flight, dated 3 March 2003:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question about the average earnings of people aged 60 in each year since 2000. (99155)

The table below shows the average annual earnings for males and females aged 60 in April for each of the years specified. The data are from the New Earnings Survey and apply to people on adult rates whose pay was not affected by absence.

Average annual earnings for people aged 60

£

	Men	*Women*	*All persons*
April 2000	22,797	14,811	20,971
April 2001	22,943	15,998	21,314
April 2002	23,574	16,216	21,817

EU Heads of Government Meeting

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his Department's approach to the discussion of economic reform and the goal of full employment at the forthcoming EU Heads of Government meeting in Brussels. [100097]

Ruth Kelly: The Lisbon agenda of economic reform will be discussed at the forthcoming EU Heads of Government meeting in Brussels. The Treasury is fully engaged in discussion of economic reform within ECOFIN and its relevant associated committees.

Euro

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent discussions on the single European currency there have been during meetings between Government officials and representatives of the Isle of Man. [99753]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given by the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 11 February 2002, columns 104–05W.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will make a statement on the implications of the report "Meeting the Challenge: Economic Reform in Europe" for the likelihood of entry to the euro; [100096]

(2) whether UK entry to the euro is conditional upon economic reform in Europe. [100095]

Ruth Kelly: The determining factor underpinning any Government decision on membership of the single currency is the national economic interest and whether the economic case for joining is clear and unambiguous. A comprehensive and rigorous assessment of the five economic tests will be made within two years of the start of this Parliament.

Fair Trade Products

Norman Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his policy is on the purchase, for departmental use, of fair trade products. [99222]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer the Chief Secretary gave to the hon. Member for Brent North (Mr. Gardiner) on 9 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 92W.

Hospitality

Mr. Gray: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what criteria Ministers in his Department use when determining whether to offer hospitality in restaurants to interest groups at public expense; and if he will make a statement; [99586]

(2) what hospitality has been offered at public expense in the last 12 months, by each Minister in his Department to outside interest groups, broken down by *(a)* restaurant, *(b)* recipient and *(c)* cost in each case; [99587]

(3) how often Ministers in his Department have received hospitality in restaurants from outside groups in the last 12 months. [99510]

Ruth Kelly: All offers of hospitality are made in accordance with published departmental guidance on financial procedures and propriety, based on the principles set out in "Government Accounting". The giving and receiving of hospitality is conducted fully in accordance with the guidance set out in the "Ministerial Code", and "Guidance on Contacts with Outside Interest Groups including Lobbyists". The detailed information requested is not held in the form requested, and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Individual Savings Accounts

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what the take up rate was in the last five years of PEPs and TESSAs for individuals earning up to *(a)* £10,000, *(b)* £15,000, *(c)* £20,000, *(d)* £25,000, *(e)* £30,000 and *(f)* over £30,000; [99031]

(2) what the take up rate was for the last five years of PEPs and TESSAs for individuals in each of the income tax bands that applied to earnings at this time; [99030]

(3) What the take up rate for ISAs has been for each year since introduction for individuals in each of the income tax bands that applied to earnings during this period. [99029]

Ruth Kelly: Estimates are not available in the terms specified or for all time periods, but those estimates that are available are contained in the following table.

This compares the holding of TESSAs or PEPs in 1998–99, the last year when subscriptions could be made to these products, with the first three years of ISAs.

The estimates are based on the Family Resources Surveys 1998–99 to 2001–02 and relate to those reporting holding these products, as the Survey does not separately identify those who are subscribing to them in the year. As take-up built during the first three years of ISAs the total number reporting holdings is lower than that suggested from administrative sources, particularly in 1999–2000.

Note that the earnings group 'Less than £10,000' includes individuals with no reported earnings; many in this group will be pensioners.

Percentage of individuals holding a TESSA or PEP in 1998–99 compared with the percentage of individuals holding an ISA in 1999–2000 to 2001–02

Annual earnings (lower limits, £)	*TESSA or PEP 1998–99*	*ISA 1999–2000*	*ISA 2000–01*	*ISA 2001–02*
Less than £10,000	15%	7%	15%	20%
£10,000-£14,999	15%	8%	16%	19%
£15,000-£19,999	17%	9%	18%	22%
£20,000-£24,999	22%	10%	22%	25%
£25,000-£29,999	24%	13%	25%	31%
Over £30,000	33%	14%	31%	37%

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Insurance Tax Premium

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much insurance tax premium was collected in *(a)* the UK and *(b)* Northern Ireland in each of the last five years. [99319]

Ruth Kelly: The total amount of insurance premium tax collected in the UK can be found on the HM Customs and Excise website: www.hmce.gov.uk/about/reports/ann-report/n2.pdf. The total collected for the last five years is as follows:

£million

	Total tax receipts
1997–98	1,044
1998–99	1,245
1999–2000	1,423
2000–01	1,707
2001–02	1,861

Separate data on the amount of insurance premium tax collected in Northern Ireland are not available.

Labour Market Participation

Mr. O'Hara: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what the rates of participation in the labour market were of people aged between *(a)* 18 and 35, *(b)* 35 and 50, *(c)* 50 and 65 and *(d)* 65 and 75, in (i) 1992, (ii) 1982 and (iii) 1973; [100452]

(2) what the participation rate is of people in the labour market aged between *(a)* 18 and 35, *(b)* 35 and 50, *(c)* 50 and 65 and *(d)* 65 and 75. [100451]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Pullinger to Mr. Edward O'Hara, dated 3 March 2003:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Questions about economic activity rates. I am replying in his absence. (100451, 100452)

The table overleaf gives estimates of economic activity rates by age for the three month periods ending May 1984, May 1992 and May 2002. These estimates are from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and are not seasonally adjusted. This information is not available for 1973 and 1982.

Economic activity rates[1] by age

United Kingdom (percentage), not seasonally adjusted

	March to May		
	1984[2]	*1992[3]*	*2002[3]*
All aged 16 and over	62.1	62.9	62.6
16 to 59/64[4]	77.6	78.7	78.2
18 to 34	79.7	80.1	80.1
35 to 49	83.6	85.9	85.0
50 to 59/64[4]	69.8	69.1	70.4
60/65[4]	8.2	8.4	8.7

[1] Total economically active as a percentage of all persons in the relevant age group.

[2] Data not adjusted for the Census 2001 results.

[3] Data adjusted for the 2001 Census results.

[4] Economic activity rates are usually given for the working age population. This is defined as men aged 16 to 64 and women aged 16 to 59. The age groups in this table reflect that definition.

Source:

ONS Labour Force Survey.

Mr. O'Hara: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the projected participation rates of people in the labour market are, given current trends, for the year 2012. [100453]

Ruth Kelly: The Government's projection framework goes up to 2006 and it does not forecast directly participation rates. However, the Treasury's trend output growth projections imply an estimated trend increase in the working age activity rate i.e. labour market participation rate of 0.1 percentage point a year up to Q4 2006. Further details are available in "Trend Growth: Recent Developments and Prospects", published by HM Treasury in April 2002.

Laptop Computers

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many laptop computers were used by *(a)* Ministers and special advisers and *(b)* officials in his Department in each year since 1995; how many were (i) lost and (ii) stolen; what their cost was; and if he will make a statement. [98705]

Ruth Kelly: Current Treasury records simply assign ownership of laptops and other small equipment to Budget centres within the Department, and so a distinction between *(a)* and *(b)* is not made.

Year	*Stock*	*Cost/£*	*Stolen*
< 1995	111	194,030	2
1996	+ 145	299,421	1
1997	+ 59	132,982	3
1998	+ 15	33,967	1
1999	+ 111	221,801	2
2000	+ 135	301,497	1
2001	+ 100	168,543	2
2002	+ 35	69,053	5

Notes:

1. All recorded losses of laptops have been due to theft. The figure for 2002 does not include 16 old and redundant laptops that were removed without authorisation from a temporary stockroom during the move to new accommodation.

2. The totals above indicate acquisitions and do not reflect the actual number in use, which is affected by occasional stock holding and by old equipment being replaced with newer models. At present the number of laptops supported is about 300.

Private Sector Businesses (Forms)

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the forms that his Department requires private sector businesses to complete and return. [98089]

Ruth Kelly: The Treasury does not require private sector businesses to complete and return any forms, although the Debt Management Office, an executive agency of the Treasury, requires the 16 investment banks that act as Gilt-edged Market Makers (GEMMs) to report weekly on their turnover in gilts. This data is then aggregated and sent to the GEMMs so they can assess their gilt market share.

It would be impractical to list all forms the Inland Revenue uses, although Inland Revenue business forms are available on their website: www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk. However, the Inland Revenue database does not differentiate between forms for completion and return and material on guidance for operating PAYE and/or tax credits.

In respect of Customs and Excise the information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

The information with regard to the Office for National Statistics (ONS) is as follows:

Office for National Statistics-Business Inquiries
Survey of British Enterprise Research and Development
Monthly inquiry into the Production Industries
Monthly inquiry into the Distribution and Service Sector
Monthly Stocks inquiry
Annual PROCOM Inquiry
Quarterly PRODCOM Inquiry
Quarterly Stocks inquiry
Quarterly Non Production Stocks
Quarterly Capital Expenditure Inquiry
Quarterly Profits Inquiry
Retail Sales Inquiry
Merchants Inquiry
Quarterly Inquiry into International Trade in Service
Annual Inquiry into International Trade in Service
Annual Film and Television
Corporate Services Price Index
Annual Foreign Direct Investment in the UK
Annual Foreign Direct Investment Overseas
Quarterly Foreign Direct Investment in the UK
Quarterly Foreign Direct Investment Overseas
Motor Vehicle Production Inquiry (Cars)
Motor Vehicle Production Inquiry (Engines)
Quarterly Survey of Financial Assets and Liabilities
Acquisitions and Mergers Inquiry
Quarterly Inquiries into Insurance Companies (QIIC)—Long Term Funds—Transactions in Financial Assets
QIIC-General Funds—Transactions in Financial Assets
QIIC-Long Term Funds—Income and Expenditure
QIIC-General Funds—Transactions in Financial Assets
Annual Inquiries into Insurance Companies (AIIC)—Long Term Funds—Balance Sheet
AIIC-General Funds—Balance Sheet
AIIC-Long Term—Funds Income and Expenditure
AIIC-General Funds—Income and Expenditure
Quarterly Inquiries into Pension Funds—Transaction in Financial Assets
Quarterly Inquiries into Pension Funds—Income and Expenditure
Annual inquiry into Pension Funds—Balance Sheets
Unit Trusts—Assets and Liabilities—Annual
Unit Trust—Transactions—Quarterly
Investment Trusts—Annual Return of Liabilities
Investment Trusts—Quarterly Return of Transactions
Securities Dealers—Overseas Direct Investment—Quarterly
Property Unit Trusts—Assets and Liabilities—Annual
Property Unit Trusts—Transactions—Quarterly
Securities Dealers—Assets, Liabilities and Transactions—Quarterly
Securities Dealers—Income and Expenditure—Quarterly
Monthly Credit Grantors
Monthly Producer Price Index
Monthly Export Price Index
Monthly Wages and Salaries
Quarterly Inquiries into the Distribution and Service Sector
New Earnings Survey
Monthly Import Price Index
Quarterly Inquiry into the Number of Employees in Local Government
Monthly Producer Price Index—Recruitment
Imported Capital Goods
Quarterly Asset Finance Inquiries
Annual Asset Finance Inquiries
Survey onto Business Spending on Capital Goods
Quarterly Dividends Inquiry
Vacancies Inquiry
E-Commence Inquiry
Export Prices Inquiry (Recruitment)
Import Prices Inquiry (Recruitment)
Imported Capital Goods Inquiry (Recruitment)
Annual Business Inquiry Part 1 Employment
Annual Business Inquiry Part 2 Financial
Annual Register Inquiry (1)
Annual Register Inquiry (2)
Monthly Inquiry of Internet Service Providers
Labour Disputes
Inquiries carried out for OGD
Quarterly Oil and Natural Gas
Quarterly Fuels Inquiry
Quarterly Sand and Gravel
Quarterly Concrete Blocks
Quarterly Roofing Tiles
Quarterly Fibre Cement
Quarterly Slate
Monthly Concrete Blocks
Building Materials Inquiry—Annual Ready Mix Concrete—Monthly Bricks
Marine Dredged Sites
Annual Minerals Raised
Electricity Generated Inquiry
Quarterly Electricity
Quarterly Railway Investment Inquiry
Construction Industry Statistics

Stamp Duty

Mr. John Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received about the number of house buyers who have unnecessarily paid stamp duty because of inaccurate information provided by the Inland Revenue relating to post codes; how many people have been affected; and if he will make a statement. [98547]

John Healey: Relief from stamp duty in disadvantaged areas was implemented by this Government on 30 November 2001, exempting from stamp duty all property transactions below £150,000 in around 2,000 of the most deprived areas of the UK. We intend to abolish this cap for non-residential property this year.

Qualifying areas in England, Wales and Northern Ireland are defined in regulations by reference to electoral wards. As with other tax reliefs, the onus is on the customer to claim this relief. To help customers to identify whether they can claim the relief, the Inland Revenue has made available a postcode search facility on its website. The Inland Revenue is aware that there have been some problems with this tool, particularly where properties straddle ward boundaries or are new developments. As soon as the Inland Revenue has become aware of any shortcomings in the system, they have rectified them and any customer who has paid stamp duty and subsequently discovers relief was due may claim a full repayment of the duty with interest from the Inland Revenue. As an indication of the number of people who have not claimed the relief but have subsequently claimed a repayment, the Inland Revenue currently processes around 300 claims for repayment per month.

Suicide

Tim Loughton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many suicides have been recorded in each of the last 10 years for *(a)* males under 18, *(b)* females under 18, *(c)* males over 18 and *(d)* females over 18. [100549]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Tim Loughton, dated 3 March 2003:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question concerning how many suicides have been recorded in each of the last ten years for *(a)* males under 18, *(b)* females under 18, *(c)* males over 18 and *(d)* females over 18.

The most recent available mortality data are for the calendar year 2001. Figures for each year from 1992 to 2001 are given in the table below.

Number of deaths from suicide and injury undetermined whether accidentally or purposely inflicted,[1] by sex, England and Wales, 1992 to 2001[2]

Calendar year	Number of deaths *(a) males under 18*	*(b) females under 18*	*(c) males 18 and over*	*(d) females 18 and over*
1992	51	23	4,009	1,403
1993	63	30	3,812	1,346
1994	65	21	3,822	1,236
1995	43	35	3,787	1,292
1996	54	25	3,600	1,214
1997	56	30	3,666	1,229
1998	66	21	3,863	1,204
1999	53	27	3,851	1,257
2000	66	25	3,593	1,238
2001	52	17	3,486	1,150

[1] The cause of death wad defined using the International Classification of Diseases, Ninth Revision (ICD-9) codes E950-E959 and E980-E989 excluding E988.8 for the years 1992 to 2000, and, for the year 2001, the International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision (ICD-10) codes X60-X84 and Y10-Y34 excluding Y33.9 where the Coroner's verdict was pending.

[2] Figures are for deaths registered in 1992 and for deaths occurring in each calendar year from 1993 to 2001.

Work Force Statistics

Mr. Wray: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of the working population is in *(a)* part-time and *(b)* full-time jobs. [100479]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. James Wray, dated 3 March 2003:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question about part-time and full-time employment. (100479)

The estimates from the Labour Force Survey for the three month period ending December 2002 are 74.5 per cent of people in employment are employed full-time and 25.5 per cent are employed part-time. These estimates are seasonally adjusted.

Written Questions

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many named day written questions were tabled to the Department between 15 October 2002 and 24 February 2003; how many that received a holding answer were given a substantive answer *(a)* within three days, *(b)* within seven days, *(c)* within 14 days, *(d)* within 28 days and *(e)* over 28 days later; and what procedures the Department has in place to monitor performance on answering (i) Parliamentary Questions and (ii) ministerial letters. [99426]

John Healey: 273 of the 369 Named Day questions tabled to Treasury Ministers in the period concerned (74 per cent.) received replies on the nominated day for answering. Of the 96 remaining questions, 23 received replies within three days of the nominated day, 46 within a week, 19 within 28 days, and eight over 28 days.

Treasury Ministers attach a high importance to parliamentary questions on time. Performance is monitored continually by officials and reported regularly to Minister. Ministers also receive regular reports on correspondence: 78 per cent. of letters to Ministers are currently being answered within 15 working days, an increase from 44 per cent. in 1999.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Anti-personnel Mines

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent steps the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has taken to promote the Convention on the prohibition of the use, stockpiling, production and transfer of anti-personnel mines. [99666]

Mr. Rammell: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has lead responsibility within government for humanitarian demining issues, including the Ottawa Convention. This involves playing a full role in the follow-up process to the Convention, including participation in the annual Meeting of States Parties, the most recent of which was held in September 2002. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has also recently assumed the chair of the Sponsorship Committee, a Geneva-based body responsible for determining levels of assistance to States Parties and aspirant countries which would otherwise be financially unable to attend, and has contributed £25,000 to the Committee's funds. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has also recently funded an exploratory visit to the Russian Federation by a UK ordnance expert in connection with the possible establishment of a trust fund for the destruction of stockpiled PFM anti-personnel landmines.

Balbir Singh Bonnis

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the progress of the application for a visa to return to the UK by Mr. Balbir Singh Bonnis; and on what grounds the processing of this visa application has been delayed. [98460]

Mr. Rammell: The case was referred to the Immigration and Nationality Directorate of the Home Office by the High Commission in New Delhi on 10 September 2002. The Home Office are considering the case and will make a decision shortly.

Biochemical Weapons

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to his answer of 13 February 2003 to my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South (Alan Simpson), *Official Report*, column 107W, what the biochemical weapons referred to by US Defence Secretary Rumsfeld on 5 February 2003 in his testimony before the House Armed Services Committee are. [99673]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I understand US Defence Secretary, Donald Rumsfeld, in his evidence on 5 February to the US House Armed Services Committee, was referring to non-lethal Riot Control Agents. He went on to acknowledge that the United States has undertaken not to use any such Agents as a method of warfare. This prohibition applies to all States Parties to the CWC. Riot Control Agents are defined under the CWC as any chemical not listed in a Schedule which can produce rapidly in humans sensory irritation or disabling physical effects which disappear within a short time following termination of exposure.

Broadcast Services (Funding)

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his estimate is of the net cost to his Department of *(a)* the London Radio Service and *(b)* the British Satellite News, in each year from 1996–97 to 2003–04 (planned); what the purpose is of these two services; and if he will make a statement. [99122]

Mr. MacShane *[holding answer 26 February 2003]*: LRS and BSN were established in order to promote Britain and HMG's policies overseas.

The net cost of London Radio Service (LRS) was as follows:

1 August 1997 to 31 July 1998: £1.400 million

1 August 1998 to 31 July 1999: £1.426 million

1 August 1999 to 31 July 2000: £1.458 million

1 August 2000 to 30 September 2001: £1.820 million

1 October 2001 to 30 September 2002: £1.573 million at which point the service was terminated.

The net cost of British Satellite News is as follows:

1 October 1997 to 30 September 1998: £1.676 million

1 October 1998 to 30 September 1999: £1.703 million

1 October 1999 to 30 September 2000: £1.718 million

1 October 2000 to 30 September 2001: £2.182 million

1 October 2001 to 30 September 2002: £2.221 million

1 October 2002 to 30 September 2003: £1.25 million at which point BSN was streamlined from a global service to one that focused primarily on the Islamic and Arab world.

Planned BSN cost for 2003–04 is £1.25 million.

Catholic Priests

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations his Department has made to the Chinese Government regarding the imprisonment of Catholic priests. [99990]

Mr. Rammell: The cases of Catholic Bishops Su Zhimin, Jiang Shurang and Shi Enxiang were included on our list of individual cases of concern which was handed over to the Chinese authorities at the most recent UK/China Human Rights Dialogue in November 2002. We shall continue to press the Chinese for a full explanation of their arrest and their early release.

We raise freedom of religion in general with the Chinese, both in the context of the biannual UK/China Human Rights Dialogue and at other appropriate official and ministerial meetings.

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he intends to reply to the letter to him dated 16 January from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mr. Mohammad Arshad. [99365]

Mr. Straw: I did reply to my right hon. Friend's letter of 16 January, on 30 January. I am sorry however that my right hon. Friend did not for some reason receive this reply. I forwarded him a copy of that letter on 26 February, in response to this question.

European Union

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether his Department has achieved its Public Service Agreement target to ensure increasing public support for EU activities; and if he will make a statement. [98429]

Mr. MacShane: The FCO's Public Service Agreement for 2001–04, agreed under the 2000 Spending Review, sets out our aim to achieve 'Increased support for, and better understanding of, merits of EU membership'. We work towards achieving this objective through our EU Public Diplomacy strategy. Progress can be measured through Eurobarometer, the European Commission's regular survey of pan-European public opinion.

According to Eurobarometer, support for EU membership in the UK has increased recently. In the Eurobarometer spring 2000 survey, only 25 per cent. of those polled in the UK said that our EU membership was a 'good thing'. By the autumn of 2002, this figure had risen to 31 per cent. Eurobarometer showed that levels of perceived knowledge about the EU in the UK also rose between the spring 2000 and spring 2002 surveys.

Gibraltar

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to promote agreement with the Government of Spain regarding *(a)* better access to Gibraltar and *(b)* improved communications for the Territory. [100557]

Mr. MacShane: The Government secured through the Brussels Process talks better access from Spain to Gibraltar through the opening in March 2002 of a second customs lane at the border. It remains our view that dialogue with Spain and Gibraltar is the only way to resolve such problems.

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the responsibilities of the Gibraltar Financial Services Commission in respect of regulation of financial services in Gibraltar. [100560]

Mr. MacShane: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave the hon. Member for the Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) on 17 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 761W.

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received from the Government of Spain about *(a)* up-rating of the pension paid to Spanish pensioners who worked in Gibraltar prior to 1969, *(b)* payment of the household cost allowance to Spanish pensioners who worked in Gibraltar prior to 1969 and *(c)* reform of the household cost allowance scheme operating in Gibraltar. [100559]

Mr. MacShane: Her Majesty's Government have received a number of representations from the Government of Spain on these issues.

International Criminal Court

Tony Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what account he has taken of the scope of US federal law in deciding whether to conclude a bilateral Article 98 treaty relating to the International Criminal Court. [98386]

Mr. Rammell: In considering such an Agreement, we shall be guided by the Principles agreed by EU Foreign Ministers on 30 September 2002. The Principles envisage that an Agreement will include appropriate operative provisions ensuring that persons who have committed crimes falling within the jurisdiction of the ICC do not enjoy impunity. Such provisions should ensure appropriate investigation and—where there is sufficient evidence—prosecution by the US authorities of persons requested by the ICC.

Iraq

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has on the number of Iraqis killed or tortured in each year since Saddam Hussein came to power. [100059]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. Keetch) today (UIN 99526).

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received on how many estimated Iraqi civilian deaths have been directly caused by the regime of Saddam Hussein *(a)* prior to 1990, *(b)* since 1990, *(c)* since 1998 and *(d)* since November 2002; and if he will make a statement. [99526]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Precise figures are not available. But it is clear that Saddam Hussein's regime is responsible for many Iraqi civilian deaths. Amnesty International's report "Iraq: State cruelty: branding, amputation and the death penalty"—April 1996, deplores "the disappearance or extrajudicial execution of hundreds of thousands of people—including whole communities—for political reasons, and the widespread use of the death penalty for numerous criminal and political offences after unfair trials. The Iraqi Government has sanctioned mass killings and torture as a matter of policy..." The testimonies of Iraqi exiles give credence to these and other similar reports.

John "Jackie" Elliot

John Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to *(a)* the United States Federal Authorities, *(b)* the Texas State Authorities and *(c)* the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles to plead for clemency for John 'Jackie' Elliot. [92313]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Representations were made by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary to the Governor of Texas, the hon. Rick Perry, and to the Chairman of the State Board of Pardons and Paroles, Gerald Garret; my noble Friend Baroness Amos also wrote to Gerald Garret; and to other Texas State officials who had a role in the decision making process of the Paroles and Pardons Board in this case. The US Federal Authorities have no direct role in the Texas parole and pardons process.

These representations made clear HMG's opposition to the death penalty and urged that Mr. Elliott's sentence of death be commuted to a term of imprisonment. In making our representations, we sought information from key officials in Texas to ensure that we were doing all that we could to prevent the execution from taking place. We were in regular and close contact with Mr. Elliott's lawyers and were ready to make further representations as appropriate. Mr. Elliott was executed on 4 February.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Texan authorities regarding the pending execution of Mr. John 'Jackie' Elliott; and if he will make a statement. [92788]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Anniesland (John Robertson) today, UIN 92313.

Kurdish Autonomous Region (Northern Iraq)

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what guarantees of autonomy have been offered to the Kurdish parties in Northern Iraq after any US-led invasion has taken place; [100280]

(2) what guarantees have been given by the Government of Turkey that they will respect the Kurdish autonomous region of Iraq following any US-led invasion. [100279]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I am not aware of any guarantees given to the Kurdish administrations in Northern Iraq by Turkey. But the UK is committed to the maintenance of Iraq's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its current borders. The only secure long term future for the Kurds and other minority groups in Northern Iraq is as part of a stable, peaceful Iraq, which gives them a negotiated degree of autonomy.

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions have been held with the Government of Iran concerning their approach to the Kurdish autonomous region of Northern Iraq; and if he will make a statement. [100281]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We regularly discuss Iraq policy with out Iranian counterparts. Like the UK, the Iranians tell us that Iran is committed to the maintenance of Iraq's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its current borders. The only secure long-term future for the Kurds and other minority groups in Northern Iraq is as part of a stable, peaceful Iraq, which gives them a negotiated degree of autonomy.

Malta

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Government of Malta regarding their referendum on EU membership. [99737]

Mr. MacShane: My right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary met Dr. Fenech Adami, Prime Minister of Malta, in London on 18 February 2003. Malta's EU membership was one of the subjects discussed. The decision on Malta's EU membership is one for the Maltese people alone to make, in the referendum on 8 March.

Mobile Phones

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) how many mobile phones have been used and at what cost by *(a)* himself and Ministers in his Department, *(b)* special advisers in his Department and *(c)* his departmental officials in each year since 1997; [98572]

(2) how many mobile phones used by *(a)* himself, his Ministers of State and Parliamentary Under-Secretaries of State, *(b)* his Department's Special Advisers and *(c)* his departmental officials have been listed as lost or stolen in each year since 1997. [98571]

Mr. Rammell: Information is not held in the form requested and, particularly with regard to posts overseas, could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Publicity Campaigns

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 31 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 1089W, if he will list the publicity campaigns which account for his Department's publicity expenditure in *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03; and if he will make a statement. [98500]

Mr. Rammell: Most of the expenditure listed in my answer of 31 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 1089W, is deployed in support of the FCO's efforts to promote greater understanding and awareness of the UK to overseas audiences, to project the UK's strengths and increase trade, inward investment, tourism and the influence of UK foreign policy. This includes expenditure on events, creative work, research and production of videos, leaflets and posters. Details of how each activity supports individual FCO objectives are not held centrally and these activities are not managed as separately identifiable publicity campaigns.

An exception is the FCO's consular publicity campaigns, which are aimed at encouraging travellers to be better prepared before going overseas. These account for £1,141,459 in 2001–02 and £1,060,000 in 2002–03.

Spain

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next plans to hold meetings with the Government of Spain under the Brussels Process; and what consultation with the Government of Gibraltar will take place in advance of such meetings. [99952]

Mr. MacShane: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 11 December 2002 to the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring), *Official Report*, column 380W. The Government have always wanted the Government of Gibraltar to be fully involved in discussion within the Brussels Process.

United Nations Security Council

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the vetoes in the Security Council used on *(a)* 17 May 1995, *(b)* 30 June 2002, *(c)* 14 December 2001, *(d)* 27 March 2001, *(e)* 21 March 1997, *(f)* 7 March 1997, *(g)* 10 January 1997, *(h)* 11 May 1993 and *(i)* 2 December 1994. [98330]

Mr. Rammell: The US vetoes on 17 May 1995, 7 March 1997, 21 March 1997, 27 March 2001, 14 December 2001 were in respect of the Israel/Palestine situation.

The US veto on 30 June 2002 was in respect of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The other vetoes listed were not by the US:

The veto on 11 May 1993 was by Russia in respect of Cyprus.

The veto on 2 December 1994 was by Russia in respect of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The veto on 10 January 1997 was by China in respect of Central America.

The Government believe that the veto should be used with restraint, and in a manner consistent with the principles of the UN Charter.

PRIME MINISTER

Iraq

Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister what proportion of recent letters and e-mails he has received are *(a)* in favour and *(b)* against military action against Iraq. [100039]

The Prime Minister: Since January, I have received over 80,000 letters and cards about the subject of Iraq. Given the volume of correspondence I receive, over one million letters in the last year covering a broad spectrum of issues, my office records the numbers of letters received on a subject rather than by the view expressed. However, I know that many people have written to me expressing concerns about the action against Iraq and I reiterate what I have said that no decision has been made to take military action and military action is not inevitable. My office works hard to ensure that all the letters receive appropriate responses.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Prime Minister what the procedure was for approving and publishing the dossier entitled Iraq—Its Infrastructure of Concealment, Deception and Intimidation; and which Minister had ultimate responsibility for its contents. [100285]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith) on 10 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 583W and Prime Minister's Questions on 12 February 2003.

Oil Contracts

Andrew Selous: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his statement to the House of 25 February 2003, *Official Report*, columns 123–140W, what contingency plans he has in place relating to the honouring of current oil contracts between Iraq and France and Russia. [99968]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 28 February 2003]:* Contracts for the export of Iraqi oil under the Oil for Food programme continue to be honoured, with Iraq exporting 11.9 million barrels in the week beginning 15 February. Our policy is that the sanctions regime should be complied with.

United Nations Security Council

Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the leaders of other members of the United Nations Security Council with whom he has had contact since 1 February 2003 broken down by date and purpose of communication. [100075]

The Prime Minister: I am in regular contact with other world leaders, including heads of state and government of other members of the UN Security Council, on a wide range of international issues.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Services

Simon Hughes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when the databases inherited by CAFCASS on 1 April 2001 will no longer be required. [99544]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The databases inherited by CAFCASS from its predecessors will no longer be required when CAFCASS has alternative service-wide systems in place. User consultation has taken place and CAFCASS is currently examining its options for the most appropriate IT solution to its organisational requirements.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how long it takes to make a file on a CAFCASS client available on request, and at what cost. [99545]

Ms Rosie Winterton: CAFCASS clients have access to documents in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act (DPA) 1998 and associated rules and regulations, including those governing court proceedings. CAFCASS applies the standard DPA provisions to the timescale for the release of information—aiming to complete all requests within 40 days. Relevant documents are made available on payment of a fee of £10.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Sure Start

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much has been spent on Sure Start projects in each of the last five years. [96108]

Maria Eagle: The annual spending on Sure Start for the last five financial years is shown in the following table.

	£ million
1997–98	n/a
1998–99	n/a
1999–2000	5
2000–01	56
2001–02	134

Class Sizes

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* five, *(b)* six and *(c)* seven-year-old children in Nottingham, North were taught in class sizes of 30 or more (i) in 1997 and (ii) in the latest period for which figures are available. [98327]

Maria Eagle: Information on the age of pupils within classes is not collected centrally.

The available information on the number of pupils in designated nursery classes and other classes of 31 or more in maintained primary schools in Nottingham, North parliamentary constituency is shown in the table.

Maintained primary schools[1]: number of classes of 31 or more and the number pupils within them[2] Nottingham, North parliamentary constituency

	Taught by one teacher			
	Nursery classes		*Other classes*	
Position as at January each year	*Number of pupils*	*Number of classes*	*Number of pupils*	*Number of classes*
1997	563	14	3,502	107
1998	529	13	3,052	93
1999	617	16	2,633	79
2000	527	13	2,388	72
2001	493	12	1,763	53
2002	524	13	1,443	44

[1] Excludes middle schools as deemed.

[2] Classes as taught during the one selected period in each school on the day of the census.

Source:

Annual Schools' Census

Demountable Classrooms

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many demountable classrooms there were at primary schools in the Colchester constituency in May 1997; how many there are; and how many have been replaced with permanent accommodation since May 1997. [99654]

Mr. Miliband: As part of the data collected through the appraisal of sset management plans, the Department for Education and Skills has some information on the overall area of temporary accommodation at schools, but it is not possible from these data to identify with any precision the actual number of temporary classrooms. The Department does not hold information on numbers of replacement temporary classrooms.

Departmental Phone Directories

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when the most recent internal phone directory for the Department was published; how often it is updated; and if he will place a copy in the Library. [100092]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The Department's internal directory is held electronically and updated constantly. We are discontinuing printed versions but will, however, provide the House Library with a CD-Rom version and update that quarterly.

Education Fees (Contribution)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of students in each local education authority *(a)* contributed and *(b)* partly contributed to fees in (i) 1999–2000, (ii) 2000–01 and (iii) 2001–02; and what his estimate is for the current academic year. [99141]

Mr. Charles Clarke *[holding answer 25 February 2003]:* In England and Wales students on full-time undergraduate courses and their families are expected to make a contribution towards the cost of their tuition only if they can afford to do so.

The percentage of students in England and Wales in academic years 1999–2000 and 2000–01 (latest year for which data are available) who have been assessed to make a full or partial contribution towards the cost of their tuition is shown in the table:

	All students (percentage)[1]	
Academic year	*1999–2000*	*2000–01[2]*
Partial contribution towards the cost of tuition from student/parents/spouse/partner	20	19
Full contribution towards the cost of tuition from student/parents/spouse/partner	35	39

[1] Contributions towards the cost of tuition are assessed by local education authorities in England and Wales for students normally domiciled in their area and studying in the UK.

[2] 2000–01 data are provisional.

Source:

F503G survey of local education authorities

National level data are published annually in the Department's Statistical First Releases (SFRs) (SFR 18/2001 and SFR 08/2002 for 1999–2000 and 2000–01 respectively). Data are collected from the local education authorities (LEAs) to produce national estimates and the data collection exercise does not allow the production of firm figures at the individual LEA level. National data for academic year 2001–02 will be available at the end of April 2003 and that for the current year 2002–03 will be published in spring 2004.

Education Funding

Angela Watkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average Education Funding Spending Share per *(a)* primary pupil and (*b*) secondary pupil is in London; and which London borough will receive the lowest EFSS per pupil in 2003–04. [100221]

Mr. Miliband: In London, the average education formula spending share per primary pupil in 2003–04 is £2,733 and per secondary pupil is £3,470.

Havering has the lowest EFSS per pupil in London. The main reason for this is that Havering benefits less overall than other London authorities from the top-ups in the funding formula to reflect the additional costs of educating deprived pupils, and the additional costs of recruiting and retaining staff in high-cost areas.

That is because, in London, only Richmond upon Thames has a lower proportion of deprived pupils than Havering. But Richmond upon Thames benefits more from the factor in the formula for area costs. The area cost adjustment for outer London authorities is split into east and west: wages in west London are generally higher than in east London so the ACA for west London is higher. Richmond upon Thames receives the (higher) ACA for outer London authorities in the west, and Havering receives the (lower) ACA for those in the east. The net effect is that Havering has a lower EFSS per pupil than Richmond upon Thames, and other London authorities.

Higher Education

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what evidence his Department assessed on the deterrent effect of debt on potential students from lower socio-economic groups when drawing up the proposals in the policy document, The Future of Higher Education; and if he will make a statement. [98131]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The Department considered a range of evidence including its own commissioned research into "Social Class and HE: Issues Affecting Decisions on Participation by Lower Social Class Groups" (published 2001), the HE extension of the Youth Cohort Study (still in progress) and preliminary results from its evaluation of the Excellence Challenge. The findings suggest that concern about debt is only one of the inhibitors on HE participation. Cultural, social and institutional influences and educational background are also important. The right kind of information is vital. Recent departmental research suggests also that the most common cause of non-completion of HE courses is poor choice of course rather than financial problems associated with participation.

In the light of this evidence we are introducing the measures set out in the White Paper, The Future of Higher Education, notably means tested higher education grants of up to £1,000 per year and raising the loan repayment threshold from £10,000 to £15,000 from April 2005, but also the abolition of upfront tuition fees which were perceived as inhibiting access. In addition we are committed to improving our promotion, marketing and outreach to convince those from low income backgrounds that HE really is for them. We must also continue with our school reforms, particularly now at secondary level, to increase the number of young people with the right qualifications to benefit from higher education.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will list the average amount of Government support towards living costs per student for each university and higher education institution in each year since 1980. [94708]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The information requested is not available in the format requested. However, information on average maintenance grant per student is available nationally for England and Wales and is shown in the table.

Average maintenance grant in England and Wales[1]

£

	Cash terms		In real terms 2000–01[2]	
Academic year	Student support scheme students[3,4]	Mandatory award scheme students[4,5]	Student support scheme students[3,4]	Mandatory award scheme students[4,5]
2000–01[6]	150	1,130	150	1,130
1999–2000[6]	130	1,150	130	1,180
1998–99[6]	690	1,200	720	1,250
1997–98[6]	[7]—	1,210	[7]—	1,300
1996–97[6]	[7]—	1,240	[7]—	1,360
1995–96[6]	[7]—	1,390	[7]—	1,580
1994–95[6]	[7]—	1,520	[7]—	1,780
1993–94[6]	[7]—	1,670	[7]—	1,980
1992–93[6]	[7]—	1,610	[7]—	1,980
1991–92[6,8]	[7]—	1,550	[7]—	1,980
1990–91[6]	[7]—	1,480	[7]—	2,000
1989–90	[7]—	1,390	[7]—	2,050
1988–89	[7]—	1,320	[7]—	2,060
1987–88	[7]—	1,240	[7]—	2,050
1986–87	[7]—	1,220	[7]—	2,070
1985–86	[7]—	1,170	[7]—	2,070
1984–85[9]	[7]—	1,240	[7]—	2,310
1983–84[9]	[7]—	1,310	[7]—	2,530
1982–83[9]	[7]—	1,270	[7]—	2,590
1981–82[9]	[7]—	1,250	[7]—	2,730
1980–81[9]	[7]—	1,190	[7]—	2,910

[1] Payable to students normally domiciled in LEAs in England and Wales.

[2] Expenditure shown in 2000–01 prices based on the RPI (excluding mortgage interest payments) of September each academic year.

[3] Students starting their course in 1998–99, 1999–2000 and 2000–01 under the student support scheme funding.

[4] Average maintenance figures have been rounded to the nearest £10.

[5] Students who entered higher education up to 1997–98 and those who entered in 1998–99 to whom the mandatory scheme funding arrangements still applied.

[6] Student loans were introduced when student support arrangements were changed in 1990–91 to supplement maintenance grants which were frozen at their level in that year. Data in this table exclude student loans and relate to maintenance grants only.

[7] Not applicable

[8] Includes an estimated 8,600 students and £17.5 million maintenance expenditure in respect of the London Residual Body.

[9] Up until academic year 1984–85 all eligible mandatory scheme students were entitled to receive a minimum cash grant (£205 in 1984–85; £410 in 1981–82 to 1983–84; and £385 in 1980–81).

Source:

F503G Survey of local education authorities on student support funding.

Additionally, loan support has been available to eligible students normally domiciled in the United Kingdom since 1990–91 and information on the average amount of student loan is given in the table. However, because the rules for eligibility between maintenance grants and loans differ, and because the average maintenance data refer to students domiciled in England and Wales, whereas the average loans data refer to students domiciled in the United Kingdom, the two sets of data should not be added together.

Student support provision—average loan: United Kingdom—academic years 1990–91 to 2001–02[1]

£

	Average loan (United Kingdom)[2,3,4]			
	Cash terms		*In real terms 2001–02*[5]	
Academic year[6]	*Student support scheme students*	*Mandatory award scheme students*	*Student support scheme students*	*Mandatory award scheme students*
2001–02[1]	[7]3,120	1,500	[7]3,120	1,500
2000–01	3,100	1,450	3,170	1,480
1999–2000	3,150	1,470	3,290	1,540
1998–99	2,580	1,520	2,760	1,620
1997–98	[8]—	1,530	[8]—	1,680
1996–97	[8]—	1,490	[8]—	1,680
1995–96	[8]—	1,250	[8]—	1,450
1994–95	[8]—	1,040	[8]—	1,240
1993–94	[8]—	740	[8]—	900
1992–93	[8]—	660	[8]—	830
1991–92	[8]—	530	[8]—	690
1990–91	[8]—	390	[8]—	540

[1] 2001–02 data are provisional.

[2] Student loans are available to eligible students normally domiciled in the United Kingdom.

[3] Student loans are available to students on full-time undergraduate HE courses (and students on full-time and part-time postgraduate courses of initial teacher training). From 1999–2000, students aged between 50 to 54 at the start of their course (this includes students who started their course after September 1998) can apply for a student loan as long as they can demonstrate to their awarding authority that they plan to return to employment after finishing their course.

[4] Average figures have been rounded to the nearest £10.

[5] Expenditure shown in 2001–02 prices based on the RPI (excluding mortgage interest payments of September each academic year).

[6] The time series of this table is different to that shown for average maintenance because student loans were not introduced until 1990–91, and provisional data are available for 2001–02

[7] The drop in the average loan is explained by final year students of a three year course entering the figures for the first time; these students are eligible for a lower rate of loan.

[8] Not applicable

Source:

The Student Loans Company

Industrial Action/Illness

Mr. Roger Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many working days were lost due to *(a)* industrial action and *(b)* illness in his Department in each year since 1997. [95899]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The overall sickness absence rate in the Department for Education and Skills for 2001 was 8.4 days per staff year.

The overall sickness absence rate in the former Department for Education and Employment for each of the years from 2000 to 1997 was:

	Days per staff year
2000	11.3
1999	11.0
1998	11.6
1997	12.6

The figures are taken from the report "Analysis of Sickness Absence in the Civil Service", published annually by Cabinet Office. The figures for 2002 will be announced in due course.

My Department is committed to managing sickness absence effectively and to maintain its efforts to try and meet the 2003 target for reduced sickness absence as set out in its Service Delivery Agreement.

Information on the number of working days lost due to industrial action could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. My Department recognises the importance of and maintains its commitment to working in partnership with the trade union side as a means of eliminating industrial action.

Internal Directorate

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the allocated funding is for each internal directorate of his Department in *(a)* 2003–04, *(b)* 2004–05 and *(c)* 2005–06, (i) in cash terms and (ii) on a full resource budgeting basis. [96281]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Details of the administrative budgets allocated to internal directorates in my Department for 2003–04 are set out in the table. Firm internal allocations have not been agreed for the forward years. The figures are on a resource accounting basis, budgets are no longer allocated on a cash basis.

£000

Directorate	*2003–04*
Youth	13,824
Corporate services and development	89,859
Schools	43,874
Finance and analytical services	20,029
Strategy and communications	10,100
Lifelong learning	26,867
Legal adviser's office	3,300

Non-cash costs previously charged to annually managed expenditure are included within corporate services and development directorate's allocation. Similarly, the costs of the Department's estates, information systems and human resource services are not devolved and are included in the allocation for corporate services and development directorate.

List 99 Database

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how often the List 99 database is updated and maintained; and what checks are in place to ensure information is accurate. [100146]

Mr. Miliband: List 99 is updated every time my Department issues a direction, barring or restricting a person from employment in the education service, or removing or varying a bar or restriction on a person's employment. It is also updated when we receive notification that a person on the list has died. The information shown on List 99—a person's name, date of birth, teacher reference number (if appropriate) and National Insurance Number—is provided by the police and the person's employer.

Modern Languages

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many students achieved A grades in modern languages at *(a)* GCSE and *(b)* 'A' level in each year since 1995; and if he will make a statement. [99625]

Mr. Miliband: The number of students who achieved A grades in Modern Languages at GCSE and A level in each year since 1995 are:

	GCSE[1]			A level		
	French	*German*	*Spanish*	*French*	*German*	*Spanish*
2002	52,751	22,121	10,542	-	-	-
2001	53,692	22,931	10,378	3,745	2,177	1,202
2000	53,331	23,503	9,439	3,519	2,079	1,068
1999	53,580	23,367	8,381	3,789	2,008	992
1998	52,383	23,764	7,852	3,969	2,042	1,049
1997	54,811	25,904	8,081	3,986	1,866	945
1996	56,672	24,965	7,405	4,351	1,897	844
1995	54,896	23,788	6,262	4,190	1,712	689

[1] GCSE figures include A* grades

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many modern languages teachers qualified in each year since 1995; and if he will make a statement. [99626]

Mr. Miliband: The following table gives the numbers qualifying as teachers in England[1] with a modern language as their subject.

Calendar year of qualification[2]

1995	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
1,590	1,590	1,510	1,520	1,410	1,260	1,390

[1] Includes those trained through the Open University but excludes those qualifying through employment based routes.

[2] The data for 1995 to 2000 are from the DfES Database of Teachers' Records (DTR). The 2001 figure is taken from the Teacher Training Agency's (TTA) Performance Profiles because 2001 DTR data are not available. The TTA figure is comparable to the DTR data.

Nursery Education

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* three and *(b)* four-year-old children in Nottingham, North attended nursery (i) in 1997 and (ii) in the most recent period for which figures are available. [98328]

Maria Eagle: The information is not available in the form requested.

The available information on the numbers of free early education places taken up by three and four-year-olds in Nottingham City local education authority for 1997 and 2002 are shown in the table.

Numbers of free early education places taken up by three and four-year-olds, Nottingham City local education authority area 1997 and 2002

Position in January each year	*1997*	*2002*
3-year-olds		
Maintained nursery and primary schools[1,2]	1,800	—
Other maintained and private, voluntary and independent providers[3]	n/a	—
4-year-olds	3,900	—
Total	5,700	—

Numbers of free early education places taken up by three and four-year-olds, Nottingham City local education authority area 1997 and 2002

Position in January each year	*1997*	*2002*
3-year-olds		
Maintained nursery and primary schools[1]	—	2,400
Other maintained and private, voluntary and independent providers[3]	—	690
4-year-olds	—	
Maintained nursery and primary schools[4]	—	3,000
Other maintained and private, voluntary and independent providers[5]	—	430
Total 4-year-olds[6]	—	3,430
Total	—	6,520

n/a = not available

[1] Headcount of children aged three at 31 December in the previous calendar year from the Annual Schools Census

[2] Summer term 1997.

[3] Part-time equivalent number of children aged three at 31 December in the previous calendar year from the Nursery Education Grant data collection exercise. Nursery Education Grant for three-year-olds was allocated to the 65 LEAs in 1999–2000 and all LEAs from 2000–2001.

[4] Headcount of children aged four at 31 December in the previous calendar year from the Annual Schools Census.

[5] Part-time equivalent number of children aged four at 31 December in the previous calendar year from the Nursery Education grant data collection exercise.

[6] The total 4-year-old figure for 2002 combines two sources of information, the Annual Schools' Census and Nursery Education Grant data. In previous years, only Nursery Education Grant data was used.

Latest figures on three and four-year-olds in early years education providers were published by the Department in the Statistical Bulletin "Provision for Children Under Five Years of Age in England—January 2002 (08/2002)" in December 2002, a copy of which is available from the Library. An electronic copy of this publication is also available on the Department's website (www.dfes.gov.uk/statistics).

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many nursery places in England and Wales there were for children *(a)* under three years and *(b)* from three years to compulsory school age for each year since 1997. [96802]

Mr. Miliband: The available information on the number of free early years education places taken up by three and four-year-olds in each year since 1997 is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Number[1,2] of 3 and 4-year-olds taking up free early years education places England 1997–2002

Position in January each year	*3-year-olds*	*4-year-olds*	*Total*
1997	214,200	576,200	790,300
1998	222,000	591,500	813,500
1999	225,700	593,800	819,500
2000	270,200	598,500	868,600
2001	335,400	589,300	924,700
2002	408,200	584,500	992,800

[1] Rounded to the nearest hundred.

[2] Sum over 3 and 4-year-olds may not equal total because of rounding.

All four-year-olds have been able to access a free, part-time early education place since September 1998. Since September 1999, we have invested substantially in new free early years education places for three-year-olds. The table shows that the number of free early years education places taken up by three-year-olds increased from 214,200 in 1997 to 408,200 in 2002, an increase of 194,000 places. We are committed to providing all three-year-olds, whose parents want one, with free early years education places by April 2004.

The latest figures on provision for three and four-year-olds were published in Statistical Bulletin 09/2002 "Provision For Children Under Five Years Of Age in England-January 2002", which is available from the Library or the Department's website www.dfes.gov.uk/statistics/.

Information for Wales is a matter for the Education Department of the Assembly for Wales.

School Buildings

Mr. Mike Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much money the Government has spent on the replacement of old and worn-out school buildings in *(a)* England and *(b)* the Portsmouth area in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [100104]

Mr. Miliband: Government support for capital investment in school buildings in England for 2002–03 is £3 billion; for Portsmouth the figure is £4.25 million. We do not collect information on the split between new buildings and renovation. Looking to the future, I announced on 26 February proposals for a new approach to capital investment in a paper, "Building schools for the future". This will be a programme of rebuilding and renewal to ensure that secondary education in every part of England has facilities of 21st Century standard within 10 to 15 years from 2005–06, subject to future public spending decisions. We will also aim to provide substantial investment in primary school buildings.

School Circulars

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will list the circulars that have been sent by the Learning and Skills Council to *(a)* secondary schools and *(b)* colleges of further education since 1 March 2002; and how many pages each circular contained. [99486]

Mr. Miliband: This is a matter for the Learning and Skills Council. John Harwood, the Council's Chief Executive, will write to the hon. Member with the information requested and a copy of his reply will be placed in the Libraries.

Student Grants (Portsmouth, South)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate he has made of the number of students in Portsmouth, South eligible to claim grants for university in each of the next three years; and if he will make a statement. [98096]

Mr. Charles Clarke: My Department does not make forecasts for the number of students likely to be claiming grants for university in each local education authority (LEA) or parliamentary constituency.

Student Grants

Mr Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will estimate the cost of providing students with family incomes of *(a)* £15,000, *(b)* £20,000 and *(c)* £30,000 with student grants of (i) £1,000, (ii) £2,000 and (iii) £3,000. [94754]

Margaret Hodge: The information requested is currently not available. I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to the hon. Member for Birmingham Selly Oak (Lynne Jones) on 6 February, *Official Report*, column 357W.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Affordable Housing

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether the London Housing Board will be able to fund the construction of new affordable housing in the east, south east and south west regions for use as part of the Seaside and Country Homes Scheme. [99170]

Mr. McNulty: It will remain open to authorities in London, and elsewhere, to support the provision of additional affordable housing in other regions if this is a cost-effective way of addressing their housing needs but only where it has the support of the authority in which the housing is to be provided. The establishment of regional housing boards will allow a more strategic view to be taken about the extent to which needs can be met by provision of housing outside the region.

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many units of affordable housing *(a)* for rent and *(b)* for sale were built from funding generated by recycled capital grant in each year since 1997. [99174]

Mr. McNulty: The option for Registered Social Landlords to recycle social housing grant was introduced in April 1997. The number of dwellings completed by RSLs which have been funded, wholly or in conjunction with loans or RSL reserves from recycled capital grant fund since 1997 are tabled below.

	Sale	*Rent*
1997–98	1	0
1998–99	100	87
1999–2000	85	271
2000–01	502	646
2001–02	[1]218	361

[1] Figures for 2001–02 subject to validation

In addition, RSLs have built affordable housing units by combining recycled grant with social housing grant from local authorities or the Housing Corporation. These units are not included in the above figures. RSLs can also use recycled grant for major repair and improvement of their existing housing.

Disconnections

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many households there are where *(a)* gas, *(b)* electricity and *(c)* water utilities are disconnected. [98971]

Mr. Wilson: I have been asked to reply.

Information on the number of households disconnected at any one time is not available. During 2002, 22,335 gas and 3,334 electricity customers were disconnected for debt or theft.

My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has responsibility for the water industry. I understand that under the Water Industry Act 1999, water companies do not have the power to disconnect various categories of premises, including private dwellings.

Gypsies and Travellers

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he will issue joint guidance with the Home Department on managing unauthorised camping by gypsies and other travellers; and if he will make a statement. [99494]

Mr. McNulty: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in conjunction with the Home Office, will issue new joint guidance on managing unauthorised camping by gypsies and other travellers by the summer.

The joint guide will form two documents, "Framework Guidance", which is a set of general principles, and detailed "Operational Guidance" for use mainly by local authorities and police services.

Homebuy Loans

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many homebuy loans were made in each local authority in London in each year since the scheme's introduction. [99172]

Mr. McNulty: Tabled as follows is the breakdown of homebuy loans that have been made in each local authority area [illegible]ndon since the scheme was first introduced on [illegible] 1999.

Sponsoring authority	Loans 1999–2000	2000–01	2001–02	2002–03[1]
Barking and Dagenham	6	18	15	2
Barnet	12	20	18	8
Bexley	0	0	5	8
Brent	21	34	29	28
Bromley	8	21	16	14
Camden	9	12	17	12
Croydon	15	17	15	10
Ealing	9	32	18	6
Enfield	8	18	11	11
Greenwich	0	19	29	16
Hackney	19	39	17	32
Hammersmith and Fulham	27	31	17	15
Haringey	19	32	26	22
Harrow	4	11	8	2
Havering	0	7	10	7
Hillingdon	7	25	16	5
Hounslow	11	27	10	6
Islington	14	13	13	9
Kensington and Chelsea	14	5	0	0
Kingston upon Thames	6	3	6	5
Lambeth	20	16	17	17
Lewisham	22	23	13	19
Merton	6	8	13	4
Newham	57	42	0	8
Redbridge	0	9	0	17
Richmond upon Thames	10	6	6	1
Southwark	19	19	15	22
Button	1	7	8	2
Tower Hamlets	32	17	21	6
Waltham Forest	17	23	11	9
Wandsworth	33	59	50	6
Westminster	31	36	33	15
City of London	1	2	5	8

[1] To 31 January

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many homebuy loans were made to *(a)* those in social housing, *(b)* those on housing waiting/transfer lists and *(c)* key workers in London in each year since the scheme's introduction. [99173]

Mr. McNulty: A total of 2,529 people were helped into home ownership using the homebuy scheme during the first three years of its operation. The following table shows the breakdown between those from rented properties and those from the waiting list where available.

	1999–2000	2000–01	2001–02
On the waiting list	177	343	346
In social housing	355	569	519
Not available	394	584	449
Total	926	1,496	1,314

To be eligible for a homebuy loan, a potential purchaser must either be currently in social housing, or be on the housing waiting list and be recommended by the local authority as being in housing need.

Information on the number of homebuy loans made to key workers is not collected. The starter home initiative is helping key workers into home ownership through equity loans based on the homebuy model and shared ownership schemes. To the end of January 2003 around 1,000 key workers in London had purchased homes with Starter Home Initiative assistance.

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of introducing *(a)* low tranche (below 25 per cent.) shared ownership schemes and *(b)* lower tranche (below 75 per cent.) homebuy schemes. [99176]

Mr. McNulty: As announced by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister on 5 February and published in "Sustainable Communities: building for the future", the Housing Corporation has agreed to lead a task force which will look at existing programmes that support sustainable home ownership. This will include both the shared ownership and homebuy schemes. The task force will examine the scope for better targeting and design of the current home ownership initiatives to ensure they are cost effective and that the home ownership is sustainable.

Homelessness

Mr. Webb: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the correlation between the indicators of deprivation used by his Department to distribute local authority finance and actual levels of homelessness in each authority. [99733]

Mr. Raynsford: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and local authority groups considered a range of indicators to reflect the costs of providing services to homeless people during the recent review of the Environmental, Protective and Cultural Services block formula. These costs vary significantly around the country and it is clear that they are related to the balance between demand and the supply of available housing in each area. However no workable formula to measure this balance or otherwise model homelessness expenditure was found. The EPCS formula has also to take account of a substantial number of other important services.

The new EPCS formula contains deprivation indicators that reflect the additional costs of provision across the full range of EPCS services.

Housing

Matthew Green: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many properties have been compulsorily purchased by *(a)* housing action trusts, *(b)* English Partnerships, *(c)* regional development agencies and *(d)* the Housing Corporation in each year since 1999. [99401]

Mr. McNulty: This information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Housing Affordability

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will publish *(a)* the house price and *(b)* income data underlying the south east: Housing Affordability 2001 map in his document "Sustainable Communities in the South East"; if he will provide a breakdown of income data for each district or unitary authority; and what the ratio of lower quartile house prices to lower quartile income is in each local authority area in the South East. [99309]

Mr. McNulty: Tabled below are the lower quartile house prices for local authorities in the South East, the regional lower quartile earnings and the equivalent house price to earningsratios that were used to produce the South East; Housing Affordability 2001 map in the recent document entitled "Sustainable Communities in the south east"[1].

The derivation of the house price to earnings ratios that formed the basis of the map entitled "South East: Housing Affordability 2001"[2] and published by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in "Sustainable communities in the South East"

Local Authority	*Lower quartile houseprice (£)*	*Lower quartile earnings per person by region (£)*	*Ratio of house price to earnings*
Adur	89,950	14,794	6.08
Arun	80,000	14,794	5.41
Ashford	81,000	14,794	5.48
Aylesbury Vale	93,000	14,794	6.29
Basingstoke and Deane	99,950	14,794	6.76
Bracknell Forest	114,000	14,794	7.71
Brighton	89,950	14,794	6.08
Canterbury	82,000	14,794	5.54
Cherwell	89,950	14,794	6.08
Chichester	105,000	14,794	7.10
Chiltern	142,500	14,794	9.63
Portsmouth	67,000	14,794	4.53
Southampton	70,000	14,794	4.73
Crawley	88,500	14,794	5.98
Dartford	75,000	14,794	5.07
East Hampshire	107,500	14,794	7.27
Eastbourne	70,000	14,794	4.73
Eastleigh	91,000	14,794	6.15
Elmbridge	155,000	14,794	10.48
Epsom and Ewell	135,000	14,794	9.13
Fareham	93,000	14,794	6.29
Gosport	65,303	14,794	4.41
Gravesham	76,000	14,794	5.14
Guildford	128,000	14,794	8.65
Hart	128,000	14,794	8.65
Hastings	45,950	14,794	3.11
Havant	76,094	14,794	5.14
Horsham	112,500	14,794	7.60
Isle of Wight	65,000	14,794	4.39
Lewes	89,000	14,794	6.02
Maidstone	87,000	14,794	5.88
Medway	62,000	14,794	4.19
Mid Sussex	112,000	14,794	7.57
Milton Keynes	73,500	14,794	4.97
Mole Valley	140,125	14,794	9.47
New Forest	94,500	14,794	6.39
Oxford	125,000	14,794	8.45
Reading	102,950	14,794	6.96
Reigate and Banstead	120,000	14,794	8.11
Rother	75,000	14,794	5.07
Runnymede	126,000	14,794	8.52
Rushmoor	96,000	14,794	6.49
Sevenoaks	118,000	14,794	7.98
Shepway	63,000	14,794	4.26
Slough	88,000	14,794	5.95
South Bucks	150,000	14,794	10.14
South Oxfordshire	112,000	14,794	7.57
Spelthorne	120,000	14,794	8.11
Surrey Heath	130,000	14,794	8.79
Swale	64,984	14,794	4.39
Tandridge	124,950	14,794	8.45
Test Valley	99,950	14,794	6.76
Thanet	58,950	14,794	3.98
Tonbridge and Malling	96,950	14,794	6.55
Tunbridge Wells	99,000	14,794	6.69
Vale of the White Horse	112,000	14,794	7.57
Waverley	132,500	14,794	8.96
Wealden	91,000	14,794	6.15
West Berkshire	115,000	14,794	7.77
West Oxfordshire	110,000	14,794	7.44
Winchester	123,000	14,794	8.31
Windsor and Maidenhead	150,000	14,794	10.14
Woking	121,000	14,794	8.18
Wokingham	137,000	14,794	9.26
Worthing	74,659	14,794	5.05
Wycombe	115,000	14,794	7.77

The derivation of the house price to earnings ratios that formed the basis of the map entitled "South East: Housing Affordability 2001"[2] and published by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in "Sustainable communities in the South East"

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[1] House price data: Land Registry

[2] Earnings data: Office for National Statistics: New Earnings Survey, 2001 (based on adults working full-time)

Whilst the above data was used as a basis for the published map, more recent information on estimated earnings by local authority is now available and may be published in the near future.

However, in the context of measuring affordability of housing in each local authority no decision has yet been made on the most appropriate combination of house price and income indicators. For instance, it may be decided to continue using regional incomes rather than local authority incomes.

Islington

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what action is being taken by his Department to ensure improvements in the performance of the London borough of Islington. [100518]

Mr. Raynsford: A process of support and assistance is now in place to aid recovery in Islington council. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has appointed a lead official, who is working closely with the council's elected members and officers to establish what needs to be done to bring about rapid improvement in Islington. The official will help Islington council, other Government Departments and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister to work together in a co-ordinated and supportive manner to address Islington's key priorities and deliver the quality of services the people of Islington rightly deserve.

Local Government

Mr. Maude: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many different plans concerning local authority functions each tier of local government has been required to submit to central Government in each year since 1997. [98407]

Mr. Raynsford: The number of plans required to be submitted in each year to central Government is in the following table. These figures include plans which are required from partnerships which include local authorities as well as those plans that are required from only particular authorities. The table reflects the best available information.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister recently announced a significant reduction in the number of plans that will be required from all authorities. The very best authorities will have only to prepare two plans, neither of which will be submitted to Government.

		Tier	
Year	*Unitary*	*District*	*County*
1997–98	5	2	4
1998–99	11	3	10
1999–2000	18	3	17
2000–01	22	5	21
2001–02	31	9	28
2002–03	33	7	31
2003–04[1]	22	5	20

[1] Estimate

Pathfinder Report

Mr. Michael Weir: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to publish in full the Fire Cover Task Group's Pathfinder report. [100119]

Mr. Raynsford: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to my hon. Friend, the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak, Lynne Jones on 7 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 115W.

Recycled Capital Grant

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to require the Housing Corporation to promote greater transparency about the amount and uses of recycled capital grant. [99175]

Mr. McNulty: Registered social landlords (RSLs) are required, by the Housing Corporation, to present accumulated recycled capital grant in their annual accounts. RSLs are expected to consult with the local authorities from whose area grant has been recycled about the use of the recycled capital grant fund (RCGF).

Information on the permitted uses of RCGF is available on the Housing Corporation's website (www.housingcorp.gov.uk). In brief, RSLs may use RCGF for projects that would qualify for new social housing grant. These projects are subject to the same grant rates, cost limits and rents as new grant projects.

Regional Housing Boards

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) when each of the new Regional Housing Boards will first meet; and how often they will be expected to meet each year; [99167]

(2) what plans he has to issue further guidance to the new Regional Housing Boards *(a)* collectively and *(b)* individually; [99169]

(3) which organisations and individuals have been invited to sit on each of the new Regional Housing Boards; [99166]

(4) what the arrangements will be for the new Regional Housing Boards to consult with interested parties. [99168]

Mr. McNulty: Government and Housing Corporation Regional Offices, the Regional Assembly, the Regional Development Agency and English Partnership will be represented on the Regional Housing Board. Further membership of the board, the timing and frequency of its meetings and the arrangements for consulting with other interested parties are a matter for agreement within the region. The composition of the board is still being finalised in some regions. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister expects to work closely with Regional Housing Boards in the coming months to ensure the new arrangements are implemented successfully.

Seaside and Country Homes Scheme

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister which registered social landlords participate in the seaside and country homes scheme. [99162]

Mr. McNulty: There are eight registered social landlords who hold seaside and country homes. These are North British Housing, Anchor Trust, Bristol Churches, Devon and Cornwall, Gloucestershire, Knightstone, Longhurst and Nene Housing Society.

All London registered social landlords can nominate tenants for the scheme. In the year from April 2001 until March 2002 the following RSLs had tenants either interviewed for the scheme and/or rehoused (some of the rehousings were from previous years): Bethnal Green and Victoria Park HA, Bradford Property Trust, Bromley/Broomleigh HA, Church Commissioners, Circles 33 Housing Trust, Community HA, East Thames HA, English Churches HA, Family HA, Guinness Trust, Hexagon HA, Hyde HA, Islington and Shoreditch HA, London and Quadrant, Metropolitan Housing Trust, Network HA, New Islington and Hackney HA, Octavia HA, Orbit HA, Peabody Trust, Poplar Harca, Richmond Churches, Samuel Lewis Trust, Sanctuary HA, Soldiers and Sailors Foundation, South London Family HA, Springboard HA, St Pancras HA, Threshold Tennant HA, Toynbee HA and Warden HA.

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister which local authorities place restrictions on the numbers of tenants they will nominate to the Seaside and Country Homes Scheme each year. [99163]

Mr. McNulty: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is not aware of any local authorities that have placed restrictions on the number of their tenants who meet the eligibility criteria that can apply.

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what guidance his Department has issued to local authorities about establishing the relative priority of tenants they nominate to the Seaside and Country Homes Scheme. [99164]

Mr. McNulty: The last guidance on the scheme was issued to all London Boroughs by HOMES in 2000. This included as an annex the application form, that explains how points are awarded.

HOMES also send all boroughs a quarterly report which gives details of areas with lower demand and also ensure that London Borough staff who take over responsibility for the scheme are trained in how it operates. Front line staff are encouraged to attend these sessions so as to ensure they are familiar with the scheme's operation.

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what figures his Department has collated on the number of tenants whose application to be considered for the Seaside and Country Homes Scheme has been refused by their local authority on the grounds of *(a)* their eligibility and *(b)* their relative priority. [99165]

Mr. McNulty: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has not collected any figures on the number of applicants who have been refused by local authorities.

Shared Ownership

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) what estimate he has made of the proportion of registered social landlords who set rents for shared ownership properties in the range of 3 to 3.5 per cent. of equity; [99177]

(2) what plans he has to require the Housing Corporation to *(a)* set benchmark rents for shared ownership properties and *(b)* monitor the performance of registered social landlords against these. [99178]

Mr. McNulty: The rent for a shared ownership property is a matter for the individual registered social landlord (RSL). The rent for new shared ownership schemes is dependent on a number of factors including levels of equity bought, development loans to be serviced by the association, sales receipts and consideration of what is affordable and marketable.

The Housing Corporation does not analyse the proportion of registered social landlords (RSLs) who set rents for shared ownership properties in the range of 3 to 3.5 per cent. of equity.

The Housing Corporation has agreed to lead a Task Force, to be chaired by Baroness Dean, which will look at existing programmes that support sustainable home ownership. Further details will be announced shortly.

Sheltered Housing

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what guidelines his Department gives in respect of the construction standards for sheltered housing; what funding his Department provides for the refurbishment of sheltered housing; and if he will make a statement. [98867]

Mr. McNulty: The Government are committed to the provision of social housing including sheltered accommodation and have substantially increased resources provided to local authorities and the Housing Corporation for housing investment. The Housing Corporation's Approved Development Programme (ADP) may be used to refurbish sheltered housing in the ownership of a Registered Social Landlord (RSL). Since 1999 the Housing Corporation has approved some £22 million of ADP for sheltered housing accommodation schemes in respect of elderly people with warden support, and frail elderly people, improving 2,363 dwellings.

No specific guidelines are given by the Department in respect of construction standards for sheltered housing. All building work must comply with the current Building Regulations 2000. New build sheltered housing schemes funded by the Housing Corporation must comply with their Scheme Development Standards.

Starter Homes Initiatives

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what benefits will be received by *(a)* persons and *(b)* local authorities in areas covered by the Starter Homes Initiatives; and what criteria determines which (i) authorities and (ii) areas are chosen for that initiative. [99310]

Mr. McNulty: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is providing £250 million for the Starter Home Initiative (SHI) which aims to help around 10,000 key workers to buy their first homes. The assistance is primarily in the form of equity loans or shared ownership and is being administered by local scheme providers, mainly registered social landlords. The funding was allocated via two competitive bidding rounds.

In the first round, bids were invited to administer schemes to help key workers in any area where the high cost of housing was undermining recruitment and retention. The main factors taken into account in making allocations were: the relative need for SHI based on house prices, incomes and assessments of recruitment and retention difficulties for key worker groups in different areas; and the cost effectiveness of competing bids.

Second round bids were invited to help key workers in specific areas of the south east, eastern, south west and west Midlands regions. These areas were targeted taking into account recruitment and retention problems being experienced across different areas and the allocations made in round 1.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Benefits

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the cost was of *(a)* means-tested benefit paid to pensioners and *(b)* council tax relief and housing benefit paid to pensioners in 2001–02. [99151]

Mr. McCartney: The information requested is shown in the table:

Estimated costs of means tested benefits for pensioners 2001–02 (£s millions cash)

Benefit	*Expenditure*
Minimum Income Guarantee	4,486
Housing Benefit	4,225
Council Tax Benefit	1,320
Total Means tested benefit	10,031

Minimum Income Guarantee

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the estimated cost is of the minimum income guarantee in 2002–03. [99150]

Mr. McCartney: The estimated cost of the minimum income guarantee in 2002/03 is £4.47 billion.

Benefit Overpayment (Write-offs)

Kevin Brennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many overpayments of benefit have been written off in the last five years on the basis of concern for the health of the claimant. [99456]

Malcolm Wicks: Between May 1998 and the end of 2002, 394 cases were waived due to the health and welfare criteria. Information for earlier periods is not available.

Benefit Take-up

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps he is taking to encourage the take-up of *(a)* the minimum income guarantee and *(b)* attendance allowance; and if he will make a statement. [96846]

Mr. McCartney: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 24 February 2003, *Official Report*, columns 190–91W.

Departmental Vehicles

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what progress has been made, by *(a)* volume and *(b)* percentage for each category of (i) vehicle, (ii) type of power unit and (iii) type of fuel, on an annual basis, over each of the past three years, in renewal of his Department's and agencies' vehicle fleet on a lower emission basis. [97969]

Mr. McCartney: The composition of the Department's fleet is as follows:

	Petrol	*Diesel*	*LPG*	*Hybrid*	*Percentage of Green Vehicles*
1/4/00	488	2105	60	0	2.26
1/4/01	425	1983	238	0	8.99
1/4/02	652	1864	326	16	11.96
12/02/03	549	1,745	551	19	19.90

On 1 April 2002, the Department took over responsibility for the former Employment Service fleet (600 vehicles), a large number of which were petrol. We have subsequently reduced these and will continue to do so when vehicles are replaced.

The Department currently exceeds the targets set by Green Ministers, that being 10 per cent. of our fleet to be alternatively fuelled.

Early Retirement

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much he expects his Department to spend on early retirement packages over the next five years; and how much the Department and its predecessor spent on such packages in the last five years. [99053]

Mr. McCartney: Historical costs associated with early exits from the Department's predecessors are only available for the last four years.

	(£)
2002–03	11,720,398 (to the end of January 03)
2001–02	15,850,518
2000–01	21,867,831
1999–00	24,227,124

These include the cost of continuing annual payments.

The need for early retirement packages is kept under review.

File Stores

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people were employed in the departmental file stores in each year since 1997; how many have been transferred to the private sector; and if he will make a statement. [98855]

Mr. McCartney: The information requested is not available. Such information as is available is in the table.

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Staff employed	356.91	362.62	451.45	1004.31	1112.54
Transfers to private sector	None	None	None	None	None

Notes:

1. Most smaller DWP filestores are managed within DWP core business and separate staffing figures are not available for some or all of the years in the table above.
2. 1997–98 figures include data from 13 stores
3. 1998–99 figures include data from 14 stores
4. 1999–2000 figures include data from 20 stores
5. 2000–01 figures include data from 44 stores
6. 2001–02 figures include data from 62 stores

Full-time Equivalent Staff

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many full-time equivalent staff are employed in *(a)* the Department and *(b)* each of the agencies it sponsors; and what the figures were for 1997. [90663]

Mr. McCartney: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State at the Cabinet Office (Douglas Alexander) on 16 January 2003, *Official Report*, col 697W.

Mr. Douglas Cowan

Mr. Bacon: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the operation of the Appeals Service for Social Security, Child Support and Vaccine Damage, with particular reference to the case of Mr.Douglas Cowan, a constituent. [99117]

Maria Eagle: This is a matter for Norman Egan, Acting Chief Executive of the Appeals Service. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Norman Egan to Mr. Richard Bacon dated February 2003:

The Secretary of State has asked me to respond to your question regarding the administrative handling of an appeal from one of your constituents, Mr Douglas Gowan.

The administrative side of the Appeals Service supports the judicial functioning of appeal tribunals. Appeal Tribunals consist of one, two or three members drawn by the President of appeal tribunals from the panel constituted under section 6 of the Social Security Act 1998. Panel members are appointed by the Lord Chancellor.

The processing of the original appeal; handling of the application for set aside; listing of the case for a re-hearing; and, processing the request for a postponement were handled by the administrative side. The judicial functions were undertaken by the appeal tribunal or where appropriate, a legally qualified panel member, in accordance with the relevant legislation.

After the decision by a legally qualified panel member to set aside the original appeal tribunal's decision, and having notified all the parties to the proceedings regarding the re-hearing scheduled for 18 February 2003, unfortunately a further notification was issued to Mr Gowan incorrectly advising him that the date was 18 March 2003. As soon as this error was identified a further notification was issued confirming the original date and apologising for any inconvenience caused. A request for a postponement was received and passed to a legally qualified panel member. Thelegally qualified panel member decided that it was in Mr Gowan's best interest if the hearing was not postponed. At the rehearing on 18 February the appeal tribunal adjourned the hearing to a later date having issued directions regarding further evidence needed to enable it to reach a decision.

I hope this reply is helpful.

Post-retirement Work

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the proportion of people that remain in work after reaching the retirement age; what measures there are to encourage people to remain in work; what proposals he has to help people over the retirement age re-enter work; and how many people in the UK over retirement age have been helped back into work. [87365]

Mr. McCartney: There is no state retirement age, only an age at which state pension becomes payable, currently 60 for women and 65 for men. Between 2010 and 2020 the women's state pension age will be gradually increased to 65.

Figures that we published for spring 2002 showed that around 861,000 people over state pension age were in employment, 8.5 per cent. of the age group.

The New Deal 50 plus programme, which offers tailored help with jobsearch, and an Employment Credit and training grant, is open to people on qualifying benefits who are over 50. There is no upper age limit for eligibility to the programme, and people over the state pension age can take advantage of the help available.

We are encouraging people to adopt more flexible approaches to retirement. In "Simplicity, security and choice: Working and saving for retirement" (Cm 5677) published 17 December, we have proposed changes to Inland Revenue rules that will allow people to continue to work for their employer, or return to work for them, and draw their occupational pension at the same time.

To encourage more people to consider later retirement, we will bring forward the date of any increase to the increments people gain if they defer their state pension so that people can benefit from it as soon as possible.

To help people over state pension age to re-enter work we are promoting vigorously the benefits, to both employers and individuals, of an age diverse work force, including the recruitment and retention of older workers as part of our AgePositive campaign. In 2006 we will introduce legislation to make it unlawful to discriminate against people, on the grounds of age, in employment and vocational training. Under the legislation, compulsory retirement ages are likely to be unlawful, unless employers can objectively justify them.

The DWP has a programme of research designed to further understanding of the labour market participation of people over 50, in particular retirement behaviour and the barriers to work encountered by this age group. The research includes a project examining the circumstances under which people work after state pension age, the jobs they do, and the impact of working after state pension age on their health, wealth and happiness, compared with the non-working retired population. This research shows that 9 per cent. of women over 60 and 8 per cent. of men over 65 are in employment.

The report will be published in spring 2003 and will be followed by a second stage of qualitative work, which will explore, amongst other things, what would encourage people to stay in work after state pension age.

Retirement Age

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his policy is on allowing civil servants to retire at the age of 65. [90029]

Mr. McCartney: The Government have already begun to address the social and economic consequences of demographic change in its role as employer. One of the recommendations of Winning the Generation Game was that public sector employers should review their retirement ages and examine the case for allowing those who want to work on to age 65 to do so. Already 75 per cent. of civil servants now have the option to retire at 65 and the numbers able to serve beyond 60 are expected to increase.

All staff in the Department for Work and Pensions, below the Senior Civil Service, are able to choose to remain in employment beyond the age of 60 for any period of time up to the age of 65.

"Staff in the Senior Civil Service normally retire at the age of 60 but the Head of the Department and Agency Chief Executives have flexibility to retain members of the Senior Civil Service beyond age 60 if they judge it in the public interest and they are satisfied about the fitness and efficiency of the individual to carry out his or her duties. The most senior posts require written approval from the Head of the Home Civil Service to be retained for longer than three months beyond their 60th birthday."

This is based on an extract from the Civil Service Management Code.

Most public service pension schemes, however, still allow a normal pension to be taken at 60 or under. The Government is seeking views on the proposal that the rules of public service pension schemes should be changed and applied to all new members during the next few years to make an unreduced pension payable from age 65 rather than 60. Such a change would reflect improved longevity, modern working patterns and the practice in the majority of private sector pension schemes.

Targeted Audits

Kevin Brennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of targeted audits carried out by medical services and categorised as grade C have been judged to be fit for purpose. [99457]

Malcolm Wicks: The information requested is not available.

HEALTH

Laming Inquiry

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which recommendations of the Laming inquiry into the death of Victoria Climbie the Government intend to implement; and by what date each will be implemented. [95619]

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which recommendations in the Laming Report the Government agree with and intend to put in practice; and by when. [96033]

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) pursuant to the answer of 29 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 879, on Victoria Climbié, when the recommendations from the Laming Inquiry will be implemented; [95700]

(2) if he will set out for each *(a)* category 1 and *(b)* category 2 recommendations in the Laming Report, (i) whether he accepts or rejects it, (ii) if accepted, what steps he is taking to act on it and to what timescale and (iii) if rejected, what his reasons are and what alternative actions he proposes to take. [96634]

Jacqui Smith: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health made clear in the House, we will make our substantive response to the report as part of the Green Paper on Children at Risk, which will be published in the spring. We have already begun to implement many of Lord Laming's recommendations and we will say more in the Green Paper.

A and E Departments (Junior Doctors)

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of doctors in accident and emergency departments are junior doctors. [99316]

Mr. Hutton: The table shows the proportion of doctors in accident and emergency departments who are junior doctors.

Hospital medical doctors in training with an Accident and Emergency specialty: as at 30 September 2002

England	*Numbers (headcount)*
All doctors within A&E specialty	3,220
Of which:	
Doctors in training within A&E specialty	1,910
(as percentage of total)	59.2

Note:
Figures are rounded to the nearest 10.
Source:
Department of Health medical and dental workforce census

Age-related Macular Degeneration

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library the representations from *(a)* the Royal College of Ophthalmologists and *(b)* the RNIB on age-related macular degeneration. [97859]

Mr. Lammy: Letters received from the Royal College of Ophthalmologists and the Royal National Institute for the Blind in relation to the National Institute for Clinical Excellence's appraisal of photodynamic therapy have been placed in the Library. I am grateful to these organisations for their agreement to release the letters.

NICE do not release to a third party any documents received by it from consultees, including submissions, correspondence, responses to formal consultation and statement of appeal against the Final Appraisal Determination, before the completion of its appraisal.

Attention Deficit Disorder

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will commission research on the prevalence of *(a)* ADD and *(b)* ADHD in adults. [99678]

Jacqui Smith: The Department is currently committing substantial funding to a research programme in support of the implementation of the mental health national service framework. New priorities for research are continually being identified through consultation and this topic will be considered alongside others that emerge through this process.

Barnet Chase Farm Trust

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement as to the future clinical strategy for Barnet Chase Farm Trust; [98940]

(2) what plans he has to move elective surgery from Barnet hospital to Chase Farm hospital; and if he will make a statement; [98936]

(3) when he expects Barnet Chase Farm hospital to publish its proposals for the Masterplan reconfiguring services on its trust's two sites; what consultative arrangements will be in place to allow the public to consider its proposals; and if he will make a statement; [98948]

(4) what steps are being taken to create a unified management system for Barnet and Chase Farm Trust; what savings are expected from such unification; and if he will make a statement. [98942]

Mr. Hutton: Barnet and Chase Farm hospital national health service trust is continuing to work with local stakeholders in line with national policies over public and patient involvement to develop a clinical services strategy. At present there are no proposals for change.

Care Homes

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many and what percentage of admissions to care homes of people over the age of *(a)* 50 and *(b)* 65 in each of the last five years for which figures are available have been as a result of a fall. [100111]

Jacqui Smith: Information on the numbers of admission to care homes for people over the age of 50 and 65 as a result of a fall are not collected centrally. The national service framework for older people recognises that injury resulting from a fall can be a major factor in premature admission to long-term residential care. It sets out a standard and milestones for the development of integrated falls services that cover prevention, effective treatment and care of those who have fallen and appropriate rehabilitation.

Congestion Charges

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made as to the impact congestion charging in Central London will have on *(a)* doctors, *(b)* nurses, *(c)* consultants, *(d)* paramedics and *(e)* ancillary staff in the NHS; and if he will make a statement. [97842]

Mr. Hutton: The congestion charging scheme includes a number of measures which will minimise impact of congestion charging on national health service staff. This includes:

> Exemption of NHS vehicles currently exempt from vehicle excise duty, including ambulances and paramedic vehicles.
>
> A provision to reimburse journeys by NHS staff required to carry specified items, such as controlled drugs or confidential information, as part of their operational duties, that should not be transported on public transport.
>
> A provision to reimburse journeys by NHS staff for the purpose of providing emergency on-call services.

Correspondence

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he plans to reply to the letter of Mr. D.F.D. Malein of Milford on Sea of 16 December 2001. [94220]

Mr. Lammy: On behalf of my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Health, officials from the Department responded to the points raised in Mr. D.F.D. Malein's letter on 10 February 2003.

Delayed Discharges

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what procedures are being put in place to reimburse local authorities who may be subject to the impact of delayed discharges legislation. [97042]

Jacqui Smith: On 28 November, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health announced that £100 million per full year of the legislation would be transferred from the national health service to local authorities in order to meet the costs of reimbursement. Areas which are already tackling delayed discharge should have more of this additional funding available to spend on services. An announcement on how this funding is to be distributed will be made shortly.

Hearing Aids

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on progress made in the training of staff to fit digital hearing aids in the second wave of hospital trusts to receive funding for the purpose. [99405]

Jacqui Smith: The training of staff is progressing satisfactorily and is on schedule to enable all second-wave sites to begin fitting digital hearing aids by the end of March.

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many of the second wave of hospital trusts to receive funding for the roll-out of digital hearing aids *(a)* are fitting the new devices and *(b)* will have begun to fit the new devices by the end of March. [99406]

Jacqui Smith: Seventeen of the 30 second-wave sites are already fitting digital hearing aids as part of a modernised service. The remaining 13 will have begun to fit them by the end of March.

The Government are investing £94 million over the next two years to spread the benefits of digital hearing aids across the whole of England by April 2005.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what estimate he has made of the savings to be had by patients requiring digital hearing aids if registered hearing aid dispensers were enabled to access the NHS hearing aid contract; and if he will make a statement; [99660]

(2) when the evaluation of pilot projects in Shrewsbury and Leeds to examine the role that the private sector may play in supporting the modernisation of NHS hearing aid service will be completed; and if he will make a statement; [99661]

(3) what plans there are to train registered hearing aid dispensers to NHS standards so that they can access the NHS hearing aid contract; and if he will make a statement. [99662]

Jacqui Smith: On 7 February 2003, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health announced a £94 million investment to support the modernisation of hearing aid services, including the provision of digital hearing aids throughout England, by April 2005. Roll-out plans include boosting national health service capacity and improving access for patients by extending public/private partnerships.

The pilot private sector projects in Shrewsbury and Leeds have now been evaluated. The results of the pilot show that private sector hearing aid dispensers can be contracted to fit, assess and follow-up NHS patients with no detriment to the outcome for these patients.

Private sector partners in Shrewsbury and Leeds provided hearing aids obtained via the NHS hearing aid contract for the NHS patients treated as part of the pilot. NHS patients were not charged for their treatment or for the hearing aids. We intend that these arrangements will apply to extended private sector partnership arrangements. There are no plans to give hearing aid dispensers access to the NHS hearing aid contract for their private patients. Hearing aid dispensers in Leeds and Shrewsbury received training to enable them to provide a modernised service to NHS patients, including fitting digital hearing aids. Dispensers involved in extended private partnerships arrangements will be required to meet similar standards of competence and experience.

Domestic Violence

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether GP practice nurses are given training to deal with domestic violence victims. [97122]

Mr. Hutton: The Government are committed to tackling domestic violence and have set up a Ministerial group working across Government to provide co-ordinated and concerted action, including the promotion of education and awareness raising.

The Department of Health published "Domestic Violence: A Resource Manual for Health Care Professionals" in March 2000. The resource manual provides a solid foundation for local multi-agency work and supports health care professionals and managers in developing their domestic violence policies, protocols and services to ensure victims receive the support they need. Building on this initiative, in 2001, as part of a three year health visitor and school nurse practice development programme, resource packs were produced which included information on dealing with domestic violence as a health priority.

An extra £50 million has been made available over the past two years to ensure that National Health Service employers have the capacity to deliver health professional training and development effectively and to ensure that all staff, including nurses working in general practice, have better access to training programmes.

GP Patient Survey

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the general practice patient survey conducted by the National Centre for Social Research will be published. [98918]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 27 February 2003]:* The Department is currently making arrangements for the effective dissemination of the results of the general practice services survey.

Health Service Finance

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the income of each primary care trust per head of population served will be in 2003–04. [99554]

Mr. Hutton: Primary care trusts revenue allocations per weighted and unweighted head of population in 2003–04 have been placed in the Library.

Hospitality

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how often Ministers in his Department have received hospitality in restaurants from outside groups in the last 12 months; [99502]

(2) what hospitality has been offered at public expense in the last 12 months, by each Minister in his Department to outside interest groups, broken down by *(a)* restaurant, *(b)* recipient and *(c)* cost in each case; [99579]

(3) what criteria Ministers in his Department use when determining whether to offer hospitality in restaurants to interest groups at public expense; and if he will make a statement. [99578]

Mr. Lammy: All offers of hospitality are made in accordance with published departmental guidance on financial procedures and propriety, based on the principles set out in "Government Accounting". The giving and receiving of hospitality is conducted fully in accordance with the guidance set out in the "Ministerial Code and Guidance on Contacts with Outside Interest Groups including Lobbyists". The detailed information requested is not held centrally, and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his Department's hospitality budget *(a)* is in 2002–03 and *(b)* was in each of the last three years; and how much was left unspent at the end of each financial year. [99503]

Mr. Lammy: Expenditure arises on hospitality and entertainment only in the context of promoting the Department's business objectives. All such expenditure is made in accordance with published departmental guidance on financial procedures and propriety, based on the principles set out in "Government Accounting".

No specific budget amount is allocated for hospitality, which is only one element of the Department's overall administrative budget. The amount spent in recent financial years is shown in the table.

	Amount (£)
2002–03	[1]96,935
2001–02	121,968
2000–01	93,091
1999–2000	50,114

[1] Up to 31 January 2003.

In-patient Survey

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the in-patient survey conducted last year will be published. [98920]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 27 February 2003]:* Local patient survey results are included in "Your Guide to Local Health Services", which primary care trusts published for the first time at the end of 2002 and will be published annually.

National Institute for Clinical Excellence

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the extent to which acute trusts are rationing drugs that have been approved by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence; and if he will make a statement. [99727]

Mr. Lammy: National health service bodies are under a statutory obligation to provide funding for treatments recommended by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence. We expect them to meet this obligation.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if it is his policy that drugs that have been approved by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence should be available to all patients whose clinicians judge that they would benefit from them. [99734]

Mr. Lammy: Our policy is that treatments appraised by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) should be made available in accordance with recommendations of NICE.

NHS Chief Executives

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what rules and guidance govern disclosure of the salaries of NHS chief executives. [98959]

Mr. Hutton: The guidance issued to National Health Service bodies with regard to the disclosure of the remuneration of chief executives and other senior managers is contained within manuals for accounts. These documents detail the format of annual accounts and reports that NHS bodies are required to present to public meetings. Individuals may decline to give their consent to have this information published relying on the Data Protection Act 1998. In this case, their decision to withhold the information should be disclosed in the published accounts. The current guidance for the accounting period 2002–03 is being placed in the Library.

NHS Direct

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average length of call was to NHS Direct between *(a)* 15 October 2001 and 10 February 2002 and *(b)* 15 October 2002 and 10 February 2003. [97820]

Mr. Lammy: NHS Direct did not consistently start collecting call length data until April 2002. The average length of call to NHS Direct from April 2002 is shown in the table.

NHS Direct–national average nurse call length in seconds

	Average call length
April 2002	835
May 2002	834
June 2002	829
July 2002	813
August 2002	796
September 2002	794
October 2002	767
November 2002	744
December 2002	693
January 2003	685

NHS Estates (PFI)

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what contact his Department has had with the public sector team of the fraud squad concerning the NHS estates PFI scheme; and if he will make a statement. [97531]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 12 February 2003]:* Allegations of fraud which are brought to the Department's attention are investigated by the National Health Service Counter Fraud Service (CFS). For obvious reasons, it is not our practice to comment one way or the other on the detail of investigations which may or may not be taking place or on the conduct of any investigation or on contacts with other agencies with whom the CFS routinely works.

NHS Operations

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate how many instruments were retained after NHS operations in each of the last six years. [98919]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 27 February 2003]:* At the present time, we do not know how many medical errors of this kind affect national health service patients each year.

However, retained instruments and in particular swabs, are a recognised patient safety issue, both nationally and internationally.

The Government have established the National Patient Safety Agency to improve the safety of NHS patient care by promoting an open and fair culture and by introducing a national reporting and learning system for adverse events. It is planned for the system to be rolled out across the NSH from summer 2003. The reporting and learning system will, in time, enable us to understand the nature and extent of adverse events in the NHS, including material retained within patients, and take action to prevent them being repeated.

Orthopaedic Surgery (Leeds)

Mr. Best: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average waiting time for orthopaedic surgery in Leeds was over the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [98416]

Jacqui Smith: Information on waiting times is published quarterly on the Department of Health website. This is broken down into both in-patient and out-patient waiting times by national health service trusts by consultant specialty. This information can be accessed at http://www.doh.gov.uk/waitingtimes/index.htm

Parliamentary Question

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the hon. Member for West Chelmsford will receive an answer to his question of 4 February 2003, ref 95210; and if he will make a statement on the reason for the delay in answering. [100132]

Mr. Hutton: I have replied to the hon. Member today. I apologise for the delay in answering.

Patient Choice

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who will determine whether a patient in West Yorkshire needing an eye operation is eligible to choose an alternative hospital. [99106]

Mr. Hutton: Approval has recently been given by the Department of Health to the establishment of a national health service based Choice pilot scheme. This is to be based at Westwood Park Diagnostic and Treatment Centre (DTC), Bradford, and will be managed by Bradford South and West Primary Care Trust to deliver day surgery cataract extraction. When fully up and running in April 2004, the pilot proposes that the NHS will offer all patients registered with a general practitioner in West Yorkshire the choice of either referral directly to Westwood Park DTC or to attend for treatment at their local hospital.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what additional resources he has made available to NHS trusts in London to implement the London pilot scheme extending choice for patients. [97378]

Mr. Hutton: The approved funding for the London Patient Choice Pilot project during the financial year 2002–03 is £75 million.

Primary Care Trusts

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what salary is paid to each primary care trust chief executive in England; and what the average salary for chief executives of primary care groups in England was in the year to 31 October 2002. [95210]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 4 February 2003]:* Information on the salaries of individual primary care trust and primary care group chief executives is not available centrally. I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 24 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 509W.

Primary care trusts are required to disclose in their published accounts details of the remuneration of senior managers, including the chief executive. Individuals may decline to give their consent to have this information published, relying on the Data Protection Act 1998. In this case, their decision to withhold the information should be disclosed in the published accounts.

Salaries of primary care trust chief executives range from £78,625 to £107,500. However, in exceptional cases, the figures paid may be lower or higher. A copy of the framework used to determine the salaries for primary care trust chief executives in 2002–03 has been placed in the Library.

Remuneration for primary care group chief executives was decided in line with Health Service Circular (HSC) 1998/017 by the PCG Board, and overseen by the health authority Remuneration Committee, who considered the weight of the post against other health authority senior managers when setting the level of remuneration. There was local flexibility to remunerate at a higher (or lower) band where appropriate. Salaries of primary care group chief executives ranged from £26,000 to £50,000. A copy of HSC 1998/017 has been placed in the Library.

Prison Doctors

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many doctors work in prisons in England and Wales; and how many of these are qualified to general practitioner level. [99534]

Jacqui Smith: There are 543 doctors working in prisons in England and Wales as at January 2003, providing primary care and specialist services.

Of the 109 directly employed by the Prison Service to provide primary care services, 26 are not qualified to general practitioner level. They are either engaging in training towards GP or psychiatric qualification, or arrangements are being made for them to work under appropriate supervision.

Private Businesses (Forms)

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the forms that his Department requires private sector businesses to complete and return. [98092]

Mr. Hutton: Under the Government's arrangements for managing the collection of information from private sector businesses, the Department of Health collected information from private nursing homes, hospitals and clinics only up to 31 March 2001. Responsibility for collecting similar data now rests with the National Care Standards Commission.

Private Healthcare Companies

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many operations were carried out in each of the last five years by private healthcare companies using national health service facilities; [97186]

(2) what total revenue was generated in each of the last five years from the use of national health service facilities by private healthcare companies. [97169]

Mr. Hutton: The Department of Health does not hold information centrally on the use by private healthcare companies of national health service facilities, nor on the revenue generated as a result.

Severalls Hospital Site

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who is handling the sale of the former Severalls hospital site in Colchester; and when he expects the sale to be completed. [99698]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 27 February 2003]*: Severalls hospital site in Colchester is one of a number of properties included in the one-off sale of remaining retained estate being handled by NHS Estates, an executive agency of the Department of Health.

The sale is expected to be completed, subject to approval, by September 2003.

Student Work Placements

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many university students his Department and associated agencies have supported or sponsored with a work placement in the last year; what his policy is on work placements; what plans he has to develop such schemes; and what his policy is on paying their university fees. [98532]

Mr. Hutton: The Department supported nine undergraduate students in 2002–03 through the Windsor Fellowship Organisation—funded centrally. The Department only keeps records of centrally organised programmes and so there are no records held on ad-hoc work placement sponsorship. The information is shown in the table.

Agency	*Number of students sponsored in the last year*
NHS Pensions Agency	0
NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency	0
NHS Estates Agency	2
Medicines Device Agency	0
Medicines Control Agency	0

For the national health service, medical undergraduates undertake placements in a clinical setting during the third to fifth years of their degree courses. The Department reimburses NHS organisations for the additional costs they incur in providing such placements, of which there were 11,400 in 2001–02.

The NHS does not collect information on when NHS non-medical pre-registration students undertake their practice placements. As a general rule, NHS students are required to undertake practice placements which account for approximately 50 per cent. of the university course and these are unpaid.

All pre-registration non-medical NHS students have their personal tuition fee met from departmental funds. Course tuition fees are also met by work force development confederations through the contracts they hold with universities.

In the 2001–02 financial year, the number of pre-registration nursing and midwifery students was 54,313 and the number of pre-registration allied health profession, dental hygienist and dental therapist students was 15,178.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 4 March 2003

DEFENCE

European Security and Defence Policy

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he last discussed progress on the European Security and Defence Policy with the German defence minister. [100061]

Mr. Hoon: I last discussed progress on European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) with my German counterpart on 5 November 2002 in Berlin.

ESDP was also discussed extensively at the last General Affairs and External Relations Council meeting on 18 and 19 November 2002 at which Defence Ministers from all member states were present.

Export Licence (Sudan)

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether Alenia Marconi System used the F680 procedure to receive preliminary Government advice on the likely prospects for approval on their export licence application to export an air traffic control system to Sudan; and if he will make a statement. [99304]

Mr. Ingram: Details of F680 applications from companies are normally commercially confidential and exempt from disclosure under Exemptions 13 and 14 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. Any F680 application received in respect of Sudan would be rigorously assessed on a case by case basis against the consolidated EU and national arms export licensing criteria and the EU arms embargo.

Honours and Decorations

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he received the recommendations of the Sub-Committee of the Honours and Decorations Committee, on the issue of a medal for UK servicemen who were in Egypt between 1951 and 1954; whether he will accept the recommendations of this sub-committee; and if he will make a statement. [100249]

Dr. Moonie: I have not received the recommendations of the sub-committee. They passed their recommendations directly to the HD Committee for its consideration. The Ministry of Defence awaits the publication of the result of their deliberations and will accept their decision.

Procurement

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the MOD expects to award the contract for the Future Infantry Soldier Technology Programme; what capabilities the new equipment will have; when the technology will come into full service; what the length of the contract is; and if he will make a statement. [98349]

Mr. Ingram: An announcement on the Prime Contractor for the Assessment Phase (AP) of the Future Integrated Soldier Technology (FIST) programme will be made shortly. Contract award will take place soon thereafter. The contract will last for a little under three years, and will be followed by a Demonstration and Manufacture Phase which will be the subject of separate contractual arrangements. The FIST programme will bring the benefits of technology improvements to the infantry soldier by providing an integrated suite of equipment which will enhance mission effectiveness in dismounted close combat. This will be defined more closely during the AP. An In-Service Date will not be set until the main investment decision, but current estimates are around the end of this decade.

Separated Service Allowance

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence in what circumstances unmarried service personnel deployed to the Gulf receive longer separated service allowance. [100624]

Dr. Moonie: Longer separated service allowance (LSSA) compensates for longer separated service regardless of marital status. From 1 March 2003, following changes recommended by the Armed Forces Pay Review Body (AFPRB), it is paid to all eligible personnel who have completed 12 months' initial qualifying service. LSSA is paid on a daily basis for separation of 10 days or more, at three rates (basic, middle and higher) dependent upon periods of accumulated separation. Bonuses are available for those who experience very high levels of accumulated separation.

Regularly reviewed by the AFPRB, their 2003 report reduced the initial qualifying period from 18 months' service to 12 to target the allowance at junior personnel to ensure that they do not commence a second operational tour without compensation for separation.

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which categories of service personnel are eligible for longer separated service allowance; and under what circumstances it is awarded. [100625]

Dr. Moonie: Regardless of marital status, all regular service personnel can receive longer separated service allowance (LSSA) provided that they meet the qualifying criteria. Reservists who have been called out on permanent service or who undertake full-time reserve service are eligible for the allowance; members of non-regular permanent staff of the TA and reservists who are undertaking part-time reserve service can also qualify for LSSA.

LSSA compensates personnel for the effects of longer separated service regardless of marital category or rank. Following recommendations by the Armed Forces Pay Review Body (AFPRB), the initial qualifying period was reduced from 18 months' service to 12 months from 1 March 2003. The allowance is paid at three daily rates to eligible personnel who spend 10 days or more on temporary duty away from their permanent duty station. The basic rate is paid once 12 months' service has been completed. After 300 accrued days of separation at the basic rate, the middle rate applies and after a further 300 accrued days of separation at the middle rate, the higher rate applies. Bonuses are available for those who experience very high levels of accumulated separation.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Council Tax Benefit

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the *(a)* number and *(b)* percentage of (i) single males, (ii) single females and (iii) couples (A) over 60 and (B) over 75 who will be eligible for (1) any amount of council tax benefit and (2) full council tax benefit *(x)* at present, *(y)* in April 2003 and *(z)* in October 2003. [96369]

Malcolm Wicks: The available information is in the table.

Estimated numbers of pensioners eligible for Council Tax Benefit (CTB) in 2002–03

	All pensioners		*Pensioners aged over 75*	
	Any CTB	*Full CTB only*	*Any CTB*	*Full CTB only*
2002–03				
Single males	630,000	310,000	270,000	120,000
Single females	1,960,000	1,170,000	1,080,000	710,000
Couples	1,300,000	510,000	430,000	170,000
Total	3,890,000	1,990,000	1,780,000	1,000,000
2003–04				
Single males	700,000	320,000	310,000	120,000
Single females	2,080,000	1,210,000	1,140,000	730,000
Couples	1,470,000	540,000	480,000	180,000
Total	4,240,000	2,060,000	1,930,000	1,030,000

Notes:

1. The Policy Simulation Model is only available for each financial year and estimates can be interpreted as relating to the mid-year point. It is therefore, not possible to provide estimates for the points in time requested. Estimates for 2003–04 include the effects of the Pension Credit.

2. Pensioners are defined to be households where the benefit recipient or their partner is aged 60 or over. The over 75 group includes cases where either the benefit recipient or their partner is 75 or over.

3. The estimates are rounded to the nearest 10,000 and totals may not sum due to rounding.

4. Although it is possible to infer estimates of take-up by comparing these figures with forecast caseloads, it should be noted that these figures may not be consistent with those published in the take-up statistics, which are estimated on a different basis.

Source:

Estimates have been produced using the DWP Policy Simulation Model, which is based on the 2000–01 Family Resources Survey with prices and benefits uprated to the year in question.

File Stores

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the cost was of operating his Department's filestores in each year since 1997. [98845]

Mr. McCartney: The information requested is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the following table. Because the availability of data is not uniform across the period, the figures are non-comparable.

£

Year	*Operating costs*
1997–98	21,078,728
1998–99	21,142,259
1999–2000	21,783,791
2000–01	27,714,146
2001–02	28,470,915

Notes:

1. Operating costs shown include staff salaries and estates costs but not running costs such as those for utilities.

2. Where filestores are operated by external contractors then contract costs have been used.

3. Most smaller DWP filestores are managed within DWP core business and separate operating costs for these stores are therefore not available prior to the current review of records storage and retrieval.

4. 1997–98 figures include staff data from 13 stores and estates data from 60 stores.

5. 1998–99 figures include staff data from 14 stores and estates data from 60 stores.

6. 1999–2000 figures include staff data from 20 stores and estates data from 60 stores.

7. 2000–01 figures include staff data from 44 stores and estates data from 60 stores.

8. 2001–02 figures include data from 62 stores.

Housing Benefit (Rent Restrictions)

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate he has made of total housing benefit expenditure on private accommodation used for housing families in temporary accommodation in 2001–02. [91691]

Malcolm Wicks: The March 2002 report, "More than a roof" and the Government's response to it set out a challenging new approach to tackling homelessness. Specific measures include changes to Housing Benefit (HB) rules worth around £10 million to boost incentives for private sector leasing by local authorities.

HB expenditure for temporary accommodation is recorded where the accommodation is arranged by or through the Council. However, expenditure is not identified separately where a homeless person finds his/her board and lodging accommodation or where the council has no licensed or short-term lease accommodation available. Therefore it is not possible to reliably estimate total HB expenditure on private accommodation used for housing families in temporary accommodation in 2001–02.

Local Housing Allowance

Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the Government's plans are to introduce a standard local housing allowance to replace housing benefit; when the plan's changes will be introduced throughout the UK; and in which areas the reforms are being piloted. [97318]

Malcolm Wicks: The Standard Local Housing Allowances (SLHA) will provide a better, quicker service based on simpler, clearer rules. It will allow people to know in advance what housing benefit support they will receive, promote choice and personal responsibility, and bridge the gap between benefit and work by allowing tenants to budget for their own rent.

Details of our proposals are in the prospectus, "Building Choice and Responsibility: a radical agenda for Housing Benefit", a copy of which is in the Library.

We will be piloting the SLHA in 10 pathfinder local authorities (Blackpool, Brighton and Hove, Conwy, Coventry, Edinburgh, Leeds, Lewisham, Middlesbrough, North East Lincolnshire and Teignbridge). All 10 local authorities have accepted our invitation to participate in the pilot, based on our commitment to meet all reasonable costs. The scheme will be based on local reference rents and these local authorities were selected to reflect a wide range of housing market conditions, including areas with high value rented properties.

Extension of SLHA throughout the rest of the country will depend on the results of our evaluation of the pilot scheme.

Pensioners

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to provide an alternative method to people to drawing their pension in person, when they suffer from sudden illness, from April. [100564]

Malcolm Wicks: If someone cannot get out to collect their state pension which is paid into an account then they can give authority for someone they trust to do this. The precise arrangements will depend on the type of account they have. If the customer could not make alternative arrangements to draw their state pension, the Department currently has arrangements in place to ensure vulnerable customers do not suffer hardship.

Pensions (Casual Agents)

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people draw their pensions through post offices using casual agents. [100563]

Malcolm Wicks: Information on the number of people who draw their pensions through post offices using casual agents is not available.

There is a facility available for all benefit and pension recipients to allow an individual to complete the reverse of a giro cheque or payment foil from their order book, which gives authorisation to someone to act as their agent on a one-off or temporary basis, without notifying the Department.

Post Office Card Accounts

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps he will take to advertise the benefit of the post office card accounts to those recipients of *(a)* war pensions and *(b)* child benefit who have already been contacted about changes in the method of benefits payments, prior to the start-up of the Post Office card account. [100565]

Malcolm Wicks: Those people who have already been contacted about the move to direct payment received a mailing with information which clearly set out the account options. The information material set out the key features of the various accounts and explained how people can access their money at the Post Office, if they wish to do so and what to do if they wanted a Post Office card account. War pension and child benefit customers who have already opted for a Post Office card account after receiving the mailing will be contacted after April when the account becomes available.

University Students (Work Placements)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many university students his Department and associated agencies have supported or sponsored with a work placement in the last year; what his policy is on work placements; what plans he has to develop such schemes; and what his policy is on paying their university fees. [98531]

Mr. McCartney: The Department for Work and Pensions supports certain students with work placements via a combination of local and centrally-run arrangements. Figures for the former are not available centrally. For the latter, the Department supported 14 students on work placements in 2002, with the aim of attracting high-calibre undergraduates who are interested in a career in the Civil Service. The Department plans to continue to offer paid work placements to undergraduates during their breaks. Payment of university fees is not therefore an issue.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Abandoned Vehicles

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many abandoned vehicles there were in the UK in each year since 1992; and how many are projected for the next five years *(a)* in total and *(b)* in each region. [99226]

Mr. Meacher: Information on the number of abandoned vehicles in England and Wales is as follows:

Wales

In 2000–01 local authorities notified the National Assembly that there were 7,700 abandoned vehicles in Wales. This was the first year that this question was included in the National Assembly's Local Authority Municipal Waste Survey. No figures are available for earlier years.

England

Information on the numbers of abandoned vehicles was requested for the first time from local authorities as part of the Municipal Waste Management Survey 2000–01. Regional results from the survey, which include estimates for those local authorities that did not respond to the survey, are listed in the table. Results from the 2001–02 survey are currently being collected and initial estimates should be available in April.

Government region	*Abandoned vehicles (thousands)*
North East	2.5
North West	9.2
Yorkshire and the Humber	7.7
East Midlands	11.9
West Midlands	20.7
East of England	28.9
London	83.6

Government region	*Abandoned vehicles (thousands)*
South East	44.7
South West	17.2
Estimated England Total	226.4

It is not possible to provide projected figures for England or Wales as there is only one year's data to work with. Although costs of disposal will increase as a result of the depollution and dismantling requirements of the end-of-life vehicles directive, the impact on the number of abandoned vehicles is difficult to predict—much will depend upon future values of scrap metal and the effectiveness of the various initiatives which are being taken to tackle the abandoned vehicle problem.

The information requested is not held centrally in either Scotland or Northern Ireland.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what steps she is taking to ensure that *(a)* abandoned and *(b)* end of life vehicles are disposed of in a sustainable manner; [99335]

(2) what the cost to local authorities of *(a)* disposing of and *(b)* administering schemes to dispose of abandoned vehicles was in each of the last 10 financial years. [99336]

(3) what plans she has to ensure that abandoned vehicles are appropriately dismantled and recycled. [99357]

(4) what steps she is taking to co-ordinate the collection and disposal of abandoned vehicles. [99355]

(5) what the average cost is of disposing of abandoned vehicles, including the costs of administration. [99356]

Mr. Meacher: Waste collection authorities are required under section 3(1) of the Refuse Disposal (Amenity) Act 1978 to remove a vehicle which is abandoned in their area on any land in the open air or on any other land forming part of a highway. Section 4 of the 1978 Act enables waste disposal authorities to dispose of vehicles in their custody which have been removed because they were abandoned. Such vehicles are normally disposed of through either dismantlers or scrap yards.

The dismantling and recycling of End of Life Vehicles (ELVs) must be carried out in compliance with the conditions of a waste management licence or under a registered exemption from licensing and in a manner which does not pollute the environment and harm human health.

The End-of-Life Vehicles Directive requires that all ELVs, including those abandoned vehicles which are ELVs, are depolluted and dismantled to specified environmental standards by appropriately-permitted facilities. The permits will replace registered exemptions (unless a site is only carrying out recovery operations on de-polluted vehicles). Draft regulations to transpose this aspect of the Directive will be published shortly for consultation with a view to their coming into effect later this year. The Directive also requires that 85 per cent. by weight of ELVs are recovered and recycled by 1 January 2006, and 95 per cent. by 1 January 2015. The Government is currently considering its preferred approach to achieving these targets.

We estimate that disposal costs for abandoned vehicles under the 1978 Act arrangements are between £30 and £50 per vehicle. Under the ELV Directive additional costs for the takeback and treatment of ELVs are estimated to be £50 depending on the age, condition and type of the vehicle and the price of scrap metal at the time. The increase is largely due to the costs of depolluting the ELVs to the standard required by the Directive.

Information on the cost to local authorities of disposing of and administering schemes to dispose of abandoned vehicles is not held centrally.

Illegal Bush Meat

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what action her Department is taking to tackle the illegal importation of bush meat [100395]

John Healey: I have been asked to reply.

Bush meat is generally taken to refer to meat from wild animals hunted for food. Controls on its import arise from both the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) and from controls imposed to protect animal health.

Customs are responsible for the enforcement of CITES restrictions and they take action to target, intercept, seize and where appropriate prosecute offenders.

In controls to protect animal health Customs' role is to support the lead enforcement authorities, port health authorities and Defra. In 2002, Customs deployed additional resources in this role. A Cabinet Office study has recommended that the anti-smuggling role is transferred to Customs is actively working with Defra to implement this change as soon as practicable.

Domestic Waste

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what investigations she has carried out into the amount of household domestic waste which has been separated for recycling by the householder but has ended up in landfill *(a)* by Project Integra and *(b)* in England. [100033]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 28 February 2003]:* We do not collect this information. Under the best value performance indicators the information collected is household waste sent for recycling; this would not distinguish any amount subsequently sent to landfill because it was not recycled.

Environment Agency (Fines)

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what assessment has been made or is planned of the effectiveness of fines levied by the Environment Agency on polluters in preventing *(a)* further incidences of pollution by the polluters and *(b)* incidences of pollution from others who have not previously polluted; what changes are planned; and if she will make a statement; [99240]

(2) how much has been levied in fines by the Environment Agency against *(a)* companies, *(b)* local authorities and *(c)* individuals with regard to incidences of pollution, broken down by type of pollution incidence (i) in total, (ii) in each region and (iii) per fine in each year since 1995. [99239]

Mr. Meacher: The Environment Agency does not have the legal capacity to impose fines, which are a matter for the courts. The role of the Environment Agency is to present cases where they consider environmental damage to have been inflicted, and to maximise the chance of conviction by ensuring that all relevant information is made available to the court.

No assessment has yet been made of the preventive effect of fines levied against environmental offenders. The Department shares the Agency's view that the level of fines being imposed for pollution offences is generally too low. We are now working together and with others, especially the Magistrates Association, to ensure that magistrates are trained and have an increased awareness of the implications of polluting activity and consequently impose more realistic fines. To this end, the Association recently circulated relevant training material to all its 28,000 members. The Government are also exploring the possibility of developing general guidelines on sentencing for environmental offences.

The Agency does not hold statistical information on fines that predates the computerisation of their system in 1999. However, they produced the tables which address the question for convictions from 1999, copies of which have been placed in the Library of the House.

Exercise Action Pilots

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what local exercise action pilots have been introduced by the Countryside Agency in collaboration with Sport England and the Department of Health to tackle obesity and increase physical activity. [100424]

Alun Michael: The Local Exercise Action Pilots Programme is a joint initiative funded by the Department of Health, Sport England and the Countryside Agency, with support from the Local Government Association, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, Department for Education and Skills and Department for Transport. Nine local pilots led by Primary Care Trust are being developed to test effective approaches to increasing access to, and levels of, physical activity. The pilot sites will be announced in March.

Fly Tipping

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimated total volume of waste she estimates was illegally flytipped in each year since 1992, broken down by the nature of this waste. [99269]

Mr. Meacher: Fly tipped waste is collected by both local authorities and the Environment Agency. Data on the volume of fly tipped waste are not collected centrally and so estimates cannot be provided. However, a recent report looking at fly tipped waste on agricultural land estimated that 0.6 million tonnes of waste was deposited on agricultural land in England and Wales in 2001. This is broken down as follows.

Waste type	*Grossed up weights for England and Wales (tonnes)*
White goods	2,900
Furniture	5,600
Green waste	94,000
General household waste	8,500
C and D waste	380,000
Cars	118,000
Tyres	8,700
Total [2]	0.6 million [2]

The Government is currently discussing with the Environment Agency the potential for setting up a national recording system for fly tipping which would record these type of data from both the Agency and local authorities in England.

GM Crops

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what role the Minister of State for the Environment and Agri-Environment has in the Government's consideration of policy towards GM crops. [99286]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 27 February 2003]*: I contribute to all aspects of the Government's policy thinking on GM crops.

Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the industries and activities which have moved *(a)* from a Part B process to a Part A process and *(b)* from a Part A to a Part B process, under the IPPC Regulations since the Climate Change Levy was introduced, providing reasons for changes which have taken place. [99237]

Mr. Meacher: The Pollution Prevention and Control (England and Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2001, came into force on 1 April 2001, the same date as the Climate Change Levy. The Amendment Regulations provided for certain activities listed in Part 1 of Schedule 1 to the Pollution Prevention and Control (England and Wales) Regulations 2000 to be moved from one section or part of a section to another in order to ensure that they were subjected to appropriate regulation.

The Amendment Regulations transferred three industry sectors from Part B to Part A(2):

(i) composite wood-based board manufacture: plant manufacturing wood particleboard, oriented strand board, wood fibreboard, plywood, and any other composite wood-based board, as well as the manufacture of cellulose fibre reinforced calcium silicate board using unbleached pulp;

(ii) grinding of metallurgical slag (where not part of an A(1) installation) and where the installation has an annual grinding capacity of more than 250,000 tonnes; and

(iii) large plant manufacturing new rubber tyres: installations which use, in any 12-month period, 50,000 tonnes or more of natural rubber, synthetic elastomers, and other substances mixed with them.

The intention of these transfers was to secure environmental benefits from the control of a wider range of environmental impacts, compared with control of only air emissions under Part B.

There have been no transfers of activities from Part A(2) to Part B.

Mobile Recycling Plants

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many mobile recycling plants there are in operation in the UK; and what their total weekly capacity is, broken down by region. [99227]

Mr. Meacher: The most up to date information indicates that the Agency has issued 116 mobile plant licences for the treatment of waste soil. The typical annual licensed capacity (per plant) is up to 75,000 tonnes per annum. This would equate to a theoretical maximum annual treatment capacity of 8,700,000 tonnes per annum, or 167,308 tonnes per week of waste soil.

The plants can operate anywhere in the UK and it is not possible to provide a breakdown of the capacity by region.

One mobile plant licence has been issued for the treatment of waste refrigerationequipment. It has a weekly capacity of around 3000 fridges.

Nappies

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many disposable nappies she estimates were *(a)* used and *(b)* disposed of by (i) landfill, (ii) incineration and (iii) other means in the last year for which figures are available. [99247]

Mr. Meacher: The last national study on disposable nappies was in 1993. Local authorities have carried out more recent studies, and the results suggest that nappies constitute approximately 4–5 per cent. of the municipal waste stream.

The most recent figures show that 78 per cent. of municipal waste goes to landfill, 12 per cent. is recycled and 9 per cent. disposed of through thermal treatment. As disposable nappies cannot be recycled, using these figures we can estimate that approximately 90 per cent. are sent to landfill and 10 per cent. undergo thermal treatment.

New work on a new compositional analysis of the municipal waste stream is being started at the beginning of the next financial year, with figures expected in December 2004. Nappies will be identified separately in this work.

Pollution

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the annual emission was of *(a)* NOx, *(b)* SOx, *(c)* particulates and *(d)* CO$_2$ at (i) London Gatwick Airport and (ii) London Stansted Airport in the last year for which figures are available. [100399]

Alun Michael: The following table shows estimated emissions of No$_x$, So$_x$, particulates (PM$_{10}$), and CO$_2$ for Gatwick and Stansted Airports in 2000 (the latest year for which figures are available).

	Gatwick (tonnes)	*Stansted (tonnes)*
NO$_x$ (as nitrogen dioxide)	3,670	867
SO$_x$ (as sulphur dioxide)	137	61
CO$_2$ (carbon dioxide)	422,489	184,932
Particles (as PM$_{10}$)	41	16

Source:

National Environment Technology Centre. These cover emissions from aircraft and airside vehicles within the perimeter of the airport. These cover emissions from aircraft and airside vehicles within the perimeter of the airport. Emissions are calculated from aircraft movement data for the airports in 2000. Aircraft emissions during complete take off and landing cycle up to 1,000m are allocated to the airport. Consequently a proportion of the emissions are emitted at some height and horizontal distance from the boundaries of the airport.

Refrigerators

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when proposed new recycling plants related to the recycling of refrigerators will come online; and what their capacity will be, broken down by region. [99229]

Mr. Meacher: 10 fixed plants have already come online in Oldham, Willesden, Wallasey, Knighton, Bromsfield, Bradford, St Helens, Cradley Heath, Newport and Billingham. Each has a capacity of around 300k units per year. Plans are advanced for a further six plants in Chesterfield, Hertford, Wolverhampton, Sheffield, Birmingham and Kettering. One mobile plant, with a capacity of around 150k units per year, has been licensed to operate in Lewes, South Wales and Swindon.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many refrigerators and freezers are being stored by each local authority pending disposal or recycling. [99230]

Mr. Meacher: There are no figures on the numbers of refrigerators and freezers being stored by local authority area. Most local authorities have already let contracts with fridge treatment companies so their backlog will have been removed. To monitor the disposal of refrigerators, we have asked local authorities to report on the number of fridges they have dealt with as part of the national waste monitoring questionnaire.

Tyres

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many tyres were *(a)* purchased, *(b)* reused and *(c)* disposed of by (i) landfill, (ii) incineration, (iii) illegal fly tipping and (iv) other means in each year since 1992. [99271]

Mr. Meacher: The Used Tyre Working Group, which comprises representatives from the tyre industry and officials from the Department of Trade and Industry and the Environment Agency, has compiled statistics on used tyres since 1995. The statistics, which are based on information supplied to the UTWG on a voluntary basis, are indicative in nature since the quality of the source data varies.

	Replacement tyre sales		*Tyres on new vehicles*		*Total*	
	Units (m)	*Tonnes (000s)*	*Units (m)*	*Tonnes (000s)*	*Units (m)*	*Tonnes (000s)*
1995	27.9	382	11.2	94	39.1	476
1996	27.2	359	11.6	96	38.8	456
1997	26.6	369	12.4	100	39	468
1998	27.8	370	12.9	106	40.7	476
1999[1]	26.3	275	12.7	103	38.9	378
2000	25	260	12.8	105	37.8	365
2001	26.9	284	14.1	114	41.0	398

[1] From 1999 onwards, the method of calculating replacement tyre sales tonnage from unit information changed to better reflect the spread of commercial vehicle tyre sizes and weights.

Tonnes (000s)[1]

	1995	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Reused[2]	72	87	93	110	92	99	94
Retreaded	124	116	110	86	66	56	49
Recycled	41	41	34	49	83	75	107
Energy recovery[3]	80	102	117	84	70	54	40
Total recovery	317	346	354	328	311	283	290
Other (inc. landfill)[4]	166	138	136	139	123	167	191
Used tyre arisings[5]	483	484	490	468	427	450	481

[1] Units not separately identified, since recovery generally reported in tonnage terms.

[2] Category includes part-worn tyres, tyres used for silage clamps and landfill engineering purposes and exports of used tyres.

[3] Includes the former Elm Energy/Sita Tyre Recycling tyres to energy plant which closed in 2000.

[4] The figure for landfill, as reported in the table, is effectively the balance between used tyre arisings and used tyre recovery. As well as covering the disposal of both whole and shredded tyres to landfill, it also includes those tyres which are disposed of to landfill as automotive shredder residue.

[5] From 1999, total used tyre arisings have been based on the number of replacement tyre sales, numbers of vehicles scrapped and imports of used tyres as well as a proportion of tyres re-entering the waste stream after temporary re-use.

The level of tyre fly-tipping is not separately identified. However, the Environment Agency responded to over 1,300 incidents involving tyres in 2002. The actual total is likely to be substantially higher since many incidents are reported directly to local authorities and do not feature in Environment Agency statistics.

Government, through the Department of Trade and Industry, are shortly to issue a follow-up paper to its 2002 consultation on a possible statutory producer responsibility mechanism for used tyres. This follow-up paper invites views on the introduction of statutory reporting requirements through both the new tyre supply and used tyre disposal chains with the aim of improving the information base, promoting responsible tyre recovery and disposal practices while at the same time making it increasingly difficult for those fly-tipping tyres. The paper will also seek views on the introduction of a single point for the reporting of tyre fly-tipping incidents.

Waste Disposal

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the total volume of *(a)* domestic, *(b)* commercial and *(c)* other waste was in each region in each year since 2000 and projected to 2005, broken down by the proportion of waste (i) sent to landfill, (ii) incinerated and (iii) disposed of by other means. [99234]

Mr. Meacher: The available information is shown in the tables below. The latest available data for municipal waste are from the 2000/01 Municipal Waste Management Survey, by Defra and the National Assembly for Wales. In 2000–01 some 89 per cent of all municipal waste was domestic (household) waste. The latest available data for commercial and industrial waste are taken from the Environment Agency's National Waste Production Survey for 1999. Projections are not available.

Municipal waste 2000–01

Government Region	*Municipal waste (000 tonnes)*	*Landfill disposal (percentage)*	*Incineration (percentage)*	*Other methods (percentage)*
East Midlands	2,290	78	7	15
East of England	2,918	82	2	16
London	4,463	71	21	8
North East	1,452	75	19	6
NorthWest	4,155	90	1	9
South East	4,344	81	0	19
SouthWest	2,678	82	0	18
Wales	1,642	93	0	7

Municipal waste 2000–01

Government Region	*Municipal waste (000 tonnes)*	*Landfill disposal (percentage)*	*Incineration (percentage)*	*Other methods (percentage)*
West Midlands	2,895	58	31	10
Yorkshire and the Humber	2,959	85	3	12
Total:	2,959	79	8	13

Commercial waste 2000–01

Government Region	*Commercial waste (000 tonnes)*	*Landfill disposal (percentage)*	*Incineration (percentage)*	*Other methods (percentage)*
East Midlands	1,787	49	5	46
East of England	2,487	63	1	36
London	4,350	56	1	43
North East	996	45	8	47
NorthWest	3,104	57	1	42
South East	4,043	56	1	43
SouthWest	2,322	52	1	48
Wales	1,141	68	0	32
West Midlands	2,340	45	9	46
Yorkshire & the Humber	2,231	48	3	49
Total:	24,802	54	3	43

Industrial Waste 1999

Government Region	*Industrial waste (000 tonnes)*	*Landfill disposal (percentage)*	*Incineration (percentage)*	*Other methods (percentage)*
East Midlands	5,919	49	2	49
East of England	3,652	46	2	52
London	2,740	40	4	56
North East	3,761	46	2	51
NorthWest	6,475	45	1	54
South East	4,958	46	1	53
SouthWest	2,914	40	3	57
Wales	4,989	33	1	66
West Midlands	5,219	41	4	55
Yorkshire and the Humber	9,465	37	1	62
Total:	50,090	42	2	56

Notes:

1. Percentages for tables may not add due to founding.
2. 'Other Methods' for municipal waste will include recycled and composted waste and waste sent for refuse derived fuel.
3. 'Other Methods' for commercial and industrial waste will include land recovery, re-used and recycled and a proportion of waste sent for treatment or transfer station.
4. Industrial waste excludes construction and demolition, agriculture, mining and quarrying.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Central America

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to his United States counterpart in respect of United States involvement in the democratic process in countries of Central America. [100040]

Mr. Rammell: FCO Officials are in regular consultation with the US Administration on a wide range of issues including Central American affairs. FCO Ministers have not made direct representations to US counterparts on the subject in question.

Cote d'Ivoire

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what measures his Department is taking to prevent violence between forces of the Government of Cote d'Ivoire and Liberian refugees. [99295]

Mr. Rammell: We are not aware of any confirmed reports of violence between forces of the Government of Cote d'Ivoire and Liberian refugees. However, the UK is concerned that Liberians may be involved in the Cote d'Ivoire conflict.

The UK fully supported UN Security Council Resolution 1464 which urged all parties including the Cote d'Ivoire Government to implement the Linas-Marcoussis Peace Agreement and to take all necessary steps to avoid further violations of human rights and international law, particularly against civilians and regardless of their origin; and called upon the neighbour states of Cote d'Ivoire, including Liberia, to prevent any action that might undermine the security of Cote d'Ivoire. UNSCR 1464 also authorised French and ECOWAS troops to ensure 'the protection of civilians immediately threatened with physical violence within their zones of operation, using the means available to them'.

We have raised our concern for Liberian refugees in Cote d'Ivoire in the UN Security Council.

We have provided £1 million in humanitarian assistance. This has included the provision of emergency health services, water services and food supplies to civilians, internally displaced people and refugees in both government and rebel controlled areas. Many Liberian refugees have benefited from this assistance, particularly in the worst affected west of the country. We are also contributing £600,000 towards a UNHCR camp refurbishment programme for Liberian and Ivorian refugees who have crossed into Guinea.

Cyprus

Mr. Best: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to promote a settlement in Cyprus. [98417]

Mr. MacShane: I refer my hon. Friend to the written Ministerial Statement made by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary on 25 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 14WS, and to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) on 25 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 427W.

EU Accession

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent communication he has had with the governments of the EU applicant countries regarding their accession to the European Union. [99738]

Mr. MacShane: Her Majesty's Government has close relations with all the candidate countries for EU accession. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and I, have met with representatives of incoming EU member states on a number of occasions both in London and on mainland Europe. I intend to visit several of the applicant countries.

EU Candidate Countries

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps remain to be taken before candidate countries become members of the EU. [100519]

Mr. MacShane: The European Commission gave a positive opinion on 19 February to the accession of the 10 new members. The draft Accession Treaty is now being considered by the European Parliament, which is expected to give its assent on 9 April. The Council of Ministers will take a formal decision on 14/15 April to admit the new members. Heads of State and Government will meet in Athens on 16 April to sign the Accession Treaty. All 25 parties to the treaty will have until 30 April 2004 to ratify it according to their respective constitutional requirements. Subject to ratification of the treaty, the new members will accede to the Union on 1 May 2004.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with European counterparts regarding the Turkish application to join the EU; and what talks he has had with *(a)* Greek and *(b)* Cypriot representatives on the issue. [100520]

Mr. MacShane: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has regularly discussed Turkey's EU candidacy at meetings of EU foreign ministers in Brussels in the General Affairs and External Relations Council and in bilateral discussions. The EU is committed to opening accession negotiations with Turkey without delay if the European Council decides that it fulfils the Copenhagen political criteria. We look forward to working with the new Cypriot government to that end.

Foreign Agreements

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many agreements were reached between the UK Government and foreign powers in 2001; and of those, how many were agreed without Parliament being informed. [99917]

Mr. Rammell: The negotiation and conclusion of international legally-binding agreements is a function of the executive. Such agreements are subsequently laid before Parliament as a Command Paper and, where the Ponsonby Rule applies, accompanied by an explanatory memorandum.

Thirty five such agreements were signed by the United Kingdom in 2001, of which nine are yet to be published.

Funding

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the *(a)* environment, *(b)* education and *(c)* human resources grants funded by his Department for which individual members of the public and organisations may apply; how much funding has been provided in the last financial year in each case; how many awards were made; and what their administrative cost was. [99963]

Mr. Rammell: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has three environment funds to which members of the public and organisations can apply. In the financial year 2001–02, The Climate Change Challenge Fund had an allocation of £800,000 and made six awards to organisations/members of the public totalling £151,650. The Environment Project Fund had an allocation of £1,750,000 in that year, and made 49 awards to organisations/members of the public totalling £295,000. The Environment Fund for Overseas Territories had an allocation of £500,000 and made 15 awards to organisations/members of the public. These funds are administered by officials in London and at overseas posts, and separate information about the administration costs specifically for these funds is not held centrally. It cannot therefore be compiled without disproportionate effort and cost.

The Foreign and Commonwealth office holds funds for educational scholarships for which non-British members of the public can apply. In the financial year 2001–02 there were 2,366 Chevening Scholarship awards, the total cost of which was £40.1 million. Of this the FCO paid £31.5 million, other government departments £1.8 million, UK universities £2 million and the private sector £4.7 million. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office also funded 85 Commonwealth Scholarships and Fellowships Plan scholarships at a cost of £2 million and 87 Marshall Scholarships at a cost of £1,800,186. The British Council's management fee for administering the Chevening scheme was £4.25 million. The cost of the British Council's, the Association of Commonwealth Universities' and Commonwealth Scholarships Commission's administration of the Commonwealth Scholarships and Fellowships Plan scholarships was approximately £200,000. The Marshalls Commission administered the Marshall scholarships at a cost of £181,519. Additionally, all these schemes were administered in co-operation with a large number of officials in London and at overseas posts, but separate information on the time spent by these staff on this particular work is not held centrally and could not be compiled without disproportionate effort and cost.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office also provides financial assistance to educational institutions to fund joint seminars, conferences and workshops of FCO interest. These are not formal grants; the funding usually covers speakers' travel and accommodation expenses. In the financial year 2001–02 seven such events took place at a cost of £18,850. Administrative costs (mainly staff time) associated with these events are estimated to total 450.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has no human resource grants for which members of the public and organisations can apply.

General Affairs and External Relations Council

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the outcome was of the General Affairs and External Relations Council held on 24–25 February; what the Government's stance was on the issues discussed, including its voting record; and if he will make a statement. [100141]

Mr. MacShane: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary represented the UK at the General Affairs and External Relations Council in Brussels on 24 and 25 February. No formal votes were taken. Conclusions were agreed by consensus.

External Relations Session

Wider Europe: New Neighbourhood

The Council continued its discussion of the 'Wider Europe; New neighbourhood' initiative, originally proposed by the UK. A Commission Communication on 'Wider Europe' would be available for the next GAERC meeting. There would be further discussion at the enlarged meeting of the European Conference in Athens on 17 April. In discussion, Ministers noted the need to develop new policy instruments in addition to EU membership to influence its relations with other countries.

Western Balkans

The Presidency, High Representative Solana and Commissioner Patten gave presentations to the Council on the morning's political dialogue meetings with Croatia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Ministers noted Croatia's application to join the EU, for which some member states expressed their support, and noted the process for its consideration.

The Council agreed conclusions on Serbia and Montenegro, Kosovo, Republic of Macedonia and return of refugees and internally displaced persons. In a brief discussion, Ministers urged Belgrade and Pristina to refrain from any unilateral initiatives which were incompatible with the objectives of a multi-ethnic and democratic Kosovo.

Iraq and the Middle East

Ministers discussed the Middle East and Iraq in the presence of the President of the Arab League, Mr. Hammoud, and of the Secretary General of the Arab League, Mr. Moussa.

The Foreign Secretary explained in general terms plans for tabling a second resolution on Iraq, and stressed the need for a tough and clear message to Saddam that Iraq had to comply with relevant UNSCRs, in particular 1441. The Arab League representatives argued for more time for inspections. Ministers reaffirmed that full co-operation by Iraq on disarmament in accordance with UNSCR 1441 was an urgent objective shared by all.

Ministers reaffirmed the importance of reinvigorating the Middle East Peace Process and supported early publication of the roadmap endorsed by the Quartet.

ESDP

High Representative Solana gave a presentation to the Council, including on the envisaged EU take-over of the international military presence in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The UK Permanent Representative commended joint proposals tabled by France and the UK on this subject, emphasising the need for careful and thorough planning. Other Ministers joined the UK in stressing the importance of a robust mandate and close co-operation with NATO.

The Council took stock of implementation of the 'Berlin plus' permanent arrangements between the EU and NATO. It noted that the three main elements (assured access to NATO planning, presumption of availability of pre-identified NATO common assets and capabilities, and European command options including the role of DSACEUR) had been concluded. The Council also noted progress achieved in preparations for the EU's take-over of military operations in Macedonia.

EU-Russia Relations

EU-Russia relations were discussed ahead of the EU-Russia Summit on 31 May, in St. Petersburg, and in the context of the EU Common Strategy on Russia, which is coming up for review next June. The Presidency underlined the importance of making EU-Russia relations more effective and results-orientated and the need to focus on this at the Summit. The upcoming entry into force of the PCA (partnership and Co-operation Agreement)'s dispute settlement mechanism, was a step in the right direction.

AOB: EU-OSCE Co-operation

The Presidency underlined the importance it attached to EU-OSCE co-operation and referred to the EU-OSCE Ministerial meeting held in the morning.

General Affairs Session

Progress of work in the Convention

Jean-Luc Dehaene, Vice Chairman of the European Convention, gave a progress report on work in the Convention on the Future of Europe. The Convention has now reached a decisive phase in its work, as it begins to flesh out a Constitutional Treaty. The first 16 draft articles (covering Titles on Establishment of the Union, Values, Objectives, Legal Personality, Fundamental Rights and Competencies), were circulated to the Convention at the plenary on 6 February. A large number of written comments have been received on these and will be the subject of a full debate at the plenary on 27–28 February. At the same time, a second batch of articles (on the Union's instruments and procedures) will be circulated.

The President of the Convention, Valery Giscard d'Estaing, will make a further report to the European Council at its meeting of 20–21 March 2003. The Convention will present a final document later this year.

Progress of work in other Council configurations

The Council noted a Presidency report on work under way in the Council's other configurations. The report draw's particular attention to: the Economic/Financial Affairs Council meeting on 18 February, where a first exchange of views was held on the economic reform strategy set at Lisbon in March 2000; the conclusions adopted by the Education, Youth and Culture Council meeting on 6 February on activities aimed at creating coherence in education and training in Europe; and the conclusions adopted by the Agriculture and Fisheries Council on January 27–28 on the integration of environmental protection requirements in the Common Fisheries Policy and on the sustainable development of European aquaculture.

Preparation of the European Council in March

The Council examined a draft annotated agenda for the European Council prepared by the Presidency, in advance of substantive preparation at its next meeting on 18–19 March. At this stage the Presidency intends to limit the agenda to the Lisbon strategy of social and economic reform. The Government welcome this as the focus for discussion.

The annotated draft agenda sets out the main items that the European Council is due to address in connection with the economic reform strategy that it laid down at Lisbon in March 2000, including how the strategy can be used to support the Union's enlargement. The agenda draws on the Commission's "Spring Report" on progress made on the Lisbon strategy and suggested policy orientations.

At this stage the Presidency intends to limit the agenda to the Lisbon strategy, although there may be discussion of the international situation. The European Council will also hear a progress report on work of the European Convention from its President, Valery Giscard d'Estaing, and will hold an exchange of views with the President of the European Parliament, Pat Cox.

Economic and Social cohesion in the run-up to enlargement

The Council took note of a Commission presentation on its second interim report on economic and social cohesion in the Union. It requested the Permanent Representatives Committee to examine this document further and to report back at its meeting on 17 and 18 of June 2003. The Commission's third full cohesion report is due in autumn and will emphasise the unprecedented challenge for cohesion policy that enlargement will bring. It will also examine the conditions for implementation of a new generation of structural fund programmes for the 2007–13 period.

Gibraltar

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans his Department has to celebrate the 300th anniversary of British sovereignty over Gibraltar; and what representations he has received from *(a)* the Gibraltar Government and *(b)* Spain concerning the anniversary. [100312]

Mr. MacShane: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle) on 26 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 595W. We have not received any representations.

Human Rights Convention

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions have been held with non-governmental human rights groups in preparation for the forthcoming UN Human Rights Convention, which opens on 17 March 2003 in Geneva. [100511]

Mr. Rammell: I attended a pre-Commission on Human Rights (CHR) briefing session with NGO human rights groups on 13 February this year. The aim of the meeting was to brief the human rights community on the UK's approach towards the CHR and to give them the opportunity to feed in their views. The Forum is a key part of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's dialogue with NGOs. Among a total number of 26 NGOs, representatives from Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and the All Party Parliamentary Human Rights Group attended the meeting.

The UK delegation to the CHR in Geneva will keep in regular contact with British and International NGO representatives during this year's session of the CHR.

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs who the United Kingdom representatives will be at the United Nations Human Rights Conventions to be held in Geneva from 17 March 2003. [100517]

Mr. Rammell: I will attend part of this year's session, and, as is customary, will address the Commission in plenary. Mrs. Audrey Glover CMG will head the United Kingdom delegation to the UN Commission on Human Rights as she has done since 1998. The delegation will include officials from the UK Representation to the EU in Brussels, UK Missions to the United Nations in Geneva and New York, as well as London-based officials from the Human Rights Policy Department and Global Issues

Research Group of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and a representative from the Department for International Development

Iraq

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the United States Government in respect of the United States registered companies shown to be suppliers to Iraq of military equipment and technology in the dossier provided by Iraq to the United Nations Security Council in December 2002. [100076]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Government has made no representations to the Government of the United States on this issue. It is a matter for the Government of the United States to take any action against US-registered companies alleged to have been involved in the supply of military equipment and technology to Iraq.

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to ensure the widest possible support for the UK sponsored draft resolution on Iraq at the UN; and if he will make a statement. [100276]

Mr. Rammell: We made it clear in tabling the draft Security Council Resolution on 24 February 2003 that it will not be put to a vote immediately. We are in active discussion with other members of the Security Council and key allies to build support for the tabled draft.

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what evidence there is to support his statement, 26 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 270, that the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1441 authorises the use of force against Iraq. [100819]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The statements to which my hon. Friend refers concern the provision in United Nations Security Council resolution 1441(2002) which recalls that the Council has warned Iraq that it will face serious consequences as a result of its continued violation of its obligations. As the Government have made clear, that means consequences up to and including the use of force.

Kosovo

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with his European colleagues on the final status of Kosovo; and if he will make a statement. [100013]

Mr. MacShane: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and I are in close and regular contact with European colleagues. On 24 February 2003, Foreign Ministers issued a statement at the European Union General Affairs and External Relations Council which reiterated the importance of full respect for UNSCR 1244, and urged all parties, both in Belgrade and in Pristina, to refrain from any unilateral initiatives which were incompatible with the objective of a multi-ethnic and democratic Kosovo, and which may jeopardise stability and the normalisation process not only in Kosovo but in the entire region

Moroccan Prisoners

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations his Department has made to the Algerian Government on the condition of Moroccan prisoners in Algerian detention camps. [99992]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Officials regularly meet with representatives of the Algerian Government. They often raise the subject of the Moroccan prisoners of war held by the Polisario Front in camps in South Western Algeria, particularly when discussing the dispute over Western Sahara.

Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a written statement in the Official Report following each *(a)* ministerial meeting and *(b)* meeting of the Permanent Representatives of the OSCE. [99442]

Mr. MacShane: We have no plans to make a written statement in the Official Report following each ministerial unless there is an issue of sufficient interest to report. I do not propose to make a written statement following weekly meetings of the Permanent Representatives. The OSCE website: www.osce.org carries reports of key OSCE business and decisions.

Palestinian Refugees

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he has taken to press Israel to implement United Nations General Assembly Resolution 194 of 1948 on the right of return for Palestinian refugees. [100042]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The issue of the right of return of Palestinian refugees forms part of the final status negotiations. As with the other final status issues, the details of a solution are a matter for negotiation between the parties. We continually impress upon all parties the importance of returning to negotiations, and taking account of the relevant UN Resolutions

Spain

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his discussions with the Spanish Minister for Foreign Affairs since her appointment. [99953]

Mr. MacShane: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and Foreign Minister Palàcio have spoken frequently since her appointment as Foreign Minister in July last year. I also have spoken regularly to my Spanish counterpart, Ramon de Miguel. Discussion has covered international, European and bilateral issues.

Sudan

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received regarding the civil war in Sudan, with specific reference to the bombing campaign of the Sudanese Government in southern Sudan; and if he will place a copy of these reports in the Library. [100737]

Mr. Rammell: We have received a copy of the US-led Civilian Protection Monitoring Team's report into the incident at Mundri (Lui), south Sudan. A copy of the report has been placed in the Library.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what end-use monitoring agreements relating to the export of military products are in place with Sudan; and what end-use monitoring mechanisms exist in each case. [96241]

Mr. Rammell *[holding answer 7 February 2003]:* All export licences to Sudan are assessed against the Consolidated EU and national arms export licensing criteria, including the EU arms embargo and Military End Use Control.

Western Sahara

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has held with UN officials concerning the date of a referendum on the future of the Western Sahara; and if he will make a statement. [100510]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I refer my hon. Friend to the answers I gave him and the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) on 22 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 358W.

TREASURY

Animal Welfare

Norman Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many animals are used by customs and excise authorities in the UK, broken down by species. [100368]

John Healey: As at 28 February 2003, HM Customs and Excise had a total of 56 animals of the species *canis familiaris* (dogs), including those in service, training and planned replacements. No other species of animal is used.

Climate Change Levy

Sue Doughty: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to his answer of 7 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 195W, on the Climate Change Levy, why no estimate is available of levy receipts the Exchequer anticipates to receive during 2002–03 from those companies covered by negotiated climate change agreements; and if he will make a statement. [100081]

John Healey: It is not possible to estimate climate change levy receipts at a sufficient level of detail to allow tax receipts expected from those businesses covered by negotiated climate change agreements to be identified separately. The negotiated agreements and sector fuel data, which serve as a basis for the estimating revenue, do not map exactly onto one another. Also, businesses in a specific sector and/or covered by an agreement can claim for more than one relief under the levy.

It is also not possible for Customs to use data from levy receipts, since they collect the levy from fuel suppliers, while it is their customers that enter into the agreements.

Departmental Policies (Northampton)

Mr. Tony Clarke: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact of his Department's measures to tackle income inequality in Northampton. [100801]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government have taken a range of measures to tackle income inequality since 1997, including supporting families with increases in Child Benefit and the introduction of the Children's Tax Credit; supporting low income people in and into work through introduction of the National Minimum Wage, the 10 per cent. starting rate of Income Tax, reductions in National Insurance contributions for the low paid, and the Working Families' Tax Credit (WFTC) and Disabled Person's Tax Credit (DPTC); and supporting pensioners with increases in the basic State Pension, provision of the winter fuel payment, and for the poorest pensioners through the Minimum Income Guarantee (MIG).

As an indication of the coverage of some of the measures designed to tackle income inequality, 4,800 families with children in Northampton were receiving the WFTC and DPTC in August 2002, while there were 4,600 pensioner households in Northampton claiming the MIG in November 2002.

Home Insurance

Tony Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to stop mortgage lenders charging fees when customers switch their home insurance. [100742]

Ruth Kelly: None.

Insurance Mediation Directive

Mr. Cameron: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what representations he has received on the decision that the Insurance Mediation Directive will be administered by the Financial Services Authority under a statutory regime; [100678]

(2) what estimates he has made of the cost to *(a)* insurance brokers and *(b)* the insurance industry of complying with the Insurance Mediation Directive; and if he will make a statement. [100679]

Ruth Kelly: The Government published a consultation document, "Regulating Insurance Mediation" on 21 October 2002 that set out its proposals on implementing the Insurance Mediation Directive. Consultation closed on 31 January 2003 and the Government received around 400 responses. Representations were received from trade bodies, insurance providers and insurance intermediaries as well as from travel agents and consumer organisations. A draft regulatory impact assessment (RIA), setting out the proposals in the consultation document, was published as annex E to the consultation document. The Government will be revising the draft RIA in the light of wider consultation responses.

Manufacturing Exports

Mr. Russell Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimates he has made of the value of manufacturing export from companies within the Dumfries and Galloway region in the last 10 years. [100160]

Ruth Kelly: The estimate for value of manufacturing exports as declared by companies within the Dumfries and Galloway region is as follows:

£ million

Year	*Exports value*
1996	69
1997	57
1998	64
1999	56
2000	78
2001	73
2002	65

Note:

Regional trade statistics are not available prior to 1996.

The value of all exports (including manufacturing but excluding services) from this region has been approximately £90 million per year on average.

Middle East

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he plans to allow tax concessions for Britons who have been advised to leave the middle east because of the political situation in the region. [100089]

Dawn Primarolo: Under a long standing Inland Revenue practice, days spent in the UK due to exceptional circumstances beyond an individual's control may, in certain cases, be disregarded in deciding whether the individual is resident here for tax purposes.

This practice was applied on a case by case basis after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, and its application to the current situation is being kept under close review.

Sure Start

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will meet the hon. Member for Nottingham, North to discuss the Strelley/Broxtowe Sure Start and its loss of underspends caused by building delays. [94519]

Maria Eagle: I have been asked to reply.

Officials will meet with the Broxtowe and Strelley Sure Start programme on 4 March. Pending the outcome of this meeting Baroness Ashton, the Parliamentary Under Secretary for Sure Start, would be pleased to meet with my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North.

Taliban

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the Taliban assets in the UK which *(a)* are frozen and *(b)* were frozen in October 2001; when assets were frozen of the Afghan National Credit and Finance and the National Trading Company of Afghanistan; and what was the value of frozen assets. [100617]

Ruth Kelly: The al-Qaeda and Taliban (United Nations Measures) Order implementing United Nations Security Council Resolution 1390 allowed for the release of Taliban funds to the legitimate Government of Afghanistan. As a result, UK financial institutions have made such funds available to the Afghan Government and no Taliban (as distinct from al-Qaeda) funds remain frozen. As I indicated in my written answer of 16 October 2001, to the hon. Member (at column 1212W), no funds belonging to Afghan National Credit and Finance have been frozen in the UK. The assets of the National Trading Company of Afghanistan were frozen on 5 October 2001 as a temporary measure but were then unfrozen since they were not covered by UN sanctions. As my written answer explained, some £63 million sterling in 33 accounts had been frozen as at 15 October 2001. Regrettably, the sterling value of the frozen account of Khalid Al Fawwaz was incorrectly printed in the *Official Report* as £23.19 million; the correct figure, as stated in my written answer and as reflected in the total figure, was £23.19.

Tax (Non-residents)

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many individuals were considered to be non-domiciled for tax purposes in the UK in each year from 1980–81 to 2001–02; and if he will make a statement. [99900]

Dawn Primarolo: This information is not available.

Trust Ports

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if trust ports classified as public corporations are required to remit an annual dividend to the Chancellor of the Exchequer. [100699]

Ruth Kelly: It is for the Department for Transport to determine whether any trust ports classified as public corporations should be required to remit an annual dividend. Any dividend would be payable to the Department for Transport.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to his answer of 16 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 597W, if he will place in the Library the information held by the Office of National Statistics concerning the retrospective classification of trust ports as public corporations. [100702]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Pullinger to Christopher Chope, dated 4 March 2003:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question regarding information held by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) concerning the retrospective classification of Trust Ports as public corporations. I am replying in his absence. (100702)

The ONS has been working on the basis of published Annual Accounts and legislation on individual Trust Ports supplied by the Department for Transport. ONS does not hold any information of its own on Trust Ports. As stated in earlier replies, major Trust Ports have been reclassified as public corporations in National Accounts. We are continuing to examine the information about smaller ports to identify whether they should be private and public corporations.

Unpaid Tax

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the amount of unpaid tax in each year since 1993–94, broken down by *(a)* income tax, *(b)* VAT, *(c)* customs duties, *(d)* corporation tax and *(e)* other taxes; and if he will make a statement. [95431]

Dawn Primarolo:

Inland Revenue

The Inland Revenue's accounting for tax runs to the end of October each year. The table below shows the amounts of unpaid assessed and unassessed taxes at the end of each accounting year. The figures for uncollected tax represent net tax charged but not paid at the accounting date, and are a snapshot of the position at that date. Amounts of tax unpaid at the accounting date have, over the period covered in the table, approximately halved as a proportion of the tax collected during the year.

(£)million

Position at end of year to 31 October	*Income tax other than PAYE*	*Corporate tax*	*Other tax*[1]	*Total*
1993	2,401.8	631.4	184.1	3,217.3
1994	2,249.9	719.7	155.9	3,125.5
1995	2,201.2	576.0	131.4	2,908.6
1996	2,326.8	1,287.4	141.4	3,755.6
1997	2,270.4	682.7	136.3	3,089.4
1998	2,278.9	710.0	177.6	3,166.5
1999	2,492.2	606.4	57.4	3,156.0
2000	2,350.8	571.0[1]	49.9	2,971.7
2001	2,348.7	566.6[1]	33.6	2,948.9

[1] These figures include estimates for the amount of unpaid self assessed corporate tax.

Customs and Excise

An analysis fo Customs' debt management performance, covering VAT, Customs duties and other indirect taxes, for years from 1998 is available in their annual report and accounts 2001–2002 which was published December 2002, a copy of which is available in the Library of the House. The figures for "debt" represent a snapshot of liabilities established and reported for collection as at the financial year-end and include assessed liabilities subject to dispute, and so not immediately available for recovery, and assessed liabilities generated through anti-fraud activity.

For both Departments, much of the tax uncollected at the balance of each account is subsequently collected, and most of the amount outstanding attracts either an interest charge or default surcharge.

VAT Exemption

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he has estimated the net change in value added tax revenue which would result from the proposed VAT exemption for welfare services provided by state-regulated private welfare agencies; [100099]

(2) what discussions officials from his Department have had with representatives of state-regulated private welfare agencies concerning the proposed VAT exemption for welfare services provided by state-regulated private welfare agencies; [100098]

(3) when the proposed VAT exemption for welfare services provided by state-regulated private welfare agencies will come into force. [100100]

Tim Loughton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what estimate he has made of the net revenue implications of changes to VAT treatment of services connected with the care and protection of children and young people by independent fostering agencies; [100833]

(2) what notice was given to independent fostering agencies about changes to VAT treatment of services connected with the care and protection of children and young people and reclamation of VAT on inputs purchased. [100780]

John Healey: The Government's decision at the end of last year to abolish VAT on essential care in the home will cut the cost of home care for many of the 60,000 people who currently buy in these services. Someone previously paying £400 a month for care could see a reduction of £40 in their bill as a result of these VAT changes, which have been discussed between officials and a wide range of organisations.

The changes will cost an estimated £30 million per year, of which a negligible amount relates to services connected with the care and protection of children and young people by independent fostering agencies.

Welfare services provided by state-regulated private welfare agencies can be exempt from 31 January. Independent fostering agencies, whose supplies are to local authorities, may choose to postpone changing the VAT treatment of their supplies until 1 April while they make the contractual and financial arrangements that are necessary for them to implement the change. This was announced in Customs and Excise business brief 01/03, issued on 20 January, and Customs additionally wrote to agencies on 24 and 30 January.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Social and Environmental Reporting

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to make social and environmental reporting mandatory for medium and large companies. [99263]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Government's plans for a revised reporting regime for all companies were contained in the White Paper "Modernising Company Law" (Cm 5553), published in July 2002. This included the proposal that economically significant companies should be required to prepare an Operating and Financial Review as part of their annual financial statements and reports. The Review would include information on social and environmental matters where those were relevant to an informed assessment of the company. We intend to bring forward legislation as soon as Parliamentary time permits.

Accountancy

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent representations she has received from bodies representing the accountancy profession on the use of the term Accountant. [100027]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 28 February 2003]:* None, excepting in their response to the Department's recent consultation on the Review of the Regulatory Regime of the Accountancy Profession, the

Irish Institute of Chartered Accountants raised a point about defining the term "accountant" in Irish and in UK legislation.

Age Diversity

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when her Department completed its diagnostic review for compliance with the Government's Code of Practice for Age Diversity in Employment; and what changes her Department plans to make following the review. [99424]

Ms Hewitt: The DTI has taken a number of steps to embed the provisions of the Code of Practice, produced in 1999. This has led to the removal of all obvious and unjustifiable age discrimination including in DTI job advertisements and in selection criteria. The Code has been superseded by the Cabinet Office's Winning the Generation Game report and we have adopted, or have already met, its recommendations for Departments. This includes from August 2002 giving all staff in the DTI below the Senior Civil Service the option of continuing to work to age 65.

Bottled Water

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many incidences and what total volume of bottled water has been withdrawn from sale in the United Kingdom since 1992, broken down by reasons for withdrawal; and what prosecutions have resulted. [99216]

Ms Blears: I have been asked to reply.

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) only has reliable data on national withdrawals of bottled water following FSA advice in a food hazard warning.

Since April 2000, when the FSA was formed, there has been only one withdrawal of bottled water as a result of a food hazard warning and the FSA has no information on the volume of water withdrawn. The reason for withdrawal was microbial contamination.

Formal action in the case of this withdrawal, which took place in October 2002, is a matter for the relevant local authority. The FSA does not collate information on withdrawals instigated by local authorities, or on withdrawals initiated by the water bottler.

Employment Tribunals Service

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether the Employment Tribunals Service makes payment and administers the arrangements for the provision for a sign language interpreter or other forms of communication support when requested by a deaf person coming before a tribunal. [92812]

Alan Johnson *[holding answer 27 January 2003]:* The Employment Tribunals Service (ETS) pays reasonable fees and costs for the provision of a professional interpreter, palantypist, lip-speaker, or other professional form of communication support when requested by a deaf person coming before a tribunal.

While there are no limits on interpreters' fees, the ETS uses the rates for interpreters charged by the major agencies as a guide. The Tribunal may permit a friend or relative to act as an interpreter and he or she may claim the same travel and other expenses (but not a fee) as the deaf person.

The ETS is able to put deaf people in touch with appropriately qualified interpreters via a national register but it does not administer the provision. Such matters are left to the individual concerned because of differing personal requirements.

Fur Labelling

Annette Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans her Department has to enforce the *(a)* accurate and *(b)* specific labelling of fur used in consumer goods; and if she will make a statement. [98876]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Trade Descriptions Act 1968 makes it a criminal offence, if a trader applies a false trade description to any goods or, supplies or offers to supply any goods to which a false description is applied. This legislation is enforced by local authority trading standards departments.

I also refer the answer given to the hon. Member on 25 February 2003, *Official Report,* column 421W, about the difficulties of identifying certain fur types and the steps that this Department is taking to address this matter.

Newspapers (Carriage Costs)

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent assessment she has made of the progress being made by the Office of Fair Trading investigation into the carriage costs charged by newspaper wholesalers to independent newsagents; and if she will make a statement. [98082]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Office of Fair Trading (OFT) is currently reviewing the undertakings given by newspaper wholesalers, introduced following the then Monopolies and Mergers Commission report in 1993, on the supply of national newspapers in England and Wales.

The Office of Fair Trading published its findings and provisional recommendation on 12 December 2002. The OFT found that carriage and service charges have risen faster than costs (which in turn have risen significantly faster than retail price inflation). The provisional recommendation, to liberalise selling-on within exclusive territories, is open to public consultation until 14 March 2003. The OFT will then finalise its recommendations and report to DTI.

Part-time Workers

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she is taking to ensure that part-time workers receive *(a)* the minimum wage and *(b)* appropriate levels of paid leave. [100481]

Alan Johnson: Annual publicity campaigns have ensured that awareness of the minimum wage is at almost universal levels. Enforcement of the minimum wage is carried out by the Inland Revenue. If any worker—whether part or full-time—is not receiving the minimum wage, they should phone the helpline on 0845 6000 678. All complaints are followed up by Inland Revenue enforcement teams and workers' details remain confidential.

The Working Time Regulations give all workers the right to four weeks paid leave per year. Part-timers receive this pro-rata depending on the hours they normally work. This was publicised following the introduction of the Regulations and again in 2001. It is enforced through the Employment Tribunals.

CABINET OFFICE

E-Government

24. **Mr. Blizzard:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will make a statement on progress with the introduction of e-government. [100201]

Mr. Alexander: The Government's target is to make all government services available electronically by 2005 with key services achieving high levels of use. The last survey of e-government services showed that 54 per cent. of services are available electronically.

Civil Service (Ethnic Diversity)

25. **Mr. Russell Brown:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what recent progress has been made in improving ethnic minority recruitment into the civil service. [100202]

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will make a statement on ethnic diversity within the civil service. [100767]

Mr. Alexander: The Government remain strongly committed to a civil service that is fully representative of the community it serves.

Ethnic minorities make up 7.9 per cent. of the civil service as a whole and 2.8 per cent. at senior civil service level, up from 5.7 per cent. and 1.6 per cent. respectively in April 1998. Our target for senior civil service level staff is 3.2 per cent. by 2004–5.

Civil Service Legislation

26. **Tony Wright:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what progress has been made on proposals for civil service legislation. [100203]

Mr. Alexander: The Public Administration Select Committee, chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase, and the Committee on Standards in Public Life are looking at this issue. We will want to consider the work of these two important committees.

Health Sector Targets

27. **Mr. Streeter:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what discussions he has had in recent weeks with the Delivery Unit about Government targets in the health sector. [100204]

Mr. Alexander: There are regular meetings with the Delivery Unit to discuss a range of delivery issues, including health.

Government Websites

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many Government websites comply with W3C standards. [100693]

Mr. Alexander: The Government Interoperability Framework and the Guidelines for UK Government Websites require that all Government websites that employ hypertext markup languages comply with published W3C's standards. Responsibility for adopting the W3C standards rests with those in charge of individual websites and is not centrally monitored.

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many Government websites have a PCIS rating. [100696]

Mr. Alexander: PICS labels are registered through a third-party organisation, the Internet Content Rating Association, and I have asked them to check for the latest figures. I will write to the right hon. Gentleman when these figures are available.

Online Nation Campaign

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office when the Government plans to launch the Online Nation campaign. [100695]

Mr. Alexander: The Prime Minister announced at the e-Summit in November 2002 that the Government would run the Online Nation campaign in spring 2003. The campaign will encourage people, particularly those from socially excluded groups, to experience the benefits of the internet. A pilot campaign will run in Newcastle from 5–31 March.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

CAFCASS

Simon Hughes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what her estimate is of the efficiency savings that will be made by CAFCASS over the next 10 financial years. [99546]

Ms Rosie Winterton: CAFCASS is committed to making effective and efficient use of public resources, as stated in its Corporate Plan 2002–06. For 2003–04 Ministers will set targets regarding CAFCASS' performance, including the development of efficiency measures. The expected efficiency savings will be published in CAFCASS Corporate Plans.

Constituency Boundaries

Mr. Tony Clarke: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when he expects the boundary commission to complete its review of constituency boundaries; and when the review will be implemented. [100808]

Mr. Leslie: I have been asked to reply.

At the outset of their fifth general review of parliamentary constituencies in February 2000, it was the intention of the Boundary Commission for England to conclude the review by the end of December 2005. That target date remains although it is possible it may change in the future. The Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 requires the Secretary of State to lay the report with a draft of an Order in Council giving effect to the recommendations, with or without modifications, as soon as possible after the report is received.

Jury Service

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department for what reason payment for jury service increases after five days' service. [99876]

Yvette Cooper: Jurors are not paid for jury service but can claim financial loss allowances to cover loss of earnings or benefits, or increased expenses, incurred as a result of jury service. The maximum daily allowance of £52.63 increases to £105.28 where service exceeds 10 days. This increase acknowledges that jurors might incur additional expenses when they are required to serve for a longer period.

Public Record Office

Mr. Laws: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment she has made of the effect on net government spending on the Public Records Office of introducing additional charging for access to records; and if she will make a statement. [99824]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Most of the services provided by the PRO are free of charge. This includes access to original records and microforms at Kew and the Family Records Centre; consultation of PROCAT, the online catalogue relating to the PRO's own holdings, and the Access to Archives virtual catalogue for England; the award-winning Learning Curve gallery which provides online material for schools relating to the history national curriculum; and selected digital record images, including those which have featured in recent press coverage.

The PRO has introduced charges for online access to electronic copies of paper records. These same paper records are accessible free of charge onsite at the PRO. This new electronic internet service, which is over and above the PRO's statutory service, is charged at full cost recovery and hence has no effect on the PRO's net government spending.

The PRO's 1901 census online service is provided by QinetiQ. The rates are fixed by Statutory Instrument and are based on the principle of full cost recovery. Until QinetiQ has recovered its full investment from the project from the income it receives, the PRO will not receive any income and hence this service has no effect on the PRO's net government spending.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what reasons underlie the change in total public spending on the Public Record Office between 1998–99 and 2003–04; and if she will make a statement. [99825]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The changing pattern of the PRO's expenditure in this period is mainly explained by the progressive introduction of new services, which collectively make a significant contribution to the e-government agenda.

The PRO website usage has grown from 738,977 in 1998–99 to a projected figure of 70 million in 2002–03 and is now regularly one of the top five government websites consulted by online users in the United Kingdom. The website includes a detailed electronic catalogue of the PRO's records and many digital record images of strong interest to educational users at all levels and to family historians.

It is also offering detailed guidance and increased support to other Government Departments, as they make plans to meet the target of introducing Electronic Records Management (ERM) by 2004. The PRO is itself on course to implement ERM in full in the business year 2003–04.

In the area of digital preservation, it is currently making arrangements for long-term archiving by setting up a secure repository at Kew, which can store selected electronic records transferred from other Government Departments. In this way a crucial part of the nation's memory will be made available to present and future generations. In the forthcoming year the PRO will secure new storage for its offsite records, thereby ensuring that all of its accessioned material is kept in conditions which comply with the relevant British Standard.

Further details about the PRO's programmes and expenditure are to be found in the Keeper's annual reports from 1998–99 to 2001–02, copies of which are available in the Library. Information about its latest achievements can be obtained from the website at www.pro.gov.uk.

Work Placements

Mr. Allen: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many university students her Department and associated agencies have supported or sponsored with a work placement in the last year; what her policy is on work placements; what plans she has to develop such schemes; and what her policy is on paying their university fees. [98536]

Ms Rosie Winterton: In 2002 we offered 19 under graduates paid work experience broadly at executive officer level. This consisted of the following schemes that are run each year.

We have given 10 students work experience through the departmental summer placement scheme advertised via the Cabinet Office. The scheme aims to encourage students to consider the department or civil service overall as a career option.

In addition, seven students were placed on the Cabinet Office summer development programme. The purpose of the programme is to encourage ethnic minority students to join the civil service through the fast stream programme.

We support the Windsor Fellowship scheme and offer two fellows work experience each year. This is a structured outreach training and development programme for ethnic minority students.

It is our intention to offer placements under all of these schemes during summer 2003 and thereafter.

The Department does not have a policy to pay university fees, but has provisions to fund degrees for staff.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Audit Commission (Inspectors)

Mr. Norman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many inspection staff have been employed by the Audit Commission responsible for inspecting local authorities in each year since 1997. [100509]

Mr. Leslie: The number of staff employed in the Audit Commission's inspection directorate, including inspectors and direct support staff, by Audit Commission financial year (1 November—31 October), is as follows:

	Number of staff employed
1996–1997	Nil
1997–1998	4
1998–1999	18
1999–2000	73
2000–2001	324
2001–2002	438
2002–2003	400 (budget)

Community Empowerment Fund

Mr. Battle: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much funding Leeds city Council has received from the Community Empowerment Fund; which organisations manage the fund; what projects have been developed; and which communities benefit. [96962]

Mrs. Roche: Leeds city council receives no Community Empowerment Fund (CEF) money. CEF is always provided directly to a community or voluntary sector organisation in each of the 88 most deprived local authority areas in England (which receive Neighbourhood Renewal Fund) to build the local community's capacity to engage effectively on Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs).

CEF does not fund 'projects' as such. It is used to develop and support a fully inclusive Community Empowerment Network (CEN) and helping to facilitate community and voluntary sector involvement in the LSP, especially the most deprived neighbourhoods and hard-to-reach groups.

Leeds Voice is the organisation administering CEF in Leeds. It is also the CEN. The grant allocation for Leeds is £501,898 over three years (2001–04). 2002–03 is the second year of the programme.

Leeds Voice Community Link teams work to engage 'hard to reach' and disadvantaged groups. Their Forum team facilitates 'forums of interest'—e.g. community groups addressing issues of learning, health, environment, faith and Connexions—and 'area based forums' for the community and voluntary sector—e.g. in South Leeds and Chapeltown/University.

External Finance/Council Tax (Increases)

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list for each local authority the percentage increase in *(a)* aggregate external finance and *(b)* council tax from (i) 1997–98 to 2002–03 and (ii) 2002–03 to 2003–04. [100573]

Mr. Raynsford: *(a)* Aggregate external finance (AEF) can be defined either on a gross or net basis. The net definition comprises revenue support grant and redistributed national non-domestic rates; the gross definition additionally includes police grant and special and specific grants.

(i) Figures for AEF for each local authority on a like-for-like basis for years between 1997–98 and 2002–03 are not held centrally on either gross or net bases, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. For England as a whole, the comparable increase in gross AEF in that period is £11.6 million or 30 per cent. and the increase in net AEF is £6.6 million or 20 per cent.

(ii) Figures for gross AEF for 2003–04 are not yet available for each local authority. Figures for the percentage increase in net AEF between 2002–03 and 2003–04 are, however, available and have been placed in the Library of the House. For England as a whole, the comparable increase in gross AEF is £3.8 million or 8 per cent. and the increase in net AEF is £2.2 million or 5.8 per cent.

(b)(i) Figures for the percentage increase in council tax for each local authority between 1997–98 and 2002–03 have been placed in the Library of the House.

(ii) Council taxes for 2003–04 are still being set, and figures are therefore still being collected by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. They will not be available until validated information has been received from each local authority.

Fire Services

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what figure for the percentage increase in fire service productivity over the past 10 years was submitted to the Bain Inquiry by the Fire Service employers. [99632]

Mr. Raynsford: The evidence given by the fire brigades' national employers to the independent review of the fire service is a matter for the employers. Their evidence to the review is available on their website (www.lg-employers.gov.uk).

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister which Fire Brigades have introduced an integrated personal development system with the agreement of the FBU *(a)* as a pilot scheme and *(b)* in full. [99655]

Mr. Raynsford: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is not aware of any Brigades which have introduced an integrated personal development system either as a pilot scheme or in full. The eight components which support the Integrated Personal Development System (IPDS) are still under development.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the cost would be to the fire service employers of the implementation of the recommendations contained in the Bain review. [100122]

Mr. Raynsford: The Independent Review of the Fire Service have said that the costs and savings of their proposals will balance over the next three years, the period of the Spending Review 2002. Chapter 12 of the Independent Review's report sets out in detail the costs and benefits of the reforms they propose. The Independent Review's final report is available on their website at www.irfs.org.uk, and a copy has been placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what overtime hours were worked by firefighters, in each fire brigade area, in the last period for which figures are available. [100124]

Mr. Raynsford: There is a Fire Brigades Union ban on pre-arranged overtime which has been called into question by the independent review of the fire service. However, unplanned overtime is worked e.g. when firefighters are in attendance at an incident at the end of their shift. Details of this overtime are not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

GLA (Elections)

Richard Ottaway: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what steps he is taking to reduce the numbers of spoilt ballot papers at the 2004 elections for the Greater London Authority. [100034]

Mr. McNulty: The Greater London Authority (GLA)—through the Greater London Returning Officer—is working with the Electoral Commission to develop a publicity and information strategy which will help voters understand what they are voting for and how to exercise their votes at the 2004 GLA elections.

At the same time, the Government is consulting on "Changes To The Rules For London Mayoral And Assembly Elections". After the consultation closes on 10 March, all consultation responses will be considered before any amendments to the rules are put before Parliament.

New Deal

Matthew Green: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many employees of New Deal for Communities projects *(a)* have been made redundant and *(b)* had a contract terminated early in each of the last five years. [99399]

Mrs. Roche: During the last five financial years 17 employees of New Deal Communities Partnerships have had their contracts terminated and two have been made redundant.

Sustainable Communities

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether the funding for Housing—London, East and South East and Housing—other regions in 2003–04 identified in the table on page 66 of Sustainable Communities: Building for the Future, includes *(a)* local authority social housing grant, *(b)* the housing investment programme and *(c)* the major repairs allowance. [98514]

Mr. McNulty: *(a)* The table does not include local authority social housing grant. This is being abolished from April 2003. However, provision has been made in the housing transitional arrangements line of the table to safeguard LASHG schemes in progress or committed.

(b) The table does include the Housing Investment Programme (HIP). This is £842 million for 2003–04. From 2004–05 resources provided to local authorities for HIP, and resources provided to the Housing Corporation will be put into a single regional housing pot. Final decisions on the allocation of resources will be made based on advice from the new Regional Housing Boards.

(c) The major repairs allowance is not included in the table. This totals over £4 billion for the next three years.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Aggregates Tax

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what measures he has put in place to assess the impact of the aggregates tax on companies in Northern Ireland. [97013]

Mr. Pearson: Officials from the Department of Finance and Personnel are passing information to HM Customs and Excise on the prevailing conditions within the aggregates industry since the introduction of the Tax. However, responsibility for policy regarding the Aggregates Tax rests with HM Treasury/Customs and Excise.

Areas of Special Scientific Interest

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the European-recognised Area of Special Scientific Interest sites in Northern Ireland. [97942]

Angela Smith: There are two classes of site recognised for their scientific interest at the European level: Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) under the Habitats Directive (1992); and Special Protection Areas (SPA) under the Birds Directive (1979).

Final agreement on the UK list of candidate SAC has not yet been reached with the European Commission. Among those proposed for the UK, the following sites are in Northern Ireland.

Aughnadarragh Lough
Ballynahone Bog
Ballykilbeg
Banagher Glen
Bann Estuary
Binevenagh
Black Bog
Breen Wood
Carn/Glenshane Pass

Cladagh (Swanlinbar) River
Cranny Bogs
Cuilcagh Mountain
Curran Bog
Dead Island Bog
Deroran Bog
Derryleckagh
Eastern Mournes
Fairy Water Bogs
Fardrum and Roosky Turloughs
Garron Plateau
Garry Bog
Hollymount
Largalinny
Lecale Fens
Lough Melvin
Magheraveely Marl Loughs
Magilligan
Main Valley Bogs
Monawilkin
Moneygal Bog
Moninea Bog
Montiaghs Moss
Murlough
North Antrim Coast
Owenkillew River
Peatlands Park
Pettigoe Plateau
Rathlin Island
Rea's Wood and Fair's Bay
Rostrevor Wood
Slieve Beagh
Slieve Gullion
Strangford Lough
Teal Lough
Tonnagh Beg Bog
Tully Bog
Turmennan
Upper Ballinderry River
Upper Lough Erne
West Fermanagh Scarplands
Wolf Island Bog

The sites classified as SPAs are:

Belfast Lough
Carlingford Lough
Killough Bay and Strand Lough
Larne Lough (Incorporating Swan Island SPA)
Lough Neagh and Lough Beg
Outer Ards
Pettigoe Plateau
Rathlin Island (Incorporating Rathlin Cliffs SPA)
Sheep Island
Strangford Lough
Upper Lough Erne
Lough Foyle

Banking

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland for what reasons banking institutions in Northern Ireland were excluded from examination and control by the Director General of Fair Trading, with particular reference to excessive charging for current accounts; and if he will make a statement. [96746]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I have been asked to reply.

The Competition Commission, in its report on the supply of banking services to SMEs, made an adverse public interest finding in relation to the charging of excessive prices and therefore the making of excessive profits by the largest four clearing groups operating in England and Wales. These were HSBC, Barclays, Lloyds TSB and RBSG. The Fair Trading Act 1973 does not empower the Secretary of State to impose remedies on a company in the absence of an adverse finding. The Director General of Fair Trading was therefore required to seek undertakings in relation to interest on current accounts in surplus, or provision of free money transmission services, from these four banks only in respect of their operations in England and Wales. The conclusions of the Commission's reasoning is reported at paragraphs 2.418 to 2.431 and 2.490 to 2.495 of its report.

Belfast City Airport

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether public consultation will take place prior to the proposed increase in flights into and out of Belfast City Airport. [99412]

Angela Smith: The Department of the Environment's Planning Service and Belfast City Airport have a planning agreement, signed in January 1997, under Article 40 of the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991. This agreement includes controls on operating hours to restrict scheduled flights to between 06.30 hours and 21.30 hours. The agreement makes provision for delayed flights to arrive between 21.30 hours and 23.59 hours.

To date, no formal approach has been made to Planning Service seeking provision to be made for later flights. Upon receipt of an application to amend the present planning agreement governing the operation of Belfast City Airport, the Department of the Environment would examine the application on its merits. In particular, this would involve considering whether a new planning agreement was required and the most appropriate method of dealing with the application, including the possibility of holding a Public Inquiry.

Competition Commission

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether the recommendations of the Competition Commission in respect of the eight clearing banking institutions in the United Kingdom will apply to Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement. [96747]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I have been asked to reply.

The Competition Commission made adverse public interest findings about eight leading clearing banks in respect of their operations in the UK. These banks have provided my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and the Chancellor of the Exchequer with behavioural undertakings to remedy the adverse effects. Ministers announced on 31 October that they had accepted these undertakings, which apply to their operations throughout the United Kingdom.

Diabetes

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what estimate he has made of the cost of diabetes and its associated complications to the health service in Northern Ireland. [98311]

Mr. Browne: The information on which to base such an estimate is not available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Domestic Violence

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he is taking to tackle domestic violence in Northern Ireland. [97743]

Mr. Browne: The regional forum on domestic violence provides the focal point for taking forward issues on domestic violence in Northern Ireland. Much of the work of the forum is carried out by working groups on inter-agency co-operation; criminal justice; education and training; research and information; work with churches and most recently, child protection issues. Local inter-agency groups are also established in all eleven Health and Social Services Community Trusts.

The Northern Ireland Office also is currently co-ordinating, on behalf of the Northern Ireland Departments, the development of a strategy to tackle violence against women inNorthern Ireland. The strategy is due for publication in Spring 2003 and will look at a range of crimes, including domestic violence, where women are predominately the victim.

In addition, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive's homelessness Strategy and Services Review has been developed in acknowledgment of the need to help prevent homelessness resulting from domestic violence, help victims escape such situations through the delivery of adequate accommodation and support services and help support victims upon being re-housed.

Education Strategy

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what discussions have occurred between the Department of Education and the Department of Employment and Learning regarding development of a strategy on educational provision for 14 to 19-year-olds. [100066]

Jane Kennedy: A series of discussions has taken place between the two Departments to define the issues in the 14–19 phase of education and, to consider a conjoint approach to future provision.

Energy Contracts

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to introduce provisions to enable the buyout of long-term energy contracts through *(a)* a bond mechanism, *(b)* low-cost loans and *(c)* another mechanism; and if he will make a statement. [97894]

Mr. Pearson: I am fully committed to pursuing and evaluating options and mechanisms for reducing energy costs in Northern Ireland. This process is not solely or specifically focused on buying out long-term contracts and includes a thorough examination of views and proposals on more efficient means of financing energy assets and contracts, many of which are already financed by bond arrangements. I have allocated a high priority to this exercise and my officials are working closely with the Regulator in defining possible mechanisms.

Foetal Health

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many individuals have received compensation in each of the last five years as the result of disability from injuries incurred while in the mother's womb. [88071]

Mr. Browne: I am sorry for the delay in replying.

The information requested is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Legal Action (Funding)

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on what grounds the Permanent Secretary of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment has been granted public funding to pursue private legal action against the media. [90185]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Financial assistance is provided to civil servants to pursue legal action against third parties if it is considered to be in the interests of the employing Department that proceedings should be instituted. In this case, financial assistance was provided to uphold the reputation of the Permanent Secretary in the interests of the Department.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many civil servants in each of the past 15 years have been granted public funds to pursue libel actions. [90186]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Three civil servants have been authorised to receive financial support to pursue libel actions in the past 1[illegible]rs. Two other civil servants were authorised to receive financial support for preliminary advice in matters relating to their reputations.

Financial assistance is given to civil servants to pursue legal action against third parties if it is considered to be in the interests of the employing Department that proceedings should be instituted.

Linguistic Diversity

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to whom the draft linguistic diversity policy of the National Museums and Galleries of Northern Ireland has been presented. [98198]

Angela Smith: The draft linguistic diversity policy of the National Museums and Galleries of Northern Ireland has not yet been presented to anyone. The policy continues to have draft status at present because the outgoing Board of Trustees did not have an opportunity to approve it before the end of their term of office.

However, it is hoped that the new Board will formally adopt the policy shortly, so that it can be widely circulated as part of the full, external consultation exercise required under the Northern Ireland Act 1998, prior to implementation.

Manufacturing Employment

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many jobs were lost in each sector of the manufacturing industry in Strangford in each of the last 10 years; and how much government funding was provided to manufacturing industry in each of the last five years. [97668]

Mr. Pearson: Information on redundancies is currently only available at either Job Centre Area level or for Northern Ireland as a whole. The Newtownards Job Centre is the only job centre located within Strangford parliamentary constituency (PC). There have been a total of 927 redundancies since 1997 (the earliest year for which disaggregated information is available) in the manufacturing industry. Information on redundancies by sub-sector within manufacturing by year since 1997 is provided in Table 1.

Over the last five years, the Invest NI legacy organisations (Industrial Development Board, Local Enterprise Development Unit and Industrial Research and Technology Unit specifically) offered assistance of £11.56 million to companies in the manufacturing sector within the Strangford constituency. Details of the assistance offered is set out in Table 2.

Table 1: Total confirmed redundancies in the Newtownards Job Centre area 1997–2003

	Manufacturing sector	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*	*2003*
DA	Food products; beverages and tobacco	26	23	38	22	1	25	0
DB	Textiles and textile products	142	43	50	498	0	0	0
DH	Rubber and plastic products	0	0	0	21	0	0	0
DM	Transport equipment	0	0	0	0	14	24	0
D	Total manufacturing	168	66	88	541	15	49	0

Table 2: Key assistance offered to manufacturing companies in the Strangford constituency for the last 5 years

	£ million
1997–98	2.57
1998–99	2.99
1999–2000	1.93
2000–01	2.19
2001–02	1.88

Mobile Phone Masts

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the latest available scientific research on the safety of mobile phone masts. [89402]

Mr. Browne: The Independent Expert Group on Mobile Phones (IEGMP), chaired by Sir William Stewart, published a report on the subject of mobile phone technology in May 2000. The Group examined the health implications of this technology and carried out an assessment of existing research. It concluded that the balance of evidence indicated that there was no general risk to the health of people living near to base stations on the basis that exposures were expected to be small fractions of the guidelines.

Recognising, however, that there were gaps in knowledge, the Expert Group recommended further research and as a result a joint government/industry research project, to which my Department is contributing £30,000 over three years, was announced in 2001. The Mobile Telecommunications and Health Research (MTHR) Programme invites research applications both in relation to masts and to mobile phone handsets. Research on the group of projects funded under the first call is now well under way. The names of the projects selected from the second call are expected to be announced in due course and an advert for a third call appeared in appropriate publications in week commencing 16 December.

Nurse Recruitment

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many new nurses have taken up their post in each board area in Northern Ireland over the last two years. [98260]

Mr. Browne: The information requested is detailed in the following tables.

Figures in the following tables relate to nursing staff (including midwives) in each Health and Social Services Board that have taken up their post in the last two years—joiners are defined as those who were not in employment at the start of the year but who were in employment in the NI Health and Personal Social Services at the end of the year.

Nursing joiners between September 2000 and September 2001

Board	*Headcount*	*WTE*[1]
Eastern Board	799	708.51
Northern Board	213	177.29
Southern Board	157	136.83
Western Board	177	154.98
Total	1,346	1,177.61

Nursing joiners between September 2001 and September 2002

Board	*Headcount*	*WTE*[1]
Eastern Board	1,361	1,218.40
Northern Board	201	168.05
Southern Board	214	181.67
Western Board	377	340.70
Total	2,153	1,908.82

[1] Whole-time equivalent

Railway Services

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what his plans are for the future of the Whitehead to Larne railway line. [94078]

Angela Smith: Further to my answers to Question ref. 82681, *Official Report*, 25 November 2002, column 24W, and Question ref. 82682, *Official Report*, 28 January 2003, column 770W, I can confirm that the plans for the retention of services on the Whitehead to Larne railway are set out in the "Regional Transportation Strategy for Northern Ireland 2002–12" (RTS). The intention is to retain services on this line, subject to successful results from the introduction of new trains and improved infrastructure on the "core" network in the early stages of implementing the RTS. Hence, in the short to medium term services will be retained on the Whitehead to Larne railway line, subject to normal safety procedures. However, no major improvements will be carried out until the assessments referred to above are concluded.

Rohypnol

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the availability of Rohypnol in Northern Ireland; and what mechanisms are in place to ensure that Rohypnol is attained by the public solely for its prescribed purpose. [98374]

Mr. Browne: Rohypnol (Flunitrazepam) is subject to the same legal controls and prescribing restrictions in Northern Ireland as are in force within the rest of the UK. It is a prescription only medicine (POM) which may be only prescribed on private prescription. It is a Schedule 3 drug under the Misuse of Drugs Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2002 and as such prescriptions written for it must comply with both prescription and handwriting requirements under the Regulations.

Stocks of the product are subject to safe custody requirements. The Misuse of DrugsInspector (NI) is responsible for inspection and monitoring activities and enforcement action where appropriate. Routine and unannounced inspections are carried out on practitioners, pharmacists, trust and private hospitals, pharmaceutical manufacturers and wholesalers, and research and clinical trial establishments to ensure compliance with legislative controls, agreed standard operating procedures, good practice guidelines and safe custody requirements.

Teachers' Pay Review

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if the pay settlement reached in the Review of Salaries for Principals and Vice Principals will be extended to *(a)* teaching and *(b)* non-teaching principals. [100064]

Jane Kennedy: The independent Inquiry's Interim Report on Principal and Vice-principal Pay applies to all principals in grant-aided schools, irrespective of the teaching duties they carry out.

Trolley Waiting Times

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the average trolley waits in Daisy Hill Hospital were in *(a)* November 2002, *(b)* December 2002 and *(c)* January 2003. [98261]

Mr. Browne: There were no trolley waits in Daisy Hill Hospital in *(a)* November 2002, *(b)* December 2002 or *(c)* January 2003.

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the average trolley wait was in each hospital in Northern Ireland in January. [98262]

Mr. Browne: Trolley wait information is collected by time band. It is therefore not possible to calculate the arithmetic mean length of trolley wait. It is however possible to identify the median or mid point trolley wait.

The median length of trolley waits by hospital are provided in the table below.

	Median hours waiting	*Total monthly trolley waits*
Altnagelvin	Less than 1	7
Antrim	12–13	312
Belfast City	8–9	188
Causeway	13–14	152
Craigavon	17+	421
Down	4–5	11
Lagan Valley	11–12	124
Mater	13–14	242
Mid Ulster	8–9	29
Royal Group	8–9	107
Sperrin Lakeland	2–3	29
Ulster	10–11	357
Whiteabbey	8–9	1

Vehicle Fleets

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he has issued guidelines to local authorities in Northern Ireland on the introduction of facilities for the provision of *(a)* retail and fleet liquefied petroleum gas and *(b)* compressed natural gas. [96555]

Angela Smith: No guidelines have been issued to local authorities in Northern Ireland on the introduction of such facilities.

The Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002 enables District Councils to undertake the assessment and management of air quality in Northern Ireland. It requires District Councils to identify areas where air quality standards are not likely to be achieved within specified timeframes. In such areas, relevant authorities can then be required to produce proposals for reduction in the pollution levels. Should pollution from road transport be identified as a significant source in a particular area, government departments, district councils and other public bodies will consider possible reduction measures, including, where relevant, any contribution that might be made by a programme supporting low emission vehicles.

Work Permits

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether the term Baltic dancers appeared in the application made in summer 2002 for a group work permit for lap dancers for the Movie Star Café. [98034]

Jane Kennedy: The name of the group stated on the application form was "Baltic Dancers".

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what discussions the Department of Employment and Learning had with Work Permits UK on the application made for a group work permit for lap dancers for the Movie Star Café in summer 2002. [98036]

Jane Kennedy: When processing work permit applications for Northern Ireland the Department for Employment and Learning applied the same criteria as used in Work Permits (UK). As no guidelines existed in respect of pole dancers, it was only after querying this aspect with Work Permits (UK) that DEL treated the application in question on the basis of an entertainment application.

Work Placements

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many university students his Department has supported or sponsored with a work placement in the last year; what his policy is on work placements; what plans he has to develop such schemes; and what his policy is on paying their university fees. [98550]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The Department has supported or sponsored 71 university work placement students during the past year. These cover the areas of Valuation, Statistics, Economics, Architecture, Quantity Surveying, Mechanical Engineering, Media Studies and IT.

There is no specific policy, however, the numbers employed are decided upon by the specialist business areas and is dependant on available funding.

There are currently no plans to further develop the schemes.

The Department employs and pays university students for the period of placement but do not pay or make any contribution to their university fees.

TRANSPORT

A46/A47 Link Road

5. **Keith Vaz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make an assessment of the effectiveness of the A46-A47 Link Road. [100181]

Mr. Spellar: No. As the A46/A47 Link Road is a local road scheme, the responsibility for monitoring its performance rests with the local highway authority, Leicester city council.

Buses

14. **Mr. Webb:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what his strategy is for encouraging greater reliance on bus transport in areas where bus services are deregulated. [100191]

Mr. Jamieson: Better partnership between bus operators and local authorities, with co-ordinated investment in infrastructure and new vehicles, is a proven way of growing bus patronage, and is particularly effective where it can relieve congestion. Other local authority policies, for example on parking restraint and park-and-ride schemes, can also encourage greater use of buses. That is why we have established the Bus Forum between the bus operators and local authorities to develop the best framework for this partnership.

New Airport (Rugby)

15. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the Environment Agency's submissions on the proposed site of a new airport east of Rugby. [100192]

Mr. Jamieson: The Environment Agency has engaged in the consultation process and we welcome their input. As I have said previously, we will produce a summary of the responses after the consultation has finished.

Railways

16. **Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about the level of investment in the national railway infrastructure in the last financial year. [100193]

Mr. Jamieson: National Rail Trends published quarterly by the Strategic Rail Authority gives details of total investment in the rail industry. For 2001–02 this stood at £4,070 million. Of this £922 million was in respect of rolling stock. The bulk of the remaining investment spend is in respect of infrastructure.

Road Works Obstructions

17. **Andrew Selous:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the cost to businesses of the overrunning of road works contracts which obstruct entry to business premises in the last five years. [100194]

Mr. Jamieson: Where a highway authority carries out works under a statutory power or duty, and performs those works properly, there is not at law any liability on the authority for loss of business.

Consequently, no assessment is made of the cost to businesses of the overrunning of road works contracts.

Nevertheless, the Highways Agency recognises the disruption these works can cause and requires its contractors to complete them as quickly as possible with minimum disruption to businesses. Every effort is made to ensure that its road works do not obstruct entry to business premises or, otherwise, alternative access arrangements are provided.

Cycling Projects Fund

18. **Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the Cycling Projects Fund. [100195]

Mr. Jamieson: The Cycling Projects Fund supports cycling across England by providing funds for projects that can meet a local need and deliver an increase in cycling. Over £2 million was allocated in the first round and a second bidding round is now in progress, with a further £1million available.

Roads (Eastern Region)

19. **Mr. Blizzard:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to improve road links in the eastern part of the eastern region. [100196]

Mr. Jamieson: Schemes currently under construction or programmed to improve access by road to the eastern part of the eastern region include: A47-Thorney bypass, Hardwick flyover, Kings Lynn, and Blofield-North Burlingham dualling; A11-Five Ways to Thetford dualling, Roudham Heath to Attleborough dualling and Attleborough bypass dualling; A14 Haughey New street-Stowmarket improvement and Rookery Crossroads grade separated junction, and A428 Caxton Common to Hardwick dualling. We are carrying out further studies to identify the appropriate way to deal with the A47 Acle Straight and the Highways Agency are looking at ways to improve safety on the Acle Straight and at improvements to roundabouts in Great Yarmouth to increase capacity and improve safety.

Norfolk county council recently completed the Broome and Ellingham bypass and Suffolk county council are progressing with the south Lowestoft relief road for which funding will be provided once it has passed through all the statutory processes.

Congestion

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment has been made by his Department on the effect of the central London congestion charge on *(a)* traffic levels, *(b)* traffic speeds, *(c)* bus usage, *(d)* air pollution and *(e)* road safety; and if he will make a statement. [100533]

Mr. Jamieson: We are following the scheme's progress with great interest. However, it is the responsibility of the Mayor and Transport for London (TfL) to monitor the scheme's effects. The first annual report will be published in spring 2003, meanwhile a paper on their proposed monitoring, "Impacts Monitoring Programme: Preview of First Annual Report" was published on 4 February, and is available on the TfL website at: http://www.tfl.gov.uk/tfl/cc_monitoring.shtml.

Highways Agency

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on what basis the valuation of Highways Agency assets in the National Asset Register was made; and if he will make a statement. [99395]

Mr. Jamieson: The data used to compile the National Asset Register return was based on the Agency's resource accounts for the year ending 31 March 2000 which were prepared in accordance with the Treasury Resource Accounting Manual.

The trunk road network was valued at depreciated replacement cost. This was based on internal costing and physical asset records adjusted to current prices and to reflect the condition of the network. The network assets comprise carriageways; earthworks; tunnels and road pavements; roadside communications; bridges and other structures; and land and buildings within the highways perimeter.

Roads in the course of design or construction were valued at current cost. Most other tangible assets were similarly valued at current cost. IT hardware and office equipment was valued at historic cost.

Hospitality Budget

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what his Department's hospitality budget *(a)* is in 2002–03 and *(b)* was in each of the last three years; and how much was left unspent at the end of each financial year. [99580]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department does not have a dedicated hospitality budget.

Light Rapid Transit Project

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on progress of the Light Rapid Transit project for Fareham-Gosport-Portsmouth. [100187]

Mr. Jamieson: We approved this scheme for funding in March 2001. The new light rail line will bring considerable benefits to the residents of Fareham, Gosport and Portsmouth. It will help to reduce congestion by providing a realistic alternative to the car. I understand that the promoters are currently assessing bids from two consortia to build the scheme.

Maritime Oil Cargo

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent measures he has taken with his European colleagues to improve the safety of transport of oil cargo in European waters. [100490]

Mr. Jamieson: A number of measures designed to improve the safety of the transport of oil by sea were agreed at the European Transport Council on 6 December 2002. The Council set out 20 conclusions, endorsed a week later at Head of Government level, which requested action at member state level, collectively at EU level, and by member states at the international level. The range of activity is ambitious—from ship design through better enforcement of existing safety rules to better arrangements for intervention, salvage and clean-up.

Maritime Pollution

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress has been made since 1997 in reducing pollution in UK waters; what proposals he has to further reduce these levels; and if he will make a statement. [100491]

Mr. Jamieson: My Department has taken a number of proactive measures since 1997 with a view to reducing pollution in UK waters. Among these measures, the following are particularly worthy of note:

> in 1997 we were the first country to introduce a statutory requirement on ports to prepare a port waste management plan to address the waste disposal needs of all types of ships calling.
>
> in 1997, we introduced legislation which enables magistrates to impose a fine of up to £250,000 on either the master or ship owner for an oil pollution offence. This is the highest fine for any offence in a magistrates court.
>
> we have played a leading role in launching the 1997 Quality Shipping Campaign, which tackles the problem of substandard shipping and marine pollution by addressing the role of owners and flag states in fulfilling their responsibilities under relevant international conventions.
>
> in 1999 we introduced the role of Secretary of State's Representative for Maritime Salvage and Intervention (commonly know as SOSREP), who has the power to oversee, control and, if necessary, intervene in salvage operations within UK waters involving vessels or fixed platforms where there is a significant risk of pollution. The SOSREP role has proved very successful, as well as being an international first for the UK.
>
> in 1999 we increased the number of government-funded Emergency Towing Vessels (ETVs) around the UK coast to four (located in the Dover Strait, the Minch, the South West approaches and in the Fair Isle), and in October 2001 we extended their period of operation so that all four operate all year round.
>
> in 2000, we published the revised National Contingency Plan for Marine Pollution from Shipping and Offshore Installations, setting out how the relevant agencies and authorities in the UK will respond to such pollution incidents.

As regards further measures, the Government are now in the final stages of the identification of Marine Environmental High Risk Areas (MEHRAs), which will further assist in the protection of our seas and coasts. We are working on a consultation document which will announce the locations of the MEHRAs and seek comments on a range of issues associated with MEHRAs. We expect to issue the document for public consultation shortly.

My Department's Maritime and Coastguard Agency annually commissions a report to compile statistics and other information on the different types of marine pollution in the waters around the British Isles. Since 1965 this work has been completed by the Advisory Committee on Protection of the Sea (ACOPS), and in 2000 the ACOPS Report was revised and now provides data on the number of incidents, the type of incident by pollutant, the source of the pollutant and the geographical distribution of the reported incidents. The key figures from the ACOPS Reports since 1997 on chemical, oil, diesel spillages in UK waters are as follows.

	2001	*2000*
Number of pollution incidents	678	743
Incidents where source could be identified (Percentage)	87	88
Incidents from offshore oil and gas installations (Number)	419	456
Mineral oils (Percentage)	95.5	95
Chemicals (Percentage)	1.3	0.7
Garbage (Percentage)	0.4	0.5
Vegetable/animal oils (Percentage)	0.3	0.4
Other substances (Percentage)	2.4	3

	Number of pollution incidents	*Incidents where source could be identified*	*Incidents from offshore oil and gas installations*	*Incidents where an estimate of the quantity of oil was reported*	*Incidents where 100 gallons or more were spilled*
2001	678	614	419	544	67
2000	743	627	456	543	77
1999	747	748	382	541	69
1998	801	609	359	613	87
1997	723	578	351	553	100

NATS

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what measures he is taking to address the shortcomings in the provision of safety information by NATS to general aviation; and what assessment his Department has made of the risk posed by flying without access to safety information; [100260]

(2) what recent discussions his Department has had with NATS and the CAA concerning the provision of safety information by NATS to general aviation; [100259]

(3) what recent representations he has received on the provision of safety information by NATS to general aviation; and if he will make a statement. [100258]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government's statutory aviation safety adviser, the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), has assured me that there are no shortcomings in the provision of Notice to Airmen (NOTAM) information. The new version of the NOTAM handling system launched last August by National Air Traffic Services Ltd. (NATS) did have teething problems, but the CAA is satisfied that aviation safety has not been compromised and it has been possible to obtain the required data during this period.

My officials have been in regular contact since last September with the CAA and NATS to discuss the resolution of the outstanding difficulties with the NOTAM system. Many of these difficulties have been resolved by the system improvements made since its introduction last August and which have concentrated on making it more user friendly. Furthermore, a number of meetings have taken place between CAA and NATS officials and representatives of the user community to address these concerns.

NATS is scheduled to introduce a further revision of the NOTAM system in April 2003 designed to overcome the outstanding difficulties the General Aviation community is having with it. Officials from my Department and the CAA are monitoring the progress of this work and will continue to scrutinise the performance of the system after the changes have been made.

Rail Services

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many trains travelling from Worcester to Hereford have been prematurely terminated at *(a)* Malvern and *(b)* Ledbury stations in the past six months; what percentage of total journeys from Worcester to Hereford this represents; and if he will make a statement. [99877]

Mr. Jamieson: During the period from 18 August 2002 to 1 February 2003, 1,854 trains were timetabled to travel between Worcester and Hereford of which 1,818 arrived at Hereford. This means that 36 trains or 1.94 per cent. of the timetabled services failed to complete their journeys in full.

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to ensure sufficient passenger capacity on cross country trains. [100461]

Mr. Jamieson: All train operators have an obligation to avoid excessive overcrowding on the services they provide, and they must agree a plan with the Strategic Rail Authority detailing how they will match capacity to demand. The authority have recently announced a number of timetable revisions agreed with Virgin Cross Country to be made from May and September which are aimed at improving performance and relieving congestion. In the longer-term the authority's "Capacity Utilisation Policy" will determine the most efficient use of the network.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Communications Bill

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations she has received on the impact on employment in regional newspapers of the provisions of the Communications Bill. [99656]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I have been asked to reply.

A number of representations relating to the newspaper merger provisions of the Communications Bill have been received. None of these has focused on any impact of these provisions on jobs in regional newspapers.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Domestic Violence

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Solicitor-General if she will make a statement on the role of the Crown Prosecution Service in domestic violence cases. [99404]

The Solicitor-General: The role of the Crown Prosecution Service is to review and prosecute cases of domestic violence in accordance with the Code for Crown Prosecutors and CPS policy. The revised policy, launched in November 2001, focuses on victims' priorities of safety, support and information and promotes the immediate and long-term safety of the victim and any children, while holding abusers accountable for their actions. This is achieved by promoting close working relationships between the Crown Prosecution Service, the police and the voluntary sector, to ensure that decisions are properly informed and victims are properly supported. The revised policy also emphasises the need to construct cases, wherever possible, on the basis of evidence other than that of the victim. To underpin CPS policy, each CPS area has a domestic violence coordinator.

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of the Crown Prosecution Service and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary are currently preparing to undertake a joint thematic review of the investigation and prosecution of cases involving domestic violence, which will be concluded later this year.

Serious Fraud Office

Mr. Laws: To ask the Solicitor General how many staff worked for the Serious Fraud Office in each year from 1988–89 to 2003–04 (planned); and if she will make a statement. [99833]

The Solicitor-General: The following table provides all the relevant Serious Fraud Office statistics in relation to numbers of staff employed by the SFO from its inception in April 1988 to 2003–04 (planned).

Financial Year	*Number of Permanent Staff Employed*
1988–89	63
1989–90	Figure unavailable
1990–91	103
1991–92	117
1992–93	136
1993–94	138
1994–95	137
1995–96	162
1996–97	166
1997–98	154
1998–99	149
1999–2000	170
2000–01	178
2001002	233
2002–03	231
2003–04 (planned)	240

Staffing levels at the Serious Fraud Office have steadily increased over the last four years. This has been necessary in order to accept a higher caseload and to compensate, in part for the reduction in the number of police officers made available to the SFO. The SFO continues to be an important tool in the fight against white-collar crime and its dedicated and professional staff play a fundamental role in the fight against fraud.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

Car Parking

Mr. Laws: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission what estimate he has made of the revenue forgone in each of the last five years from providing free parking for hon. Members and senior staff at the House; and if he will make a statement. [99892]

Sir Archy Kirkwood: The House has never had a policy of charging for use of the car park, which is provided for security reasons as well as for the convenience of Members and staff. No estimate of revenue foregone has therefore been made.

Public Expenditure

Mr. David Laws: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission what total public spending on the House of Commons was in each year from 1992–93 to 2003–04 (planned), broken down by *(a)* hon. Members' salaries and allowances, *(b)* other staff costs, *(c)* building costs and *(d)* other costs; and if he will make a statement. [99891]

Sir Archy Kirkwood: The amounts of cash spent, or estimated to be spent, in each year are as follows:

Expenditure from 1992–93 to 2003–04

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	2001–02	2002–03 Forecast	2003–04 Planned
Members' pay and allowances	67,038	68,502	69,469	72,128	81,766	95,819	86,175	91,495	94,417	116,567	131,000	143,607
House staff costs	26,180	30.519	31,056	31,949	33,795	34,951	37,483	39,928	40,943	43,000	47,820	46,907
Accommodation	19,745	21,248	25,934	27,802	29,111	33,620	34,609	35,656	38,844	41,558	44,345	35,708
Portcullis House	3,367	7,662	6,292	15,104	30,002	35,958	54,893	44,769	38,557	6,686	2,657	—
Other	37,307	36,733	36,364	38,986	37,284	40,699	46,565	44,598	41,653	41,264	48,790	58,215
	153,637	164,664	169,115	185,969	211,958	241,047	259,725	256,446	254,414	249,075	274,612	284,437

Notes:

The Members' costs shown include financial assistance to opposition parties (Short money) and the regular payments to the Members' Fund;

Staff costs include pensions paid in-year;

Accommodation includes new works, maintenance, rent rates and utilities; and

The figures in 2001–02 show the cash spent in the year. This was the first year of resource accounting and the figures in the audited accounts are now presented on a resource basis

The House of Commons Commission is not responsible for the pay and allowances of hon. Members. However, to assist the hon. Member for Yeovil I have included figures already on the public record.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Afghanistan

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent discussions her Department has had with his US counterparts on the reconstruction of Afghanistan; and if he will make a statement. [100008]

Clare Short: Both my officials and I regularly meet with other donors to discuss a variety of issues, including the reconstruction of Afghanistan. I have discussed these issues with US counterparts on a number of occasions.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what estimate her Department has made of the number of Afghans who suffered hunger-related deaths in 2001. [100005]

Clare Short: Neither DFID nor the UN agencies WHO or FAO have made an estimate of these figures. Malnutrition increases the propensity to catch other illnesses but is very hard to isolate as the direct cause of death in Afghanistan, where there is food insecurity but no famine.

The WFP estimates that in 2003 approximately 4.3 million people in rural settled areas will not be able to meet basic food needs. The WHO estimates that acute malnutrition in children is aroung 10 per cent. and chronic malnutrition is approximately 50 per cent. 20 per cent. of children are born with a low birth weight.

UN agencies are co-ordinating a response that provides food aid to the most vulnerable sections of society, including returning refugees and people in isolated, rural areas. WFP have put forward a strategy for 2003 that aims to provide food assistance to over 9 million people over two years. WFP's food aid is in the form of wheat fortifield with nutritional supplements to halp combat the problems of malnutrition.

HIV/AIDS

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what financial resources have been allocated to HIV/AIDS projects in each year since 1992. [100003]

Clare Short: DFID bilateral commitments to HIV/AIDS since 1991/92 are as follows:

HIV/AIDS bilateral commitments by year

	(£million)
1991/92	6.9
1992/93	10.1
1993/94	37.4
1994/95	78.2
1995/96	57.1
1996/97	53.6
1997/98	106.4
1998/99	154.8
1999/00	231.1
2000/01	362.6
2001/02	436.4

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment her Department has made of the impact of HIV/AIDS on the economic development of *(a)* Swaziland, *(b)* Malawi, *(c)* South Africa, *(d)* Tanzania, *(e)* Ethiopia, *(f)* Kenya and *(g)* Botswana. [99994]

Clare Short: HIV/AIDS is having a catastrophic impact on sub-Saharan Africa undermining and even reversing gains made in economic and social development over the last two decades. Current estimates suggest that HIV/AIDS has reduced the growth of Africa's per capita income by 0.7 percentage points a year.

In South Africa, DFID is co-funding research into the economic impact of HIV/AIDS (with USAID and AUSAID), looking at the effects on labour supply, agriculture, on the education and health sectors, and at the household level. Research is also being done on developing methodologies for the analysis of the impact of HIV/AIDS on economic sectors, which will have broader application across Africa. In Kenya and Malawi, DFID are shortly about to undertake similar impact assessments.

Elsewhere in Africa, economic impact assessments are being undertaken by a number of agencies, the findings of which are enabling DFID to develop their cross-sector strategy to combat HIV/AIDS and support country governments in mainstreaming HIV/AIDS responses.

(a) In Swaziland, UNAIDS estimate that maize production has been reduced by 54.2 per cent. as a result of AIDS deaths among households.

(b) In Malawi, HIV/AIDS is estimated to depress economic growth by 1.5 to 2 per cent. annually. Human capital is being continually drained with 8 to 10 per cent. of teachers lost every year to AIDS, faster than can be trained.

(c) HIV/AIDS is impacting negatively on South Africa's international competitiveness, with domestic and foreign investment being deterred because of the high HIV prevalence rates.

(d) The World bank estimated that in Tanzania, GDP will be 15 to 20 per cent. smaller than in a non-AIDS scenario in 2010 because of the impact of disease on physical, human, and social capital accumulation.

(e) Ethiopia is a predominantly agricultural based economy, and HIV/AIDS is impacting heavily on rural populations. Families with an infected family member spend 14 hours a week working their land compared with the average of 34 hours, bringing agricultural productivity down considerably.

(f) In Kenya, GDP is projected to decline by 14.5 per cent. by 2005, while per capita income would decline by 10 per cent. due to AIDS.

(g) In Botswana, the epidemic will be responsible for an 8 to 10 per cent. decrease in per capita income over the next ten years and households in poverty will increase by 6–8 per cent. in the next 10 years.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development which HIV/AIDS education programmes her Department is supporting, broken down by continent. [99996]

Clare Short: My Department is working with development partners to ensure that HIV is mainstreamed throughout education systems, plans and interventions in all African countries and elsewhere where we are providing education support. Support to education is critical to ensure that "Education for All" is achieved and that school children in Africa are properly equipped with the skills and knowledge with which to protect themselves from the epidemic. This includes working directly with Ministries of Education to ensure that school curricula address HIV and AIDS in a manner that is gender-sensitive and relevant to students.

We are also making progress by piloting targeted school-based HIV prevention programmes—the Nigeria Extended Life Planning Education Project is one such initiative.

DFID is also supporting innovative "edutainment" programmes in Southern Africa, using multiple media such as radio drama, pamphlets and cartoon books to communicate about HIV prevention. For example, we are supporting a regional initiative to provide materials on HIV/AIDS to all 12 to 16-year-olds in Botswana, Namibia, Lesotho and Swaziland.

Other HIV education programmes supported by my Department include:

Africa

Educational support to HIV/AIDS—Rwanda:

HIV/AIDS Community Prevention and anti-AIDS project educational material—South Africa:

Supporting the needs of young people—South Africa:

Capacity building for HIV/AIDS Education—Africa regional:

Africa Alive HIV/AIDS education messages to young people—Africa regional.

Asia

Reproductive Health Education and HIV/AIDS education—Kyrgyzstan:

HIV/AIDS Education Project for young people—China.

Eastern Europe

United Nations Fund for International Partnerships.

Pacific

VSO HIV/AIDS personal and social education for Kiribati youth.

Humanitarian Contingency Planning

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what contingency plans have been made to assist the civilians of Iraq in *(a)* water supplies, *(b)* food and *(c)* medical treatment after military conflict. [100082]

Clare Short: Operational humanitarian organisations have made a range of contingency plans to assist civilians with water food and medical treatment in the event of conflict in Iraq. My Department is in close contact with several such organisations, including Un agencies, the Red Cross/Crescent and NGOs. We also discuss regularly with the armed forces the importance of minimising the extent of civilian suffering, and the limited humanitarian assistance the military could provide during any period before UN agencies/NGOs were operational.

Iraq

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what measures her

Department will take to support the Iraqi ration distribution system in the event of military intervention in Iraq. [100004]

Clare Short: The continuation of the oil-for-food programme would be a very high priority in the event of any conflict in Iraq. Measures necessary to ensure this are being actively discussed.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps her Department will take to aid the re-establishment of links between families in the aftermath of possible war in Iraq. [99991]

Clare Short: Following any possible conflict in Iraq, I would expect as elsewhere that the International Committee of the Red Cross, and those UN agencies and NGOs experienced in tracing and family reunification, would take the lead in helping affected families. My Department regularly funds such organisations.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment her Department has made of the number of people who will be displaced within Iraq in the event of conflict. [99998]

Clare Short: UN agencies and others have made a range of estimates of possible displaced people, which vary widely. The number of people who might leave their houses or try to cross borders would depend on what they are moving from. An essential part of our work has been to try to refine the military options to minimise the humanitarian risk which would lead to large scale movements of people.

Kosovo

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made in Kosovo of *(a)* health services and indications and *(b)* education services. [100014]

Clare Short: Kosovo's health indicators are amongst the worst in Europe, following years of neglect to health services, the exclusion of the majority Albanian population from formal healthcare under the Milosevic regime, and serious damage to facilities during the 1999 conflict.

Since 1999, the international community has invested €92 million in the reconstruction of Kosovo's health care facilities. The UN administration has established a basic framework for the delivery of health services. This responsibility has now been transferred to Ministry of Health of the elected Provisional Institutions of Self Government.

My department has invested heavily in the improvement of Kosovo's health services, providing extensive emergency assistance during the immediate post-conflict phase, and a subsequent €11 million as technical assistance and infrastructure development. We now plan to launch a €1.6 million programme to boost the capacity of the Ministry of Health to meet these challenges. In addition, we have contributed approximately €7.8 million through the European Commission's health programmes since 1999.

Education services were similarly disrupted during the Milosevic years and the eventual conflict. There is some evidence that access to education has improved markedly since the conflict ended, with the total number of children attending school rising by 42 per cent. since 1998, and the total number of university students rising by 19 per cent. My department does not provide direct support for education services in Kosovo, as this sector is already well provided for by other donors, including the World Bank and the Canadian and German governments.

Liberia

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment her Department has made of the humanitarian situation in the refugee camps in Montserrado county in Liberia. [100001]

Clare Short: Our information on the humanitarian situation in Liberia is from reporting by the UN and other agencies such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF).

There are six camps in Montserrado county. Health and other services in three camps are supported by MSF Belgium, and in one each by MSF France, ICRC and World Vision. Another camp is being established by a Liberian NGO. We understand that the general condition of those civilians displaced and those living in camps, as well as the resident population, is poor but as yet not critical.

We have recently committed £450,000 to MSF Belgium for primary health care and £550,000 to ICRC for humanitarian programmes in Liberia.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what estimate she has made of the number of Liberians who have fled into Sierra Leone following the upsurge of hostilities between Liberian Government forces and Liberian rebels; and what financial allocation has been made for the provision of shelter for Liberian refugees in Sierra Leone. [100002]

Clare Short: UNHCR estimates that, since the most recent outbreak of fighting in mid-February, 7,000 refugees have crossed into Sierra Leone.

We recently committed £1.4 million for humanitarian assistance in Sierra Leone. £900,000 of this has been earmarked directly for assistance to Liberian refugees. £500,000 will provide emergency assistance, care and maintenance through UNHCR; and £400,000 will contribute to a UNICEF programme to control vaccine preventable diseases among refugees and the civilian population, in the east and north of Sierra Leone.

Meningitis Vaccine

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what estimate the World Health Organisation has made of the number of doses of meningitis vaccine required and how many have been distributed in *(a)* Burkina Faso and *(b)* the Central African Republic. [100046]

Clare Short: The information is as follows:

a) Burkina Faso:

In the epidemic season 2001–02 there was a global shortage of tetravalent vaccine. In Burkina Faso, there were 13,000 cases, with 1,500 deaths. The target population for a mass vaccination campaign is an estimated 3.5 million people. The national authorities made no formal request for vaccines. The World Health Organisation (WHO) provided 25,000 doses of tetravalent (corresponding to a donation from Aventis) which were used to protect health workers.

So far in the epidemic season 2002–03, there has been 3,000 reported cases including 400 deaths. The national authorities have requested 1.4 million doses of the new GSK trivalent vaccine. WHO is in partnership with GSK to ensure widest use of this vaccine and are currently looking for funds from donors including the Gates Foundation. 500,000 doses have been sent so far with 1 million extra doses ready to be shipped.

b) Central African Republic (CAR):

The political situation in CAR is unstable and consequently it is difficult to collect reliable data. Medecins sans Frontieres (MSF) reported 60 cases in Bangassou and 20 cases in Mobaye between October and December 2002. CAR authorities requested 10,000 doses of tetravalent vaccine but due to the epidemiological figures and the absence of reliable lab data, no vaccination campaign has been implemented.

Mine Clearance

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much was spent on *(a)* humanitarian mine clearance, *(b)* commercial mine clearance *(c)* military initiatives, *(d)* mine awareness, *(e)* victim assistance and *(f)* research and development for mine clearance in 2002. [100011]

Clare Short: The information is as follows:

(a) DFID estimates that it will spend approximately £9 million on Humanitarian Mine Clearance in 2002–03. This figures also includes some integrated mine awareness activities. As programmes are often integrated separate costs of awareness are not available.

(b) DFID has not funded commercial mine clearance. There are no records of UK commercial demining activities currently available in Department of Trade and Industry.

(c) Military mine clearance has taken place in the Balkans since 1992. This is not funded by DFID. UK military advisers have been attached to UN Mine Action Centres assisting in the development of mine action programmes. They have also supervised the mine clearance carried out by the Entity Armed Forces and provided mine awareness to local populations. The Mine Information Training Centre (MITC) has provided mine awareness training to over 30,000 people. The MOD has also continued to monitor minefields in the Falkland Islands. This work is part of the wider responsibilities of those involved and is impossible to cost accurately.

(d) DFID has contributed £300,000 to UNICEF for specific mine awareness activities.

(e) Assistance to landmine victims is additional to our mine programme. Mine victims benefit from our mainstream health and population and social development programmes, as well as specific humanitarian programmes assisting the disabled. It is not possible to disaggregate expenditure figures for landmine victims.

(f) DFID estimates that it will spend £1,400,000 on research and development in 2002–03 in connection with Humanitarian Mine Action.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what organisations the Government gave money for mine clearance in 2002–03; and how much was given in each case. [100009]

Clare Short: The following table gives the figures for the Department of International Development:

£

Organisation	*Estimated final Outturn 2002–03*
The HALO Trust (bilateral)	325,000
Mines Advisory Group (MAG) (bilateral)	660,000
United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS)	5,300,000
UNICEF (Mines Awareness)	300,000
Organisation of American States (Nicaragua demining)	378,000
QINETIQ (Tech Advice and Testing)	200,000
UNDP	2,500,000
Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD)	1,000,000
Landmine Monitor	137,000
DISARMCO (Research and Development)	10,000
ERA (Research and Development)	117,000
SERCO (Research and Development)	30,000
BARIC Consultants (Technical Advice)	100,000
Total	11,057,000

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the expenditure was on humanitarian mine clearance in each year since 1997, broken down by country. [100010]

Clare Short: For details relating to the period 1997 to 2000, I refer the hon. Member to the Answer I gave her on 29 March 2001 (*Official Report*, column 721W). The figures for 2000 to 2003 are given in the table below:

Country	*2000–01 (£)*	*2001–02 (£)*	*2002–03 (£ estimated)*
Afghanistan		3,150,000	1,800,000
Albania	369,648		
Chad	369,648		
Croatia	150,000		
Eritrea	544,151	694,540	
Guinea Bissau	120,000		
Lebanon	387,296		
Nicaragua	283,000	189,000	378,000
Cambodia	1,430,571	1,000,000	500,000
Northern Iraq	616,100	500,000	500,000
Jordan	270,000	197,402	
Laos	616,689	300,000	
Ge[illegible]	438,616	500,000	325,000
Kosovo	8,700,000	2,000,000	
Thailand	300,000		
Bosnia		500,000	
Croatia		326,529	

The balance of the DFID spend on Humanitarian Mine Action is via the UN and not ring fenced for specific countries.

Occupied Territories

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the estimated amount of food aid in the Occupied Territories is; and how much has been distributed. [99995]

Clare Short: Food aid is provided by a range of donors in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Comprehensive figures are not available. The largest provider, UNRWA, disbursed food to the value of US$21 million in 2002, and plans further support of US$32million in the first six months of 2003. The World Food Programme, the International Committee of the Red Cross and a range of NGOs provide complimentary support to the non-refugee population. Food aid is however only one of a range of instruments used to meet the urgent needs of the Palestinian people. Other instruments, such as budget support and employment generation, have contributed significantly in easing the growing humanitarian situation and have the added benefit of stimulating the local economy.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment her Department has made of the impact of a war against Iraq on the routes of humanitarian aid to the Occupied Territories; and what steps she will take to guarantee humanitarian aid routes to the Occupied Territories. [99997]

Clare Short: The most likely major impact, in the event of a war in Iraq, would be a complete closure by Israel of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, severely restricting travel between and within the Occupied Territories. The international community has made it clear that Israel must allow humanitarian operations to continue without impediment, including the safe passage of humanitarian staff and supplies. Lessons learned from the 1991 Gulf War and from the intense military activity of Israel's 'Operation Defensive Shield' in 2002 will help international and local organisations cope more effectively should this happen.

Palestinian Authority Area (Living Conditions)

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what action she is taking to help those living in the Palestinian Authority area to *(a)* secure employment, *(b)* access healthcare provision and *(c)* improve opportunities for improving literacy and numeracy; and if she will make a statement. [100586]

Clare Short: We are working, in close cooperation with our international and Palestinian partners, to support a range of initiatives to help ease the humanitarian situation in the West Bank and Gaza. We have supported the World Bank's employment generation project and a wide range of healthcare and education programmes. Our contributions to the World Bank's Emergency Services Support Programme help the Palestinian Ministries of Health and Education to continue to deliver services despite the economic and social decline. And our support for UNRWA delivers vital health and education services to the Palestinian refugee population.

Police Training

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what consultation takes place with *(a)* the OSCE, *(b)* the United Kingdom's mission to the OSCE, *(c)* other regional international agencies and *(d)* the United Kingdom's missions to other regional international agencies prior to the commissioning or making of grants, in relation to police training and civil society building in the area of the OSCE; and if she will make a statement. [99448]

Clare Short: The UK Government-supported project concerned with community based policing and community safety in Serbia has been designed in collaboration with the OSCE. Consultation was also carried out with theSerbian Government and other interested bodies such as the EC and the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights. Close links will be maintained with all interested parties in the course of project implementation.

World Food Programme Supplies

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment her Department has made of the impact of the Israeli Defence Force's activities on World Food Programme supplies. [99993]

Clare Short: Over the last two years there have been significant disruptions of the delivery schedule of food aid by the World Food Programme (WFP), and other providers such as UNRWA, due to Israeli military actions and movement restrictions. Food consignments have been held in Israeli ports for considerable periods, and in November 2002 the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) destroyed a WFP warehouse in Gaza. 540 tonnes of food supplies were destroyed. High level representation by the international community has led to Israel's agreement to reimburse WFP's losses as a 'humanitarian gesture'.

Written Questions

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many named day written questions were tabled to the Department between 15 October 2002 and 24 February 2003; how many that received a holding answer were given a substantive answer *(a)* within three days, *(b)* within seven days, *(c)* within 14 days, *(d)* within 28 days and *(e)* over 28 days later; and what procedures the Department has in place to monitor performance on answering (i) Parliamentary Questions and (ii) ministerial letters. [99430]

Clare Short: Between 15 October 2002 and 24 February 2003, 119 named day written questions were tabled to my Department.

For those that received a holding answer substantive replies were given as follows:

(a) 9 were given within three days,

(b) 1 within seven days,

(c) 2 within fourteen days,

(d) 4 within 28 days and

(e) 1 over twenty eight days.

The Cabinet Office, on an annual basis, publishes a report to Parliament on performance of departments in replying to Ministerial correspondence. The Report for 2001 was published on Friday 24 May 2002, column 674W. The Report for 2002 will be published in due course.

Zimbabwe

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on foot and mouth disease in Zimbabwe and assistance from the UK in supplying vaccines. [100050]

Clare Short: The foot and mouth disease outbreak in Zimbabwe is another problem directly attributable to the lack of law and order and mismanagement of a poorly conceived land reform programme. Fences around wildlife reserves have been destroyed, and domestic cattle allowed to mingle with wild buffalo that carry the disease.

The problem cannot be fully solved until the fences are restored and the movement of indigenous cattle regulated effectively. In the meantime, the FAO have imported 340,000 doses of vaccine, which are being used in the worst affected areas. This contribution was funded by the Dutch Government. Although more vaccine will be needed, my Department has prioritised support for the humanitarian crisis affecting 7.2 million Zimbabweans, and work to prevent and mitigate the impact of HIV/AIDS.

SCOTLAND

Departmental Annual Report

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much producing her Department's latest annual report cost; how many copies were printed; how many copies of it were sold at its cover price; to whom copies of the report have been provided free of charge; and how many copies were provided free of charge. [100816]

Mrs. Liddell: I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 27 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 657W.

Gaelic Language

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many Gaelic speakers there are in Scotland; and what proportion this is of the Scottish population. [100619]

Mrs. Liddell: Census figures for 2001 show 58,652 people aged three and over able to speak Gaelic, which is just over one per cent. of the Scottish population.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans her Department has to protect and promote the Gaelic language, with specific regard to broadcasting; and if she will make a statement. [100620]

Mrs. Liddell: The Government recognise that Gaelic is an essential part of the UK's cultural identity and heritage. On 27 March 2001, we ratified the European Charter on Regional and Minority Languages, making clear our commitment to the support and development of the Gaelic language. We set out our plans for Gaelic broadcasting in the Communications Bill, published on 7 May 2002. We believe our proposals will put Gaelic broadcasting on a more stable footing and will result in a better co-ordinated service for the benefit of the Gaelic television audience.

In addition, colleagues in the Scottish Executive have established the Gaelic Development Agency (Bòrd Gàidhlig na h-Alba), which will have responsibility for co-ordinating and funding activities of the various Gaelic organisations.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much money the Government are giving to support the Gaelic language in Scotland in the areas of *(a)* education and *(b)* cultural organisations in 2002–03. [100621]

Mrs. Liddell: Expenditure on these matters is for the Scottish Executive. For the current financial year, Scottish Ministers have allocated £3.334 million to Gaelic medium education, £1.6 million through the Gaelic Organisation Fund for cultural organisations and £8.5 million for Gaelic broadcasting.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Sure Start

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will list the Sure Start programmes in operation, and their budget. [96109]

Maria Eagle: The information requested has been placed in the Libraries.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will list Sure Start programmes which have ceased operating. [96110]

Maria Eagle: No Sure Start programmes have ceased operating.

A-Levels

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills pursuant to his answer to question 97151, what his assessment is of the interrelation of the finding in Mike Tomlinson's final report into A level standards that criterion-referencing has significant implications for the design of the A level framework with proposed changes to the 14–19 curriculum, as outlined in the Excellence for All White Paper. [99726]

Mr. Miliband: As recommended by the final report of the inquiry into A level Standards, the QCA is establishing an independent committee to advise publicly on whether or not standards are being maintained. The 14–19 Working Group, chaired by Mike Tomlinson, will be considering how best to ensure that reformed 14–19 learning programmes reflect the need to maintain standards over time.

Assisted Places

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate he has made of *(a)* the number and *(b)* the percentage of undergraduate students at UK universities who had been recipients of assisted places in independent schools. [100574]

Margaret Hodge: The information is not held centrally. Figures published by the Universities and Colleges Admission Service (UCAS) show the number of students accepted for entry to higher education who came from independent schools, but do not indicate whether or not they had received an assisted place

Classrooms (Yeovil)

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether *(a)* Westfield Secondary School and *(b)* Grass Royal Junior School in Yeovil will be required under the departmental school net capacity formula to have three classrooms removed; and if he will make a statement. [100413]

Mr. Miliband: The net capacity is intended to provide a single, robust and consistent method of assessing the number of pupil places available in schools.

By comparison with the number of pupils on roll, the net capacity can indicate the number of places that are surplus or additional places that are needed. It is for individual authorities to determine how best to balance the supply of places in their area to ensure that schools serve the needs of their local communities and provide good quality education in the most effective way. The Department does not require authorities to remove capacity where there is a surplus.

Exam Results

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what impact his federation of schools proposal will have on the availability and publication of each school's exam results. [100049]

Mr. Miliband: Exam results for schools in federations will continue to be published for individual schools as at present. In addition, we will also publish results for federations.

Higher Education Funding

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much was spent on higher education in England, in real terms at 2000–01 prices, in each year from 1989–90 to 2003–04 (planned), *(a)* in total, and *(b)* per student; and if he will make a statement. [99822]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The data are shown in the table.

	Publicly planned funding for higher education in England (£m)[1]	*Unit funding (£)*[2]
1989–90	4,380	7,720
1990–91	4,370	7,030
1991–92	4,640	6,680
1992–93	4,860	6,190
1993–94	5,120	5,850
1994–95	5,370	5,690
1995–96	5,400	5,440
1996–97	5,140	5,080
1997–98	5,040	4,930
1998–99	5,080	4,930
1999–2000	5,290	4,920
2000–01	5,410	4,860
2001–02	5,680	4,900
2002–03	5,800	4,930
2003–04	6,100	5,080

[1] Rounded to nearest £10 million.

[2] Rounded to nearest £10.

The unit of funding fell by 36 per cent. in real terms between 1989–90 and 1997–98. As a result of the 2002 Spending Review, publicly planned funding will rise by 16 per cent. in real terms by 2005–06 compared to 2002–03; and the unit funding will rise by 7 per cent. in real terms between those years.

Learndirect

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what his policy is on Learndirect selling its products free of charge; and what assessment he has made of the impact of this on competition. [100047]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Ufi Ltd. was established by the Government as a private company limited by guarantee. It is funded through a combination of public funds and commercial earned income. The public funds are allocated and used to enable Ufi/learndirect to provide education and training programmes as part of the wider public service of further education and adult learning. They include adult literacy and numeracy programmes offered as part of the Skills for Life initiative. For these programmes Ufi/learndirect hubs and learning centres receive funding through the Learning and Skills Council. In addition Ufi/learndirect offers a range of other programmes with fees charged on a commercial basis for employers and learners who wish to buy them. These programmes are primarily oriented towards workforce development.

Local Authority Spending

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will list for each local education authority in England and Wales, for each year since 1997, their *(a)* total spending, *(b)* spending per pupil and *(c)* spending per pupil at (i) nursery, (ii) primary and (iii) secondary stages of education. [96657]

Mr. Miliband: The information requested has been placed in the Libraries.

Playing Field Sales

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans he has to prevent the sale of school playing fields provided for under-eights; and if he will make a statement. [100327]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 3 March 2003]:* Before October 1998, there was nothing to prevent a local authority selling a school playing field if it wanted to. Section 77 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 was introduced in October 1998 to protect school playing fields from indiscriminate disposal. Section 77 requires local authorities and schools to obtain the written consent of the Secretary of State before disposing, or changing the use, of school playing fields and applies to all maintained schools, irrespective of pupils' ages. In addition, the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 prescribe minimum areas of team game playing fields for those schools with pupils who have attained the age of eight years. Although the regulations do not require team game playing fields to be provided for pupils under eight years, section 77 protects all areas of playing fields which have been provided, whether in response to regulatory requirements or otherwise.

Applications to dispose, or change the use, of school playing fields are assessed against the following criteria:

(a) schools' needs: that playing field provision and curriculum requirements at the school making the disposal—irrespective of the age of those pupils that attend the school, and at the statutory needs of other schools in the local area, will be met;

(b) community needs: that community use of a school's playing fields is taken into account, with alternative facilities made available if necessary; and

(c) finance: that any sale proceeds are re-invested to provide new or improved sports facilities at schools, or are used to help to raise standards by providing better educational facilities.

Only those applications that meet the criteria are approved. All applications made since July 2001 have been scrutinised by the independent School Playing Fields Advisory Panel to make sure that they conform to the published criteria. The Panel comprises representatives from the National Playing Fields Association, the Central Council of Physical Recreation, the education organisation: Learning Through Landscapes, the National Association of Head Teachers and the Local Government Association.

Pupil Deprivation

Angela Watkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what factors are taken into consideration in assessing deprivation in pupils. [100220]

Mr. Miliband: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Tamworth (Mr. Jenkins) on 11 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 692W.

School Circulars

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will list the circulars that have been sent by *(a)* the Office for Standards in Education, *(b)* the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority and *(c)* the Teacher Training Authority to (i) primary schools and (ii) secondary schools since 1 February 2002. [99487]

Mr. Miliband: The information is as follows.

(a) This is a matter for the Office for Standards in Education. David Bell, Ofsted's chief executive will write to the hon. Member with the information requested and a copy of his reply will be placed in the Library.

(b) This is a matter for the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority. Ken Boston, the authority's chief executive will write to the hon. Member with the information requested and a copy of his reply will be placed in the Library.

(c) This is a matter for the Teacher Training Agency. Ralph Tabbererr, the Agency's chief executive will write to the hon. Member with the information requested and a copy of his reply will be placed in the Library.

Specialist Schools

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what his Department's policy is towards the Specialist Schools (Selection by Aptitude) Bill. [100818]

Mr. Miliband: The Bill seeks to repeal the provisions of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, which enable schools with a specialism, not just those designated under the Specialist Schools Programme, to give priority to up to 10 per cent. of pupils who can demonstrate an aptitude in one or more of the prescribed subjects.

We do not believe it is necessary nor desirable to remove the flexibility which enables the admission authorities for schools with a specialism, where they wish to do so, to give limited priority to pupils with a particular aptitude for the relevant specialism. Allowing limited use of aptitude in this way makes it possible for pupils who, for example, show a capacity to be trained or developed in sport or the visual arts to get a place where they would not have been able to do so under the school's other admissions criteria.

The basis on which schools may use aptitude as part of their admissions criteria is set out in my Department's statutory guidance document, "School Admissions Code of Practice".

Sure Start (Harwich)

Mr. Ivan Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what funding has been allocated to the Harwich constituency under the Sure Start scheme. [96912]

Maria Eagle *[holding answer 10 February 2003]*: No Sure Start local programme funding has been approved for Harwich to date. Plans for a 'mini' Sure Start programme are currently being considered by the Sure Start Unit. The Harwich 'mini' Sure Start, if approved, will receive up to £100,000 each year for revenue expenditure and funding for capital expenditure of up to £250,000 in total.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Angel Group

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will list the contracts which the Angel Group and its subsidiaries have agreed with local authorities for the provision of services for asylum seekers and other specific groups of individuals; [99687]

(2) if he will list the contracts let and the dates on which they were let by his Department and its agencies to the Angel Group and its subsidiary companies; [99702]

(3) for how many contracts the Angel Group and its subsidiary companies applied to the Home Office and its agencies, and with what results, in the last five years. [99705]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 27 February 2003]:* The National Asylum Support Service (NASS) has one contract with the Angel Group which was signed on 3 April 2000 and runs for five years. I am unable to supply information on tenders submitted by the group during the last five years since this is commercial in confidence. NASS is not aware of any contracts the Angel Group has entered into with local authorities and other agencies regarding the provision of services for asylum seekers.

Animal Experiments

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what recent assessment he has made of the reliability of animal experiments relating to behavioural neuroscience; [99788]

(2) what recent assessment he has made of the capacity of non-animal neurological research to replace animal experimentation. [99789]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The Government believe that animal based research still has an important part to play in research relating to the biomedical sciences. Neurological diseases and disorders remain major sources of human morbidity and mortality. Their impact is felt by individuals, their families, and society in general. Notwithstanding progress that has been made with understanding the causes and identifying possible treatments, there remains an urgent need to find better methods of preventing and treating conditions such as stroke, Parkinson's disease, and mental health problems. This requires the identification and use of the best current scientific technologies, not simply a reliance on animal research.

To meet section 5(4) of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986, any application to use protected animals in research must be subjected to a detailed cost/benefit assessment by the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Inspectorate. This is undertaken on a case by case basis. The reliability and relevance of all animal models requested are key considerations in the cost/benefit assessment and the Secretary of State looks to a number of sources, including Home Office inspectors and the Animal Procedures Committee, to provide advice not only relating to programmes of work, but also relating to technical developments that enable animal models to be reduced, refined and replaced. Licence authorities are only granted when there is no replacement alternative, and when all relevant and reasonable steps have been taken to identify and incorporate relevant reduction and refinement strategies.

Asylum Seekers

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what sources of in-country information about *(a)* Afghanistan, *(b)* Iraq and *(c)* Somalia are used in contesting appeals against refusal of an application for asylum from people leaving these countries. [100058]

Beverley Hughes: The main sources of in-country information for these countries are the Country Assessments and bulletins produced by the Home Office Country Information and Policy Unit. These are produced using published material from a wide variety of sources, which include non-governmental organisations, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and overseas governments. Information from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office may also be included.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many asylum seekers awaiting a decision on their application have stated that they fought for or supported the Taliban; [99568]

(2) how many people who have stated they fought for or supported the Taliban have entered this country through the asylum system; [99571]

(3) how many rejected asylum seekers awaiting deportation have stated that they fought for or supported the Taliban; [99569]

(4) how many failed asylum seekers awaiting an appeal have stated that they fought for or supported the Taliban. [99570]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 27 February 2003]:* We are not in the business of offering asylum to Taliban terrorists or anybody else who poses a security risk to our country.

All cases where a Taliban connection is claimed are referred to a Senior Caseworker to decide whether exclusion from the protection of the Refugee Convention is appropriate and for further security checks if appropriate. No evidence has been found that anyone who has willingly supported and fought for the Taliban has been granted asylum, and no other cases have arisen that have merited security action.

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department after what period benefit payments are stopped in respect of asylum seekers who are refused asylum. [99711]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 3 March 2003]:* An asylum seeker without children under the age of 18 remains eligible for asylum support from the Secretary of State under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999, subject to meeting the other criteria for eligibility, until the claim for asylum is determined. The time when a claim for asylum is treated as determined for this purpose varies depending on the type of case pursuant to regulations 2 and 2A of the Asylum Support Regulations 2000. Where the claim for asylum is rejected, the claim for asylum is treated as determined 21 days after receipt of the decision refusing asylum or, if the person appeals, 21 days after the disposal of the appeal. However, where the asylum claim is rejected but the person is at the same time given exceptional leave to enter or remain, or where the asylum claim is rejected initially but the person successfully appeals against refusal of asylum, the claim for asylum is treated as determined 28 days after receipt of the decision, respectively the disposal of the appeal.

In the case of an asylum seeker whose claim is rejected but whose household includes a child under the age of 18, while the child remains under 18 and the asylum seeker and the child remain in the United Kingdom, unless they are granted leave to enter or remain, they will be eligible for asylum support under Part VI of the 1999 Act, subject to meeting the other eligibility criteria, until they leave the United Kingdom.

Carter Report

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will publish the Carter Report into the Criminal Records Bureau. [99690]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 27 February 2003]:* We have made it clear that the conclusions and recommendations which the Independent Review Team led by Patrick Carter presented at the end of last year took the form of advice to Ministers and included matters which are commercially confidential; and, as such, were not in a form intended for publication. But on 27 February my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary made a written statement welcoming the report. The main findings and recommendations of the Team have been placed in the Library, and my right hon. Friend's statement described how the Government proposes to take forward work on the 10 recommendations which have been made.

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what date he received the report of the independent team led by Patrick Carter into the operation of the Criminal Records Bureau; when the report, or parts thereof, will be published; and what the key conclusions of the report are. [99713]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 3 March 2003]:* The Independent Review Team's report was received on 17 December. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary made a written statement on 27 February setting out how the Government propose to take forward the Review Team's 10 recommendations. The main findings of the Review Team were published on the same date. Copies have been placed in the Library.

Charity Law

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he has taken to implement the recommendations in the Strategy Unit report Private Action, Public Benefit; and what the timetable is for drawing up a Charities Bill to implement the recommendations on charity law. [99650]

Beverley Hughes: The consultation period for the Strategy Unit report has now ended and over 1,100 responses have been received, which Home Office officials are now analysing.

Where recommendations have commanded general support and do not require legislation, we aim to move as quickly as possible to implement them, although some may first need further policy development work.

However, legislation would be needed to give effect to many of the recommendations; including the areas relating to the introduction of the Community Interest Company, the changes to Industrial and Provident Society legislation and changes to charity and fundraising law.

Initial analysis of the responses to the Strategy Unit report indicates support for the Community Interest Company concept. The Department of Trade and Industry, the Home Office and other interested Departments are now considering the timing and content of a possible technical consultation on the concept, which would be necessary before legislation could be introduced.

The Treasury are currently examining the responses received to the proposals for changes to Industrial and Provident Society legislation and considering options for taking forward the recommendations. However, my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Ruth Kelly) made it clear at the Second Reading of the Co-operatives and Community Benefit Societies Bill, (private members Bill sponsored by my hon. Friend, Member for South Derbyshire (Mark Todd)) that it is Government's intention to enact an asset 'lock-in' regime, following further examination and consultation, if it continues to appear sensible and feasible to do so. Such a regime was one recommendation of the Strategy Unit report. The Treasury are working with Mark Todd to see how they can facilitate the introduction of such a regime through his Bill.

Further policy development work will need to be done in some areas before the Home Office would be in a position to produce a draft Charities Bill, which my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary recently promised to publish as soon as possible. Currently Home Office Officials are liasing with the Department for Transport and the Treasury on their respective areas of responsibility.

Correspondence

Ian Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letter of 13 September 2002 from the hon. Member for Eccles concerning Ms Weyni Abraha, which his Department has acknowledged ref: 18797/2. [100401]

Beverley Hughes: My noble Friend, (Lord Filkin) wrote to my hon. Friend on 4 March.

Mrs. Roe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letters from the hon. Member for Broxbourne of *(a)* 25 October 2002, *(b)* 18 November 2002, *(c)* 20 December 2002 and *(d)* 16 January 2003 relating to her constituent, Mr. Raj Kumar of Broxbourne. [92616]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 21 January 2003]:* I refer the hon. Member to my letter to her of 21 February. As I set out in that reply, I am sorry for the delay in responding.

David Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the honourable Member for Walsall North will receive a reply to his letter of 8 January regarding a constituent ref. 7113. [98395]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 24 February 2003]:* I wrote to my hon. Friend on 3 March 2003.

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department why he has not replied to the letter to him dated 4 November 2002 from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Ms Mansovreh Bozoronia. [98963]

Mr. Blunkett: I refer my right hon. Friend to the reply I gave on 25 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 397W.

Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to adjust the budget for the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority for 2002–03. [99614]

Hilary Benn: An additional £25 million is being provided for the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme in the Spring Supplementary Estimate, published on 28 February. This will increase the 2002–03 resource budget for compensation to £208 million, sufficient to meet the liabilities accruing from compensation awards offered within that financial year.

Criminal Records Bureau

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staff have been redeployed to the Criminal Records Bureau from the Passport Agency in each month since the introduction of the Criminal Records Bureau. [98722]

Hilary Benn: In order to support the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) continuous improvement programme, the United Kingdom Passport Service (UKPS) has seconded staff without any significant impact on the delivery of the passports.

The secondment programme began in June 2002 with the majority taking place during the period of lower seasonal demand for passports. UKPS normally seeks work for its staff elsewhere in the Home Office and other Government Departments at this time as a "wider markets" initiative. Currently, 35 UKPS staff remain attached to either CRB or are offering support to police forces.

The breakdown of numbers on a month by month basis is as follows:

	Staff
June 2002	64
July 2002	80
August 2002	228
September 2002	228
October 2002	228
November 2002	192
December 2002	122
January 2003	35
February 2003	35

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much the inquiry headed by Patrick Carter into the Criminal Records Bureau will cost; and who will be responsible for the costs. [99388]

Hilary Benn: The estimated cost of the review is £585,000. This includes the cost of various consultancies in support of the review. The Home Office will be responsible for this cost.

Domestic Violence

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which local authorities in England and Wales have a written and publicly available policy on domestic violence; when each local authority's domestic violence policy was published; and if he will make a statement. [94124]

Mr. Denham: Central Government keep records of local authority policies only where there is a statutory requirement to have one. It is therefore not possible to give the Information requested since there is no statutory requirement to have a domestic violence policy, though all are encouraged to do so.

Drug Treatment and Testing Orders

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to his answer of 5 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 328W, in what circumstances drug treatment and testing orders are revoked; what is deemed as failure to comply by a participant; and if he will undertake a review of DTTOs. [99284]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Drug Treatment and Testing orders (DTTO) can be revoked for any of the following reasons: failure to comply; a conviction for a further offence; for other reasons, including ill-health or death or where the offender has demonstrated good progress on the order.

Failure to comply refers to failure to adhere to the requirements of the order as set out under legislation and determined by the court. The two main requirements are to attend for treatment and to attend for testing as specified for a set period. The offender must also attend periodic court reviews and is expected to comply with instructions issued to him by his responsible officer.

The results of the first year of a two year re-conviction study and also a DTTO thematic inspection report will be published later this year. The Government intend that the DTTO will become part of the generic community sentence as proposed by the Criminal Justice Bill currently before Parliament.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many convicted offenders were assessed as having drug problems in the last year for which figures are available; and what proportion of these were eligible for a Drug Treatment and Testing Order. [99540]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The best available evidence on the links between criminal offending and drug use comes form the New English and Welsh Arrestee Drug Abuse (NEW-ADAM) research programme. This involves interviewing and drug testing those arrested by the police at 16 sites throughout England and Wales. Analysis of the data from the first eight sites in the programme, collected during 1999–2000, shows that of those arrestees that provided a urine sample, 65 per cent. tested positive for one or more illegal drugs. Furthermore, 55 per cent. of arrestees who reported using one of more drugs in the last 12 months and committing one or more acquisitive crimes, acknowledged a link between their drug use and their offending behaviour. This proportion rose to 78 per cent. for arrestees who said they had used heroin and cocaine/crack.

Drug Treatment and Testing Orders (DTTO) enable courts to require offenders to undergo treatment and other programmes, designed to tackle their drug misuse and offending. Before making such an Order, a court has to be satisfied that:

> the offender is dependent upon, or has shown/demonstrated a propensity to misuse, drugs and that their offending is linked to drug misuse;
>
> is motivated and amenable to treatment;
>
> has given consent; and
>
> treatment and DTTO arrangements are in place in the area where the order is being made.

Between November 2001 and October 2002, the latest period for which data is available, 6,296 offenders were assessed as suitable for a DTTO.

Extradition Bill

Angela Watkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* clauses and *(b)* schedules were (i) fully debated, (ii) partly debated and (iii) not debated during the committee stage of the Extradition Bill. [100222]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: For a clause or schedule to be debated during the Committee Stage a member of the Committee must either table an amendment to it or speak to the motion that it should stand part of the Bill. In the case of a large number of clauses in the Extradition Bill, no member of the committee chose to do so.

The number of Committee sessions for the Bill was agreed through the usual channels. The figure of nine was first suggested by the official Opposition.

At its first meeting the Committee sessions for the Bill was agreed the terms of a programme motion which imposed a number of cut-off points by which discussion of a particular part of the Bill had to be completed.

On only one occasion did the knife fall before the Committee had completed its discussion of the relevant part. This was in respect of Part 1 of the Bill which covers clauses 1–67. The knife fell when the Committee was discussing clause 63.

Amendments to clauses 63, 64 and 65 had already been discussed at previous Committee sittings. At the point when the knife fell, the Chair was obliged to put the question for each of the remaining Part 1 clauses that it should stand part of the Bill. It was open to any member of the Committee to oppose it. No member of the Committee chose to do so in respect of clauses 66 and 67.

When it became clear that there was a possibility that the knife might fall before the Committee had completed its deliberations on Part 1, the Government made several offers to change the timetable. All of these offers were rejected by the official Opposition.

Hit-and-run Accidents

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the maximum fine is that can be levied on a hit-and-run driver without insurance. [98723]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Under section 170 of the Road Traffic Act 1988 a driver is required to stop after an accident and provide his name and address. If for any reason the driver does not give his name and address, he is required to report the accident. Should the driver fail to do either of the above, the maximum fine available is £5,000 (level 5 on the standard scale). This is also the maximum fine for driving without insurance under section 143 of the Road Traffic Act 1988. Therefore, a driver convicted of both of these offences could be subjected to a maximum fine of £1,000.

If a driver fails to stop or report following a serious road traffic incident in respect of which there is evidence to support more serious charges, he may be prosecuted for those offences in addition to failing to stop or report.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* hit-and-run accidents, *(b)* hit-and-run accidents whose driver did not have insurance and *(c)* hit-and-run drivers taken to court and (i) fined, (ii) imprisoned and (iii) acquitted there were in each of the last five years; and what percentage of these fines remain unpaid. [98724]

Hilary Benn: Department for Transport figures are given in the following table for the number of hit-and-run accidents in England and Wales for the years 1997–2001.

It is not possible, in the statistics collected centrally, to distinguish offences relating to a "hit-and-run" accident from offences resulting from other kinds of accidents. Motorists charged following a "hit-and-run" will be charged with an offence appropriate to the circumstances. This may often be failing to stop after an accident or failing to report an accident, but more serious charges may be preferred in some cases depending on the circumstances.

Table B shows available data on motoring offences within England and Wales, as defined in section 170 of the Road Traffic Act 1988, for failing to stop after an accident or failing to report an accident within 24 hours. The figures shown are the numbers of offences, rather than the numbers of offenders.

Data on the number of cases where drivers were convicted for insurance offences, (under section 143 of the Road Traffic Act 1988, using motor vehicle uninsured against third party risks), as well as the offences of failing to stop after an accident or failing to report an accident within 24 hours are given in table C.

Information on fines unpaid by offence is not collected centrally.

Table A—The number of hit-and-run accidents, England and Wales, 1997–2001

Year	*Total*
1997	17,456
1998	17,564
1999	19,023
2000	21,591
2001	23,757

Table B—Proceedings at magistrates courts and outcome at all courts for the motoring offences of failing to stop after an accident, etc. and failing to report an accident within 24 hours—England and Wales

Number of offences

Year/ offence	*Total proceedings*	*Acquittals*[1]	*Fine*	*Immediate custody*[2]
Failing to stop after accident, etc. (Road Traffic Act 1988 s170(4))				
1997	15,829	935	6,760	319
1998	15,387	861	6,299	387
1999	14,923	790	5,922	406
2000	14,663	754	5,658	403
2001	15,392	784	5,411	396
Failing to report accident within 24 hours (Road Traffic Act 1988 s170(4) and (7))				
1997	13,092	830	4,419	142
1998	12,876	773	3,944	176
1999	12,336	721	3,603	192
2000	12,029	684	3,283	189
2001	12,377	705	3,092	168

[1] Includes cases dismissed at the magistrates courts under the Magistrates' Courts Act 1980 s9 and acquittals at the Crown Court.

[2] Includes unsuspended sentence of imprisonment, young offender institution, secure training order (1998–2000) and detention and training order (2000 onwards).

Table C—The number of convictions for insurance offences[1] *where drivers were also convicted for failing to stop after an accident or failing to report an accident within 24 hours, England and Wales, 1997–2001*

Year	*Total number*
1997	4,207
1998	4,339
1999	4,428
2000	4,446
2001	4,742

[1] Section 143, Road Traffic Act 1988—using motor vehicle uninsured against third party risks.

Hospitality

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what hospitality has been offered at public expense in the last 12 months, by each Minister in his Department to outside interest groups, broken down by *(a)* restaurant, *(b)* recipient and *(c)* cost in each case; [99583]

(2) how often Ministers in his Department have received hospitality in restaurants from outside groups in the last 12 months; [99506]

(3) what criteria Ministers in his Department use when determining whether to offer hospitality in restaurants to interest groups at public expense; and if he will make a statement. [99582]

(4) what his Department's hospitality budget *(a)* is in 2002–03 and *(b)* was in each of the last three years; and how much was left unspent at the end of each financial year. [99582]

Mr. Blunkett: All offers of hospitality are made in accordance with the published departmental guidance on financial procedures and propriety, based on the principles set out in 'Government Accounting'. The giving and receiving of hospitality is conducted fully in accordance with the guidance set out in the 'Ministerial Code, and Guidance on Contacts with Outside Interest Groups including Lobbyists'. The detailed information requested is not held centrally, and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Leave to Remain

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in each quarter since January 1997, *(a)* how many applications for leave to remain on the basis of marriage were received, *(b)* what the normal time taken to full initial screening and decisions on straightforward cases was, *(c)* what the time taken to deal with those applications not considered straightforward was and *(d)* how many staff were employed in the relevant departments of the IND dealing with these applications. [99779]

Beverley Hughes: The latest available statistics are given in the following table. The information relates to grants and refusals of extensions of leave to remain on the basis of marriage for each quarter 1997 to 2001. Data for 2002 will be published later this year. Information on the number of applications lodged is not currently available.

Grants and refusals of extensions of leave to remain on the basis of marriage in the United Kingdom, excluding EEA nationals, 1997 to 2001

	Q1	*Q2*	*Q3*	*Q4*	*Total*
1997					
Grants	4,060	3,965	4,105	3,650	15,780
Refusals	385	360	280	210	1,235
1998					
Grants	4,075	3,670	4,020	3,635	15,400
Refusals	290	255	210	130	885
1999					
Grants	2,255	3,375	5,795	4,620	16,050
Refusals	25	50	60	80	215
2000					
Grants	6,610	6,990	6,335	5,845	25,785
Refusals	140	330	440	150	1,065
2001					
Grants	6,025	5,900	5,685	4,960	22,570
Refusals	570	360	375	370	1,670

Notes:

Figures rounded to the nearest 5.

Data exclude unmarried partners and fiance(e)s.

Data exclude the outcome of appeals and withdrawn applications.

There are no published data on decision times for individual types of settlement applications. Our aim is to decide all straightforward applications within three weeks. At present some straightforward applications decided in initial consideration are taking about 10 weeks because of the exceptionally high intake of new applications received in the latter part of 2002. At present some applications that cannot be dealt with on initial consideration can take around 12 months to decide. Measures are being taken to reduce turnaround times.

The information on staff dealing with marriage applications is not available in the form requested as individual staff members do not take decisions solely on marriage applications.

London Prisons

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women have been assessed for drug treatment in each London prison during the last 12 months. [99407]

Hilary Benn: Prisoners may receive different types of assessment for drug treatment, depending on need and availability. All prisoners receive a health care assessment on reception into custody which will trigger a further assessment for detoxification if required. All prisoners referred to counselling, assessment, referral, advice and throughcare (CARATs) receive an initial assessment of need.

Prior to acceptance on a rehabilitation programme, all prisoners will receive a detailed assessment. Figures showing the number of CARAT assessments are given in the following table. No figures are available centrally for the number of detoxification and rehabilitation assessments undertaken. Figures for the number of actual treatments, a proxy measure of assessments, are included in the table.

April 2002 to January 2003

	CARATs[1]		*Detoxification*[2]		*Rehabilitation*[2]	
Prison	*Male*	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*
Belmarsh	572	—	799	—	0	—
Brixton	744	—	1,068	—	78	—
Feltham	1,356	—	163	—	0	—
Holloway	—	596	—	1,828	—	0
Latchmere House	0	—	0	—	0	—
Pentonville	1,024	—	2,361	—	71	—
Wandsworth	1,170	—	1,692	—	58	—
Wormwood Scrubs	1,096	—	950	—	46	—
Total	5,962	596	7,033	1,828	253	0

[1] Initial assessments.

[2] Treatment episodes.

Multi-agency Public Protection Panels

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons are under the supervision of each multi-agency public protection panel in England and Wales; whether there is a central database of offenders who are under the supervision of each multi-agency public protection panel in England and Wales; and whether a protocol exists for multi-agency public protection panels regarding the passing of information to other agencies. [99969]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 28 February 2003]*: The number of offenders being supervised by multi-agency public protection panels in each area of England and Wales is not currently available and there is no central database of these offenders. However, each area's multi-agency public protection arrangements (the MAPPA) annual report (to be published this summer) will include this information. Also, a computer-based Violent and Sex offenders Register (ViSoR) is being developed with plans for its introduction next year.

Many Areas have established local protocols for sharing of information with other agencies and the consolidated guidance that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is to issue on MAPPA in March will contain advice on the legal principles and practicalities of information sharing.

Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list IT contracts in his Department above £50 million in each of the last 10 years; what the inception date for each system was; when it became fully functional; when it became fully debugged; and what the cost of over-runs has been. [99010]

Mr. Blunkett: I am unable to provide the hon. Member with a complete answer as central records are not held on the information sought, and to obtain the requested information in the time given may incur disproportionate cost. I am, however able to provide the following information on IT contracts held by the Home Department which were valued at £50 million or more, detailing date of inception and also when systems became fully functional:

Contract	*Inception date*	*Fully functional*
Home Office IT Services Contract 1994–2001	August 1994	9 November 1994
Immigration and Nationality Directorate Casework Contract[1]	April 1996	Contract never became fully functional and has now been superseded
Quantum Project IT and Private Finance Initiative Agreement Contract for infrastructure	February 2000	Infrastructure roll-out will be substantially completed by 31 March 2003

Contract	*Inception date*	*Fully functional*
Criminal Records Bureau Contract with Capita	August 2000	May 2001—Manual Registration Services Launched July 2001—Automated Registration Services Launched March 2002—High Level Disclosure Service Launched
Home Office IT Services 10 year Contract	October 2000	February 2001
Provision of Information Communication Technology Services to the Probation Service	October 2001	December 2001

[1] Contract is a multi-disciplinary one, which is not exclusively IT.

Police Cells

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners are held in police cells; and if he will make a statement. [99541]

Hilary Benn: On 27 February 2003, no prisoners were held in police cells under Operation Safeguard. The Prison Service last used police cells under Operation Safeguard on 20 December 2002.

Prison Service

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the total cost of the Prison Service was in real terms at 2000–01 prices *(a)* in total and *(b)* per prisoner, in each year from 1985–86 to 2002–03; and if he will make a statement. [99809]

Hilary Benn: Prison Service total costs for the years 1985–86 to 2001–02 are shown in the following table. The total cost figures for 2002–03 are not yet available. To ensure comparability across the years the data is based on actual cash expenditure and has been drawn from the Prison Service Annual Reports and Accounts from 1991–92 onwards and the annual Report on the Work of the Prison Department prior to 1991–92.

Separate information on cost per prisoner was not published in the Annual Report prior to 1999–2000. The figures for 2001–02 and 2002–03 have been constructed on a cash basis to give a consistent comparison with earlier years. The figure for 2002–03 is based on the published target figure.

Financial year	*Total current expenditure (Cash) (£ million)*	*Total capital expenditure (Cash) (£ million)*	*Total net expenditure (Cash) (£ million)*	*Total net expenditure (at 2000–01 prices) (Real terms)*	*Cost per prisoner (£000 at 2000–01 prices) (Real terms)*
1985–86	564.8	89.9	654.7	1,177.4	n/a
1986–87	585.0	111.1	696.1	1,212.4	n/a
1987–88	666.8	108.1	774.9	1,280.2	n/a
1988–89	750.8	158.2	909.0	1,406.0	n/a
1989–90	756.4	366.3	1,122.7	1,620.6	n/a
1990–91	887.7	453.8	1,341.5	1,796.3	n/a
1991–92	1,049.5	412.6	1,462.1	1,845.2	n/a
1992–93	1,138.4	331.9	1,470.3	1,797.4	n/a
1993–94	1,223.7	285.1	1,508.8	1,800.0	n/a
1994–95	1,279.6	318.3	1,597.9	1,881.3	n/a
1995–96	1,336.7	330.2	1,666.9	1,908.2	n/a
1996–97	1,388.5	220.1	1,608.6	1,784.9	n/a
1997–98	1,462.9	277.9	1,740.8	1,873.7	n/a
1998–99	1,611.7	200.4	1,812.1	1,898.3	n/a
1999–2000	1,696.8	149.6	1,846.6	1,888.5	26,454
2000–01	1,777.7	135.2	1,912.9	1,912.9	26,118
2001–02	1,921.0	197.0	2,118.0	2,069.1	29,037
2002–03	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	28,367

Prison Training Programmes

Annette Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will take steps to *(a)* promote and *(b)* provide financial assistance to corporate socially responsible training programmes in prisons and young offenders institutions; and if he will make a statement. [98877]

Hilary Benn: A number of companies and other organisations help the Prison Service to work to reduce reoffending through skills training and work placement schemes for prisoners. Discussions are continuing with those organisations on how best to develop these important and welcome links.

Prisoner Nutrition

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of *(a)* the nutritional needs of prisoners in HM prisons and *(b)* the need for supplements to be issued; and if he will make a statement. [99943]

Hilary Benn: Prison caterers are required to offer a balanced and varied diet which meets the nutritional needs of prisoners. Healthy options are indicated on all menus. Advice for caterers is contained in Prison Service Order 5000, together with mandatory requirements. The advice is consistent with recommendations made by the Committee on Medical Aspects of Food Policy and covers nutritional and energy intake.

A nutritional research analysis of prison food was carried out in late 1998 by Professor John Edwards of Bournemouth University. The report concluded that 'the diet consumed in all surveyed prisons was extremely good and in general fell within the recommendations'. Individual clinical needs of prisoners are assessed by medical officers. Any necessary supplements would be given on the authority of the medical officer.

Prisoners (Drugs)

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of offenders serving sentences of *(a)* under 12 months and *(b)* over 12 months tested positive for (i) heroin, (ii) crack cocaine and (iii) cocaine while in prison in the last year for which figures are available. [99536]

Hilary Benn: Figures for prisoners in England and Wales testing positive under the random mandatory drug testing programme are not disaggregated by sentence length. Figures for heroin are included under the heading of opiates. Laboratory analysis is not able to distinguish between use of crack cocaine and cocaine. The respective percentages of positive tests for opiates and cocaine in 2001–02 are 4.6 per cent. and 0.2 per cent.

Probation Service

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what performance targets are set for the National Probation Service in England and Wales. [99932]

Hilary Benn: The performance targets for the National Probation Service for England and Wales are as follows.

National Probation Service Performance Measures

Service Delivery Agreement (SPA) Targets

1. Improve the timeliness of probation service reports to the courts by:

(a) increasing the proportion of Pre-Sentence Reports (PSRs) completed within the 15 day National Standard to 90 per cent.; and

(b) increasing the proportion of reports to the court (i.e. PSRs and Specific Sentence Reports (SSRs)) that are SSRs to 20 per cent. in 2002–03 and 25 per cent. in 2003–04.

2. Increase the educational and vocational qualifications of offenders with 6,000 programme starts and 1,000 completions of basic skills awards at any level in 2002–03; and 12,000 completions in 2003–04, comprising 2,000 at entry level, 8,000 at Level 1 and 2,000 at Level 2.

3. Increase the number of offenders going through accredited offending behaviour programmes with 12,000 offenders to complete accredited programmes in 2002–03, 20,000 offenders to complete accredited programmes in 2003–04, and, subject to a satisfactory scheme being accredited by the Correctional Services Accreditation Panel, a further 30,000 to start enhanced community punishment programmes in 2003–04 (from October 2003 to March 2004).

4. Breach action to be taken in accordance with the National Standard (on or before second unacceptable failure for community sentences and on or before third unacceptable failure for licence cases)—Target: 90 per cent.

5. To improve access to employment and accommodation for offenders.

6. Ensure that the number of Drug Treatment and Testing Order commencements in England and Wales increases to 6,000 approximately in 2002–03, to 9,000 in 2003–04 and to 12,000 in 2004–05.

7. Progress against the Home Secretary's race equality employment targets (published in July 1999) aimed at increasing levels of representation, retention and career progression of people from minority ethnic groups.

8. To reduce sickness absence in the probation service to an average of 10 days per staff year by 2003 and to 9.0 days per staff year by 2004 and to sustain this improvement thereafter.

Supporting Performance Measures (SPMs)

1. Proportion of cases involving serious sexual or other violent offence in which the probation service makes contact with the victim or victim's family within eight weeks of sentence in accordance with National Standards and Victim's Charter Target: contact made within target time in 85 per cent. of cases where offender sentenced to 12 months or more.

2. Proportions of

(a) PSRs completed in 15 working days

(b) Total reports that are SSRs

Each for (i) Crown and (ii) magistrates courts separately (i.e. breakdown of SDA 1 figures by court type).

3. Overall quality of PSRs

4. Actual reconviction rates for persons subject to community orders by type of order compared to predicted rates. Target: lower actual rates for all types, and achieve rates lower than predicted

5. Average of compliance proportions across a basket of national standards requirements on first and subsequent contact, i.e:

Community Rehabilitation Orders

first appointment was arranged for within five working days

at least 12 appointments were arranged for within the first 12 weeks

at least six appointments were arranged for the next 12 weeks

appointments thereafter were monthly

Community Punishment Orders

first work session was arranged for within 10 working days

offenders were offered a minimum of five hours per week throughout order

Community Punishment & Rehabilitation Orders

first probation appointment arranged for within five days and first work session arranged for within 10 days

at least 12 CR appointments and 11 CP work sessions arranged in first 12 weeks

at least six CR appointments and 12 CP work sessions arranged in next 12 weeks

Licences

offender seen within one working day of release

home visit within 10 working days of release (excluding HOC)

weekly contact arranged for first four weeks (further to first meeting)

two-weekly contact arranged for second and third months

monthly contact arranged thereafter

Target: overall average of 90 per cent.

6. Proportion of supervision cases where supervision plan done in 15 days, and reviews every four months.

7. Proportion of cases where breach action taken in accordance with NS, broken down by community punishment order/community rehabilitation order/community punishment and rehabilitation order/licence (i.e. breakdown of SDA 4).

8. Proportion of offenders under supervision whose current offence is serious (i.e. violence, sexual, robbery or burglary). (To be discontinued from 2003–04)

9. Proportion of cases assessed as High of Very High risk of harm on any of the four such OASys measures where a plan to manage the risk was prepared within five days of order or release, or the date at which a previously lesser risk was identified as having risen to High or Very High.

10. Proportion of hostel residence orders or conditions which are completed.

11. For offenders on community sentences: difference between the proportion in employment at end of their supervision and that in employment at start.

12. For offenders on licence:

difference between the proportion in employment at end of their licence and that in employment directly after release

difference between the proportion in employment at end of their licence and that in employment immediately before custodial sentence started

13. For offenders on community sentences: difference between the proportion in education or training at end of their supervision and that in education or training at start.

14. For offenders on licence:

difference between the proportion in education or training at end of their licence and that in education or training directly after release

difference between the proportion in education or training at end of their licence and that in education or training immediately before custodial sentence started

15. For offenders on community sentences: difference between the proportion in settled accommodation at end of their supervision and that in settled accommodation at start

16. For offenders on licence:

difference between the proportion in settled accommodation at end of their licence and that in settled accommodation directly after release

difference between the proportion in settled accommodation at end of their licence and that in settled accommodation immediately before custodial sentence started

17. Unit cost of PSR, community rehabilitation order, community punishment order, community punishment and rehabilitation order, ACR and life licence.

18. Proportion of bedspaces in approved hostels which are occupied. Target: 90 per cent.

19. Proportion of all community punishment orders where the average weekly hours worked was at least five hours.

20. Wastage of staff (excluding death, retirement and in-service transfer) as percentage of work force.

21. Annual sample survey of sentencer satisfaction, i.e. the proportion of magistrates satisfied with

the work of the service overall

the overall usefulness of PSRs, ditto for SSRs

the objectivity of PSRs, ditto for SSRs

Target: 90 per cent for each

the proportion of judges satisfied with

the work of the service overall

the overall usefulness of PSRs, ditto for SSRs

the objectivity of PSRs, ditto for SSRs

Target: 90 per cent for each

22. Achievement of Charter Mark or Investors in People award.

(To be discontinued from 2003–04)

23. Proportion of hostel residents whose conviction or charge is for a serious offence (i.e. violence, sexual, robbery or burglary).

(To be discontinued from 2003–04)

24. Average National Standards compliance proportions for high risk of harm cases—on same lines as general basket measure at SPM 5 above but including proportion of cases where appointments actually took place as well as just arranged.

25. The proportion of those offenders for whom drug misuse is a criminogenic factor who are on a recognised drugs intervention (e.g. DTTO, drug abstinence order, drugs programme) in the course of their supervision.

26. Proportion of offenders commencing orders and licences who go on accredited programmes:

(a) Proportion for all such offenders;

(b) From 2003–04 proportion for those offenders who have OASys scores above a certain level.

27. Number of offenders completing accredited programmes (i.e. number of people completing, to complement the "satisfactory completions" measure in SDA 3).

28. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) implementation quality rating (IQR) for delivery of accredited programmes.

29. Number of offenders completing accredited drug misuse programmes.

30. Ratio of total commencements of orders and licences to total (weighted) staff. (To be discontinued from 2003–04)

31. Satisfaction surveys of other CJS stakeholders (e.g. police, other Crime and Disorder Act partners); partnership agencies; victims

Bail information. (To be discontinued from 2003–04)

Other Measures

To ensure that there is a clear recommendation in at least 95 per cent. of PSRs written on minority ethnic offenders.

To ensure complete and timely information in at least 95 per cent. of returns.

Reconvictions

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to his answer of 13 February to question 98141, what the reconviction levels were between 1995 and 2002; and what estimates he has made of reconviction levels in *(a)* 2003 and *(b)* 2004. [99723]

Hilary Benn: Two-year 'un-adjusted' reconviction rates for prisoners discharged from custody are available for 1995 to 1998. These were 58 per cent. in 1995, 57 per cent. in 1996, 58 per cent. in 1997 and 59 per cent. in 1998. These rates are published in "Prison Statistics—England and Wales 2001".

Reconviction rates for offenders discharged from custody have also been published according to the requirements of the Government's Public Service Agreement (PSA) 10 target. These are adjusted to take out convictions for offences committed prior to discharge, giving a reconviction rate of 55.3 per cent. for the first quarter of 1999. The equivalent figures for the first quarter of 1997 and 1998 are 56.8 per cent. and 55.7 per cent. respectively.

Neither set of rates indicate trends in rates over time, as they make no allowance for changes in the characteristics and criminal histories of offenders given custodial sentences. To do this a predicted rate is used. Comparisons between the actual and predicted reconviction rates for 1999 show that the actual rate was 3.3 percentage points lower than predicted relative to the 1997 baseline.

Reconviction rates for more recent periods are not yet available.

Rehabilitation

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners undergoing drug treatment were offered continuing treatment on release into the community; and how many prisoners took up this offer in the last year for which figures are available. [99538]

Hilary Benn: Information on the numbers of prisoners offered treatment on release and the number taking up that offer is not available centrally. A programme of work is under way to collect that information but data are not expected to be available until late summer 2003.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much was spent on drug rehabilitation for *(a)* offenders in prison and *(b)* prisoners on release in each of the last five years. [99539]

Hilary Benn: The following table shows the drug rehabilitation spend for offenders in prison for the financial years 1999–2000 to 2001–02; this comprises additional rehabilitation resources made available through the Comprehensive Spending Review and Spending Review 2000 settlements. Drug-related expenditure prior to 1999–2000 cannot be broken down by individual drug intervention.

Drug rehabilitation spend for prisoners in custody

	£ million
1999–2000	2.4
2000–01	4.4
2001–02	6.4

Information relating to rehabilitation spend for prisoners post-release is not recorded centrally and could be established only at disproportionate cost.

Secure Units

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his latest estimate is of the cost per year per inmate of *(a)* local authority secure units, *(b)* secure training centres and *(c)* young offenders' institutions. [99797]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 28 February 2003]:* The juvenile secure estate comprises Prison Service Young Offender Institutions, privately-operated secure training centres and local authority secure units. The different types of establishment vary in the age and vulnerability of the offenders they hold, and in the levels of staffing and types of regime. Responsibility for commissioning and purchasing places in the secure estate rests with the Youth Justice Board for England and Wales which estimates that the average annual costs of detaining an offender aged under 18 in these establishments are as follows.

	£
Young Offender Institution	53,000
Secure Training Centre[1]	159,000
Local authority secure unit	164,000

[1] Includes VAT

Traffic Accidents (Havering)

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many road traffic accidents were reported last year in *(a)* the London Borough of Havering, *(b)* the London Borough of Redbridge, *(c)* the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham and *(d)* the County of Essex. [99742]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Data for reported road traffic accidents in these areas referred are as follows:

London Borough	*2001*	*2002*
Havering	957	[1]801
Redbridge	1,186	[1]913
Barking and Dagenham	696	[1]536
Essex	19,005	18,803

[1] Figures for December 2002 not yet available

The figures for Essex include reported non-injury accidents whereas those for the London Boroughs do not. Non-injury accidents in the London boroughs are not recorded centrally.

The total number of accidents reported is not always a useful figure since many minor accidents are not reported and the length and type of roads in the four areas are very different.

Voluntary Organisations (Vulnerable Children)

Annette Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans his Department has to support the establishment and development of voluntary organisations using the model and approach of 'Kids Company' in Camberwell. [98875]

Beverley Hughes: Kids Company is a charitable organisation working with disadvantaged young people in Southwark. It is one of a number of voluntary organisations and charities working with young people at risk to help them achieve positive outcomes and avoid becoming involved in drugs and crime.

In June 2001 the Youth Justice Board commissioned Crime Concern to undertake a short study on the feasibility of replicating the Kids Company model, and we are considering the outcome of that study. Kids Company offers one approach in working with young people and there are others, such as the Youth Inclusion Programme. We do not advocate one model above any other without clear evidence of both impact and cost effectiveness.

Young Offenders

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average length of sentence *(a)* issued and *(b)* served for those young offenders sent to (i) local authority secure units, (ii) young offenders' institutions and (iii) secure training centres was in each of the last five years. [99796]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 28 February 2003]:* The information is not available in precisely the form requested. The custodial part of a sentence may be served in different types of establishment and an individual offender may move between different types of establishment during the course of his sentence. The table shows the average length of sentence imposed, some of which will be served in a custodial establishment and some in the community.

Average custodial sentence length[1] imposed on persons aged 10–17, by sentence type, England and Wales, 1997 to 2001

Months

Custodial sentence type	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Detained under sec 53 C & YPA 1933[2]	42.1	39.6	37.7	39.6	40.1
Detention and training order[3]	n/a	n/a	n/a	7.6	7.3
Secure training order[4]	n/a	8.3	9.6	8.1	n/a
Young offender institution[5]	6.7	6.3	6.2	6.1	n/a

n/a = not applicable.

[1] Excluding life sentences.

[2] Sec 90–92 Powers of Criminal Courts (Sentencing) Act 2000 from 25 August 2000. Served in local authority secure units (LASUs), Young Offender Institutions (YOIs) or, since 2000, secure training centres (STCs).

[3] Served in LASUs, YOIs or STCs and available nationally from 1 April 2000.

[4] Served in STCs and available from 1 March 1998 to 31 March 2000, when replaced by detention and training orders.

[5] Served in YOIs and replaced by detention and training orders from 31 March 2000.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* local authority secure units, *(b)* young offenders' institutions and *(c)* secure training centres have been in operation in each of the past five years; how many places there are in each; and what the average occupancy rate for each unit was in those years. [99798]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 28 February 2003]:* The information requested cannot be readily provided. I shall therefore write to my hon. Friend.

HEALTH

Endocrine Disrupting Chemicals

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research has been carried out into the impact of endocrine-disrupting chemicals on human health. [99254]

Ms Blears: There has been and continues to be a large amount of research relevant to the broad hypothesis that current exposures to chemicals may alter the functions of the endocrine system in such a way as to harm human health, and many expert reviews have been published. The most recent comprehensive review is in the International Programme on Chemical Safety (IPCS), Global assessment of the state-of-the-science of endocrine disrupters, published in August 2002 by the World Health Organization (WHO/PCS/EDC/02.2). A copy will be deposited in the Library. The report is also available at http://www.who.int/pcs/emerg site/edc/global edc TOC.htm

The Department of Health provided financial support for the IPCS review and both financial and secretariat support were provided by the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

Several Departments fund research projects on possible health effects from and levels of potential endocrine disrupters present naturally or man-made, in food, consumer products and the environment.

Attention Deficit Disorder

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the effect of *(a)* junk food and *(b)* additives in food on (i) ADD and (ii) ADHD; and if he will make a statement. [99679]

Ms Blears: Independent evidence suggests that some foods and their ingredients can affect certain aspects of children's behaviour. While eliminating some foods may thus be helpful, a dietary approach to the treatment of children with the more severe form of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder has been found to be of limited value.

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) considers that more definitive information is needed on the relationship between additives and the behavioural effects on children. The FSA is currently seeking advice on undertaking further research in this area.

Cancer Services (Investment)

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) whether the findings of the exceptional tracking exercise on the additional investment in cancer services will be published *(a)* in full and *(b)* on his Department's website; [99313]

(2) if his Department will use the findings of the exceptional tracking exercise on the additional investment in cancer services to inform its work to improve the patient's experience of cancer, as an NHS Cancer Plan priority; [99314]

(3) if his Department will contact *(a)* patient stakeholder groups and *(b)* their representative organisations to inform them of the publication of the findings of the exceptional tracking exercise on the additional investment in cancer services; [99312]

(4) when his Department plans to publish the findings of its exceptional tracking exercise on the additional investment in cancer services; [99311]

(5) what format will be used for the publication of the findings of the exceptional tracking exercise on the additional investment in cancer services. [99926]

Ms Blears: We intend to publish headline national and network level figures on cancer investment on the Department's website in late spring. The exact format will depend on the level and type of information received from strategic health authorities. We will continue to work with key stakeholders and patient representative groups to improve the patient experience including making available to them the figures from the cancer investment tracking exercise. At a local level this exercise will inform cancer networks' discussions with their stakeholders on plans for future investment, to further improve patient care.

Further details of the tracking investment exercise can be found at www.doh.qov.uk/cancer/trackinginvestment.htm

Cloning

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has held with his European counterparts on cloning; and if he will make a statement. [100319]

Ms Blears: My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, has held no meetings with his European counterparts on cloning. However, cloning has been on the agenda at a number of international meetings attended by the Prime Minister and Science Minister since 1998.

The United Kingdom was the first European country to put in place a specific legal ban on human reproductive cloning in 2001 and we continue to support moves in the United Nations to introduce a global ban on human reproductive cloning.

Continuing Care

Mr. O'Hara: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to revise the notes for guidance on continuing care in the light of the case of R v North and East Devon Health Authority ex parte Pamela Coughlan. [100815]

Jacqui Smith: Revised guidance was issued in light of the case of R v North and East Devon Health Authority ex parte Pamela Coughlan in June 2001.

Contraception

Jim Dobbin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many girls aged *(a)* under 16, *(b)* under 18 and *(c)* under 20 have been given the morning-after pill under Patient Group Directives in each year in which Patient Group Directives have been in force. [99460]

Ms Blears: The information requested is not collected centrally. The use of patient group directions for health professionals to supply emergency contraception is a local decision taken by the relevant primary care trust.

National data on the occasions on which emergency contraception is provided is derived from the KT31 form annual returns from national health service contraceptive services in England. This data does not identify whether the provision is through a patient group direction.

Digital Hearing Aids

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many digital hearing aids have been issued by the NHS in the London Borough of Havering in the last 12 months; [99735]

(2) if he will make a statement on the availability of digital hearing aids in the London Borough of Havering; [99750]

(3) what proportion of the funding for digital hearing aids will be available to hospitals in the London Borough of Havering. [99749]

Mr. Hutton: Barking, Havering and Redbridge Hospitals National Health Service Trust will start to fit digital hearing aids routinely from the end of March. Audiology staff are currently being trained and new equipment is being installed.

We have recently announced that £94 million is being made available, over the next two years, to support the introduction of a modernised hearing aid service, including the provision of digital hearing aids, across the whole of England.

Primary care trusts are being asked to fu[illegible] 25 per cent. of the additional revenue costs of a modernised service.

Drug Treatment

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what clinical trials there have been on heroin treatment using *(a)* methadone, *(b)* buprenorphine, *(c)* naltraxone, *(d)* psychotherapy and *(e)* residential rehabilitation. [98153]

Ms Blears: Comprehensive reviews of the effectiveness of methadone have been provided by several authors (Hall et al., 1998, Farrell et al., 1994, Bertschy 1995, Marsch, 1998). Most of those studies demonstrating the effectiveness of methadone are of on-going maintenance treatment but the evidence generally becomes weaker as the duration of treatment shortens, with little systematic evidence to support short-term detoxification. Specific studies include Fontain & Ansseau, 1995, Glass, 1993 and Gossop, M. et al., 2001. High quality medical and psychosocial services, a clear orientation towards social rehabilitation, treatment longevity and slow detoxification of well-stabilised patients have all been identified as giving the best outcomes (Cacciola et al 1998, Bertschy 1995). Randomised controlled trials (RCTs) show a relationship between higher doses (>50 mg) and reduced illicit drug use with better treatment retention rates (Ward et al 1992, Ling et al 1996, Fontaine & Ansseau 1995 and D'Aunno & Vaughan 1992).

Buprenorphine has more recently been established as a potential effective alternative substitution treatment for some patients by a number of studies such as those concentrating on effective doses including Johnson et al., 1995, Ling et al., 1998 and Strain et al., 1994. Specific differences from methadone have been highlighted in other studies including Walsh et al., 1994, Reynaud et al., 1998, Bickel & Amass, 1995, Reisinger, 1997 and Barnett P. G. et al., 2001) and trials in Europe have been reviewed by Chapleo et al., 1997. Also see Uehlinger, C. et al. 1998 and Fischer, G. et al. 1999 for published studies.

The Cochrane review of buprenorphine maintenance for opioid dependence in August 2002 concluded 'Buprenorphine is an effective intervention for use in the maintenance treatment of heroin dependence, but it is not more effective than methadone at adequate dosages.'

The effectiveness of naltrexone for relapse prevention has been demonstrated in controlled studies by Shufman et al., 1994 and Gerra et al., 1995. Probation-linked supervised naltrexone has been used as an alternative to custody in opiate-misusing offenders and studied by Brahen & Brewer, 1993. A recent systematic review of the efficacy of naltrexone maintenance treatment in opioid dependence by Kirt Mayer et al. 2002 noted limit support for naltrexone in its findings and this treatment is generally seen as appropriate for a minority of patients.

The Cochrane review of naltrexone maintenance for opioid dependence in January 2002 concluded 'The available trials do not allow a final evaluation of naltrexone maintenance treatment yet. A trend in favour of treatment with naltrexone was observed for certain target groups (particularly people who are highly motivated), as has been previously described in the literature.'

There is a very limited experimental research base comparing specific psychotherapies. McLellan et al., 1994 reviewed the evidence and concluded that 'successful outcomes are related to marked and consistent differences between counsellors,' and 'a study of whether the addition of counselling improved the efficacy of methadone maintenance programmes found that the addition of basic counselling on a weekly basis resulted in major and significant improvements'.

International literature (Gerstein D. R. et al., 1990, Kooyman M., 1993 and Hubbard, R., 1994) demonstrates improvements from residential rehabilitation with programmes offering additional services having improved outcomes. The National Treatment Outcome Research Study (Gossop et al. 2001) has confirmed benefits in the UK for those attending residential rehabilitation and found that time in residential treatment is predictive of superior outcomes.

Useful general references containing more detailed references as above:

Community treatment of drug misuse: more than methadone. Nicholas Seivewright, Cambridge University Press 2000.

The task force to review services for drug misusers—report of an independent review of drug treatment services in England (DH 1997).

Methadone substitution therapy—policies and practices. Monograph series number one. Ghodse, A. M. et al. 1998. European Collaborating Centre in Addiction Studies (ECCAS).

Drug Users

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many problematic drug users were in treatment in each of the last five years. [99535]

Ms Blears: Information is not available in the form requested.

Following the closure of the Home Office Addicts Index in 1997, The regional drug misuse databases (RDMDs) were the main source of information on people presenting to drug treatment services with a drug problem up to 31 March 2001. Information on the numbers of users reported as presenting to drug treatment services for treatment in England is shown in the table.

A one-off exercise was carried out to estimate the number of drug users in England in contact with drug treatment agencies in 2000–01. Around 118,500 individuals were reported to be in contact with drug treatment agencies in England in 2000–01.

In April 2001 the national drug treatment monitoring system (NDTMS) was introduced. The figures from the NDTMS are not directly comparable with information collected previously for the RDMDs. However, provisional estimates are that the number of problem drug misusers who presented for treatment to drug treatment agencies and general practitioners in England in 2001–02 increased by around 8 per cent., over the previous year.

Number of users reported as presenting for treatment for drug misuse in England during the six months periods ending 30 September 1996 to 31 March 2001

Six month period ending	*Number presenting for treatment*
September 1996	24,879
March 1997	25,925
September 1997	21,996
March 1998	23,916
September 1998	28,599
March 1999	28,499
September 1999	30,545
March 2000	31,815
September 2000	33,093
March 2001	33,234

Note:

Reporting to the RDMDs was voluntary; changes in the numbers may, at least in part, be due to changes in reporting practice.

Source:

The Department of Health series of Statistical Bulletins "Statistics from the Regional Drug Misuse Databases". Bulletins for the six months ending March 1998 onwards are available at http://www.doh.qov.uk/public/work public health.htm

The Department of Health Statistical Press Notice "Provisional Statistics From The National Drug Treatment Monitoring System In England, 2QgVg2//http://www.doh.qov.uk/public/spndruqsQ212.htm

Drug-eluting Stents

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) which NHS hospitals provide drug eluting stents to private patients but not to NHS patients; [99439]

(2) which NHS hospitals which provide drug eluting stents to private patients also provide NHS patients with drug eluting stents. [99438]

Ms Blears: No information is held centrally regarding the provision of drug eluting stents for national health service patients or for private patients who are treated in private units based in NHS hospitals. Such information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Drugs

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when his Department will have stocks of *(a)* The Score: Facts about drugs, *(b)* Drugs-The Facts A6 booklet, *(c)* A parent's guide to drugs and *(d)* drugs helpline cards; and if he will make a statement. [100030]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 28 February 2003]:* It has been decided that the national drugs helpline cards will not be reprinted. This decision has been made in the light of upcoming new work on the development of a new national drugs campaign.

The following leaflets will be reprinted to cover the time period until the new campaign launches and the resources to support the campaign are available. It is expected that delivery into the warehouse for these leaflets will be:

The Score: Facts about drugs—17 March

Drugs: The facts—17 March

A parent's guide to drugs and alcohol—17 March

While these items have been out of stock we have continued to collect orders from customers and will despatch these items as soon as new stock is received.

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how long the Department has been out of stock of *(a)* The Score: Facts about drugs, *(b)* Drugs the facts A6 booklet, *(c)* A parent's guide to drugs and *(d)* Drugs helpline cards: and what the reasons are in each case. [100031]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 28 February 2003]:* The Score: Facts about drugs, Drugs, the facts A6 booklet and A parent's guide to drugs and alcohol all went out of stock in December 2002.

The National Drugs Helpline credit card went out of stock in January 2003.

We experienced higher than usual demand over the December and Christmas period for all drugs resources.

The Department of Health, in partnership with the Home Office and supported by the Department for Education and Skills, is currently developing a new national drugs campaign, which we anticipate will launch in late spring 2003.

The campaign will be supported by new material promoting a helpline service and providing information for young people and parents on the risks and dangers associated with drug use.

Elder Abuse

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent representations he has received from the Community and District Nursing Association on elder abuse. [100771]

Jacqui Smith: On 12 February, I held a meeting with representatives of the Community and District Nursing Association, who raised the findings of their membership survey relating to elder abuse.

Epilepsy

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* medical consultant and *(b)* nursing specialist posts specifically concerned with the treatment of epilepsy there are in the United Kingdom. [99338]

Mr. Hutton: Information on the number of medical consultant and nursing specialist posts specifically concerned with the treatment of epilepsy is not collected centrally.

Consultants in neurology and neurosurgery treat patients with epilepsy. Latest figures show that, between September 1997 and March 2002, consultant numbers in neurology increased by 94, or 34 per cent., to 372. During the same period, consultant numbers in neurosurgery increased by 27, or 21 per cent., to 154.

General Practitioners

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average patient roll is for each general practitioner in the Camden and Islington area; what he expects the number to be in 2003–04; and if he will make a statement. [100531]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is shown in the table. Figures from September 2001 are still the latest available.

Unrestricted principals and equivalents (UPEs)[1] and average list size as at 30 September 2001

Number (headcount)

	UPEs	*Average list size*
England total	27,843	1,841
Of which:		
London RO	3,962	1,985
Of which:		
Camden and Islington HA	225	2,039

[1] UPEs include CMS Unrestricted Principals, PMS Contracted GPs and PMS Salaried GPs.

Source:

General and Personal Medical Services Statistics

Health Protection Agency

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to agree the National Assembly of Wales funding for the Health Protection Agency. [95671]

Ms Blears: Departmental officials came to an agreement some months ago on the general principle of the National Assembly for Wales' contribution to the funding of the Health Protection Agency; that is that funding streams continue as now for those functions which the HPA will provide in Wales. As is usual at this point in the year, precise sums are still to be confirmed. We expect to do so in the near future.

Health Service Finance

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much was spent providing *(a)* occupational and physiotherapy, *(b)* home help and *(c)* district nursing services in England in each of the last five years. [99390]

Jacqui Smith: Complete information on expenditure on occupational and physiotherapy and on district nursing services is not collected centrally.

Local authority personal social services expenditure for England on home care, inclusive of management and support costs, are shown in the table.

Year	*£000*
1997–98	1,359,761
1998–99	1,438,617
1999–2000	1,559,316
2000–01	1,625,869
2001–02	1,712,064

Health Services (Children)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which module within the National Services Framework for children will include targets for improving the treatment of enuresis and paediatric continence. [100418]

Jacqui Smith: Common childhood conditions, including enuresis and paediatric continence, will be considered primarily by the healthy child and young people module of the national service framework for children, young people and maternity services.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to introduce training for *(a)* commissioners and *(b)* managers on managing comprehensive Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services in accordance with the national service framework for children. [100497]

Jacqui Smith: A conference for joint commissioners/managers of child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) in the light of the pending publication of the emerging findings from the CAMHS module of the Children's national service framework was held on 7 January in Doncaster. Further conferences are planned for 4 April in Newbury and 20 May in London.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to monitor the child and adolescent mental health targets set out in his Department's publication "Improvement, expansion and reform: the next three years". [100554]

Jacqui Smith: The objectives for improving and expanding child and adolescent mental services (CAMHS), set out in the priorities and planning framework 2003–06, "Improvement, Expansion and Reform", will be incorporated into the local delivery plans currently being prepared by primary care trusts. Local monitoring of these plans will be undertaken by strategic health authorities.

At a national level, progress towards the CAMHS objectives will be monitored mainly via the annual CAMHS mapping exercise, which will provide detailed information on the level of services. The first mapping survey has just been completed. This will be used as a baseline against which future service improvements will be measured.

Heart Choice Scheme

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many patients have *(a)* been eligible and *(b)* applied for treatment elsewhere under the Heart Choice Scheme; [97313]

(2) how many patients have received treatment *(a)* abroad and *(b)* in the independent sector as part of the Heart Choice Scheme; [97314]

(3) how many patients have been treated in a hospital that is not their home centre under the Heart Choice Scheme; [97312]

(4) how many patients waiting more than six months for heart surgery had a choice of alternative hospital in *(a)* 1998, *(b)* 1999, *(c)* 2000, *(d)* 2001, *(e)* 2002 and *(f)* 2003; [98929]

(5) how many choices of alternative hospital patients waiting more than six months for heart surgery have had since 1997, and what has been the average wait between referral and treatment in the alternative hospital. [99093]

Ms Blears: Early unvalidated data suggest that between 1 July 2002 and 31 January 2003, 3,822 patients were eligible for choice and of these 1,423 patients chose to be treated in a different hospital. Further information will be placed in the public domain when data returns have been validated and analysed.

Hepatitis C

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to implement the hepatitis C strategy for England, published in consultation form in August 2002. [99523]

Ms Blears: The Chief Medical Officer's strategy to combat infectious diseases, "Getting Ahead of the Curve", has called for intensified action in a number of areas including blood-borne and sexually transmitted viruses. Implementation plans for the hepatitis C strategy will be set out as part of this action plan, which will be published in the next few months.

Work has already begun on improving surveillance of hepatitis C and raising awareness amongst health care professionals.

In March 2002, the Department held four regional conferences for primary care staff, which were very well attended. It will be holding a further four conferences in March 2003. Following the conferences in March 2002, the Department published a briefing pack for health professionals, entitled "Hepatitis C: Essential Information for Professionals", which was distributed to all general practitioners and practice nurses in England.

Homoeopathic Treatments

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans his Department has to encourage the use of homoeopathic treatments, where their effectiveness has been proven; [99920]

(2) what studies he has considered that evaluate the worth of homoeopathic treatments for GP practices. [99922]

Ms Blears *[Holding answer 3 March 2003]:* Our June 2000 complementary medicine information pack for primary care groups commented that there was some evidence to suggest that homeopathy might help certain patients. It suggested in particular that the best evidence of its effectiveness was in relation to conditions with an allergic element, for example asthma, rhinitis and hay fever.

However, the centre for reviews and dissemination at the University of York has concluded in its more recent Effective Healthcare bulletin on homeopathy (2002, volume 7, number 3) that current evidence of the effectiveness of homeopathy is not conclusive enough to warrant a significant change in National Health Service provision of homeopathy.

Hospital Mergers

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer of 11 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 666W, on hospital mergers, if he will *(a)* name and *(b)* publish the study covering trusts in London. [99451]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 27 February 2003]:* The article referred to in my response of 11 February 2003 is "Process and impact of mergers of NHS trusts: multicentre case study and management cost analysis" (Fulop N, Protopsaltis G., Hutchings A., King A., Alien P., Normand C., Walters R.).

This study was published in the *British Medical Journal* (BMJ) on 3 August 2002—reference BMJ 2002;325:246–9. It is also available on the BMJ's website at www.bmi.com/all/shtml and in the Library.

Long-term Care

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what estimate he has made of the number of people who may have been obliged to sell their homes to pay for care, following the report by the Health Service Ombudsman on NHS funding for long term care; [99375]

(2) how families of deceased relatives will be informed that they may be entitled to appeal against the selling of the family home to pay for NHS care, following the report by the Health Service Ombudsman on NHS funding for long term-care; and if he will make a statement; [99384]

(3) what plans he has to compensate people obliged to sell their homes to pay for care for *(a)* emotional distress and *(b)* loss of value of the home; and if he will make a statement; [99385]

(4) what steps his Department is taking to ensure cases of the sale of homes to pay for care since 1996 will be investigated, following the report by the Health Service Ombudsman on NHS funding for long term care; and if he will make a statement; [99376]

(5) what the timescales are for the assessment of the unlawful selling of homes to pay for care for *(a)* strategic health authorities, *(b)* primary care trusts and *(c)* social services departments, following the report by the Health Service Ombudsman on NHS funding for long term care; and if he will make a statement. [99386]

Jacqui Smith: My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, has welcomed the Ombudsman's report on national health service funding for long-term care. As part of the initial response, the Department has asked strategic health authorities to estimate by 28 March the number of people who may have been wrongly assessed under criteria not consistent with the Coughlan judgment.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment he has made of the report by the Health Service Ombudsman on NHS funding for long term care; and if he will make a statement; [99387]

(2) what assessment he has made of the compatibility with R v North and East Devon Health Authority ex parte Pamela Coughlan of the guidance *(a)* HSC 2001/015 and *(b)* HSC 1999/180, following the report by the Health Service Ombudsman on NHS funding for long-term care; and if he will make a statement; [99382]

(3) when he will publish new guidance following the report by the Health Service Ombudsman on NHS funding for long-term care. [99374]

Jacqui Smith: My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, welcomes the Ombudsman's report on national health service funding for long term care. The Department has already asked strategic health authorities to review criteria in use since 1996 and estimate the number of people who may have been wrongly assessed under criteria not consistent with the Coughlan judgment by 28 March.

The Department is satisfied that the guidance issued in 1999 and 2001 was compatible with the Coughlan judgment.

The Department will consider the recommendation to review national guidance on continuing care carefully and respond in due course.

Mental Health

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) whether consideration of the responses to the Draft Mental Health Bill consultation has been completed; and when a re-drafted bill will be presented to the House; [100826]

(2) how many responses to the Draft Mental Health Bill there were from community health councils. [100776]

Jacqui Smith: We received almost 2,000 responses to the consultation of which 88 were from Community Health Councils. Work on the Mental Health Bill continues and a Bill will be introduced as soon as Parliamentary time allows.

MMR Immunisation

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the immunisation rates were for MMR in each of the last five years. [99184]

Ms Blears: Information about immunisation rates for MMR for children by their second birthday and by their fifth birthday for the last five years is shown in the table.

Percentage of children immunised against MMR

		By their 5th birthday[1]	
	By their 2nd birthday	*First dose*	*First and second dose*
1997–98	90.8	—	—
1998–99	88.3	—	—
1999–2000	87.6	93.0	76.0
2000–01	87[illegible]	91.9	74.8
2001–02	84.1	90.8	74.0

[1] Information about uptake at age 5 was collected for the first time in 1999–2000

Source:

Department of Health, Statistics Division SD3G, COVER data

MMR Immunisation (Kent)

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the immunisation rates were for MMR in each of the last five years for Tunbridge Wells and West Kent. [99180]

Ms Blears: Statistics on immunisation rates are collected by health authority area. The table shows the immunisation rates for measles, mumps and rubella for children by their second birthday and by their fifth birthday within the West Kent health authority area for the five years to 2001–02, the last date for which figures are available.

Percentage of children immunised against MMR in West Kent health authority

		By their 5th birthday[1]	
	By their 2nd birthday	*First dose*	*First and second dose*
1997–98	93	—	—
1998–99	91	—	—
1999–2000	90	95	80
2000–01	91	94	78
2001–02	93	93	75

[1] Information about uptake at age 5 was collected for the first time in 1999–2000

Source:

Department of Health, Statistics Division SD3G, COVER data

Motor Neurone Disease

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what targets are being set to reduce diagnosis time for people suffering from motor neurone disease; and if he will make a statement; [100101]

(2) what assistance is available from the NHS for people suffering from motor neurone disease; and if he will make a statement. [100105]

Jacqui Smith: A wide range of services which are tailored to suit individual needs are required to support people with motor neurone disease (MND). National health service services provided include physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech and language therapy and augmentative communication, mobility aids and district nursing support. In the later stages of the disease, the following interventions may also be required: enteral feeding (for severe dysphagia), domiciliary or hospice care and ventilatory support, including mechanical ventilation and tracheostomy.

The National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE) has reviewed the evidence of the clinical and cost effectiveness of Riluzole for MND. NICE has advised that Riluzole (marketed as Rilutek) should be made available in the NHS as one component of the management of those people with the amyotrophic lateral sclerosis form of MND.

There is no specific test for MND and it may be difficult to diagnose with certainty in the early stages of the disease, because the patterns of symptoms varies between individuals and may be similar to those seen in other conditions. However, a great deal of research work is being carried out, and encouraging advances are being made in understanding both the disease process and the way motor neurones function.

We are developing a national service framework (NSF) for long term conditions, which will have a particular focus on neurological conditions. It is scheduled for publication in 2004 and implementation from 2005. The national service framework will help to drive up standards and improve the quality of and access to care for people with neurological conditions like MND.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he plans to place motor neurone disease in the national service framework; and if he will make a statement. [100102]

Jacqui Smith: The national service framework (NSF) for long-term conditions will focus on neurological conditions, including motor neurone disease and brain and spinal injuries. It will also tackle some of the common issues, which are relevant to a wider range of people with long-term conditions generally and help to drive up the quality of treatment and care.

We have appointed an external reference group and working groups to take forward detailed development of the NSF. One of the groups is looking at areas where standards might be set along the patient pathway for people with progressive conditions, including motor neurone disease. People with clinical expertise and experience in dealing with motor neurone disease and from the Motor Neurone Disease Association are represented on this group. They will ensure that the needs of people with motor neurone disease are considered during development of the NSF.

National Service Framework for Older People

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer of 7 February 2003, *Official Report,* column 474W, on the National Service Framework, what methods are being used to monitor the progress of implementation of the NSF milestones for older people. [99524]

Jacqui Smith: The data collection lines underpinning the monitoring of targets in Improvement, Expansion and Reform and the frequency of data collections are currently in the process of being determined. Progress on the other national service framework milestones will be for strategic health authorities to monitor locally.

Nurses and Nursing Agencies

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) of 28 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 822W, on nurses' recruitment, how many agencies have been removed from the list of agencies who are compliant with the code of practice. [86043]

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answers of 4 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 225W, on nurses, and nursing agencies, what the reasons are for the differing indications of the level of compliance with the code of practice by nursing agencies [97237]

Mr. Hutton: No evidence of non-compliance with the code has been brought to the attention of the Department.

The NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency (PASA) is working with the NHS through a procurement programme for the provision of temporary staffing by commercial agencies across the national health service in England. As the framework agreements are awarded, the agencies will be contractually bound to comply with detailed quality standards, including compliance with the code of practice. PASA will ensure that all successful agencies are complying with their contractual obligations. A full range of national audits into compliance will begin in summer 2003.

Older People (Falls Prevention)

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the progress of local health authorities against the National Service Framework for Older People's 2003 milestone on falls prevention. [100110]

Jacqui Smith: The Department will be monitoring formally the overall falls milestone of integrated health and social care falls services by April 2005 as this is included as one of the key targets in "Improvement, Expansion and Reform", the priorities and planning framework for 2003–06.

Progress on the other falls milestones will be for strategic health authorities to monitor locally, although these are 'stepping stones' for reaching the overarching milestone of a fully integrated falls service.

Overseas Nurse Advice Line

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer of 5 February 2003, *Official Report,* column 317W, on the overseas nurse advice line, if he will break down the calls received by the helpline by *(a)* type of query and *(b)* length of call; what records are kept on callers into the helpline; and if this information is passed on to any other bodies. [99682]

Mr. Hutton: The international nurses' advice line receives queries from nurses from abroad who are currently in the United Kingdom. The calls primarily concern problems the nurses are experiencing either with their current employer or the agency they work for.

The average length of a call is three minutes and 20 seconds.

The following information is kept on file: the caller's name, postal address, contact phone number and email address; whether the caller was a member of the Royal College of Nursing or Unison; the caller's query or problem; action to be taken by the Department; the outcome of the call; and where the caller found out about the advice line.

Information is passed on to the Department at the caller's request.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer of 5 February 2003, *Official Report,* column 317W, on the international nurses advice line, if he will set out its objectives. [99683]

Mr. Hutton: The objective of the international nurses' advice line is to provide advice and assistance to internationally recruited nurses.

Overseas Nurses

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who the members are of the group set up to identify problems faced by overseas nurses; what budget the group has; what findings it has so far presented; what findings have been published; what timetable the group will work to ; and if he will make a statement. [99717]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 3 March 2003]:* The Department representatives the Royal College of Nursing, UNISON, Nursing and Midwifery Council, Work Permits (UK), Independent Healthcare

Association, Registered Nursing Home Association, Department of Trade and Industry, Philippines Embassy and Philippines Nursing UK to join an informal working group to identify problems faced by overseas nurses and help establish the international nurses advice line.

The working group does not have a separate budget and a meeting will be held in May to review progress.

An adaptation guide on clinical provision is being produced in collaboration with the Independent Healthcare Association.

Patient Choice

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many choices of alternative hospital patients in London waiting more than six months for elective surgery will have. [99103]

Mr. Hutton: Patients waiting more than six months for elective surgery in the procedures covered by choice will normally be offered the choice of two alternative hospitals. Those waiting for primary hip or primary knee operations may, in addition, be offered overseas treatment.

The London patient choice project started to offer choice for cataract patients who have already waited more than six months for treatment, in October 2002, and from March 2003 will be offering a similar choice in ear, nose and throat, general surgery and orthopaedics. The scheme rolls out to other surgical specialties such as gynaecology, urology and plastic surgery from summer 2003.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many choices of alternative hospital patients in Greater Manchester waiting six months for orthopaedic treatment, ENT treatment or general surgery will have. [99108]

Mr. Hutton: The aim is to provide up to four alternative treatment locations in Greater Manchester in 2003–04, which are:

The Greater Manchester Surgical Centre at Trafford General Hospital;

Local private sector capacity;

Other available national health service capacity in the Greater Manchester conurbation.

These options are in addition to choosing to remain with their local provider, which is an equally valid choice to make.

Primary Care Trusts

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the income per capita of the population is for primary care trusts in *(a)* Wiltshire, *(b)* Hampshire and *(c)* Berkshire. [97801]

Ms Blears: The funding per weighted head of population of primary care trusts (PCTs) is shown in the table, is calculated using the cash funding made by the Department of Health, and health authorities to those PCTs. PCTs also receive small quantities of miscellaneous income for fees and charges and this has not been included in the table.

From April 2003, PCTs will be funded directly by the Department of Health.

Health authority area	*Funding per head (£)*
Wiltshire	
South Wiltshire	977.01
West Wiltshire	837.39
Hampshire	
East Hampshire	754.66
Mid Hampshire	859.55
New Forest	766.20
North Hampshire	860.08
Portsmouth City	632.39
Southampton	583.85
Isle of Wight	704.03
Berkshire	
Newbury and Community	694.65
Reading	815.50
Slough	834.41
Wokingham	756.00

Note:

Populations derived from weighted capitation formula used for 2003–04 to2005–06 PCT revenue allocations, ie GP lists reconciled to mid 2001 Office for National Statistics (ONS) estimates and weighted for age, need and cost.

Source:

Primary Care Trusts audited summarisation schedules 2001–02.

Public Health Laboratories

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the additional resources to be provided when NHS trusts receive laboratories from the public health laboratory service will match the additional costs, including those services provided previously through the PHLS network and central facilities. [95868]

Ms Blears: Resources are being transferred from the Public Health Laboratory Service (PHLS) to national health service trusts commensurate with the additional costs for providing the services they will be responsible for with effect from 1 April. This includes the direct costs of the laboratories and an appropriate apportionment of PHLS' centrally financed overhead.

Queen Alexandra Hospital

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what the approved affordability is of the private finance initiative at Queen Alexandra Hospital, Cosham; [98628]

(2) what the expected annual cost is of the private finance initiative at Queen Alexandra Hospital, Cosham. [98629]

Ms Blears: I am advised that the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Strategic Health Authority and stakeholder primary care trusts reviewed the affordability in 2002.

The estimated capital cost of the scheme was confirmed as £173 million. The revenue consequences of the development of the Queen Alexandra Hospital site amounted to £44 million per annum.

Approval to the original proposed scheme was re-confirmed.

Radiation

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the recent research published by the European Commission on Radiation Risk and the implications for human health. [100400]

Ms Blears: The European Committee on Radiation Risk (ECRR) maintains that the scientific evidence for the harmful effects of ionising radiation accumulated by the international scientific community over several decades is flawed and risks are being under-estimated significantly. This hypothesis, originally proposed by Dr. Chris Busby, founder of the special interest group "Green Audit", is currently being considered in detail by the Committee Examining Radiation Risks from Internal Emitters (CERRIE). This Committee was set up by the Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment (COMARE) and their conclusions will be published in due course. Dr. Busby is a member of CERRIE.

ECRR is not a formal scientific advisory committee to the European Commission or to the European Parliament. Its report[1] is published by the Green Audit. Dr. Busby is the secretary of ECRR.

[1] Green Audit. 2003 Recommendations of the European Committee on Radiation Risk. Editor Chris Busby with Rosalie Bertell, Inge Schmitz-Feuerhake, Molly Scott Cato and Alexei Yablokov http://www.euradcom.org/2003/ecrr2003.htm#press

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent assessment he has made of the health implications arising from the operation of the nuclear industry. [100402]

Ms Blears: The independent Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment (COMARE) was set up in 1985 to advise Government on such matters. COMARE has carried out a series of investigations into alleged increases of cancer around several nuclear installations in Great Britain and has published seven reports and a variety of statements.

It is currently awaiting the results of a national study of childhood cancer in Great Britain, including all cases from the 1960s onwards. This study will include data on over 33,000 cases of childhood cancer and will address the question of whether there is a real association between British nuclear installations and the incidence of those cancer cases. This will be the subject of a major COMARE report, which it hopes to complete this year. The Department of Health and the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs has also asked COMARE to review the latest data on the risks from internal radiation emitters and advise on any further research that may be required. To help them to do this they have set up the Committee Examining Radiation Risks from Internal Emitters (CERRIE). This group is also hoping to report in 2003. Furthermore, Government have asked the small area statistics unit to draw up a protocol for a study of the incidence of adult cancers in the areas around British nuclear installations.

Since 1986, the Department of Health and its predecessor, the Department of Health and Social Security, has administered the Radiological Protection Research Programme. The objective of this programme is to identify the research which is needed to inform policy development in the area of low level radiation exposure (both ionising and non-ionising), its effects, and the need to quantify the risk to public health and to implement appropriate preventative measures. The programme has funded many individual research projects designed to examine these aspects of radiation exposure.

Smoking

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance his Department plans to give to its employees on actions to take on No Smoking Day. [98840]

Ms Blears: The Department sees No Smoking Day as an important opportunity to actively encourage those employees who smoke to quit. In the run-up to 12 March, the staff magazine *Link* is carrying an article on smoking which includes information about support available to smokers. The article publicises the national health service smoking helpline (0800 169 0169) and the core care welfare service (0800 652 3304) which are both available to employees who want to give up smoking. In addition, No Smoking Day posters and displays will be placed in the Department.

The Department already gives employees who wish to attend cessation groups reasonable time off to do so and reimburses the prescription cost of one week's supply of nicotine replacement therapy. In addition, the Department is piloting an on-site smoking cessation group for London-based staff. This has been scheduled to follow No Smoking Day, in the hope that it will attract employees who have set a quit date. The group will run from every Thursday from 20 March from 4.00–5.00 pm for seven weeks in the same format as NHS groups. Subject to the success of this pilot, this may be extended to other areas of the Department.

Social Care Grants

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the grants funded by his Department for social care for which individuals may apply; how much funding was made in the last financial year; how many awards were made; and what their administrative costs were. [99949]

Jacqui Smith: There are no grants funded by the Department for social care for which individuals may apply.

Tuberculosis

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when *(a)* he, *(b)* the head of the tuberculosis unit of the Public Health Laboratory Service and *(c)* senior officials from his Department last met NHS trust executives of areas with recorded rates of tuberculosis higher than the national average. [100507]

Ms Blears: Departmental officials met with national key stakeholders, including the Public Health Laboratory Service, on 30 September in London and 25 October in Leeds to review the strategic national plan to deal with tuberculosis in all areas.

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements are made to inoculate NHS staff against TB. [98627]

Ms Blears: Guidance entitled "Recommendations for the Prevention and Control of Tuberculosis at Local Level June 1996" documents the occupational health policy for national health service staff and tuberculosis:

> 'pre-employment—All staff in regular contact with patients or handling specimens, including laboratory workers, agency staff and locums, should be screened and offered protection with BCG vaccine according to BTS guidelines'.

Waiting Times (Hull and East Riding)

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list *(a)* the number of patients and *(b)* the length of waiting time for smear test results in Hull and the East Riding in the past 12 months. [92847]

Jacqui Smith: Within the East Riding Health Authority in 2001–02, 84.9 per cent. of women in the target age group (25–64) have has an adequate cervical smear test in the last five years, against 81.6 per cent. for the whole of England.

Guidance from the cervical screening programme states that women should have to wait no longer than six weeks for the written results of their cervical smear tests. Figures for the length of waiting times are available on a regional basis. Across the Northern and Yorkshire region in 2001–02, 48 per cent. of women received their results within six weeks, of which 78 per cent. received their results within 10 weeks.

Source:

Department of Health

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 5 March 2003

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

"Sustainable Communities in the East of England"

10. **Alistair Burt:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what representations he has received from Bedfordshire following publication of his plans 'Sustainable Communities in the East of England'. [100659]

Mr. McNulty: My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister is working closely with Bedfordshire County Council, Bedfordshire authorities, infrastructure providers and other local and regional partners, on detailed Assessments of the growth potential of the Luton and Bedford/Marston Vale areas. Both towns are key locations with the Milton Keynes and South Midlands growth area.

Alistair Burt: To ask the Deputy prime Minister what representations he has received from Bedfordshire following publication of his plans 'Sustainable Communities in the East of England'.

Mr. McNulty: My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister is working closely with Bedfordshire County Council and Bedfordshire districts, as well as infrastructure providers, on detailed assessments of the growth potential of the Luton and Bedford/ Marston Vale areas. Both towns are key locations within the Milton Keynes and South Midlands growth area. [100657]

Regional Government

11. **Mr. Mackay:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what progress he has made in establishing regional governance in England. [100660]

Mr. Raynsford: The Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Bill had its Report and Third Reading in the House of Commons on 23 January 2003 and received its Second Reading in the other place on 24 February 2003. The Bill provides for the English regions to hold referendums about an elected assembly, and for a review of two-tier local government by the Boundary Committee before a referendum is held in a particular region.

As my right hon. Friend said earlier we have invited responses by 3 March 2003 to the soundings exercise.

Local Government Finance

12. **Norman Baker:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the local government settlement for councils in east Sussex. [100661]

Mr. Raynsford: I refer the hon. Member to the debate on the local government finance settlement 2003–04 which took place on 5 February 2003, *Official Report*, columns 353–406 and to the letter sent to the hon. Member on 3 February setting out the above-inflation grant increases for all councils in east Sussex.

13. **Mr. Clappison:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what representations he has received from south eastern local authorities regarding the local government funding settlement. [100662]

Mr. Raynsford: 28 authorities in the south east responded to our consultation on the local government finance settlement 2003–04. In addition, eight authorities from this region came in to see Ministers to make representations on our proposals during this consultation period. Parliament has, of course, now approved the settlement which provides an increase in Government grant of £3.8 billion overall. This is an increase of 8 per cent. representing a continued significant real terms investment in local government.

Cash Incentive Scheme

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many cash incentive scheme grants were made by each local authority in London in 2001–02; and what the total value was of these grants in each case. [99171]

Mr. McNulty: The number of cash incentive scheme grants made by those London borough's running schemes in 2001–02 and the total value of grants made are in the following table.

	Total number of grants	*Total expenditure (£000)*
Barnet	32	686
Camden	33	797
Croydon	49	975
Enfield	49	1.183
Haringey	18	354
Harrow	1	20
Havering	3	37
Hillingdon	16	221
Islington	7	193
Kingston upon Thames	16	305
Lewisham	34	607
Merton	9	206
Sutton	1	22
Tower Hamlets	36	579
Waltham Forest	19	592
Wandsworth	35	756
Westminster	15	429

Council House Sales

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many council houses have been sold in each year since 1997 in *(a)* the Jarrow constituency, *(b)* South Tyneside, *(c)* Tyne and Wear and *(d)* the UK. [99928]

Mr. McNulty: Information is not available below local authority level. The available information reported by South Tyneside MBC and the other metropolitan borough councils comprising Tyne and Wear is in the following table, together with estimated number of sales in Great Britain. Information on the total number of council house sales in the United Kingdom in each year since 1997 is currently incomplete.

Sales of council dwellings in south Tyneside, Tyne and Wear and Great Britain: 1997–98 to 2001–02

All sales	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
South Tyneside	283	209	355	[1]—	[1]—
Gateshead	326	283	452	445	510
Newcastle upon Tyne	267	207	316	266(3)	569
North Tyneside	202	209	345	338	396
Sunderland	642	546	713	[2]37,534	0(3)
Tyne and Wear	1,720	1,454	2,181	N/a	N/a
Great Britain					
Total sales	95,764	133,118	168,773	202,365	106,320
Of which to owner occupiers	59,513	56,298	71,965	69,779	69,061

[1] Not reported

[2] Includes 36,356 dwellings transferred by Sunderland City Council to Sunderland Housing Group in March 2002

Note:

Where there has not been full reporting, the figures in brackets indicate the number of quarters for which complete information is available within the financial year.

Source:

DOE/DETR/DTLR/ODPM quarterly P1B return

Fire Service Deaths

Mr. Weir: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many *(a)* deaths in incidents attended by firefighters at night and *(b)* deaths in incidents attended by firefighters during day shift hours there were in each fire brigade area in the last year for which figures are available. [100123]

Mr. Raynsford: The latest data available are tabled as follows. These show fires and deaths occurring in fires attended by local authority fire brigades between the following time periods; (i) 9 am and 5.59 pm (i.e. the standard day shift), (ii) between 6 pm and 23.59 pm and (iii) between midnight and 8.59am. The "night" period has been split into more comparable time intervals rather than one 15 hour duration.

The time of the fire is defined as the time at which the emergency call was received by the local authority fire brigade and may differ in some circumstances from the time at which the fire actually started.

Information on deaths occurring in other incidents attended by fire crews (such as road traffic accidents) is not available by time of incident.

Deaths in primary fires[1] by brigade and time of day, UK, 2001–02[2]

	Total		*09:00–17:59*			*18:00–23:59*		
Brigade	*Fires*	*Deaths*	*Fires*	*Deaths*	*Rate per 1,000 fires*	*Fires*	*Deaths*	*Rate per 1,000 fires*
United Kingdom (Estimates are shown in brackets)[3]	228,087	635	79,207 (614)	227	2.9	89,662	154	1.7
England and Wales (Estimates are shown in brackets)[3]	201,433	520	70,157 (498)	191	2.7	79,888	125	1.6
England	188,701	481	65,749	179	2.7	74,843	117	1.6
England-Non-Met Counties	105,588	276	37,792	108	2.9	40,959	69	1.7
Avon	4,883	7	1,414	1	0.7	2,032	1	0.5
Bedfordshire[4]	2,045	5	603	1	1.7	797	3	3.8
Berkshire	2,649	5	947	2	2.1	902	3	3.3
Buckinghamshire	2,729	8	1,021	3	2.9	1,063	4	3.8
Cambridgeshire	2,373	4	808	2	2.5	879	1	1.1
Cheshire	3,403	6	1,243	4	3.2	1,230	0	0.0
Cleveland	3,600	7	1,269	4	3.2	1,573	0	0.0
Cornwall	1,472	7	647	2	3.1	447	2	4.5
Cumbria	1,666	4	683	2	2.9	585	1	1.7
Derbyshire	2,832	10	992	4	4.0	1,139	4	3.5
Devon	3,329	7	1,455	2	1.4	1,105	2	1.8
Dorset	1,950	8	693	5	7.2	742	1	1.3
Durham	2,398	6	841	0	0.0	1,014	4	3.9
East Sussex	2,822	7	1,054	1	0.9	1,038	5	4.8
Essex	4,597	10	1,632	6	3.7	1,774	1	0.6
Gloucestershire	1,720	6	658	2	3.0	621	1	1.6
Hampshire	4,344	14	1,795	8	4.5	1,584	3	1.9
Hereford and Worcester	2,083	4	843	3	3.6	791	0	0.0
Hertfordshire	2,826	9	1,023	6	5.9	1,126	3	2.7
Humberside	3,846	7	1,295	5	3.9	1,588	0	0.0
Isle of Wight	406	0	186	0	0.0	147	0	0.0
Kent	5,152	21	1,766	6	3.4	2,094	4	1.9
Lancashire	5,801	18	2,133	7	3.3	2,176	3	1.4
Leicestershire	3,254	14	1,121	8	7.1	1,319	3	2.3

Deaths in primary fires[1] by brigade and time of day, UK, 2001–02[2]

Brigade	*Total* *Fires*	*Deaths*	*09:00–17:59* *Fires*	*Deaths*	*Rate per 1,000 fires*	*18:00–23:59* *Fires*	*Deaths*	*Rate per 1,000 fires*
Lincolnshire	1,861	5	679	3	4.4	793	0	0.0
Norfolk	2,282	8	816	2	2.5	845	3	3.6
North Yorkshire	2,088	2	703	0	0.0	876	0	0.0
Northamptonshire	2,663	4	903	2	2.2	1,058	0	0.0
Northumberland	1,205	2	374	1	2.7	522	1	1.9
Nottinghamshire	5,503	9	1,638	3	1.8	2,521	1	0.4
Oxfordshire	1,885	5	751	3	4.0	637	2	3.1
Shropshire	1,604	4	594	2	3.4	657	1	1.5
Somerset	1,787	10	676	3	4.4	606	1	1.7
Staffordshire	3,217	9	1,068	1	0.9	1,326	3	2.3
Suffolk	1,642	4	554	0	0.0	653	0	0.0
Surrey	2,447	3	969	0	0.0	866	1	1.2
Warwickshire	1,534	8	505	2	4.0	602	3	5.0
West Sussex	2,214	4	805	1	1.2	741	2	2.7
Wiltshire	1,474	5	632	1	1.6	492	2	4.1
Isles of Scilly	1	0	1	0	0.0	0	0	—
England-Met Counties	83,113	205	27,957	71	2.5	33,884	48	1.4
Greater Manchester	16,309	37	5,251	17	3.2	6,736	9	1.3
Merseyside	8,334	17	2,833	3	1.1	3,591	4	1.1
South Yorkshire	5,548	21	1,590	8	5.0	2,389	6	2.5
Tyne and Wear	6,518	7	2,293	2	0.9	2,684	0	0.0
West Midlands	12,862	37	4,372	14	3.2	5,391	12	2.2
West Yorkshire	11,641	16	3,308	6	1.8	5,109	4	0.8
Greater London	21,901	70	8,310	21	2.5	7,983	13	1.6
Wales	12,732	39	4,408	12	2.7	5,045	8	1.6
North Wales	2,362	17	844	7	8.3	824	4	4.9
Mid and West Wales	3,947	13	1,521	4	2.6	1,539	1	0.6
South Wales	6,423	9	2,043	1	0.5	2,682	3	1.1
Northern Ireland	6,991	19	1,957	7	3.6	2,318	2	0.9
Scotland	19,663	96	7,093	29	4.1	7,456	27	3.6
Strathclyde	9,522	40	3,211	10	3.1	3,704	15	4.0
Highland and Islands	665	4	293	1	3.4	180	2	11.1
Grampian	1,664	16	625	6	9.6	565	7	12.4
Tayside	1,599	10	604	1	1.7	658	0	0.0
Lothian and Borders	3,731	14	1,350	4	3.0	1,456	2	1.4
Fife	1,229	5	478	3	6.3	430	1	2.3
Central	886	5	376	2	5.3	339	0	0.0
Dumfries	368	2	155	2	12.9	126	0	0.0

Brigade	*00:00–08:59* *Fires*	*Deaths*	*Rate per 1,000 fires*	*Time of incident unknown* *Fires*	*Deaths*
United Kingdom (Estimates are shown in brackets)[3]	59,191	252	4.3	27	2
England and Wales (Estimates are shown in brackets)[3]	51,367	202	3.9	22	2
England	48,088	183	3.8	22	2
England-Non-Met Counties	26,826	97	3.6	11	2
Avon	1,438	5	3.5	0	0
Bedfordshire[4]	645	1	1.6	0	0
Berkshire	800	0	0.0	0	0
Buckinghamshire	644	1	1.6	0	0
Cambridgeshire	685	1	1.5	0	0
Cheshire	930	2	2.2	0	0
Cleveland	758	3	4.0	0	0
Cornwall	377	3	8.0	0	0
Cumbria	39[illegible]	1	2.5	0	0
Derbyshire	701	2	2.9	0	0
Devon	770	3	3.9	0	0
Dorset	516	2	3.9	0	0
Durham	543	2	3.7	0	0
East Sussex	725	1	1.4	5	0
Essex	1,192	3	2.5	0	0
Gloucestershire	440	3	6.8	0	0
Hampshire	965	3	3.1	0	0

	00:00–08:59			*Time of incident unknown*	
Brigade	*Fires*	*Deaths*	*Rate per 1,000 fires*	*Fires*	*Deaths*
Hereford and Worcester	450	1	2.2	0	0
Hertfordshire	676	0	0.0	0	0
Humberside	963	2	2.1	0	0
Isle of Wight	73	0	0.0	0	0
Kent	1,292	11	8.5	0	0
Lancashire	1,493	8	5.4	0	0
Leicestershire	814	3	3.7	0	0
Lincolnshire	389	2	5.1	0	0
Norfolk	621	3	4.8	0	0
North Yorkshire	508	2	3.9	0	0
Northamptonshire	703	2	2.8	0	0
Northumberland	309	0	0.0	0	0
Nottinghamshire	1,344	5	3.7	0	0
Oxfordshire	497	0	0.0	0	0
Shropshire	353	1	2.8	0	0
Somerset	505	6	11.9	0	0
Staffordshire	817	3	3.7	6	2
Suffolk	435	4	9.2	0	0
Surrey	612	2	3.3	0	0
Warwickshire	426	3	7.0	0	0
West Sussex	668	1	1.5	0	0
Wiltshire	351	2	5.7	0	0
Isles of Scilly	0	0	—	0	0
England-Met Counties	21,26	86	4.0	10	0
Greater Manchester	4,322	11	2.5	0	0
Merseyside	1,905	10	5.2	5	0
South Yorkshire	1,568	7	4.5	0	0
Tyne and Wear	1,541	5	3.2	0	0
West Midlands	3,099	11	3.5	0	0
West Yorkshire	3,224	6	1.9	0	0
Greater London	5,603	36	6.4	5	0
Wales	3,279	19	5.8	0	0
North Wales	694	6	8.6	0	0
Mid and West Wales	888	8	9.0	0	0
South Wales	1,698	5	2.9	0	0
Northern Ireland	2,710	10	3.7	5	0
Scotland	5,113	40	7.8	0	0
Strathclyde	2,608	15	5.8	0	0
Highland and Islands	192	1	5.2	0	0
Grampian	474	3	6.3	0	0
Tayside	337	9	26.7	0	0
Lothian and Borders	924	8	8.7	0	0
Fife	321	1	3.1	0	0
Central	171	3	17.5	0	0
Dumfries	87	0	0.0	0	0

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[1] A primary fire is any fire in a building or vehicle and/or a fire which involved casualties or rescues. Includes late call and heat and smoke damage incidents (not recorded prior to 1994).

[2] Provisional.

[3] The fatality figures for 2001–02 are likely to be revised as later information becomes available. Estimates for the revised totals for United kingdom and England and Wales are shown in brackets.

[4] Since publication of 'Fire Statistics Monitor-Q1 2002' Bedfordshire has supplied data for quarter 1 2002. This means the figures here differ slightly from those previously published.

Housing Regeneration

Vera Baird: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assistance he will give to areas with significant housing regeneration needs which are not Pathfinder areas. [100658]

Mr. McNulty: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is investing billions of pounds in housing over the next three years. Local authorities through their housing strategies can use these resources, alongside those of their partners, to tackle the housing problems they face. Authorities now have the chance to make a real long lasting difference for their communities.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is aware that Redcar is an area with significant difficulties in terms of low demand housing. This was recognised in the draft regional housing strategy prepared by the North East Housing Forum and it is likely to be priority for the new regional housing board.

Local Authority Housing

Mr. Hopkins: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the current debt is in each English authority's housing revenue account; and if he will estimate the cost of debt redemption charges if the debt was cancelled. [100330]

Mr. McNulty: Local authorities manage their debt corporately so there are no separate data for debt in respect of housing. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister does however make estimates of national housing debt for the purposes of housing revenue account subsidy calculations. This is listed for each authority as the Mid-Year Subsidy Credit Ceiling for 2003–04 in Schedule 6 Column 1 of The Housing Revenue Account Subsidy Determination 2003–04. This Schedule can be seen at http://www.housing.odpm.gov.uk/03hrad/fmal/index.htm.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister does not have detailed knowledge of the debt of each authority and so we cannot estimate the cost of debt redemption charges if debt were cancelled.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list those local authorities whose housing revenue accounts are *(a)* in surplus and *(b)* in deficit, providing for each (i) the average surplus or deficit per dwelling and (ii) the number of dwellings. [100253]

Mr. McNulty: The information has been placed in the Library.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the value of housing capital receipts not recycled into capital housing spend was in each of the last five years in each *(a)* borough and *(b)* district council in Shropshire. [99721]

Mr. McNulty: Authorities are required to set aside up to 75 per cent. of housing capital receipts to be used only (unless the authority becomes debt-free) for debt redemption or paying off credit arrangements. The accumulated balance of usable receipts may then, at the authority's discretion, be used to support their capital programme. Information reported by local authorities in Shropshire on gross housing capital receipts, and the level of usable capital receipts applied to their housing capital programme, is in the following table.

Total housing capital receipts

£000

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Bridgnorth	1,603	1,780	2,205	1,348	1,591
North Shropshire	1,337	1,191	1,827	1,739	1,760
Oswestry	535	747	1,643	1,429	1,080
Shrewsbury and Atcham	2,457	2,837	3,364	3,101	62,846
South Shropshire	310	224	437	197	280
Telford and Wrekin	3,795	96,913	213	1,996	2,688

Usable capital receipts applied to housing capital programme

£000

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Bridgnorth	548	627	401	0	359
North Shropshire	345	313	360	278	368
Oswestry	98	115	68	0	0
Shrewsbury and Atcham	802	434	360	1,057	499
South Shropshire	895	859	853	819	677
Telford and Wrekin	290	3,105	439	2,112	2,071

Note:

Large scale voluntary transfers of council stock undertaken by Telford and Wrekin in March 1999, and by Shrewsbury and Atcham in October 2001.

Source:

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister annual Housing Investment Programme and COR returns

Mr. Hopkins: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the authorities who have not *(a)* transferred their housing stock and *(b)* set up an Arms-length Management Organisation. [100333]

Mr. McNulty: The local housing authorities in England that had not transferred all of their housing stock or been successful in achieving full Arms-length Management Organisation status at the end of February are listed below.

Adur

Alnwick

Arun

Ashford

Aylesbury Vale

Babergh

Barking and Dagenham

Barnet

Barnsley[2]

Barrow-in-Furness

Basildon
Bassetlaw
Berwick-upon-Tweed
Birmingham
Blaby
Blackpool
Blyth Valley[2]
Bolsover
Bolton[2]
Bournemouth
Bracknell Forest
Braintree
Brent[2]
Brentwood
Bridgnorth
Brighton and Hove
Bristol
Bromsgrove[1]
Broxbourne
Broxtowe
Bury
Cambridge
Camden
Cannock Chase
Canterbury
Caradon
Carrick[2]
Castle Morpeth
Castle Point
Charnwood
Cheltenham[2]
Cherwell[1]
Chesterfield
Chester-le-Street
Chorley
City of London
Colchester[2]
Copeland[1]
Corby
Craven[1]
Crawley
Croydon
Dacorum
Darlington
Dartford
Daventry
Derwentside
Doncaster
Dover
Dudley
Durham
Ealing
Easington
East Devon
East Riding of Yorkshire
Eastbourne
Ellesmere Port and Neston
Enfield
Epping Forest
Exeter
Fareham
Fenland
Forest Heath
Forest of Dean[1]
Gateshead
Gedling
Gloucester
Gosport
Gravesham
Great Yarmouth
Greenwich
Guildford
Hackney
Halton
Hammersmith and Fulham
Harborough
Haringey
Harlow
Harrogate
Harrow
Hartlepool
Havering
High Peak
Hillingdon[2]
Hinckley and Bosworth
Hyndburn
Ipswich
Isles of Scilly
Islington
Kensington and Chelsea[2]
Kettering
Kings Lynn and West Norfolk
Kingston upon Hull
Kingston upon Thames
Lambeth
Lancaster
Leeds[2]
Leicester
Lewes
Lewisham
Lincoln
Liverpool
Luton
Macclesfield
Maidstone[1]
Manchester
Mansfield
Melton
Merton
Mid Devon
Mid Suffolk
Middlesbrough[1]
Milton Keynes
Mole Valley
New Forest
Newark and Sherwood

Newcastle upon Tyne
Newham
North Cornwall
North East Derbyshire
North East Lincolnshire
North Hertfordshire[1]
North Kesteven
North Lincolnshire
North Norfolk
North Shropshire
North Somerset
North Tyneside
North Warwickshire
North West Leicestershire
Northampton
Norwich
Nottingham City
Nuneaton and Bedworth[1]
Oadby and Wigston
Oldham[2]
Oswestry
Oxford
Pendle
Peterborough
Plymouth
Poole
Portsmouth
Preston
Purbeck
Reading
Redbridge
Redditch
Ribble Valley
Richmondshire
Rochford
Rossendale
Rotherham
Rugby
Runnymede
Rutland
Salford[2]
Salisbury
Sandwell
Scarborough[1]
Sedgefield
Sedgemoor
Sefton
Selby
Sheffield
Shepway
Slough
Solihull
South Bedfordshire
South Cambridgeshire
South Derbyshire
South Gloucestershire
South Holland
South Kesteven
South Lakeland
South Norfolk[1]
South Northamptonshire
South Tyneside
Southampton
Southend-on-Sea
Southwark
St. Albans
Stafford
Stevenage
Stockport[1]
Stoke-on-Trent
Stroud
Sutton
Swindon
Tamworth
Tandridge
Taunton Deane
Teesdale
Teignbridge[1]
Tendring
Thanet
The Medway Towns
Three Rivers
Thurrock
Torridge
Tower Hamlets
Trafford
Uttlesford
Wakefield
Walsall[1]
Waltham Forest[2]
Wandsworth
Wansbeck
Warrington
Warwick
Watford
Waveney
Waverley
Wealden
Wear Valley
Wellingborough
Welwyn Hatfield
West Lancashire
Winchester
Wirral
Woking
Wokingham
Wolverhampton
Worcester[1]
Wycombe
York

[1] On current transfer programme

[2] On Round 2 Arms-length Management Organisation programme

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the housing improvement resources provided to the London borough of Islington for each of the last five years and the projected expenditure for the financial year 2003–2004. [100272]

Mr. McNulty: The housing resources, as allocated through the Housing Investment Programme, for London borough of Islington for the past five years are as follows:

	£ million
1998–99	18.86
1999–2000	18.15
2000–01	28.56
2001–02	38.3
2002–03	40.24

The allocation for financial year 2003–04 is £39.44 million.

Mr. Tony Clarke: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many new residential dwellings were built in the borough of Northampton in *(a)* 2001–02, *(b)* 2002–03; and how many will be built in 2003–04. [100807]

Mr. McNulty: In 2001–02 935 new residential dwellings were built in the borough with 74 per cent. built on brownfield land. Based on an average over the last six years, Northampton borough council expects that there will be an average of 849 new completions per annum in 2002–03 and 2003–04.

Mr. Hopkins: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the English authorities who have yet to submit an option appraisal for housing to his Department. [100332]

Mr. McNulty: My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister recently announced, in "Sustainable communities: building for the future", that all authorities with housing stock would, in future, need to produce objective and rigorous option appraisals, which are to be signed-off by Government regional offices, by July 2005. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister will be issuing guidance to authorities about the arrangements for submitting and signing off option appraisals shortly.

Pollution (Fines)

Norman Baker: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much has been levied in fines by local authorities against *(a)* companies, *(b)* local authorities and *(c)* individuals, with regard to incidences of pollution, broken down by type of pollution incidence (i) in total, (ii) in each region and (iii) per fine in each year since 1995. [99256]

Alun Michael: Local authorities' main pollution control responsibilities are under Parts I, III and IV of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 (industrial air pollution control, statutory nuisance, and litter respectively) and the Clean Air Act 1993.

With regard to Part I of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, I refer the hon. Member to my reply to his question 190 on the order page of 21 February 2003,

The Department holds no data on Part III of the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

Total fines in England and Wales with respect to Part IV of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 were as follows. The Department is unable to break down this data by region and is only available from 1997 onwards:

Date	*Total (£)*
1997–98	727
1998–99	4,778
1999–2000	2,970
2000–01	2,310

The Department holds no data on the Clean Air Act 1993.

Local authorities have been informed of the recently-issued toolkit—"Costing the Earth, Guidance for Sentencers"—which my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment launched on 20 November 2002, is available on the Magistrates Association website www.magistrates-association.org.uk/news/whats_new.htm

Public Servant of the Year

Mr. Laws: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister who the winners were of the Public Servant of the Year Award 2002; what the cost was of this initiative; and if he will make a statement. [99890]

Mr. Alexander: I have been asked to reply.

The Cabinet Office and the Office of Government Commerce are non financial sponsors of the Public Servant of the Year Awards. Any costs of the scheme are borne by CIPFA.

The event is financed from the commercial sponsorship of the award ceremony by a number of leading companies. There is no cost to the public purse.

CIPFA and Public Finance magazine are the organisers of the award and undertake all of the administrative arrangements. A small team in the Cabinet Office maintain regular contact with the organisers.

The list of winners in 2002 are noted as follows:

The Award for Innovation—sponsored by Zurich Municipal

Ms Jan Nicholson, Senior Occupational Therapist, S. Derbyshire Acute Hospital NHS Trust

The Award for Leadership—sponsored by Anon

Ms Danielle Cotton, Firefighter, London Fire Brigade

The Front-line Worker Award—sponsored by Eagle Star

Mr. Bill Marney, Social Worker, Lincolnshire Social Services

The Turn-round Manager Award—sponsored by Courtenay

Mr. Richard Vince, Prison Service, has since been promoted

The Social Inclusion Award—sponsored by UNISON

Mrs. Ragbir Virdee, Project Worker, Nottingham City Social Services

The Award for Managerial Excellence—sponsored by Reed Accountancy Personnel

Mrs. Terry Owen, Volunteer Manager, Aintree Hospitals Volunteer Scheme
The Award for Progress through Partnership—sponsored by RSM Robson Rhodes
Mr. Noel Rice, Energy Conservation Manager, Northern Ireland Housing Executive
The Award for Outstanding Contribution by a Non-Executive—sponsored by Task (Software) Ltd.
Mr. Cyril Baily, Chair of Governors, Ormskirk School
Central Government—sponsored by IFF Ltd.
Ms Wendy Gilroy, Customer Services Officer, Benefits Agency
Local Government—sponsored by Vantagepoint
Ms Clare Wichbold, Regeneration Officer, Herefordshire Partnership
Education—sponsored by Eagle Star
Mr. Andrew Parsons, Headteacher, Plymstock School
Health—sponsored by PPS Ltd.
Mr. Jeremy Handley, Non Executive Director, Northgate & Prudhoe NHS Trust
Housing—sponsored by the Chartered Institute of Housing
Mr. Tom Manion, Chief Executive, Irwell Valley Housing Association
Uniformed Services—Anite Public Sector
Mr. Howard Wright, Community Constable, West Midlands Police
Voluntary Sector—sponsored by Community Care Magazine
Mrs. Jenni Thomas, Chief Executive, The Child Bereavement Trust
Outstanding Public Servant of the Year—sponsored by Hewlett Packard and Amey
Danielle Cotton, Firefighter, London Fire Brigade

Public Works Loans Commissioners

Matthew Green: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what estimate he has made of the payments to be made by the public works loans commissioners for overhanging debt in each of the next five years. [99398]

Mr. McNulty: There is no estimate covering this period. Resources required by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister to meet commitments for overhanging debt in each of the next five years will depend on future applications from the local authorities seeking to transfer their housing in any particular year.

Travellers

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to introduce further legislation to assist parish councils and other landowners whose land is illegally occupied by travellers. [99780]

Mr. McNulty: There are no current plans to introduce further legislation to assist parish councils and other landowners whose land is illegally occupied by travellers.

Parish councils and other landowners are able to go through the civil courts for the recovery of their land under Orders 24 and 113. Parish councils can also liaise with their county council regarding the possibility of serving a Section 77 Direction under the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994.

Housing Industry (Unfair Contract Terms)

Mr. Hopkins: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what action he and his predecessors have taken to encourage the housing industry to comply with the Unfair Terms in Consumer Contracts Regulations 1999 and the originating European directive. [100334]

Mr. McNulty: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, East (Ms Prentice) on 12 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 841W.

Women's National Commission

Mr. Laws: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the remit is of the Women's National Commission; how many staff it has; what its total costs were in each year from 1996–97 to 2003–04 (planned); and if he will make a statement. [99899]

Ms Hewitt: I have been asked to reply.

The remit of the Women's National Commission is to make known to Government, by all possible means, the informed opinion of women. It is able to comment freely on government policy and inform government departments of the views of women, women's organisations and NGOs.

Currently, the WNC has a total of 10 staff. These include three permanent members of staff, one on secondment until June 2004; five temporary members of staff, all of whom will leave during the year, plus one unpaid internship.

The budgets for the financial years specified were:

Year	£
1996–97	243,342
1997–98	233,300
1998–99	299,895
1999–2000	250,025
2000–01	250,025
2001–02	303,000
2002–03	253,243

For the financial year 2003–04, the budget figures are yet to be confirmed by DTI.

PRIME MINISTER

Security and Intelligence Agencies

Mr. Laws: To ask the Prime Minister what total spending on security and intelligence agencies was in each year from 1998–99 to 2004–05; and if he will make a statement. [99893]

The Prime Minister: The Security and Intelligence Agencies' combined outturns and projected budgets for each year from 1998–99 to 2003–04 can be found in the tables on page 96 of the Cabinet Office's Departmental Report (Cm 5429).

The Department Report which will be published this spring will update this information and cover the period 1998–99 to 2005–06.

Engagements

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his diary engagements for 26 February 2003 from 1.30 pm to 7.00 pm. [100698]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 4 March 2003]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Milton Keynes (Dr. Starkey) in the House on 26 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 250.

Iraq

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister if he will publish the replies he gave between 1997 and 2001 to letters from Iraqi exiles requesting the use of armed force by the United Kingdom to overthrow Saddam Hussein. [99492]

The Prime Minister: Following my speech to the Labour Party spring conference on 15 February and my monthly press conference in Downing Street on 18 February, I made available copies of letters and an e-mail that I have received from Iraqi exiles. I have placed copies in the Libraries of the House.

University Admissions

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Prime Minister pursuant to his answer of 26 February 2003 to the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell, *Official Report*, column 257, what steps he is taking to ensure that university admissions are based on merit. [100575]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 4 March 2003]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for North West Norfolk, (Mr. Bellingham) at Prime Minister's Questions today.

CABINET OFFICE

Departmental Costs

Mr. Laws: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what the costs of the Cabinet Office were in each year from 1998–99 to 2004–05 (planned); and if he will make a statement. [99895]

Mr. Alexander: The costs of the Cabinet Office for each year from 1998–99 to 2003–04 can be found in the tables in the departmental report (Cm 5429) from page 89.

The departmental report which will be published in spring will update this information and cover the period 1998–99 to 2005–06.

Senior Civil Service

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many *(a)* civil servants and *(b)* senior civil servants were dismissed for poor performance in each of the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [100591]

Mr. Alexander: The figures for the numbers of staff who were dismissed from the civil service in the last 10 years are shown in the following table. These figures are based on headcount, permanent staff in all Departments. The data presented are for all dismissals. We do not hold separate records for poor performance as the reason for dismissal.

Leavers during 1992–2001 with selected leaving cause, dismissal, all permanent staff (headcount), of which senior civil servants

Year ending 31 March	*All staff*	*Senior civil servants*
1992	1,050	1
1993	1,030	0
1994	1,000	2
1995	880	2
1996	750	1
1997	870	0
1998	650	0
1999	590	1
2000	840	1
2001	1,020	3

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what discussions he has had with representatives from local government about widening the civil service fast-stream programme to cover local government; and if he will make a statement. [100592]

Mr. Alexander: Last year officials from my Department met representatives of the Local Government Employers Organisation under the auspices of the Public Sector Employment Forum and its recruitment sub-group. They discussed graduate and fast stream recruitment but there are no plans for the civil service scheme to cover local government. The Local Government Employers Organisation launched the inaugural recruitment campaign for their National Graduate Development Programme in March 2002. The first cohort of graduates joined the programme in September 2002.

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many Asian employees there have been in the senior civil service, broken down by Department, in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [100593]

Mr. Alexander: Declaration of ethnicity in the civil service is voluntary, so any numbers obtained may be an understatement of the true position.

For the senior civil service, the total number of staff in post of known Asian ethnic origin for each of the last five years is as follows:

	Number
1998	17
1999	17
2000	20
2001	26
2002	24

This personal information is supplied to the Cabinet Office in strict confidence, and cannot be broken down further owing to small numbers and disclosure rules.

TRANSPORT

Airport Security

Miss Anne McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the increased level of policing at UK airports; and whether the airports will meet the full cost of the additional policing. [98653]

Mr. Jamieson: As my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for the Home Department explained in his statement to the House on 13 February, an enhanced level of security was put in place in London on 11 February, this being most visible at Heathrow Airport. This was in response to a heightening of the threat to the UK from international terrorism.

The increase in policing at Heathrow and at other UK airports has been part of the response to this threat. The appropriate level of the additional policing is a matter for the operational judgement of Chief Officers of Police, in consultation as necessary. Where an airport has been designated under s26(3) of the Aviation Security Act 1982 policing costs are met by airport operators.

Since September 11, police forces have been able to bid for additional funding for various counter terrorist activities, including the protection of vulnerable sites such as airports. Given the nature of the funding, publicity is not being given to the activities it covers or what has been allocated to individual forces.

A36 Relief Scheme

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport for what reason the A36 (Wylye Valley Relief Road) Scheme has been delayed; and if he will make a statement. [100576]

Mr. Jamieson: The Wylye Valley Relief Road was recommendation as part of the Salisbury Transport Study which was included in Wiltshire county council's Local Transport Plan in July 2000. Wiltshire county council stated in their Annual Progress Report that 'Work is continuing on developing the route options and assessing potential impacts so that a preferred Route can be adopted'. The Bristol Bath to South Coast Study which is looking at the future of the A36 will report later this year and will give an indication of what further improvements are desirable on the route. I do not consider that this study has delayed this scheme.

Departmental Policies (Northampton, South)

Mr. Tony Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will set out, including statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Northampton South constituency, the effects on Northampton of his Department's policies and actions since June 2001. [100810]

Mr. Jamieson: Over the last three years my Department has allocated almost £37 million to Northamptonshire county council for the implementation of the Northamptonshire Local Transport Plan (LTP) (£11.866 million in 2001–02, £11.645 million in 2002–03, and £13.395 million for 2003–04). Such plans are an essential element of the Government's integrated transport policy, as set out in "Transport 2010—the 10-Year Plan", published in July 2000, and provide the delivery mechanism for a longer-term programme of local transport improvement and modernisation across the whole country.

Under the LTP system, funding is provided for a wide range of transport related activity, including the construction of major new road schemes, road and bridge maintenance, and the delivery of smaller integrated transport projects. While the local transport authorities, in this case Northamptonshire county council, are, quite rightly, allowed a good deal of flexibility on implementation of specific projects, they are required to submit Annual Progress Report (APRs), which include full details of the work undertaken and projects delivered in the previous year. Unfortunately, as the APR is a county-wide document, the information is not generally provided on a constituency or specific town or city basis and is reported on the financial year cycle. The following details for the 2001–02 period (April 2001-March 2002) are, however, worthy of note and provide a good example of the achievements being made:

Traffic Reduction in Northampton—inbound car vehicle traffic reduced by 3.8 per cent.

Increase Cycling Journeys in Northampton—0.2 per cent. increase in cycle flows.

Increase Bus Patronage in Northamptonshire—patronage increase of 7 per cent.

Road Casualty Reduction in Northamptonshire—killed or seriously injured figures for 2001 brought down to 29 per cent. below the 1994–98 baseline.

A fuller range of statistics and figures on the numerous schemes the county council have introduced since April 2001 are contained in the APRs issued for 2000–01 and 2001–02, which are readily available from the council. Details for 2002–03 will be available in the summer, when the next APRs are due to be submitted.

In addition to benefits and improvements brought about by funding under the Local Transport Plan, my Department also provides funding through the work of the Highways Agency in terms of the maintenance and improvements of the trunk road and motorway network. During the 2001–02 and 2002–03 financial years, the Agency has spent £24 million on major routes in Northamptonshire, including electronic information signs on the M1. In addition, since April 2001 the Highways Agency has spent £128 million on major routes as part of the Government's Targeted Programme of Investment.

Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many staff were employed by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency in each year since 1997. [100457]

Mr. Jamieson: The information requested is as follows:

Year	*Number of staff employed (full time equivalent)*
1997	3,801
1998	4,124
1999	4,408
2000	4,773
2001	5,268
2002	5,264

Extra staff were required by the Agency for the following reasons:

(a) major new initiatives such as the Statutory Off-Road Notification photographs on driving licences and Graduated Vehicle Excise Duty (712 posts);

(b) projects to implement policy changes, safeguard delivery of the core business and improve internal processes (168 posts);

(c) increased workload such as the introduction of extended hours in the Agency's call centre, and growth of volume transactions. Between 1996–97 and 2001–02, driver and vehicle volumes increased by almost 20 per cent., from 81.8 million transactions to 97.8 million (583 posts).

London Underground

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the total cost of investment is in the East London Extension; and if he will make a statement on its progress. [100271]

Mr. Jamieson: The business case for the project is being considered by Ministers. I hope a decision will be announced shortly.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the estimated date is for the handover of responsibility for the London Underground to Transport for London; and if he will make a statement. [100996]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer my hon. Friend to the written statement which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made to the House on 4 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 10WS.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport under franchise agreements, how many passengers the underground train operating companies have agreed to carry on each of their route groups; how many passengers in each group would constitute overcrowding; and if he will make a statement. [101000]

Mr. Jamieson: Under the PPP, London Underground will continue to be responsible for running the trains, working the signals and operating the stations. London Underground will also have responsibility for all aspects of safety. The public sector will remain responsible for the safe operation of a unified network.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what arrangements are being planned for compensation of Central Line passengers; who will qualify; how much money he estimates is involved; and if he will make a statement; [101001]

(2) how London Underground has informed Central Line passengers of their entitlement to claim refund of fares for the period of the line's closure; when such information was first displayed; and where it is displayed; and if he will make a statement. [100999]

Mr. Jamieson: The administration of customer refunds under London Underground's Customer Charter is an operational matter for London Underground. However, I understand from London Underground that they have actively contacted the season ticket holders they have been able to identify that have been directly affected by the closure, that they have written to all stakeholders (including MPs) and have put up posters across their network advising how those entitled to claim can go about it. London Underground have also included a comprehensive section on their website (www.thetube.com) and have used other media to spread this message. London Underground's Customer Service Centre has recruited extra staff in order to deal with the large volume of calls they have been receiving.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport pursuant to his answer of 4 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 140W, on London Underground, what the information provided to him by London Underground was relating to *(a)* the standard of maintenance and safety of the London Underground track and *(b)* the standard of the rolling stock used; when he expects to receive the reports of the inquiries of (i) the Health and Safety Executive and (ii) London Underground; and if he will make a statement. [101021]

Mr. Jamieson: The interim report of London Underground's investigation into the derailment at Chancery Lane, published on 21 February, confirmed that the derailment was caused by a motor falling from the train, and that the ongoing investigation will examine the relevance or otherwise of the maintenance of the rolling stock and the underlying causes leading to the failure of the traction motor mountings. London Underground expects to complete most parts of the investigation by the end of March but cannot yet say with confidence when the technical investigation will be complete.

The independent Health and Safety Executive is conducting its own investigation into the causes of the derailment. HSE will take as long as it needs to complete its investigations.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the insurance policy relevant to the recent accident at Chancery Lane on the Central Line; what it covers; how much he estimates the claim by London Underground will amount to; and if he will make a statement. [101024]

Mr. Jamieson: London Underground inform me that the loss adjuster appointed to investigate their property damage claim has indicated that the insured loss (for reinstatement or replacement of assets damaged in the incident) will not exceed £3 million. Of this, some £2 million is self-insured by London Underground and the remaining £1 million will be covered by their own Guernsey based insurance company (London Transport Insurance Guernsey). No claim will be made against external insurers.

London Underground does not insure either for loss of revenue or for increased costs of working.

Ministerial Travel

Mr. Simon Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many times since 2001 he has taken flights on departmental duties in the UK; how many of these were *(a)* charter flights, *(b)* first or club class and *(c)* by helicopter; and who accompanied him on each trip. [95388]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department was formed on 29 May 2002. Since its formation, the Secretary of State has taken three flights on departmental duties in the UK: none was on *(a)* a charter flight; one was *(b)* club class, travelling with two officials from my Department; and two were on *(c)* helicopters—once to fly over the route of the M6 toll road, the other on a helicopter operated by the Marine and Coastguard Agency for which the Secretary of State is responsible.

All travel is undertaken fully in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code and Travel by Ministers, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

Concessionary Fares

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on rail concessions for the elderly. [100460]

Mr. Jamieson: The national Senior Railcard is available to people aged 60 years and over. This costs £18 per year and offers one-third off most rail fares. The schemes is run by the Association of Train Operating Companies (ATOC), and all train operating companies are required to participate. Also, train operators are required by the SRA to participate in any local authority's concessionary travel scheme providing that there is no net loss to the train operator or to its budget. In London, the Freedom Pass also allows free rail travel for the elderly on the heavy rail network in the Greater London area. This scheme is funded by the local authorities and train operating companies are required to participate.

Rail Research UK

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on Rail Research UK. [100228]

Mr. Jamieson: Rail Research UK has been established by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council as a interdisciplinary centre for rail systems research. The £7 million centre involves twelve research groups from seven UK universities.

It aims to broaden the scope of rail research, to promote innovation, to strengthen the science base and to focus longer term research to help and achieve a safer and more reliable railway while reducing the impact on the environment. Rail Research UK was officially launched on 25 February 2003 and becomes operational from April 2003.

Railways

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what guidelines his Department gives to rail companies regarding the issuing of reduced price tickets. [100459]

Mr. Jamieson: About 44 per cent. fares are regulated. It is for train operators to decide other fares levels taking account of competition and market demand.

Road Gritting

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the gritting of back roads in Lancashire during the winter. [100611]

Mr. Jamieson: There is currently no statutory duty obliging highway authorities in England to grit roads in order to prevent ice from forming. We shall, however, introduce such a duty at a suitable legislative opportunity.

In the absence of a statutory duty, we do, nevertheless, expect local highway authorities to grit their roads in accordance with the Code of Practice for highway maintenance "Delivering Best Value in Highway Maintenance", which was published in July 2001 by the Institution of Highways and Transportation. The Code recommends that a hierarchy of roads be established for winter maintenance treatment, in regular consultation with the local community. Back roads would not normally feature highly in these hierarchies.

Rail Services

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received from rail user groups regarding the proposed reduction in train services on commuter routes in the South East. [100656]

Mr. Jamieson: None.

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how his Department is encouraging a reduction in travel times on trains between the North West and London; [100463]

(2) if he will make a statement on travel restrictions on rail services from the North West to London. [100462]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority has produced a practical draft strategy for the West Coast Main Line which delivers a balanced package of improvements for both passengers and freight operators, including substantial reductions in journey times by 2004 and 2006. The strategy proposes greater use of temporary closures of some sections of line to allow the upgrade to be completed more quickly and efficiently.

Trust Ports

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which trust ports are classified as public corporations. [100668]

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Mr. Jamieson: In discussion with the Office of National Statistics, we have identified 21 trust ports in England and Wales that might fall within the classification as public corporations at the present time. These are:

Bridlington
Caernarfon
Chichester
Dover
Falmouth
Flamborough (North Sea Landing)
Harwich
Hope Cove
Langstone
Littlehampton
Milford Haven
Newlyn
Orford
Poole
Port Isaac
Port of London
Port of Tyne
Sandwich
Sandersfoot
Shoreham
Teignmouth

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the financial reporting arrangements are for trust ports now classified as public corporations. [100700]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 4 March 2003]*: As we are still working to assess what the impact of this classification might be, there have been no changes to the financial reporting arrangements at this time. All non-fishery trust ports are already required to submit their annual accounts to the Secretary of State under the Harbours Act 1964.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport pursuant to his answer of 16 December 2002, *Official Report,* column 644W, on trust ports, what progress has been made on discussions with the Office for National Statistics; and if he will make a statement. [100701]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 4 March 2003]:* We have now identified with the Office of National Statistics which trust ports might fall within the classification as public corporations, and my officials are currently working to identify the financial and resource implications of this classification for those ports and the Department.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport why there is no reference to the trust ports classified as public corporations in the Resource Accounts 2001–02 of the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions; and if he will make a statement. [100703]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 4 March 2003]:* At the time of preparation of the Department's 2001–02 Resource Accounts we were still discussing the proposed classification with ONS, including trying to identify which ports would fall within that classification. Therefore we were unable to include any reference to the trust ports in those accounts.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Departmental Policies (Northampton, South)

Mr. Tony Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will set out, including statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Northampton, South constituency, the effects on Northampton of her Department's policies and actions since June 2001. [100809]

Alun Michael: Information and statistics on the effect of the Department's policies are not normally held on a parliamentary constituency basis. However, the latest information on regional progress in the national headline indicators of sustainable development were published by the Department in the second edition of the Regional quality of life report on 21 June 2002. This provides updated regional figures and analysis for 13 of the 15 headline indicators for each of the English Government Office Regions. The Government's third annual report on sustainable development in the UK—Achieving a better quality of life—was published by Defra on 24 February 2003. Both publications are available on the Government's sustainable development website: www.sustainable-development.gov.uk. A wide range of information about the Department's policies and work is also included in the Defra Publication Scheme which was introduced in November 2002 and is available on the Defra website at www.defra.gov.uk. The above mentioned reports have been placed in the Library of the House.

Data on river water quality at local authority level and air quality from local monitoring sites are available from the Defra and Environment Agency websites, and specifically at: LA-level river quality data on EPSIM website: http//www2.defra.gov.uk/db/rq/index.htm; EA "What's in your backyard "—includes rivers but not air quality: http//216.31.193.171/asp/1_introduction.asp and the Air Quality Archive at www.airquality.co.uk/archive/index.php.

Sustainable Communities Plan

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what involvement her Department had in the development of the Sustainable Communities Plan and its impact on the consumption of natural resources. [100366]

Alun Michael: Defra was consulted during the development of the Sustainable Communities Plan. Officials are now involved in discussions on how to take the proposals in the plan forward.

DEFENCE

Gulf (Medical Deployment)

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many medical staff, broken down by specialty, will be deployed to the Gulf in the event of a conflict. [98930]

Dr. Moonie: If military action is undertaken by the coalition, just over 2,000 United Kingdom medical personnel are planned to be deployed to the Gulf region as follows:

	Number
Registered medical practitioners	800
Medics	300
Nurses	800
Technicians	150

Amphetamines (US Military)

Kevin Brennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make representations to the USA Secretary of Defence about the use of amphetamines by US military personnel in joint military operations with British armed forces. [96752]

Mr. Hoon *[holding answer 10 February 2003]:* This is a matter for the US authorities.

Anglo-French Agreements

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place a copy of agreements and declarations made with the French Government at the recent Le Touquet summit in the Library. [98814]

Mr. Hoon: The United Kingdom and France agreed a joint declaration on defence at the Le Touquet Summit on 4 February. I have placed a copy of the declaration in the Library of the House.

Two Letters of Intent were also agreed at the Summit. These were a general agreement on navy-to-navy co-operation and an agreement on exploring possibilities for closer co-ordination of aircraft carrier operations, in particular harmonising activity cycles and training. Both documents contain information received in confidence from the French Government. I am therefore withholding these documents under Exemption 1c (Defence, Security and International Relations) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Battle Tanks

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many and what types of main battle tanks are held by the UK armed forces; and of these how many are being used for *(a)* static displays and *(b)* target practice. [100613]

Mr. Ingram: The Main Battle Tank in-service with the United Kingdom armed forces is the Challenger 2, of which there are 386. None of these are used either as static displays or for target practice.

The Ministry of Defence still holds 161 Challenger 1 and two Chieftain Main Battle Tanks. These are no longer in-service, but are not used as static displays or for target practice.

There may well be examples of old, retired Main Battle Tanks used for static display purposes or for target practice but such information is not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Armed Forces (Bullying and Harassment)

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* incidents and *(b)* offences of (i) bullying and (ii) harassment in the Armed Forces were recorded in each of the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [100171]

Dr. Moonie: The requirement for separate identification and recording of allegations of bullying and harassment was introduced in 1997. Figures for the last five years are as follows:

Financial year	*Naval Service*	*RAF*	*Calendar year*	*Army*
Bullying				
1997–98	14	10	1998	117
1998–99	11	9	1999	71
1999–2000	19	27	2000	78
2000–01	16	38	2001	59
2001–02	17	25	2002	36
Harassment				
1997–98	10	24	1998	26
1998–99	25	20	1999	33
1999–2000	16	13	2000	31
2000–01	16	14	2001	26
2001–02	3	13	2002	23

There is no offence of bullying as such. It is not possible therefore to determine if bullying played a part in service disciplinary proceedings without examining each case separately.

The services' policy is that no form of harassment or intimidation will be tolerated; all allegations are investigated, and appropriate action taken. Although the numbers of complaints of bullying and harassment are small, the Armed Forces see no room for complacency and aim to confront unacceptable behaviour at every opportunity.

Cyprus

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what effect the handover of land under the offer made by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in the revised 3rd draft of the Kofi Annan plan for a comprehensive settlement in Cyprus is expected to have on the operation of the British sovereign base areas in Cyprus; and if he will make a statement; [100267]

(2) what land is to be handed over under the offer made by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in the revised 3rd draft of the Kofi Annan plan for a comprehensive settlement in Cyprus; what assets and facilities are situated there; what that land is used for; and if he will make a statement. [100268]

Mr. Hoon: In order to help secure a comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus problem, the Government decided to offer accede parts of the United Kingdom's Sovereign Base Areas (SBAs) which are no longer essential for military purposes. The offer consists of 45 square miles, just under half of the total area of the SBAs.

The areas in question are mainly agricultural and residential and do not contain military infrastructure. There will be no adverse impact on the ability of British Forces Cyprus to carry out its tasks. We will also continue to perform the same tasks of civil administration in the areas remaining within the SBAs. Our offer was made within the context of UN negotiations to bring about a settlement and is conditional on the settlement being adopted and ratified by all parties. If either side rejects the UN proposals, or the proposals are rejected in a referendum by either side, the offer will become null and void.

Archives

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people were employed in the departmental file stores in each year since 1997; how many have been transferred to the private sector; and if he will make a statement. [98857]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence has 13 main archive facilities. By far, the largest is the central Records Repository that is located at Hayes in West London. The repository houses the bulk of the MOD's archived material but there are other, smaller, MOD record stores in locations around Great Britain. The following table shows these locations with staff numbers for the years 1997 to 2003 with explanatory notes. Only staff who work 'hands on' in a file store are included. The figures reflect established numbers ie they do not take into account temporary staff vacancies at any time, and they are based on permanent full-time equivalent staff. All posts are civil service unless stated in the notes. The total number of staff that were/are employed in departmental file stores in each year are shown in the last row of the table. To date 42 civil service members ofstaff have transferred to the private sector over the period.

Site	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*	*2003 (to date)*
Central Repository, Hayes[1]	60	62	62	70	65	66	69
MOD, London	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
RN personnel records, Portsmouth	4	3	3	3	3	3	4
RN personnel records, Gosport[2]	8	9	7	4.5	4	5	6
RM personnel records, Gosport	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Army personnel records, London	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Army personnel records, Glasgow[3]	36.5	74	66	67	64	35	33
RAF personnel records, Innsworth, near Gloucester	13.5	13.5	17	16	14	13.5	13
Home Guard records, Droitwich Spa	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
RAF historical records, Bentley Priory	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
MOD civilian personnel records, Llangenech	9	9	9	9	7	7	7
War Pensions records, Preston[4]	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Armed Forces medical records, Shoeburyness	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
Total	148	187. 5	181	186. 5	174	146. 5	149

[1] None of the posts have transferred to the private sector yet but the MOD repository at Hayes has been considered for contractorisation in recent years as part of the public private partnership (PPP) initiative. This PPP project is a collaborative pan-government venture, led by the MOD and involving 13 other government organisations. The project has recently been granted approval to appoint a preferred bidder with a view to a contract possibly being in place during the summer of 2003. Some of the civil servants currently employed at the site may transfer to the incoming provider when the contract takes effect. Their terms and conditions will be protected in line with the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) (TUPE) regulations.

[2] On 1 January 1998 Electronic Data Systems (EDS) took over responsibility and eight members of staff transferred across from the civil service.

[3] On 1 October 2001 EDS took over responsibility and 34 members of staff transferred across from the civil service. Prior to EDS taking over responsibility, the file store also included mail operations for a large part of the MOD Glasgow organisation. It is not possible to accurately separate mail operations staff from file store staff. However, it is reasonable to assume that file store staff would have numbered around 35 in the years 1998, 1999, 2000 and 2001.

[4] MOD war pension records are held by the War Pensions Agency at Preston, however, these are stored in a Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) facility that is staffed entirely by DWP civil servants. Therefore it is not included in this MOD answer.

Depleted Uranium

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what stocks of depleted uranium weapons are held in the theatre of conflict around Iraq; and under what conditions they would be used. [100278]

Mr. Hoon *[holding answer 3 March 2003]:* We have a duty to provide our troops with the best available equipment with which to protect themselves and to succeed in conflict. Depleted Uranium (DU) tank ammunition is judged to be the most effective weapon against armour. United Kingdom forces currently deploying to the Gulf have DU munitions available as part of their armoury for potential operation.

I am withholding the information requested on stocks of DU weapons in accordance with Exemption 1 (Defence, security and international relations) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

HMS Montrose

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the HMS Montrose refit will be complete; how much it will cost; whether it is on budget; what the target date is for completion; when the ship will be ready for service; and if he will make a statement. [99547]

Mr. Ingram: HMS Montrose's refit at Rosyth is planned for completion in February 2004 and following associated sea trials, she is expected to be ready for operational deployment later that month. The final refit cost will be agreed once all work is completed, but is expected to be just under £23 million. This exceeds the original budget as it now reflects possible changes in labour rates and takes into account additional work identified after the budget had been set.

Joint Strike Fighter

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reason the requirement for externally mounted Brimstone and ASRAAM missiles for the future Joint Strike Fighter has been removed; and what missiles will be fitted to the future Joint Strike Fighter as alternatives to the requirement for externally-mounted Brimstone and ASRAAM. [98235]

Mr. Ingram: While the design of the Joint Strike Fighter (JSF), to be known in United Kingdom service as the Future Joint Combat Aircraft (FJCA), provides for the external and internal carriage of ASRAAM and Brimstone, the external carriage of weapons would adversely impact on the aircraft's radar signature. Our weapons strategy for JSF is still evolving, but internal carriage of weapons is required in the high threat environments in which we expect FJCA to operate. On current plans, therefore, FJCA will carry both ASRAAM and Brimstone internally. It is not currently considered cost effective for FJCA to carry these weapons externally as well.

Meteor Programme

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to the written Ministerial statement of 8th January, Official Report, columns 158–96W, on Meteor, when month 1 of the programme will be. [99604]

Mr. Ingram: Month 1 of the Meteor contract was January 2003.

NBC Suits

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what different sizes of NBC suit are available *(a)* to British forces, and *(b)* to British forces in the Gulf; and if he will make a statement. [99362]

Mr. Ingram: The NBC suit, issued to all British forces regardless of service or location, is available in five standard sizes: extra-small, small, medium, large and extra-large. Additionally there is a 'Special Measure' facility that allows the procurement of made-to-measure suits for extreme sizes.

Nuclear Weapons

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps the Government is taking to fulfil its obligations under the Non Proliferation Treaty *(a)* to limit the spread of nuclear weapons and *(b)* to move actively towards the elimination of UK nuclear weapons. [99671]

Mr. Hoon: The United Kingdom has an excellent record in fulfilling its NPT obligations both on non-proliferation and on nuclear disarmament.

In order to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons the Government has taken the following measures to create regional nuclear weapon free zones and help stop non nuclear weapon states from acquiring the ability to produce and test nuclear weapons:

Ratified the relevant protocols to the Treaty of Raratonga (South Pacific Nuclear Weapon Free Zone) and signed and ratified the relevant protocols to the Treaty of Pelindaba (African Nuclear Weapon Free Zone) as well as to the Antarctic Treaty and the Treaty of Tlatelolco (Latin American and Caribbean Nuclear Weapon Free Zone);

Supported Nuclear Weapon-Free Zones in Central Asia, South East Asia, and the Middle East, and is in negotiations with the relevant states for the first two of these;

Continued to press for negotiations to begin at the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva of a Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty;

Ratified the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) and promoted its early entry into force.

To gain implementation of further non-proliferation measures aimed at preventing the diversion of civil nuclear material to military nuclear programmes the UK has:

Supported universal application of Comprehensive Safeguards Agreements;

Urged all States that have not yet done so to conclude and bring into force Additional Protocols to strengthen the safeguards system.

The UK is an active member of the Nuclear Suppliers Group and the Zangger Committee, which work to control the export and transfer of nuclear and dual use items.

To help reduce the chances of nuclear materials falling into unauthorised hands, and to terrorists, the UK is supporting amendments to improve the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Materials. The UK has also made significant voluntary contributions to the IAEA's Nuclear Security Fund, established after September 11. We have pledged a total of 750,000 over three years.

To help address the nuclear proliferation risk posed by the nuclear legacy left by the Former Soviet Union the UK committed in July 2002 up to $750 million over 10 years towards the G8 Global Partnership Against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction. This includes a programme to help dispose of surplus Russian weapons grade plutonium so that it cannot be used in weapons. In the three year period ending March 2004 the UK will spend up to 84 million for the development of other programmes to deal with nuclear security and safety risks in the Former Soviet Union.

The UK continues actively to support efforts to resolve the unanswered questions about Iraq's nuclear programmes. We have also deplored North Korea's announced intention to withdraw from the NPT and supported IAEA resolutions aimed at achieving North Korea's compliance with its safeguards obligations. The Government has strengthened its ability to take action against anyone in the UK or UK citizens abroad seeking to develop, obtain or use nuclear weapons and created new offences for those seeking to do so.

To actively move towards the elimination of UK nuclear weapons the UK has:

Withdrawn and dismantled the RAFs freefall nuclear bomb so that Trident is now our only nuclear weapons system;

Reduced our operationally available stockpile to fewer than 200 warheads, which is a reduction of more than 70 per cent. in the potential explosive power of our nuclear forces since the end of the Cold War;

Dismantled the UK's last Chevaline warhead in April 2002;

Reduced the readiness of our nuclear forces. Only a single Trident submarine is now on deterrent patrol, carrying 48 warheads. The submarine on patrol is normally on several days5 "notice to fire" and its missiles are de-targeted;

Placed fissile material no longer required for defence purposes under international safeguards and all enrichment and reprocessing facilities in the UK are now liable to international inspection;

Been more transparent about our nuclear and fissile material stockpiles and begun a national historical accounting study for fissile material produced;

Published an initial summary report on the verification of the reduction and elimination of nuclear weapons. The Atomic Weapons Establishment Aldermaston is undertaking work on this issue.

Future Carriers (Press Briefings)

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a transcript of the press briefings held by the Minister for Defence Procurement and the Chief of Defence Procurement following his statement on the Future Carriers. [98815]

Mr. Ingram: Transcripts of press conferences are usually required for internal use only, and are not placed in the Library of the House. However, recognising the public interest in such events, we have decided that in future, transcripts of press conferences will be made available in the news section of the Ministry of Defence Internet site at: www.news.mod.uk. I refer the hon. Member to the website where a transcript of this particular press conference has been posted.

RAF Continuous Attitude Survey

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many RAF personnel in the latest analysed Royal Air Force continuous attitude survey said they did not take all their annual leave; what percentage of those responding to this question this represents; what percentage cited service commitments or a combination of service commitments and personal reasons for not taking full leave entitlement; when the survey was completed; and if he will make a statement. [99188]

Dr. Moonie: The latest analysed survey was issued to 2,000 RAF personnel on 1 February 2002, and completed by them during February to April 2002. It was published in September 2002.

The extent to which Service personnel made use of their annual leave entitlement, and the reasons for not doing so, if applicable were assessed by two specific questions, the responses to which are set out in the following tables;

It is not possible to separate the 'don't know' from the 'not applicable' responses.

Table 1—How much of your annual leave entitlement did you use in your last leave year?

	Airmen	Officers	Total
All of it			
Number	200	26	226
Percentage	21.0	11.9	19.3
Did not take 1–5 working days			
Number	192	33	225
Percentage	20.1	15.1	19.2
Did not take 6–10 working days			
Number	196	43	239
Percentage	20.5	19.7	20.4
Did not take 11–15 working days			
Number	275	70	345
Percentage	28.8	32.1	29.4
Did not take 16 or more working days			
Number	91	46	137
Percentage	9.5	21.1	11.7
Total			
Number	954	218	1,172
Percentage	100	100	100

Table 2—If you were unable to take your full leave entitlement, what was the reason?

	Airmen	Officers	Total
Personal			
Number	98	12	110
Percentage	13.6	6.3	12.1
Service commitments			
Number	334	92	426
Percentage	46.5	48.2	46.9
Combination personal reasons/Service commitments			
Number	286	87	373
Percentage	39.8	45.5	41.0
Total			
Number	718	191	909
Percentage	100	100	100

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many RAF personnel in the latest analysed Royal Air Force continuous attitude survey indicated they were *(a)* very satisfied, *(b)* satisfied, *(c)* neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, *(d)* dissatisfied, *(e)* very dissatisfied and *(f)* do not know regarding (i) the direction and strategy of the RAF, (ii) the future of the RAF, (iii) the impact of change on the RAF, (iv) the effects of civilianisation and contractorisation on the RAF, (v) the quality of own line management, (vi) the quality of line management in their working group, (vii) the quality of line management in the RAF, (viii) the quality of leadership in the RAF, (ix) the RAF's compliance with employment legislation and (x) the effect of a service lifestyle on their family life; what percentage of those responding to this question each option represents; when the survey was completed; and if he will make a statement. [99189]

Dr. Moonie: The latest analysed survey was issued to 2000 RAF personnel on 1 February 2002, and completed by them during February to April 2002. It was published in September 2002.

The survey assessed the level of individual's satisfaction of the direction and strategy of the RAF, the future of the RAF, the impact of change on the RAF, the effects of civilianisation and contractorisation on the RAF, the quality of own line management, the quality of line management in their working group, the quality of line management in the RAF, the quality of leadership in the RAF, the RAF's compliance with employment legislation and the effect of a service lifestyle on their family life. This was achieved by 10 specific questions, the responses to each of which questions are set out in the following tables.

It is not possible to separate the 'Do not know' from the 'not applicable' responses.

Table 1: Please indicate how satisfied or dissatisfied you are with the direction and strategy of the RAF

	Airmen	*Officers*	*Total*
Very satisfied			
Number	14	—	14
Percentage	1.5	—	1.2
Satisfied			
Number	210	54	264
Percentage	22.2	24.7	22.6
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied			
Number	416	92	508
Percentage	43.9	42.0	43.6
Dissatisfied			
Number	220	58	278
Percentage	23.2	26.5	23.8
Very dissatisfied			
Number	67	12	79
Percentage	7.1	5.5	6.8
Do not know/not applicable			
Number	20	3	23
Percentage	2.1	1.4	2.0
Total			
Number	947	219	1,166
Percentage	100	100	100

Table 2: Please indicate how satisfied or dissatisfied you are with the future of the RAF

	Airmen	*Officers*	*Total*
Very satisfied			
Number	8	—	8
Percentage	0.8	—	0.7
Satisfied			
Number	191	45	236
Percentage	20.2	20.5	20.3
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied			
Number	345	93	438
Percentage	36.5	42.5	37.6
Dissatisfied			
Number	315	70	385
Percentage	33.3	32.0	33.0
Very dissatisfied			
Number	76	10	86
Percentage	8.0	4.6	7.4
Do not know/not applicable			
Number	11	1	12
Percentage	1.2	0.5	1.0
Total			
Number	946	219	1,165
Percentage	100	100	100

Table 3: Please indicate how satisfied or dissatisfied you are with the impact of change on the RAF

	Airmen	*Officers*	*Total*
Very satisfied			
Number	3	—	3
Percentage	0.3	—	0.3
Satisfied			
Number	129	25	154
Percentage	13.7	11.5	13.3
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied			
Number	337	70	407
Percentage	35.7	32.1	35.0
Dissatisfied			
Number	354	104	458
Percentage	37.5	47.7	39.4
Very dissatisfied			
Number	105	18	123
Percentage	11.1	8.3	10.6
Do not know/not applicable			
Number	16	1	17
Percentage	1.7	0.5	1.5
Total			
Number	944	218	1,162
Percentage	100	100	100

Table 4: Please indicate how satisfied or dissatisfied you are with the effects of civilianisation and contractorisation on the RAF

	Airmen	*Officers*	*Total*
Very satisfied			
Number	1	1	2
Percentage	0.1	0.5	0.2
Satisfied			
Number	42	8	50
Percentage	4.4	3.7	4.3
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied			
Number	152	37	189
Percentage	16.1	16.9	16.2
Dissatisfied			
Number	373	103	476
Percentage	39.4	47.0	40.9
Very dissatisfied			
Number	371	70	441
Percentage	39.2	32.0	37.9
Do not know/not applicable			
Number	7	—	7
Percentage	0.7	—	0.6
Total			
Number	946	219	1,165
Percentage	100	100	100

Table 5: Please indicate how satisfied or dissatisfied you are with the quality of your own line management

	Airmen	*Officers*	*Total*
Very satisfied			
Number	78	14	92
Percentage	8.2	6.4	7.9
Satisfied			
Number	464	115	579
Percentage	49.0	52.5	49.7
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied			
Number	230	60	290
Percentage	24.3	27.4	24.9
Dissatisfied			
Number	125	23	148
Percentage	13.2	10.5	12.7
Very dissatisfied			
Number	46	5	51
Percentage	4.9	2.3	4.4
Do not know/not applicable			
Number	4	2	6
Percentage	0.4	0.9	0.5
Total			
Number	947	219	1,166
Percentage	100	100	100

Table 6: Please indicate how satisfied or dissatisfied you are with the quality of line management in your working group

	Airmen	Officers	Total
Very satisfied			
Number	73	11	84
Percentage	7.7	5.0	7.2
Satisfied			
Number	443	115	558
Percentage	46.8	52.5	47.9
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied			
Number	269	63	332
Percentage	28.4	28.8	28.5
Dissatisfied			
Number	109	20	129
Percentage	11.5	9.1	11.1
Very dissatisfied			
Number	42	4	46
Percentage	4.4	1.8	3.9
Do not know/not applicable			
Number	10	6	16
Percentage	1.1	2.7	1.4
Total			
Number	946	219	1,165
Percentage	100	100	100

Table 7: Please indicate how satisfied or dissatisfied you are with the quality of line management in the RAF

	Airmen	Officers	Total
Very satisfied			
Number	13	1	14
Percentage	1.4	0.5	1.2
Satisfied			
Number	283	60	343
Percentage	29.9	27.4	29.5
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied			
Number	421	112	533
Percentage	44.6	51.1	45.8
Dissatisfied			
Number	172	39	211
Percentage	18.2	17.8	18.1
Very dissatisfied			
Number	41	3	44
Percentage	4.3	1.4	3.8
Do not know/not applicable			
Number	15	4	19
Percentage	1.6	1.8	1.6
Total			
Number	945	219	1,164
Percentage	100	100	100

Table 8: Please indicate how satisfied or dissatisfied you are with the quality of leadership in the RAF

	Airmen	Officers	Total
Very satisfied			
Number	20	2	22
Percentage	2.1	0.9	1.9
Satisfied			
Number	265	59	324
Percentage	28.0	27.1	27.8
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied			
Number	364	77	441
Percentage	38.4	35.3	37.9
Dissatisfied			
Number	230	64	294
Percentage	24.3	29.4	25.2
Very dissatisfied			
Number	64	15	79
Percentage	6.8	6.9	6.8
Do not know/not applicable			
Number	4	1	5
Percentage	0.4	0.5	0.4
Total			
Number	947	218	1,165
Percentage	100	100	100

Table 9: Please indicate how satisfied or dissatisfied you are with the RAF's compliance with employment legislation

	Airmen	Officers	Total
Very satisfied			
Number	29	4	33
Percentage	3.1	1.8	2.8
Satisfied			
Number	312	62	374
Percentage	33.0	28.3	32.1
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied			
Number	403	98	501
Percentage	42.6	44.7	43.0
Dissatisfied			
Number	95	26	121
Percentage	10.0	11.9	10.4
Very dissatisfied			
Number	55	11	66
Percentage	5.8	5.0	5.7
Do not know/not applicable			
Number	52	18	70
Percentage	5.5	8.2	6.0
Total			
Number	946	219	1,165
Percentage	100	100	100

Table 10: Please indicate how satisfied or dissatisfied you are with the effect of service lifestyle on your family life

	Airmen	Officers	Total
Very satisfied			
Number	15	1	16
Percentage	1.6	0.5	1.4
Satisfied			
Number	237	47	284
Percentage	25.0	21.5	24.4
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied			
Number	319	81	400
Percentage	33.7	37.0	34.3
Dissatisfied			
Number	214	62	276
Percentage	22.6	28.3	23.7
Very dissatisfied			
Number	119	21	140
Percentage	12.6	9.6	12.0
Do not know/not applicable			
Number	43	7	50
Percentage	4.5	3.2	4.3
Total			
Number	947	219	1,166
Percentage	100	100	100

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many RAF personnel in the latest analysed Royal Air Force continuous attitude survey indicated they rated the level of morale of *(a)* themselves, *(b)* their flight/section/working group, *(c)* group and *(d)* the RAF as a whole as (i) very high, (ii) high, (iii) neither high nor low, (iv) low, (v) very low and (vi) did not know; what percentage of those responding to this question each option represents; when the survey was completed; and if he will make a statement. [99193]

Dr. Moonie: The latest analysed survey was issued to 2000 RAF personnel on 1 February 2002, and completed by them during February to April 2002. It was published in September 2002.

In this survey, the level of morale of individuals, along with an individual's perception of the level of morale within their flights or working groups and the RAF as a whole were investigated by three specific questions. The responses to each of these questions are set out in the following tables.

Table 1: How would you rate the level of morale for yourself?

	Airmen	*Officers*	*Total*
Very high			
Number	70	17	87
Percentage	7.4	7.8	7.4
High			
Number	326	85	411
Percentage	34.3	38.8	35.2
Neither high nor low			
Number	293	81	374
Percentage	30.8	37.0	32.0
Low			
Number	191	28	219
Percentage	20.1	12.8	18.7
Very low			
Number	70	8	78
Percentage	7.4	3.7	6.7
Do not know			
Number	—	—	—
Percentage	—	—	—
Total			
Number	950	219	1,169
Percentage	100	100	100

Table 2: How would you rate the level of morale for your flight/section/working group?

	Airmen	*Officers*	*Total*
Very high			
Number	21	2	23
Percentage	2.2	0.9	2.0
High			
Number	177	57	234
Percentage	18.6	26.4	20.1
Neither high nor low			
Number	338	115	453
Percentage	35.6	53.2	38.9
Low			
Number	295	34	329
Percentage	31.1	15.7	28.2
Very low			
Number	116	7	123
Percentage	12.2	3.2	10.5
Do not know			
Number	3	1	4
Percentage	0.3	0.5	0.3
Total			
Number	950	216	1,166
Percentage	100	100	100

Table 3: How would you rate the level of morale for the RAF as a whole?

	Airmen	*Officers*	*Total*
Very high			
Number	2	—	2
Percentage	0.2	—	0.2
High			
Number	44	6	50
Percentage	4.6	2.7	4.3
Neither high nor low			
Number	281	80	361
Percentage	29.6	36.5	30.9
Low			
Number	467	111	578
Percentage	49.2	50.7	49.4
Very low			
Number	114	12	126
Percentage	12.0	5.5	10.8
Do not know			
Number	42	10	52
Percentage	4.4	4.6	4.4
Total			
Number	950	219	1,169
Percentage	100	100	100

RAF Menwith Hill

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with his US counterparts about the role of RAF Menwith Hill in US missile defence; and if he will make a statement. [100667]

Mr. Hoon: I have had no such discussions.

Reserve Forces

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the criteria for the Hardship Fund for Reserve Forces take into consideration the financial needs of dependent *(a)* married and *(b)* non-married partners; and if he will make a statement. [100824]

Dr. Moonie: Reservists called-out and accepted into permanent service may apply for financial assistance in the event that their military salary is less than their earnings in civilian life. This assistance is paid in the form of a Reserve Standard Award (RSA). RSA is paid in banded rates that are related to a Reservist's rank and specialism. Reservists are also eligible to apply for a Reserve Hardship Award (RHA) if the RSA alone would cause his-her dependants hardship irrespective of their marital status. There is no ceiling for RHA payments.

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures exist to ensure that reservists report for duty when ordered to do so. [100218]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 16 January 2003 *Official Report,* column 708W, to the hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. Keetch).

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many reservists called up in the last three months have failed to report for duty. [100219]

Dr. Moonie: As at 21 February only one reservist is believed to have deliberately failed to report for service. This case is being investigated.

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what restrictions are placed on the deployment of regular reservists beyond the Balkan theatre. [100224]

Dr. Moonie: There are no geographical restrictions on deploying regular reservists.

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps are being taken to retain the services of regular reservists who wish to extend their tours of duty beyond their scheduled de-mobilisation. [100225]

Dr. Moonie: The provisions of the Reserve Forces Act 1996 allow reservists to extend their service. Subject to the needs of the services and their commanding officer's approval, reservists are generally encouraged to apply to extend their service for set periods at a time (usually six months). However, normally there are theatre specific limits to the period a reservist can serve. This is to ensure that no one serves too long in an operational environment.

Service Personnel (Gulf)

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the daily rations are for British troops while on deployment in the Gulf; and if he will make a statement. [93414]

Dr. Moonie: The Naval Forces have sufficient stock embarked to sustain themselves for a number of weeks. This stock is composed of a full range of fresh/ambient/frozen and chilled foodstuffs. If required, re-supply will be effected by transfer of stock from one of the support ships of the Royal Fleet Auxiliary. Land Forces deploy with a number of days of Operational Ration Packs (ORP). This can be augmented by the addition of some items of fresh food (e.g. fruit, bread). When appropriate equipment and military Chefs have arrived in support, units are able to transition from a purely ORP diet, to a mixture of ORP and fresh food as the situation dictates.

The ORP range consists of seven menus and provides sufficient calories and nutritional balance to provide a Service person with sufficient food for one day in the field. An average calorific intake for the complete range is 3,800 calories per ration. Each menu has a breakfast (400 cals), a snack lunch (1,750 cals) and a dinner (1,000 cals) plus sufficient sundry items (650 cals) ie tea, coffee and squash powder to provide variety and minimise fatigue. The ration is designed to be eaten either hot or cold, but ideally is used in conjunction with the hexamine solid fuel cooker, as the food is more appetising if it is heated. The ORP range also provides for ethnic feeding (Halal, Sikh/Hindu) and for vegetarians. The calorific content for these rations is similar to the general purpose range.

Uranium

Hywel Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what use has been made of munitions containing uranium in live firing training in the UK since 1986. [99787]

Dr. Moonie: No munitions containing uranium have been used in live firing training in the United Kingdom since 1986.

US Military Nuclear Programme

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent requests he has received from the United States Government to provide lead test assemblies for the United States military nuclear programme. [100038]

Mr. Ingram: None.

Vaccine Schedule (Gulf Deployment)

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether multiple vaccinations are being administered to troops deploying to the Gulf. [95923]

Dr. Moonie: All Service personnel are routinely offered a range of vaccinations to protect against disease. These include public health vaccinations and vaccinations for those in special occupational risk groups. Vaccinations are also offered to Service personnel deploying to areas with specific health hazards and to protect personnel against the effects of biological weapons.

In accordance with NHS guidelines, a number of public health vaccinations may be administered at the same time, some in combination. This is not unusual. However, by offering public health vaccinations to Service personnel on recruitment, with boosters at appropriate intervals thereafter, the need to administer several vaccinations or boosters immediately before a deployment can be avoided. Nevertheless, boosters or additional vaccinations may be unavoidable at the time of a deployment or in an emergency. This is the case for anyone travelling overseas at short notice. In such circumstances, full account is taken of any other treatment or medication that an individual might be receiving at the time. This is balanced against the risk of contracting the disease during deployment.

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to record the vaccine schedules applied to troops deploying to the Gulf. [95927]

Dr. Moonie: It is Ministry of Defence policy that all vaccinations given to Service personnel are recorded in their personal medical records. In addition, staff in medical centres are required to record details of current vaccinations on the Operational Medical Record, Form F Med 965, before issuing it to individuals about to deploy. Any medical events, including vaccinations, occurring while deployed are to be recorded on the F Med 965 by medical personnel and, additionally, on an electronic medical record facility where this is held by deployed ships and units. Individuals are required to return their F Med 965 to their medical centre on return to their home base and information should then be transferred to their personal medical records. Royal Navy personnel serving in larger ships will have their full personal medical records on board, and F Med 965 would be unnecessary unless they deploy on land. Royal Marines personnel should have their full personal medical record with them if deployed in a ship, but would use the F Med 965 when deployed on land.

Work Placements

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many university students his Department and associated agencies has supported or sponsored with a work placement in the last year; what his policy is on work placements; what plans he has to develop such schemes; and what his policy is on paying their university fees. [98542]

Dr. Moonie: The separate and differing policies in relation to the Armed forces and our civilian workforce are designed to support university students to benefit recruitment. The Armed forces offer a combination of cadetships and bursaries (349 were awarded in 2002–03) for which a grant is made to th[illegible]ividual and can be used to meet university fees. [illegible] are a further 45 officer cadets and young officers [illegible] whom fees are paid direct to the university, and 200 studying for first degrees at the Royal Military College of Science. All these arrangements involve a continuing association with the parent Service. For our civilian workforce, details are not held centrally of the total number of work placements involving university students, and our policy remains to support them where this makes sense for recruitment. For example, the Defence Engineering and Science Group currently sponsors some 190 students, all of whom benefited from a work placement this year. Normally, university fees are not paid but the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory is currently supporting 38 students in a similar way to the Armed forces.

X-Bank Radar

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what *(a)* risk assessments and *(b)* environmental investigations his Department will undertake into the possible effects upon the local environment of an upgrade at RAF Fylingdales. [100664]

Mr. Hoon: While we do not expect any risk or environmental implications to arise from the upgrade, we will continue to assess the position through discussions with the US authorities and site surveys. We will report our conclusions to the local planning authority soon.

Young Service Personnel

Mr. Paul Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of the armed forces aged under 18 *(a)* are deployed and *(b)* are planned to be deployed in the Gulf; and if he will make a statement. [100108]

Dr. Moonie: The United Kingdom signed Optional Protocol II to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in September 2000 and on 24 February 2003 an Explanatory Memorandum was laid before the House to enable the Protocol to be ratified. It is accordingly our policy that we will take all feasible measures to ensure that no personnel under the age of 18 play a direct part in hostilities. Our plans for the recent deployment of Armed Forces personnel to the Gulf were drawn up and implemented on that basis. Despite these precautions, regrettably one such individual was deployed; but that has now been remedied. As a result there are no under-18s serving in the Gulf and there are no plans for any under-18s to be deployed there.

WALES

Civil Servants

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many civil servants have been employed by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* each of its agencies and non-departmental bodies in each year from 1994–95 to 2002–03; and if he will make a statement. [92409]

Peter Hain: My Department came into being on 1 July 1999 and has no agencies or NDPBs.

The Departmental Report 2002 shows there to have been 35 permanent and casual civil servants in 1999–00; 43 in 2000–01; and 41 in 2001–02.

Ministerial Costs

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what the cost was to the Welsh Office of ministerial *(a)* pay, *(b)* travel, *(c)* entertainment, *(d)* conferences, *(e)* overseas travel and *(f)* other costs in each year from 1998–99 to 2002–03; and if he will make a statement. [89957]

Peter Hain: My Department came into being on 1 July 1999.

(a) the remuneration of Ministers was £65,000 from July 1999 to March 2000; between £70,000 and £78,000 in 2000–01; between £95,000 and £110,000 in 2001–02.

(b) and *(e)* Since 1999 this Government has published an annual list of all visits overseas undertaken by Cabinet Ministers costing £500 or more during each financial year. The Government has also published on an annual basis the cost of all Ministers' visits overseas. Copies of the lists are available in the Libraries of the House.

Costs of domestic travel by Ministers are not readily separable from those of the Department as a whole.

(c) figures are not readily available for 1999/00. Departmental spending on hospitality was £21,000 in 2000/01 and 8,000 in 2001/02

(d) figures are not readily available for 1999/00. No separate expenditure on conferences is recorded for 2000/01 or 2001/02

(e) most other Ministerial expenditure cannot readily be separated from general Departmental expenditure. However the cost of Ministerial cars was £113,000 in 2000/01; £154,000 in 2001/02 and has been £107,000 in 2002/03 to date.

Minsterial Meetings

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many times he and the honourable Member for Islwyn have attended meetings of the Council of Ministers in the past nine months. [95474]

Peter Hain: Since my appointment as Secretary of State for Wales, neither I nor the Parliamentary Under Secretary for Wales has attended any such meetings.

Renewable Energy

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has to increase tidal and wave generated electricity in Wales. [94253]

Peter Hain: I maintain a close interest in proposals being taken forward or considered by the Department of Trade and Industry, the National Assembly for Wales and Welsh local planning authorities.

For example, the Department of Trade and Industry recently announced that Tidal Hydraulic Generators Ltd, who operate out of Broad Haven in Pembrokeshire, will receive £1.6m to develop and test a tidal stream prototype which could be deployed in areas of fast tidal flow around the world.

As the recently published Energy White Paper states "We are determined that wave and tidal technologies should be given the opportunity to play the fullest part they can in the expansion from renewables. This in turn can create another significant opportunity, with word-wide application, for our manufacturing sector".

Smoking in the Workplace

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what policy his Department has adopted on smoking in the workplace. [100927]

Peter Hain: My Department occupies two buildings. In London smoking is not permitted anywhere in the building during normal working hours. In Cardiff, where we are tenants of the National Assembly of Wales, smoking is permitted only in one designated smoking room.

University Students

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his Answer of 10th February, Official Report, column 564, on students (National Assembly), if he will establish whether the press were in possession of information on the question of further devolution of powers with regard to tuition fees and maintenance grants to the National Assembly for Wales in advance of contacting his press office. [98566]

Peter Hain: No.

Welsh Language

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much money the Government gave to support the Welsh language in *(a)* education and *(b)* cultural organisations in the last year for which figures are available. [100991]

Peter Hain: These are matters for the National Assembly for Wales.

TREASURY

3G Licences

Mr. Willis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to re-pay the capital sum raised through the sale of 3G licences to the successful bidder. [100128]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 28 February 2003]:* I have been asked to reply.

None.

Age Diversity

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when his Department completed its diagnostic review for compliance with the Government's Code of Practice for Age Diversity in Employment; and what changes his Department plans to make following the review. [99422]

Ruth Kelly: The provisions of the Code of Practice on Age Diversity in Employment are embedded within the Treasury's equal opportunities policies in accordance with the Performance and Innovation Unit's "Winning the Generation Game" report. Policies are in place to ensure that there are no unfair or unlawful barriers to employment or advancement in the Treasury. These policies are kept under constant review.

Company Tax Relief

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy to remove tax relief on corrupt payments and bribes made by companies to secure *(a)* export orders and *(b)* domestic orders; and if he will make a statement. [100390]

Dawn Primarolo: Section 577A of the Taxes Act 1988 provides that, when computing taxable profits, a business is not allowed relief for expenditure incurred on a payment if the making of that payment constitutes a criminal offence in the UK, or would do so if the payment were made in the UK.

Correspondence

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will reply to the letter of 3 December 2002 from the hon. Member for Manchester, Central on insurance, ref 3/12838/02. [100287]

Ruth Kelly: I wrote to the hon. Member on 10 January explaining that I hoped to be in a position to provide a full response soon and noting the reason for delay.

Statistics

Mr. Evans: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the *(a)* death rates and *(b)* age adjusted death rates for (i) England, (ii) Scotland, (iii) Wales and (iv) Northern Ireland for each year since 1997. [100734]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Pullinger to Mr. Nigel Evans, dated 5 March 2003:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question concerning *(a)* death rates and *(b)* age adjusted death rates for (i) England, (ii) Scotland, (iii) Wales and (iv) Northern Ireland for each year since 1997. I am replying in his absence. (100734)

The most recent available mortality data are for the calendar year 2001. The figures requested for the years 1997 to 2001 are given in the attached table.

Mortality rates per 100,000 population by sex and by country of the United Kingdom, for the calendar years 1997 to 2001[1]

		1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
(a) Overall death rate						
(i) England	Persons	1,096.8	1,067.9	1,063.9	1,022.4	1,008.7
	Males	1,048.5	1,047.2	1,038.6	1,002.2	985.5
	Females	1,089.9	1,087.4	1,087.8	1,041.5	1,030.7
(ii) Scotland	Persons	1,170.4	1,165.3	1,188.5	1,141.6	1,133.1
	Males	1,158.9	1,153.4	1,174.0	1,131.2	1,122.7
	Females	1,180.9	1,176.3	1,201.9	1,151.2	1,142.7
(iii) Wales	Persons	1,198.8	1,174.7	1,210.8	1,149.0	1,136.4
	Males	1,186.3	1,151.8	1,19[illegible].2	1,127.5	1,110.2
	Females	1,210.5	1,196.2	1,22[illegible].2	1,169.3	1,161.0
(iv) Northern Ireland	Persons	895.8	893.6	932.9	885.5	859.1
	Males	888.3	894.4	911.9	868.8	849.9
	Females	903.0	892.9	952.8	901.5	867.9
(b) Age standardised death rate[2]						
(i) England	Persons	727.9	721.5	714.9	682.5	666.5
	Males	904.6	894.5	880.5	839.9	815.7
	Females	597.0	592.0	589.6	563.0	552.0
(ii) Scotland	Persons	853.1	843.0	849.1	807.7	792.5
	Males	1,070.8	1,053.3	1,060.5	1,004.4	982.8
	Females	694.8	687.4	694.0	660.8	648.1
(iii) Wales	Persons	768.2	747.8	764.4	718.2	702.6
	Males	960.0	922.8	945.4	881.8	855.9
	Females	627.8	617.2	626.6	591.8	583.9
(iv) Northern Ireland	Persons	755.0	746.0	769.9	727.9	697.6
	Males	947.8	944.7	954.8	897.2	866.8
	Females	613.6	600.2	634.8	603.8	572.0

[1] Figures are for deaths occurring in each calendar year from 1997 to 2001 in England and Wales and registrations of death per calendar year for Scotland and Northern Ireland.

[2] The rates have been standardised using the European standard population.

Mr. Tony Clarke: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the predicted population is for *(a)* Northamptonshire, *(b)* borough of Northampton, *(c)* Northampton South constituency and *(d)* other parliamentary constituencies in (i) 2004 and (ii) 2005. [100800]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Pullinger to Mr. Tony Clarke, dated 5 March 2003:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question on what the predicted population is for *(a)* Northamptonshire and *(b)* Borough of Northampton, *(c)* Northampton South constituency and *(d)* other Parliamentary constituencies in (i) 2004 and (ii) 2005. I am replying in his absence. (100800)

Subnational population projections are produced at local authority level but not for parliamentary constituencies. Table 1 shows the projected population for 2004 and 2005 for the county of Northamptonshire and constituent local authority districts. The figures are drawn from the latest short-term subnational population projections, which are based on the 2000 mid-year population estimates. These are not consistent with the latest population estimates that are based on the 2001 Census. The next set of subnational population projections will be 2002-based and published in 2004.

For information we include a second table comparing the projected figures for 2001 and the new 2001 Census-based mid-year estimates for 2001. At county level the projected figures for 2001 show only a small difference. However it should be noted that for individual districts the differences are somewhat larger, and hence the projections are less consistent with latest population estimates.

Table 1: Projected population (mid-year ending 30 June) for Northamptonshire and local authorities

Thousand

	Projected population	
Area	*2004*	*2005*
Northamptonshire	641.6	645.3
Northampton	199.4	200.6
South Northamptonshire	83.1	83.8
Corby	51.0	51.0
Daventry	72.5	73.1
East Northamptonshire	79.5	80.2
Kettering	85.5	85.9
Wellingborough	70.6	70.9

Note:

ONS 2000-based short-term subnational population projections

Table 2: Comparison of 2001 population estimates and 2000-based projections for 2001 (mid-year ending 30 June): local authorities

Area	*2001 Estimates (Thousand)*	*2001 Projections (Thousand)*	*Differences (Thousand)*	*Percentage difference*
Northamptonshire	630.4	630.0	0.4	0.1
Northampton	194.4	196.3	-1.9	-1.0
South Northamptonshire	79.5	80.6	-1.1	-1.4
Corby	53.2	51.2	1.9	3.6
Daventry	72.1	70.6	1.5	2.1

Table 2: Comparison of 2001 population estimates and 2000-based projections for 2001 (mid-year ending 30 June): local authorities

Area	*2001 Estimates (Thousand)*	*2001 Projections (Thousand)*	*Differences (Thousand)*	*Percentage difference*
East Northamptonshire	76.8	77.4	-0.6	-0.8
Kettering	82.0	84.3	-2.3	-2.8
Wellingborough	72.6	69.6	2.9	4.1

ECOFIN

Mr. Hood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the outcome was of the ECOFIN Council held on 18th February; what the Government's stance was on the issues discussed, including its voting record; and if he will make a statement. [100140]

Mr. Gordon Brown: I attended the ECOFIN meeting on 18 February. ECOFIN held its first discussion on preparation for the Spring Council on 21–22 March. The Commission presented their Spring report, and the Presidency's draft Key Issues Paper was also tabled. I welcomed both contributions, and referred to the UK progress report on economic reform in Europe, published on 17 February. I also set out the UK's priorities for the Spring Council: employment, research and development, competition, state aids and better regulation. ECOFIN also agreed Council conclusions on the Broad Economic Policy Guidelines Implementation Report.

There was a discussion of the Commission Communication on reinterpreting the Stability and Growth Pact. It was agreed that draft Council Conclusions should be tabled at 7 March ECOFIN and adopted ahead of the Spring Council.

Council adopted conclusions on voting reforms of the Governing Council of the European Central Bank. This will be tabled again at the 7 March ECOFIN ahead of the Spring Council.

Under Implementation of the Stability and Growth Pact, the Council adopted Opinions on the Stability and Convergence programmes of the UK, Denmark, Spain, Ireland and Belgium.

The Council agreed a joint Commission/Council report on eurozone statistics to go forward to the Spring Council. It also agreed conclusions on the fifth progress report on the implementation of information requirements in EMU and a code of best practice on improving the quality of budgetary statistics.

The Council adopted a Decision to establish the Financial Services Committee, as foreseen by the Conclusions on Financial Supervision agreed at the 3 December ECOFIN.

Agreement was postponed on energy taxation until the 7 March ECOFIN.

Political agreement was reached on VAT Administrative Co-operation without discussion.

The UK's Convergence Programme was adopted on the basis of Qualified Majority (including the UK) in support of the final text.

Employers Liability Insurance

Mr. Flook: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimates are for revenue raised by the 5 per cent. insurance levy on employers' liability insurance with regard to the construction industry *(a)* since its inception, *(b)* for the financial year and *(c)* for the next financial year. [100669]

Ruth Kelly: Separate data on the amount of Insurance Premium Tax collected from Employers' Liability Insurance from the construction industry are not available, as IPT receipts are not broken down by source.

EU Money Laundering Directive

Ms Joan Walley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the proposed time scale is for the development of a third EU Money Laundering Directive. [100612]

Ruth Kelly: The second EU Money Laundering Directive[1] adopted in December 2001 calls on the Commission to present a proposal for a further Directive before 15 December 2004.

[1] Directive 2001/97/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 4 December 2001 amending Council Directive 91/308/EEC on prevention of the use of the financial system for the purpose of money laundering.

Euro

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will initiate a rolling programme of reassessment, should his Department conclude that Britain does not meet the five economic tests for entry to the euro. [101058]

Ruth Kelly: The Government will not speculate on the outcome of the assessment of the five economic tests, which will be completed within two years of the start of this Parliament.

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a statement setting out the *(a)* costs and *(b)* benefits of entry into the eurozone, if his Department concludes that Britain meets the five economic tests for entry to the euro. [101059]

Ruth Kelly: A comprehensive and rigorous assessment of the five economic tests will be completed within two years of the start of this Parliament. Once the assessment is complete, the supporting studies will be published alongside all to be subject to intensive public scrutiny and debate.

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he has made an assessment of what the effect would be on British business if his Department's assessment of the five economic tests for euro entry is *(a)* that Britain should enter the euro and *(b)* that Britain should not enter the euro. [101153]

Ruth Kelly: As set out in the Paper for the Treasury Committee on the Treasury's approach to the preliminary and technical work, published on 6 September 2002, a number of supporting studies will be published alongside the assessment of the five economic tests. A supporting study will be published, examining "The impact of EMU on business in different manufacturing and business sectors of the UK economy." Further detail can be found in the 6 September Paper.

Insurance Premium Tax

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to increase the basic rate of insurance premium tax. [100248]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 3 March 2003]:* As with all taxes, Insurance Premium Tax is kept under review and any changes would be announced in the annual Budget.

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to review the cost to employees of the insurance premium tax; and if he will make a statement. [100855]

Ruth Kelly: As with all taxes, Insurance Premium Tax is kept under review and any changes would be announced in the annual Budget.

Interest Rates

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the sensitivity of the economy of *(a)* the UK, *(b)* other members of the European Union and *(c)* other G7 nations to interest rate changes. [101282]

Ruth Kelly: As set out in the Paper for the Treasury Committee on the Treasury's approach to the preliminary and technical work, published on 6 September 2002, a number of supporting studies will be published alongside the assessment of the five economic tests. A supporting study will be published, "Assessing whether the monetary transmission mechanism differs substantively in the UK compared with the euro area". Further detail can be found in the 6 September Paper.

Network Rail

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions his Department has had with the National Audit Office on the Auditor General's policy on the approval of the national accounts in relation to the treatment of Network Rail debt; and if he will make a statement. [100958]

Mr. Boateng: The Treasury has discussions with the National Audit Office on wide range of issues. However, the National Accounts are the responsibility of the Office for National Statistics and not the Comptroller and Auditor General

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will undertake not to conclude loan contracts for Network Rail until the Comptroller and Auditor General has approved the accounting treatment for new debt in the Government accounts. [100959]

Mr. Boateng: While departments can, and do, consult the C&AG and his staff on accounting treatments, the ultimate responsibility for determining any accounting treatment rests with the body preparing the financial statements, not the C&AG, provided that the accounting policies selected are the most appropriate for giving a true and fair view and comply with the requirements of the Resource Accounting Manual or other accounting guidance issued by the Treasury.

Publicity and Advertising

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how much the Inland Revenue spent on *(a)* publicity and *(b)* advertising in each year from 1990–91 to 2002–03; and if he will make a statement; [91722]

(2) how much *(a)* his Department and *(b)* each agency and non-departmental public body sponsored by his Department spent on (i) publicity and (ii) advertising in each year from 1995–96 to 2002–03 (estimated); and if he will make a statement. [92233]

Ruth Kelly: Figures for 1995 to 1996 are not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

For detailed figures from 1997 to 2002 I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) on 7 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 36W.

The latest information for 2002–03 is as follows:

Inland Revenue

Self Assessment publicity, £7.4 million which includes advertising media spend of £5.78 million

Work on the communications campaign for the new Working Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit is continuing and to date has involved a spend of £9.75 million on paid for media.

Government Actuary's Department

Expenditure to date *(a)* £35,000 *(b)* £18,000

The Royal Mint

Advertising[1] £2,395,669

Publicity[2] £123,155.77

[1] Includes recruitment advertising, and advertising of collector coin and other products produced by the Royal Mint

[2] Services provided by external public relations consultants

Debt Management Office

	£
	2002–03[1]
Printing	40,000.00
Recruitment advertising	50,000.00
Auction advertising[2]	300,000.00
Total	390,000.00

[1] Estimation to year end

[2] Auction advertising costs are recovered from the National Loans Fund

Valuation Office Agency

£57,185 Estimated

Office for National Statistics

Publicity expenditure £140,000.

No expenditure is expected in respect of advertising.

The publicity spend covers two phases—the launch of the first Census population statistics in September at a cost of £61,000 and the launch of Census key statistics planned for 13 February at an estimated cost of £79,000.

HM Customs and Excise

Tackling Tobacco smuggling campaign year three of three.

To date £1,000,000 exclusive of VAT.

Fuel Fraud campaign year one of three

To date, £230,000 exclusive of VAT.

National Savings and Investments

Above the line Advertising £1,775,000 (estimated)

Press and Public Relations (Publicity) £470,000 (estimated)

Below-the-line £6,399,000 (estimated)

Office of Government Commerce

(i) Expenditure on publicity—Nil.

(ii) Expenditure on advertising: £3,878 spent in 2001–02 by OGC buying solutions. This figure reflects the spend since the launch of OGC (1 April 2000) to date and OGC buying solutions (1 April 2001) to date.

These figures relate to external advertising and publicity and exclude communications within the public sector.

Self-assessment

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many individual taxpayers who file self-assessment tax returns have registered for the Inland Revenue service for filing tax returns on the internet in each month since the service became available; how many have used the system to submit returns; and if he will make a statement. [99392]

Ruth Kelly: The Registration service for the Internet service for Self Assessment became available on 3 April 2000. Figures of the number of users registered for the service from April 2000 to June 2001 were given the Paymaster General's answer of 19 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 382W. The Filing service became available on 3 July 2000. The number of registrations and filers in each month since the service became available is as follows:

Month	*Registrations*	*Cumulative*	*Filers*	*Cumulative total*
April 2000	32,927	32,927	—	—
May 2000	14,877	47,814	—	—
June 2000	10,677	58,491	—	—
July 2000	11,703	70,194	6,765	6,765
August 2000	11,700	81,894	7,546	14,311
September 2000	16,557	98,451	9,628	23,939
October 2000	2,736	101,187	2,101	26,040
November 2000	1,697	102,884	1,063	27,103
December 2000	2,902	105,786	1,573	28,676
January 2001	14,162	119,948	10,305	38,981
February 2001	595	120,543	180	39,161
March 2001	522	121,065	129	39,290
April 2001	13,485	134,550	1,098	40,388
May 2001	5,208	139,758	2,878	43,266
June 2001	4,021	143,779	3,959	47,225
July 2001	2,618	146,397	6,887	54,112
August 2001	13,755	160,152	7,707	61,819
September 2001	3,994	164,146	12,977	74,796
October 2001	226	164,372	8,988	83,784
November 2001	4,775	169,147	1,760	85,544
December 2001	104,282	273,429	1,646	87,190
January 2002	86,849	360,278	23,404	110,594
February 2002	56,950	417,228	4,711	115,305
March 2002	31,550	448,778	222	115,527
April 2002	3,614.720	4,063,498	1,031	116,558
May 2002	32,912	4,096,410	9,897	126,455
June 2002	5,031	4,101,441	1,611	128,066
July 2002	13,113	4,114,554	26,051	154,117
August 2002	15,470	4,130,024	24,829	178,946
September 2002	38,742	4,168,766	81,982	260,928
October 2002	88,834	4,257,600	14,578	275,506
November 2002	40,901	4,298,501	13,454	288,960
December 2002	50,098	4,348,599	23,329	312,289
January 2003	60,957	4,409,556	127,948	440,237

Senior Civil Servants (IT Qualifications)

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what IT qualifications each of the senior civil servants within his Department possesses. [98111]

Ruth Kelly: Twenty-five per cent of Treasury senior civil servants have declared they hold qualifications in IT. These range from degree level computer science to in-house training. Senior civil servants are also expected to gain IT skills through a range of internal and external training.

Stamp Duty

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many commercial stamp duty exemptions have been claimed in disadvantaged electoral wards; and what estimate he has made of the value of these exemptions. [100362]

John Healey: There have been 758 commercial transactions in disadvantaged electoral wards which have been exempted from stamp duty between the introduction of the relief at the end of November 2001 and the end of January 2003 . The value of the stamp duty relief given amounts to £749,010.

Relief for all transactions (including commercial) in exempted wards is currently restricted to those where the value of the transaction is £150,000 or below. The Chancellor stated in the pre-Budget report that the Government intended to exempt all commercial property transactions in these wards from stamp duty, irrespective of value.

Tax Credits

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with the National Statistician on the different accounting practices that will be followed for the new tax credits by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the Office of National Statistics. [100798]

Dawn Primarolo: There is no difference in the accounting treatment of the Working Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit between the Office for National Statistics and HM Treasury.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many families in receipt of the working families tax credit receive it via their employer. [100790]

Dawn Primarolo: All current awards of Working Families' Tax Credit are now being paid direct by Inland Revenue.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Afghanistan

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the level of involvement of women is in the administration in Afghanistan. [100000]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Afghan Transitional Administration includes two female Cabinet Ministers and a female State Minister in the President's Office. In addition there are four female Deputy Ministers, five Generals and over a dozen division chiefs in various Ministries. Two of the nine-member Constitutional Drafting Group, five of the 11-member Human Rights Commission and one of the nine-member Judicial Commission are women.

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what investigations have been undertaken by United Kingdom officials in Afghanistan of the deaths of Taliban prisoners held by the forces of the Northern Alliance. [100516]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: UK officials have no authority to undertake investigations of this nature. However, British Embassy staff in Kabul are in frequent contact with the ICRC, which monitors closely the situation and welfare of all prisoners in Afghanistan.

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many Afghans are under training to form an Afghan National Army. [100987]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Seven battalions of between 300 and 600 men each have so far completed initial training. Five of these are currently engaged in continuation training or preparing for operations. An eighth battalion is half way through its initial training course.

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans exist for the *(a)* decommissioning of weapons and *(b)* demobilisation of men in the private armies of Afghan warlords. [100988]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: At a conference on Afghanistan held in Tokyo on 22 February, President Karzai said that he intended to announce the start date for a programme of demobilisation, disarmament and reintegration of former combatants on 21 March. The programme involves establishing disarmament centres for the collection of weapons and holding former combatants in transit centres. The former combatants will then either be selected for Afghan National Army training or transferred to a second stage that will provide education, vocational training or work programmes. This will be financed from a UN Trust Fund to which the UK has pledged US$3.5 million.

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many Afghan police officers have been trained as part of the international community's commitment to rebuild Afghanistan. [100989]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Approximately 2,500 students, including 60 women, are under training in the recently refurbished police academy in Kabul. A further 60 Afghan police instructors have been trained by Germany, which coordinates international assistance on police reform. Some training has also been carried out in India. The UK ran a two week training course in Kabul in January for five senior Afghan police officers, two of whom are now under training at the International Police College in the UK.

British Antarctic Territory

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make an assessment of the practicability of using the services of Vivendi Environmental to help clean up British Antarctica. [100363]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The British Antarctic Survey (BAS), the UK's Antarctic operator, is undertaking a major clean-up of its abandoned bases and waste dumps in British Antarctic Territory.

The clean-up work being carried out by BAS of British wastes in British Antarctic Territory will be completed by 2005, as required by the permit issued by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office under the

Antarctic Act 1994. It is being undertaken in partnership with a British civil engineering company, Morrison International, and has been very successful. For further information see the BAS web site (www.antarctica.ac.uk/environment).

The BAS has not been contacted by Vivendi Environmental regarding clean-up in Antarctica.

Clean up of stations operated by other countries in the British Antarctic Territory is the legal responsibility of those foreign operators. The practicability of Vivendi Environmental removing the wastes of foreign operators would therefore be for those foreign operators to assess.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what systems are in place *(a)* to prevent the depositing of waste and *(b)* to secure the removal of deposited waste in British Antarctica. [100364]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The UK has a comprehensive system of legal and practical measures to ensure that wastes are not deposited in British Antarctic Territory (BAS) and instead are removed for safe disposal outside of the region.

The Antarctic Act 1994, together with the Antarctic Regulations 1995, regulate all UK activities in Antarctica by way of a permit system administered by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. This ensures that all UK expeditions to Antarctica, including the British Antarctic Survey, are legally obliged to remove all wastes, other than biodegradable wastes (e.g. sewage), arising from their activities.

The BAS is one of the leaders in environmental and waste management in Antarctica. It has effective systems in place on its research stations and vessels to separate, compact and remove all solid and hazardous wastes. The wastes are re-used, recycled or disposed of safely in the Falkland Islands or in the UK. The BAS is currently in the final stages of building a biological sewage treatment plant at its Rothera Research Station.

British Detainees

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the work of the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention in investigating cases of UK subjects imprisoned overseas. [99935]

Mr. Rammell: The UK co-sponsored last year's UN Commission on Human Rights resolution on the question of arbitrary detention which encouraged all Governments to implement the recommendations of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention concerning those detained for a number of years; and to take appropriate measures to ensure that their legislation, regulations and practices were in conformity with the relevant international standards and the relevant international legal instruments.

Regarding Working Group rulings on the detention of UK citizens overseas, the UK has taken account of the Working Group's views and, where necessary, taken appropriate steps to remedy the situation of persons arbitrarily deprived of their liberty.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made on behalf of George Atkinson to the Government of Dubai following the letter from the Jumeirah prison authorities of 19 March 2002 indicating that his sentence had been completed. [99937]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We understand that in Dubai, when a prisoner has served three-quarters of a sentence, the prison authorities routinely report this to the judicial authorities. However, any decision to release a prisoner early is at the discretion of the local authorities and is not automatic. In early 2001 the Ruler's Court informed Mr Atkinson's solicitors of Dubai's legal position in relation to Mr Atkinson's sentence, and specifically of the linkage between payment of the fine imposed by the court and time served in prison. Our Embassy have provided information to Mr Atkinson's UK lawyers about local lawyers who can assist with local courts. The British Government does not normally intervene in the judicial processes of other countries.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Dubai following the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention's opinion 16/2002 confirming their opinion 17/1998 that George Atkinson be released forthwith; and if he will make a statement. [99940]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention in its opinion 17/1998 found that the detention of George Atkinson in Dubai from 1 March 1997 until 13 December 1999 was arbitrary. A subsequent report by the Working Group, in December 2002 (opinion 16/2002), stated that it was not clear whether George Atkinson's detention since 14 December 1999 was arbitrary. Although we do not normally intervene in the judicial process of other countries, we are in contact with Mr Atkinson's lawyer and will continue to do all we properly can for him.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been made to the Government of Dubai following the treatment George Atkinson received in Jumeirah prison on 30th July 2002. [99936]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Last summer there were a number of riots at Dubai's Jumeirah prison. George Atkinson and a number of other British detainees were injured. Of course our primary concern is the welfare of British detainees and, following the riots, our consular staff immediately visited George Atkinson and the other affected British detainees. Our Consul-General met the Dubai Chief of Police on 20 August, to express our serious concerns at the incidents in the prison, and the treatment of British prisoners during those events. Our Consul-General also raised the incidents with the Director of the Ruler's Court, and sought assurances that there would be no recurrence of the problems at the prison.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list British subjects imprisoned in the Middle East and the length of time that each has been imprisoned. [99938]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: At 27 February 2003 the known British prison population in the following countries stood at

Israel:	2
Lebanon:	1
Syria:	none
Jordan:	none
Iraq:	none
Egypt:	4
Saudi Arabia:	10
Kuwait:	1
Bahrain:	1
Qatar:	none
United Arab Emirates:	20
Oman:	2
Yemen:	4
Iran:	none

I am withholding the names of the prisoners and the length of their sentences under exemption 12 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government information (privacy of an individual).

Falkland Islands

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made with the feasibility study into the clearance of mines from the Falkland Islands. [99657]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The UK-led feasibility study into demining the Falkland Islands is to be carried out under the supervision of a Joint Working Party. At its first meeting, held in Buenos Aires in December 2001, progress was made on the overall aims of the study and technical and management issues. The UK has appointed a National Mine Action Authority to allow for future work in the Falklands, in line with International Mine Action Standards. We remain committed to the feasibility study and to moving ahead as soon as Argentine funds become available.

Sudan

Mr. Dawson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of whether rebel groups have seized the town of Gulu in Darfur; and what steps his Department is taking in conjunction with other Departments to investigate the conflict in Darfur, western Sudan. [100705]

Mr. Rammell: Historically there have been clashes between armed groups in Darfur over access to land and water; there are also long-standing claims of insufficient development in the region. Recently these issues have come to a head. The frequency of clashes has increased and Government forces have also become involved. The town of Gulu was taken by armed fighters three weeks ago. The town has since returned to the control of the Government.

The British Embassy in Khartoum continues to discuss the situation in Darfur with a wide range of Government and National Congress party officials in addition to Darfur MPs and other local representatives. Her Majesty's Ambassador to Khartoum has requested permission to visit Darfur and will do so as soon as possible.

Iraq

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received in respect of those countries that assisted Iraq in the development of the Al-Samoud-2 missile. [100041]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: There are reports that Iraq has received assistance with the development of the Al-Samoud-2 missile from outside Iraq.

It is not Government practice to comment in detail on intelligence matters.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether his Department has had discussions with the US and European partners concerning women's involvement at all levels in the administration planned after military action in Iraq. [100045]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: No decision has been taken to launch military action against Iraq. Our policy remains to ensure Iraq complies with its obligations under relevant Security Council resolutions, including by giving up its weapons of mass destruction. As my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary said in his 7 January statement, *Official Report*, column 4–5WS on our Iraq policy objectives, we would like Iraq to become a stable, united and law-abiding state, within its present borders, co-operating with the international community, no longer posing a threat to its neighbours or to international security, abiding by all its international obligations and providing effective and representative government for its own people.

North Korea

Mr Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the weapons of mass destruction which North Korea has admitted possessing. [98831]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: North Korea has not admitted to possession of any weapons of mass destruction. However, since being confronted by the US over its covert uranium enrichment programme in October 2002, a Foreign Ministry spokesman claimed on 25 October that North Korea was "entitled to possess" nuclear weapons as well as weapons "more powerful" than nuclear weapons.

North Korean possession of nuclear weapons would be a clear violation of its international obligations as a State Party to the NPT. North Korea is also a State Party to the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention, but has neither signed nor ratified the Chemical Weapons Convention.

EU Rapid Reaction Force

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library a copy of the Franco-British joint paper presented to the EU foreign ministers calling for the proposed EU Rapid Reaction Force to be deployed in Bosnia from early 2004. [100266]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I have placed in the Library a copy of the Franco-British joint paper presented to the EU foreign ministers calling for an EU-led military operation to be deployed in Bosnia from Spring 2004.

Somaliland

Kevin Brennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the Government's policy is towards Somaliland. [99459]

Mr. Rammell: It is UK policy to promote peace and stability throughout Somalia. We provide humanitarian and modest development assistance in areas where security allows access. We welcome the progress which has been made in establishing a stable and democratic administration in Somaliland. We are considering how we might increase our development assistance there, and an assessment team will visit in the near future. We also support the talks between Somali leaders taking place in Kenya as part of the IGAD National Reconciliation Process. We hope these will make possible an eventual political settlement between Somaliland and the rest of Somalia.

Sudan

Mr. Dawson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what lessons have been learned from the performance of the Civilian Protection Monitoring Team in order to ensure that the new Verification and Monitoring Team can respond *(a)* rapidly and *(b)* effectively to reports of fighting within southern Sudan. [100704]

Mr. Rammell: Representatives of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development, the Government of Sudan, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army, observers at the Sudan peace talks and the Civilian Protection Monitoring Team (CPMT) have been meeting in Nairobi to discuss the establishment of the verification mechanism envisaged in the Addendum to the Memorandum of Understanding on Cessation of Hostilities, signed on 4 February. The verification monitoring team will initially be based on an expanded CPMT because the latter has assets on the ground. A fuller mission will be established as soon as is practically possible. We expect the designers of the mission to draw lessons from the experiences of the CPMT. However the CPMT and the new mission have essentially different mandates and terms of reference. The UK stands ready to provide financial and practical support to the new mission.

Mr. Dawson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps have been taken to ensure that the Verification and Monitoring Team *(a)* publish and *(b)* disseminate reports of their investigations into attacks on civilians in Sudan without delay. [100706]

Mr. Rammell: The Verification and Monitoring Team will report to the committee established by the Addendum to the Memorandum of Understanding on the Cessation of Hostilities, signed on 4 February. The committee will arrange publication and dissemination of reports. Attacks on civilians will continue to be monitored by the Civilian Protection Monitoring Team which reports to the US Government.

Mr. Dawson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps the Government has taken to monitor *(a)* abductions, *(b)* rape and *(c)* recruitment of children during the recent fighting around Sudan's oil fields. [100707]

Mr. Rammell: Abduction of women and children is a serious and distressing issue to which we pay particular attention. We continue to work closely with the Committee for the Eradication of Abduction of Women and Children (CEAWC) which is working with UNICEF and Save the Children (UK), and with the Rift Valley Institute. The Government of Sudan has made clear publicly that it is committed to the success of the Committee and has said that it sees abduction as totally unacceptable and contrary to both Islam and to Christianity.

PRIVY COUNCIL

Privy Council Office

Mr. Laws: To ask the President of the Council for what reasons there was a change in staffing of the Privy Council Office between 1998–99 and 2002–03; and if he will make a statement. [99889]

Mr. Robin Cook: The following Privy Council Office staffing figures are taken from the civil service staff in post statistics published by the Cabinet Office (http://civil-service.gov.uk/statistics/publications/htm) and the additional information requested is provided in the following table:

Privy Council Office (PCO) staffing

Date of published figures	*Number of full-time equivalent permanent staff*[1]	*Commentary*
April 1999	30	—
April 2000	30	Lord Privy Seal's Office transferred to Cabinet Office. Parliamentary Secretary and staff appointed.
April 2001	40[2]	Additional staff appointed to support Ministers; manage new accommodation; strengthen corporate services so as to manage central initiatives; and administer Judicial Committee's devolution and human rights jurisdictions.
April 2002	40	—

[1] These figures exclude casual and temporary staff.

[2] This figures includes staff increases authorised in the previous financial year, which were initially covered by casual and temporary staff.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Abandoned Vehicles

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what steps he is taking to ensure that police authorities deal with the disposal of abandoned vehicles in a cost-effective manner; [99327]

(2) what guidance he gives to police authorities to assist in the co-ordination of efforts to *(a)* identify and *(b)* dispose of abandoned vehicles. [99326]

Mr. Denham: The statutory responsibility for removal and disposal of abandoned vehicles lies with local authorities rather than police authorities.

Police constables, in addition to local authority employees, can remove vehicles that have been abandoned without authority and any vehicle, whether or not abandoned, that has broken down or been left in such a position that it causes danger or obstruction or breaches parking restrictions. The majority of abandoned vehicles are unlicensed, and the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) has separate powers to remove unlicensed vehicles. We are working with the interested parties to ensure the most effective use locally of the different powers that are available.

In April 2002 we brought in important new measures to improve dealing with abandoned vehicles. These enable local authorities to remove and dispose of abandoned vehicles in a shorter timescale, act on behalf of DVLA to remove unlicensed vehicles and have easier and quicker access to the DVLA database to seek to identify the owners of abandoned vehicles, so that action can be taken against them. More recently, we have made it possible for Community Support Officers and accredited community safety officers to have the powers of constables for dealing with abandoned vehicles.

In the longer term we aim to make it less likely that vehicles will be abandoned. Continuous registration will from 1 January next year provide that the person registered as keeper on the DVLA database remains liable for a vehicle until DVLA has been properly notified of a change of keeper.

Animal Experiments

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make a statement on the timetable for implementing the recommendations of the House of Lords report on the use of animals in scientific procedures; [100468]

(2) if he will make it his policy to repeal the confidentiality clauses of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986; and if he will make a statement. [100467]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The Government's response to the report of the House of Lords Select Committee on animals in scientific procedures was published on 20 January 2003 (column 5729). Copies have been placed in the Library.

The Government welcome the Select Committee's report. We note in particular, and endorse, both its finding that animal experiments are currently necessary to develop human and veterinary medicines and to protect humans and the environment, and that such experiments should continue to be stringently regulated to minimise the suffering of the animals involved.

In our response, we announced plans to publish summaries of programmes of work authorised under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986, subject to safeguards for personal and confidential information. We also acknowledged the significant concern within the scientific community about the possible repeal of section 24 of the 1986 Act, the "confidentiality clause" and we announced our intention to consult further with scientific stakeholders before reaching final decisions on its future.

We will pursue these issues and the other matters arising from our response to the Select Committee's report over the coming months. Discussions regarding section 24 are in hand and a number of actions have already been completed.

Antisocial Behaviour Orders

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many anti-social behaviour orders have been served by each local authority in the UK. [99328]

Mr. Denham: Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) were introduced from 1 April 1999. Information held centrally up to 31 May 2000 is for the number of ASBOs issued within England and Wales by police force area only.

From 1 June 2000 official statistics on the number of ASBOs issued within England and Wales are based on quarterly returns from Magistrates' Courts Committees (MCCs). From copies of the orders we have been able to identify local authority areas involved. The number of notifications received by the Home Office of ASBOs issued within each MCC area, up to 30 September 2002 (latest available), can be found in descending order in the following table.

Tables showing data on the number issued by local authority have been placed in the Library.

We are aware that the numbers of ASBOs made within England and Wales have been consistently under reported in returns made by magistrates courts and are considering how reporting can be improved.

Information relating to Northern Ireland is a matter for The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. Matters related to Scotland are for the Scottish Executive.

Table A: The number of anti-social behaviour orders issued within England and Wales, as reported to the Home Office, from 1 April 1999 to 30 September 2002, by MCC and police force area.

MCC/Police force area	*ASBOs issued*
West Midlands	96
West Mercia	65
Greater Manchester	55
GLMCA/Metropolitan Police[1]	46
Avon and Somerset	32
Northumbria	27
Lancashire	25
Norfolk	25
West Yorkshire	22
Staffordshire	21
Merseyside	19
Durham	18
Kent	18
Nottinghamshire	17
Humberside	15
South Yorkshire	15
Sussex	15
Derbyshire	14
Devon and Cornwall	12
Hampshire	12
Cleveland	11

Table A: The number of anti-social behaviour orders issued within England and Wales, as reported to the Home Office, from 1 April 1999 to 30 September 2002, by MCC and police force area.

MCC/Police force area	*ASBOs issued*
North Yorkshire	11
Thames Valley	11
Cumbria	10
Cambridgeshire	9
Cheshire	9
Hertfordshire	9
Northamptonshire	8
Warwickshire	8
Bedfordshire	7
Suffolk	7
Surrey	6
Leicestershire	5
Dorset	4
Gloucestershire	4
Lincolnshire	3
Essex	2
Wiltshire	1
England	694
South Wales	7
Gwent	4
North Wales	1
Dyfed Powys	—
Wales	12
England and Wales	706

[1] Including City of London

Appeals

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many representations have been received in each year since 1988 regarding right to appeal cases to the Court of Appeal where the sentencing is seen to be unduly lenient; and if he will make a statement. [100208]

The Solicitor-General: I am answering this question on behalf of the Home Secretary and I will write to the hon. Member with my answer shortly.

Asylum Seekers

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what *(a)* material assistance and *(b)* protection is given to asylum seekers returned to their home countries. [100012]

Beverley Hughes: For asylum seekers who choose to return on a voluntary basis we provide an independent counselling service and an in-kind grant of £500, which provides support to promote re-integration. For Afghans returning voluntarily, there is also a cash payment programme providing £600 for individuals and up to £2,500 for families, and access to a training and employment project in Afghanistan. Protection is not provided to asylum seekers returning voluntarily because they have withdrawn their claim.

Those subject to enforced removal do not receive the benefits of voluntary return. The exception is Afghans, subject to enforced removal, who may have access to a training and employment project in Afghanistan. Protection is not considered necessary as their claim has been found to be unsubstantiated.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many children under 18 years of age have applied for asylum in each year since 1997. [100313]

Beverley Hughes: 13,025 applications for asylum in the United Kingdom were lodged by asylum seekers under 18 in 2002. 8,705 applications were lodged in 2001. In addition, it is estimated that approximately 6,400 asylum seekers aged under 18 applied for asylum in 2000, 3,600 in 1999, 4,600 in 1998 and 1,600 in 1997. These figures exclude dependants, and may overstate since some applicants aged 18 or over may claim to be younger.

Information on asylum applications by age and gender is published annually in the statistical bulletin 'Asylum Statistics United Kingdom', a copy of which is available in the Library and from the RDS website: http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what procedures are used to *(a)* identify child asylum seekers and *(b)* assist them in gaining contact with their parents. [100316]

Beverley Hughes: The Immigration Rules (HC 395, as amended) define a child as a person who is under 18 years of age or who, in the absence of documentary evidence establishing age, appears to be under that age. In the absence of documentary evidence it falls to officers of the Home Office Immigration and Nationality Directorate to make the judgment as to whether an applicant is under or over 18, based on the appearance of the applicant. Social Services Departments make use of services such as the Red Cross to trace family where this is feasible and in accordance with the child's needs and wishes.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many children claimed asylum on arrival in the UK in each of the last five years. [100478]

Beverley Hughes: 2,290 applications for asylum in the United Kingdom were lodged at ports by asylum seekers under 18 in 2002. 2,195 applications were lodged in 2001. These figures exclude dependants, and may overstate since some applicants aged 18 or over may claim to be younger. Information for years prior to 2001 is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost by examination of individual case records.

Information on asylum applications by age and gender is published annually in the statistical bulletin 'Asylum Statistics United Kingdom', a copy of which is available in the Library and from the RDS website: http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Andy Burnham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers were placed in each local authority area in England under the dispersal policy in each year since 1998. [98680]

Beverley Hughes: The information is not available in the form requested. Statistics are only available on the dispersal of asylum seekers who are supported by the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) since it commenced operation in April 2000.

Numbers of asylum seekers placed in NASS accommodation under the dispersal policy are available on a quarterly and annual basis. These statistics are available on the Home Office's Immigration and Asylum Statistics website: http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Figures for asylum seekers in receipt of NASS accommodation support in each Local Authority area as at the end of December 2002 are given in the table. Information in respect of the number of persons dispersed to an area during a given year is not available.

Region	*Local Authority*	Dispersed	Disbenefited	*Total*
England	Darlington	35	—	35
North East	Gateshead	565	—	580
—	—	—	15	—
—	Hartlepool	50	—	50
—	Middlesbrough	770	—	770
—	Newcastle upon Tyne	1,775	—	1,775
—	—	—	5	—
—	North Tyneside	500	—	500
—	Redcar and Cleveland	355	—	355
—	South Tyneside	170	—	170
—	Stockton-on-Tees	740	—	740
—	Sunderland	1,030	—	1,030
—	*Total*	5,995	—	6,010
—	—	—	15	—
North West	Burrow-in-Furness	—	—	5
—	—	—	5	—
—	Blackburn with Darwen	670	—	670
—	Bolton	1,160	—	1,160
—	Burnley	55	—	55
—	Bury	625	—	625
—	Crewe and Nantwich	10	—	10
—	Ellesmere Port and	—	—	5
—	Neston	—	5	—
—	Hyndburn	15	—	15
—	Liverpool	1,925	—	1,925
—	Manchester	1,705	—	1,725
—	—	—	20	—
—	Oldham	660	—	660
—	—	—	5	—
—	Pendle	75	—	75
—	Rochdale	440	—	440
—	Salford	1,235	—	1,240
—	—	—	10	—
—	Sefton	125	—	125
—	St. Helens	—	—	5
—	—	5	—	—
—	Stockport	265	—	270
—	—	—	5	—
—	Tameside	315	—	315
—	Trafford	130	—	135
—	Wigan	860	—	860
—	*Total*	10,275	—	10,325
—	—	—	45	—
Yorkshire and the Humber	Barnsley	495	—	495
	Bradford	1,640	—	1,650
—	—	—	10	—
—	Calderdale	380	—	380
—	Doncaster	995	—	1,015
—	—	—	20	—
—	Kingston upon Hull, City of	1,010	—	1,010
—	Kirklees	935	—	935
—	Leeds	1,685	—	1,690
—	—	—	5	—
—	North East Lincolnshire	170	—	170
—	Rotherham	695	—	695
—	Sheffield	1,645	—	1,645
—	—	—	5	—
—	Wakefield	530	-	530
—	York	—	—	5
—	—	—	5	—
—	*Total*	10,185	—	10,225
—	—	—	40	—
East Midlands	Charnwood	10	—	10
—	Corby	—	—	5

Region	*Local Authority*	Dispersed	Disbenefited	*Total*
—	—	—	5	—
—	Derby	1,550	—	1,550
—	Gedling	20	—	20
—	Leicester	1,260	—	1,260
—	Lincoln	115	—	115
—	Northampton	—	—	5
—	—	—	5	—
—	Nottingham	1,570	—	1,570
—	Rushcliffe	—	—	5
—	—	—	5	—
—	*Total*	4,525	—	4,540
—	—	—	10	—
West Midlands	Birmingham	3,530	—	3,555
—	—	—	25	—
—	Coventry	1,595	—	1,595
—	Dudley	695	—	695
—	Herefordshire, County of	—	—	5
—	—	—	5	—
—	Newcastle-under-Lyme	70	—	70
—	Sandwell	830	—	835
—	—	—	5	—
—	Solihull	110	—	110
—	Stoke-on-Trent	1,255	-	1,260
—	—	—	5	—
—	Walsall	555	—	555
—	Wolverhampton	1,625	—	1,625
—	—	—	5	—
—	Wychavon	—	—	5
—	—	—	5	—
—	*Total*	10,260	—	10,305
—	—	—	45	—
East of England	Bedford	—	*	*
—	—	—	15	—
—	Cambridge	—	—	—
—	Epping Forest	10	—	10
—	Ipswich	75	—	75
—	Luton	—	—	5
—	Peterborough	405	—	425
—	—	—	20	—
—	*Total*	490	—	535
—	—	—	40	—
Greater London	Barking and Dagenham	5	40	45
—	Barnet	15	75	90
—	Bexley	—	10	10
—	Brent	—	50	50
—	Bromley	—	20	20
—	Camden	10	20	35
—	Croydon	—	50	50
—	Ealing	—	90	90
—	Enfield	165	200	365
—	Greenwich	—	45	45
—	Hackney	50	90	135
—	Hammersmith and Fulham	—	95	95
—	Haringey	260	260	520
—	Harrow	—	65	65
—	Havering	—	*	*
—	Hillingdon	—	20	20
—	Hounslow	—	35	35
—	Islington	30	115	145
—	Kensington and Chelsea	—	15	15
—	Kingston upon Thames	5	25	25
—	Lambeth	50	50	100
—	Lewisham	—	80	80
—	Merton	—	20	20
—	Newham	60	120	180
—	Redbridge	—	25	25
—	Richmond upon Thames	—	15	15
—	Southwark	—	55	55
—	Tower Hamlets	—	20	20
—	Waltham Forest	55	120	175
—	Wandsworth	—	35	35

Region	*Local Authority*	Dispersed	Disbenefited	*Total*
—	Westminster	—	40	40
—	*Total*	710	1,900	2,605
South East	Ashford	—	10	10
—	Brighton and Hove	60	15	75
—	Hastings	225	—	225
—	Medway	—	10	10
—	Oxford	—	15	15
—	Portsmouth	340	—	340
—	Shepway	—	5	5
—	Slough	—	15	15
—	Southampton	455	5	460
—	Thanet	—	15	15
—	Wycombe	—	5	5
—	*Total*	1,080	100	1,180
—				
South West	Bristol, City of	410	—	410
—	Exeter	65	—	65
—	Gloucester	—	10	10
—	Plymouth	375	—	375
—	South Gloucestershire	55	—	55
—	Swindon	5	5	10
—	*Total*	915	10	925
(England)	*Total*	44,440	2,210	46,650
Wales	Cardiff	1,000	—	1,000
—	Neath Port Talbot	*	—	*
—	Newport	110	5	115
—	Swansea	410	—	410
—	Wrexham	55	—	55
—	*Total*	1,580	5	1,585
Scotland	Glasgow City	5,665	—	5,665
—	*Total*	5,665	—	5,665
Northern Ireland	Belfast	135	—	135
—	Newry and Mourne	*	—	*
—	Newtownabbey	30	—	30
—	Carrickfergus	5	—	5
—	*Total*	170	—	170
(United Kingdom)	*Total*	51,850	2,220	54,070

[1] Disbenefited cases are cases which were previously supported under the main UK benefits system and have been moved onto NASS support. Some of these cases have remained in the original social services accommodation.

Note:

All figures have been rounded to the nearest 5, figures between 1 and 2 are represented by a *. Only those Local Authorities where NASS dispersed or disbenefitted cases are resident are shown.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average length of time is between the arrival in the UK and the date of asylum application of those asylum seekers who have been refused support by NASS under sections 55 or 57 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 and for whom figures are available; how many applied for asylum within *(a)* 24 hours, *(b)* one week and *(c)* one month of their arrival in the UK; and what his estimate is of the number of asylum seekers who have been refused support by NASS under sections 55 or 57 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 (i) in total and (ii) on each day since 8 January. [99528]

Beverley Hughes: Information on the date of arrival of applicants who apply in-country is not available because, for example, some may have entered clandestinely. Nor is information collated centrally on the time between the claimed date of arrival in the UK and the date on which an asylum claim was made. Information on the operation of sections 55 and 57 of the Nationality Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 will be published in due course.

Domestic Violence

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the incidence of domestic violence was against *(a)* married women, *(b)* women with long-term partners and *(c)* other women in each of the last three years. [97609]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 13 February 2003]:* Domestic violence is not separately identified in recorded crime statistics collected by the Home Office.

The British Crime Survey (BCS) provides information on the number of incidents of domestic violence in England and Wales. It estimated that there were 514,000 incidents against women based on interviews in 2001–02. The 2000 BCS which measured crime in 1999 estimated that there were 560,000 incidents against women in 1999. (No comparable analysis was conducted for 2000). This information is not available for women in different types of relationship.

The BCS figures are derived from a sample and so are subject to sampling error. Moreover, the BCS is carried out by face-to-face interviews and some respondents may be unwilling to reveal experience of domestic violence to interviewers. The 1996 BCS included a self-completion component on domestic violence to encourage disclosure. Results were published in Home Office Research Study No. 191—copies are available in the Library. This more confidential approach to measurement revealed that the proportion of women that were victims in the last year of domestic violence was over three times higher than in the main BCS. This study looked at the marital status of women who had been victims of domestic violence in the last year. Women who described themselves as currently separated from a partner with whom they had been living were by far the most likely to have been a victim of domestic violence in the past year: 22 per cent. had been assaulted at least once. At lowest risk were married women (2 per cent.) and those co-habiting (3 per cent.). Risks are higher for single women—both the never married (8 per cent.) and the now divorced (6 per cent.). (Home Office Research Study 191 page 29).

The Government are committed to tackling domestic violence at all levels. It is a serious and abhorrent crime that accounts for one quarter of all violent crime and claims the lives of two women a week. Nearly half of all female murder victims are killed by a partner or an ex-partner. The Government will do everything they can to tackle it and ensure that victims receive the highest levels of support and protection.

A consultation paper setting out proposals to prevent domestic violence will be published by spring 2003. This consultation will build on the initial consultation on domestic violence in the White Paper "Justice for All" and the ongoing work of the inter-departmental Ministerial Group on Domestic Violence which brings together eight Ministers to progress five priority areas for action.

Increasing safe accommodation choices for women and children;

Developing early and effective healthcare interventions;

Improving the interface between the criminal and civil law;

Ensuring a consistent and appropriate response from the police and Crown Prosecution Service; and

Promoting Education and Awareness Raising.

The consultation will aim to generate a comprehensive response from the public, voluntary sectors and others, to ensure the widest possible agreement on what needs to be done to prevent and deal with domestic violence.

Enhanced Thinking Skills Programme

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will assess the effectiveness of the Enhanced Thinking Skills Programme. [99725]

Hilary Benn: The effectiveness of the programme is assessed through reports on institutional behaviour, psychometric data, and by the long-term evaluation of reconviction data. The programme also fulfils the strict set of accreditation criteria laid down by the Correctional Services Accreditation Panel and whose role includes an annual assessment of programme delivery.

Hate Crime

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the level of hate crime directed at people with learning disabilities; what plans he has to tackle hate crime directed at people with learning disabilities; and if he will make a statement. [99542]

Mr. Denham: The Government are committed to tackling all hate crime regardless of what form it takes.

The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) working with the Government has developed guidance for police forces in dealing with these types of crime. This guidance is entitled "Identifying and Combating Hate Crime" and was last updated in April 2002.

While there is no specific national requirement for the recording of hate crimes against those with disabilities they are covered by the ACPO Guidelines.

In November 2002 the Metropolitan police relaunched their Hate Crime publicity campaign to clearly include hate crime targeted at people with disabilities. They have since made it policy for their Community Safety Units, who record incidents of hate crime, to flag up hate crime against people with disabilities. At this stage the definition of 'disability' refers to all forms whether physical or mental.

Prisoners (Hospital Stays)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what types of cases prisoners are taken from HMP Garth and HMP Wymott to *(a)* Chorley and *(b)* Royal Preston Hospital; and how many overnight stays by prisoners have taken place at Chorley Hospital over the last 12 months. [99905]

Hilary Benn: Information about the specific cases of each prisoner taken from Garth and Wymott prisons to Chorley District hospital and Royal Preston hospital is not available without disproportionate cost, but prisoners are taken to hospital for a variety of surgical, medical and other reasons.

From the period 26 February 2002 to 26 February 2003, there have been 50 overnight stays at Chorley District hospital by prisoners from Garth. For the same period, there have been 238 overnight stays by prisoners from Wymott.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prison officers have to accompany a prisoner being taken to hospital. [99906]

Hilary Benn: The options available to prison managers when considering the levels of staffing for a hospital escort or bedwatch, are outlined in paragraph 37.116 of the Prison Service Security Manual (PSO 1000), a copy of which is deposited in the Library. Generally speaking, two officers will normally escort a single prisoner.

However, all outside prisoner movements are subject to a thorough risk assessment which will determine not only the appropriate level of staffing required, but also, where necessary, the levels of restraint to be used. The risk assessment will consider amongst other things, the nature of the prisoner's offence, their physical capability to escape (either with or without outside assistance), and the risks that they pose to both hospital staff and the general public. All risk assessments must be regularly reviewed to take into account any changes in the prisoners physical condition, or the general circumstances under which the escort is being conducted.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many hours have been spent by prison officers from *(a)* HMP Garth and *(b)* HMP Wymott accompanying prisoners during visits to hospital; and what the estimated cost is of transporting prisoners to hospital from *(a)* HMP Garth and *(b)* HMP Wymott over the last 12 months. [99907]

Hilary Benn: From the period 26 February 2002 to 26 February 2003, Garth prison used 6,773.5 officer hours for prisoner bedwatches and escorts to hospital and Wymott prison used 6,240 officer hours. The estimated cost for accompanying prisoners to outside hospital visits at Garth between 26 February 2002 and 26 February 2003 is £96,037. The estimated cost for this during the same period at Wymott is £107,182.

Human Trafficking

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the United Kingdom's initiatives to combat human trafficking. [99443]

Beverley Hughes: We set out a comprehensive approach to tackle trafficking and other forms of organised crime in the White Paper "Secure Borders, Safe Haven" published in 2002. The UK has been at the forefront of international efforts to address the heinous crime of trafficking. We were instrumental in drafting the United Nations Trafficking Protocol and the European Union Framework Decision, which commits the Government to criminalising people trafficking. An offence of trafficking for the purposes of prostitution, carrying a maximum penalty of 14 years, was introduced in the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002, and the current Sexual Offences Bill introduces wide-ranging offences covering trafficking for sexual exploitation.

The introduction of legislation forms part of a comprehensive Government strategy for addressing trafficking of men, women and children as set out in the White Paper. This strategy recognises the need for a multi-faceted response and is a four pronged approach, which also covers enforcement, prevention and protection for victims and international co-operation to combat human trafficking.

We are working to tackle the criminal networks involved in people trafficking through Reflex, the multi-agency response to organised immigration crime. Its remit is to co-ordinate operations against organised immigration crime and to develop the intelligence and strategic planning to underpin them. In the last six months alone, Reflex has had 27 operations which have reached the arrest phase, 16 organised crime groups have been disrupted and over 60 operations are currently underway. This success has not been limited to UK soil—intelligence leads from Reflex have supported other overseas investigations, helping to dismantle significant organised criminal syndicates in other jurisdictions.

We also recognise the importance of providing protection for the victims of trafficking in order to encourage them to co-operate with the authorities. We are developing support arrangements for victims in co-operation with the voluntary sector and will be launching a pilot scheme for victims of trafficking shortly. In conjunction with this we are developing a best-practice 'toolkit' to raise awareness of trafficking and enable practitioners to treat victims appropriately.

We are working with our EU partners and with source and transit countries to build effective international action. We have established a network of liaison officers to build intelligence on routes and methods used by the traffickers.

The UK is also contributing to the EU STOP II Programme, which provides support to member state organisations responsible for action against the trade in human beings and the sexual exploitation of children. The Department for International Development Office (DFID) and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) are funding prevention projects to educate potential victims of the dangers of trafficking, particularly for women and children, in source countries.. DFID also supports a project by the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) aimed at combating the trafficking of children in certain sub-regions.

Probation Service

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many vacancies there are for the Inner London Probation Service; and if he will make a statement. [100227]

Hilary Benn: The information requested is as follows:

London	*Number of vacancies*[1]
Senior Probation Officers	30
Probation Officers	231
Probation Service Officers	187
All other staff	53
Total	501

[1] Figures given as headcount numbers

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the level of recruitment was, including those starting and leaving, for each Probation Service in England and Wales in *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03. [99933]

Hilary Benn: The information requested is as follows.

England and Wales — *Number of starters and leavers*[1]

	2001–02	
	Starters	*Leavers*
Avon and Somerset	120	69
Bedfordshire	20	12
Cambridgeshire	69	28
Cheshire	65	53
Cumbria	25	28
Derbyshire	100	55
Devon and Cornwall	54	56
Dorset	51	25
Durham	69	31
Essex	123	32
Gloucestershire	17	30
Hampshire	96	85
Hertfordshire	51	50
Humberside	101	13
Kent	64	61
Lancashire	125	93
Leicestershire and Rutland	60	30
Lincolnshire	57	21
London	194	654
Greater Manchester	352	303
Merseyside	48	55
Norfolk	49	41
Northamptonshire	39	50
Northumbria	139	86
Nottinghamshire	28	80
Staffordshire	170	144
Suffolk	41	36
Surrey	44	74
Sussex	68	32
Teesside	64	44
Thames Valley	140	115
Warwickshire	13	18
West Mercia	66	84
West Midlands	175	184
Wiltshire	10	13
North Yorkshire	24	11
South Yorkshire	87	77
West Yorkshire	177	125
Dyfed-Powys	71	24
Gwent	62	20
North Wales	83	24
South Wales	76	47
Total	3,487	3,113

[1] Figures not currently available for 2002–03

Note:

The level of starters over leavers across the National Probation Service during the financial year 2001–02 showed a growth rate of 2.13 per cent. against the total number of staff in post.

Source:

Figures obtained from RDS Probation Statistics.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many vacancies by grade there were in each Probation Service in England and Wales on 31st December 2002. [99934]

Hilary Benn: The information requested is as follows:

England and Wales — *Numbers of vacancies*[1,2]

	Senior probation staff	*Probation officers*	*Probation service officers*	*Trainee probation officers*	*All other staff*
Avon and Somerset	—	12.0	15.9	12.0	8.6
Bedfordshire	—	2.0	1.0	—	0.5
Cambridgeshire	—	0.5	1.4	—	4.0
Cheshire	1.0	4.0	1.6	—	2.0
Cumbria	—	—	—	—	1.0
Derbyshire	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Devon and Cornwall	—	2.5	3.0	—	5.0
Dorset	1.0	3.0	0.5	—	0.5
Durham	—	—	5.6	—	—
Essex	—	10.0	3.8	—	5.9
Gloucestershire	—	5.0	—	1.0	1.0
Hampshire	—	3.3	13.0	2.0	6.3
Hertfordshire	—	4.0	1.0	—	6.0
Humberside	—	4.0	2.0	—	2.0
Kent	—	17.3	42.3	—	14.9
Lancashire	—	8.5	4.5	2.0	7.0
Leicestershire and Rutland	—	4.0	—	—	—
Lincolnshire	—	4.5	8.5	—	0.5
London	30.0	231.0	187.0	—	53.0
Greater Manchester	4.0	15.0	35.0	—	15.0
Merseyside	—	—	9.0	—	30.0
Norfolk	—	—	1.0	5.0	—
Northamptonshire	3.0	6.0	5.0	—	5.6
Northumbria	—	8.1	—	—	1.5
Nottinghamshire	—	3.0	5.0	—	4.0
Staffordshire	6.0	7.0	—	—	2.0
Suffolk	3.0	6.3	4.0	—	4.5
Surrey	2.0	10.0	11.5	—	8.5
Sussex	—	11.0	7.4	—	9.5
Teesside	—	—	3.0	—	4.0
Thames Valley	4.0	30.5	16.0	6.0	1.7
Warwickshire	—	2.0	—	—	4.0
West Mercia	—	3.0	—	—	1.0
West Midlands	5.5	24.0	17.0	—	21.0
Wiltshire	—	2.0	—	—	5.0
North Yorkshire	—	—	—	—	3.0
South Yorkshire	—	—	—	—	4.8

England and Wales *Numbers of vacancies*[1,2]

	Senior probation staff	*Probation officers*	*Probation service officers*	*Trainee probation officers*	*All other staff*
West Yorkshire	3.0	12.0	30.0	—	41.5
Dyfed-Powys	—	3.8	2.0	2.0	5.5
Gwent	—	8.0		—	—
North Wales	—	3.3	6.0	—	3.3
South Wales	1.0	7.8	11.5	—	15.0
Total	63.5	482.4	450.5	30.0	305.6

[1] Figures shown in wte.

[2] Information collected in November 2002.

Notes:

1. To date, the National Probation Directorate (NPD) nor RDS have not routinely collected information on vacancies within the National Probation Service (NPS) and consequently, the information above was collected during November 2002. These are the most recently available figures.
2. Work is currently on-going to implement a National Common Data Set for Workforce Information within the NPS, that will enable the regular collection of this information in the future.
3. Figures for London are given as number of posts, not Full-Time Equivalents.
4. This number of vacancies represents a percentage of around 8 per cent. over the total National Probation Service staffing level of 15,789 (taken from RDS Probation Statistics 2001).

John Redgrave

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) consequent upon the withdrawal of the members of the Metropolitan Police panel formed to consider the case of John Redgrave, what consultation was extended to John Redgrave's counsel prior to a new date for the hearing being scheduled; [99696]

(2) if he will require the Commissioner of Metropolitan Police to find a date for the disciplinary hearing of John Redgrave *(a)* which is convenient for all parties and *(b)* where he can be represented by his nominated counsel; and if he will make a statement; [99693]

(3) if the Counsel for John Redgrave at his disciplinary hearing indicated his satisfaction with the composition of the disciplinary panel membership prior to the withdrawal of two officers on the panel; and if he will make a statement. [99694]

(4) why trial members of the Metropolitan Police disciplinary board scheduled to hear the case of John Redgrave withdrew their notices; what notice of their withdrawal was given to John Redgrave's counsel; and if he will make a statement; [99692]

(5) when *(a)* John Redgrave and *(b)* his Counsel were advised of the need to reschedule the date of John Redgrave's disciplinary hearing before the Metropolitan Police; when they were advised of the revised date for the hearing; and what steps were taken to seek a mutually agreed date between all parties. [99695]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 27 February 2003]:* The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis informs me that dates for prospective hearings were set after full consultation with Counsel for DI Redgrave.

The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis informs me that two of the Discipline Board members stood down on Tuesday 11 February following submissions of possible lack of impartiality by defence Counsel acting on behalf of the other officer facing disciplinary proceedings. I am further informed that DI Redgrave's Counsel was present throughout these proceedings.

The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis informs me that during the course of the submissions that preceded two of the Discipline Board members standing down Counsel for DI Redgrave stated that he was, "...decidedly neutral".

The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis informs me that contact with DI Redgrave and his Counsel was made normally through DI Redgrave's solicitors. To that end, solicitors representing DI Redgrave were initially contacted by telephone at lunchtime on the day that members of the Discipline Board withdrew and were informed that efforts were being made to convene a new Board. DI Redgrave's solicitors were further contacted by telephone in an attempt to re-convene the hearing within the originally scheduled period of four weeks, which had been set aside for the hearing. However, when that proved not possible, on 20 February 2003, letters were faxed to solicitors acting on behalf of DI Redgrave and the other officer involved in the proceedings urgently seeking available dates for a hearing, between that date and 1 June 2003.

Matters related to the conduct of disciplinary proceedings are the responsibility of chief officers. The Secretary of State has no authority to intervene in such matters.

London Prisons

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much has been allocated to each London prison under the prison service drug strategy during the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [99408]

Hilary Benn: The Prison Service is committed to meeting the needs of all drug-misusing prisoners—to help them lead law-abiding lives on release and, thereby, reduce levels of re-offending. The following table shows the allocations made to each London prison at the start of the 2002–03 financial year.

Prison	*Total (£000s)*
Belmarsh	609.3
Brixton	632.9
Feltham	733.7
Holloway	301.8
Latchmere House	163.1
Pentonville	504.5
Wandsworth	930.3
Wormwood Scrubs	660.7
Total	4,536.3

Merseyside Neighbourhood Support Scheme

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what assessment he has made of the work of the Neighbourhood Support Team of the Special Constabulary of Merseyside; [99550]

(2) if he will make a statement on the work of the Special Constabulary on Merseyside. [99549]

Mr. Denham: Merseyside Special Constabulary plays an important role in contributing towards crime reduction and public reassurance within their force. They are recognised by the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) as being a well managed force, who have put considerable efforts into integrating specials work into that of the regular force and within their neighbourhood policing model.

The Chief Constable of Merseyside Police also tells me that since its inception in July 2002, the Neighbourhood Support Team of the Special Constabulary has made 84 arrests, itself an impressive record.

Merseyside Police was one of several forces across the country asked to take forward a project under the 'Specials Champions Initiative', contributing towards Home Office/ACPO Good Practice Guidance which will be published on the new Special Constabulary website (www.specialconstables.gov.uk)

Parole

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many prisoners who *(a)* maintain their innocence and *(b)* admit guilt for the offence for which they have been convicted have been granted parole or life licence in each of the last five years; [100170]

(2) how many prisoners who maintain their innocence have completed offending behaviour programmes in each of the last five years. [100169]

Hilary Benn: Offending behaviour programmes vary in their suitability for prisoners who maintain their innocence in relation to their current offence. Information on such prisoners who complete offending behaviour programmes is not centrally recorded by the Prison Service and to provide it would incur disproportionate cost.

Information on how many prisoners who *(a)* maintain their innocence and *(b)* admit guilt for the offence of which they have been convicted and have been granted parole or life licence in each of the last five years is not centrally recorded by the Prison Service and to provide it would incur disproportionate cost. I understand however, that as from January 2003, the Parole Board has begun to collate this data and the results are likely to be published in its future Annual Reports.

Police

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* uniformed officers and *(b)* civilian staff there were in each police authority area in the North East region (i) in 1996 and (ii) on the most recent date for which figures are available; and if he will express this figure as a ratio per head of population. [100566]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 4 March 2003]:* The information requested is set out in the table.

Force	*Police officer numbers*	*Police officers per 100,000 population*	*Civilians*	*Civilians per 100,000 population*
31 March 1996[1]				
Durham	1,401	230.4	526.5	86.6
Cleveland	1,420.3	253.6	553.3	98.8
Northumbria	3,668.3	254.4	1,399.3	97.0
North east region	6,489.6	248.6	2,479	95.0
31 March 2002[2]				
Durham	1,614	266.0	660	108.8
Cleveland	1,461	262.5	626	112.4
Northumbria	3,929	277.8	1,403	99.2
North east region	7,004	271.8	2,689	104.3

[1] Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, Annual Report 1995–96

[2] Home Office Research and Statistics Directorate

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many net transfers there were in each police force in *(a)* 1998–99, *(b)* 1999–2000, *(c)* 2000–01 and *(d)* 2001–02; [100739]

(2) what estimate he has made of the number of *(a)* transfers in, *(b)* transfers out and *(c)* net transfers for (i) 2002–03 to date and (ii) the full year 2002–03 for each police force. [100740]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 4 March 2003]:* The information in the table has been provided by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary. Statistics for 2002–03 are not yet available but will be collected by the Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate after 31March 2003 and published in due course.

	1998–99			*1999–2000*		
Police transfers	*Transfers from force*	*Transfers to force*	*Net transfers*	*Transfers from force*	*Transfers to force*	*Net transfers*
Avon and Somerset	5	47	42	16	29	13
Bedfordshire	1	2	1	5	1	-4
Cambridgeshire	3	21	18	6	12	6
Cheshire	5	22	17	4	12	8

	1998–99			1999–2000		
Police transfers	*Transfers from force*	*Transfers to force*	*Net transfers*	*Transfers from force*	*Transfers to force*	*Net transfers*
City of London	13	3	-10	13	0	-13
Cleveland	6	0	-6	1	9	8
Cumbria	4	11	7	6	4	-2
Derbyshire	0	15	15	6	10	4
Devon and Cornwall	8	3	-5	8	19	11
Dorset	0	4	4	3	54	51
Durham	3	15	12	3	6	3
Dyfed-Powys	2	17	15	5	15	10
Essex	6	9	3	10	23	13
Gloucestershire	1	3	2	3	13	10
Greater Manchester	13	19	6	15	25	10
Gwent	3	8	5	3	23	20
Hampshire	12	11	-1	20	31	11
Hertfordshire	23	11	-12	23	25	2
Humberside	5	10	5	5	15	10
Kent	11	5	-6	12	18	6
Lancashire	10	0	-10	7	7	0
Leicestershire	6	13	7	13	8	-5
Lincolnshire	1	5	4	5	14	9
Merseyside	16	15	-1	10	9	-1
Metropolitan Police	234	23	-211	244	36	-208
Norfolk	5	9	4	2	13	11
North Wales	5	4	-1	5	14	9
North Yorkshire	5	0	-5	5	10	5
Northamptonshire	3	8	5	2	3	1
Northumbria	7	36	29	9	7	-2
Nottinghamshire	13	0	-13	10	9	-1
South Wales	6	16	10	11	7	-4
South Yorkshire	10	18	8	8	22	14
Staffordshire	5	14	9	2	2	0
Suffolk	5	9	4	5	2	-3
Surrey	11	22	11	18	43	25
Sussex	13	16	3	21	21	0
Thames Valley	10	4	-6	26	1	-25
Warwickshire	7	17	10	2	3	1
West Mercia	5	16	11	6	2	-4
West Midlands	47	23	-24	42	26	-16
West Yorkshire	11	6	-5	15	0	-15
Wiltshire	1	10	9	7	13	6

	2000–01			2001–02		
	Transfers from force	*Transfers to force*	*Net transfers*	*Transfers from force*	*Transfers to force*	*Net transfers*
Avon and Somerset	25	48	23	19	44	25
Bedfordshire	21	9	-12	51	6	-45
Cambridgeshire	12	15	3	26	27	1
Cheshire	6	8	2	18	8	-10
City of London	18	2	-16	11	42	31
Cleveland	4	0	-4	4	17	13
Cumbria	10	9	-1	18	29	11
Derbyshire	5	3	-2	6	18	12
Devon and Cornwall	7	62	55	13	87	74
Dorset	9	36	27	20	36	16
Durham	5	14	9	10	10	0
Dyfed-Powys	9	13	4	4	23	19
Essex	25	50	25	56	50	-6
Gloucestershire	6	14	8	20	18	-2
Greater Manchester	28	48	20	39	64	25
Gwent	5	13	8	8	15	7
Hampshire	24	41	17	61	54	-7
Hertfordshire	43	31	-12	59	54	-5
Humberside	18	10	-8	12	24	12
Kent	26	30	4	28	24	-4
Lancashire	7	13	6	36	28	-8
Leicestershire	27	34	7	37	13	-24
Lincolnshire	6	32	26	6	8	2
Merseyside	14	18	4	8	17	9
Metropolitan Police	382	79	-303	436	196	-240
Norfolk	6	28	22	9	33	24

	2000–01			2001–02		
	Transfers from force	*Transfers to force*	*Net transfers*	*Transfers from force*	*Transfers to force*	*Net transfers*
North Wales	2	19	17	0	32	32
North Yorkshire	5	36	31	4	80	76
Northamptonshire	10	16	6	13	29	16
Northumbria	5	9	4	26	29	3
Nottinghamshire	6	33	27	14	42	28
South Wales	3	60	57	6	12	6
South Yorkshire	4	21	17	12	26	14
Staffordshire	9	2	-7	22	35	13
Suffolk	11	8	-3	3	21	18
Surrey	171	303	132	246	55	-191
Sussex	31	23	-8	34	29	-5
Thames Valley	80	9	-71	72	13	-59
Warwickshire	8	2	-6	17	27	10
West Mercia	6	18	12	10	65	55
West Midlands	59	22	-37	132	41	-91
West Yorkshire.	19	21	2	47	22	-25
Wiltshire	12	15	3	10	22	12

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many police officers transferred from Essex Police to *(a)* the Metropolitan Police and *(b)* the City of London Police in the last 12 months for which figures are available; [99640]

(2) how many police officers have transferred to the Essex Police from *(a)* the Metropolitan Police and *(b)* the City of London Police in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [99641]

Mr. Denham: Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary collects information annually about the total number of officers transferring in and out of each force. The information collected does not distinguish the force of origin or destination of officers who have transferred. The latest information is for 2001–02 and the table shows the total numbers of officers transferring in and out of the Essex, City of London and Metropolitan police forces.

Force	*Transfers out*	*Transfers in*
City of London	11	42
Essex	56	50
Metropolitan	436	196

Essex Police, in common with a number of other forces in and around London, is concerned about issues relating to the retention of police officers, including a net outflow of officers on transfer.

We are therefore working with Chief Constables, Police Authorities and staff associations in and around London, including Essex, to look at all the associated issues and to develop practical solutions.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the basic command unit fund is exempt from the requirement to save 5 per cent. overtime costs set out in the Police Reform Act 2002. [99667]

Mr. Denham: The Basic Command Unit (BCD) Fund, allocated £50 million in each of the three years from 2003–04, is provided to help the frontline deliver crime and disorder reduction locally and promote partnership working. The funding may be spent on a range of crime and disorder work and on building the capacity of Partnerships to deliver, as part of a coherent local strategy.

Where the BCU fund is used for police operations, it may be necessary for officers to be deployed outside their normal duty hours. Where that is necessary, it will need to be planned in accordance with the Agreement reached in the Police Negotiating Board (PNB) on managing overtime. That Agreement is about giving police officers a better work/life balance. It is not about cutting costs or reducing the availability of officers for operational duties, including, when the need arises, beyond their rostered hours.

Under the PNB Agreement, forces will have local targets for reducing their overtime bill, agreed between the chief constable and the police authority, with the approval of the Inspectorate. In monitoring forces' performance against their targets, the Inspectorate is expressly required, under the PNB Agreement, to take account of force strength, unforeseen major incidents and new requirements. So, the Inspectorate will ensure that any new spending on overtime to deliver reductions in crime—such as from the BCD fund—is taken into account when assessing forces' performance against their overtime targets.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers there were per notifiable offence in England in each year from 1977–78 to 2002–03 (estimated); and if he will make a statement. [99812]

Mr. Denham: The requested information is shown in the table.

	Number of officers per 1,000 notifiable offences in England
1977	41
1978	41
1979	43
1980	42
1981	39
1982	36
1983	37
1984	34
1985	33

	Number of officers per 1,000 notifiable offences in England
1986	31
1987	31
1988	33
1989	32
1990	27
1991	24
1992	22
1993	23
1994	24
1995	24
1996	25
1997	27
1997–98[1]	27
1998–99[2]	24
1999–2000	23
2000–01	24
2001–02	23

[1] Recorded crime data expressed on a financial year basis from this point onwards

[2] Revised rules for recording crime were introduced on 1 April 1998. The ratios before and after this date are therefore not directly comparable.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the resident population of each English police authority was in the latest year for which figures are available. [99881]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 27 February 2003]:* The latest available total resident population, as at 30 June 2001, as estimated by the Registrar General, is given in the table.

Police authority	*Population*
Avon and Somerset	1,483,450
Bedfordshire	566,415
Cambridgeshire	710,032
Cheshire	983,670
City of London	7,216
Cleveland	541,262
Cumbria	487,792
Derbyshire	956,560
Devon and Cornwall	1,578,595
Dorset	693,460
Durham	591,551
Essex	1,616,246
Gloucester	565,000
Greater Manchester	2,482,824
Hampshire	1,778,181
Hertfordshire	1,034,895
Humberside	869,099
Kent	1,580,870
Lancashire	1,415,596
Leicestershire	924,661
Lincolnshire	647,649
Merseyside	1,361,658
Metropolitan Police	7,180,790
Norfolk	797,906
North Yorkshire	751,414
Northamptonshire	630,444
Northumbria	1,383,718
Nottinghamshire	1,015,767
South Yorkshire	1,266,487
Staffordshire	1,047,575
Suffolk	669,366
Surrey	1,059,469
Sussex	1,495,453
Thames Valley	2,092,923
Warwickshire	506,200
West Mercia	1,158,958
West Midlands	2,554,365
West Yorkshire	2,080,165
Wiltshire	613,657
Total	49,181,339

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the cost was of telephone call-handling facilities for the public at each English police authority in the last year for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [99904]

Mr. Denham: Information on the costs of telephone services to police authorities in England are not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Police forces in England have developed telephone call-handling facilities to deal with calls from the public. Again, information relating to the costs of providing such facilities are not held centrally and could not be collected except at disproportionate cost.

Police Cells

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many arrests have taken place in *(a)* Chorley, *(b)* south Ribble and *(c)* west Lancashire in each of the last three years; to which custody suite were arrestees taken; and how many went to Magistrates court; [100383]

(2) whether the extension to police cells at south Ribble will change the cells' status; [100384]

(3) how many custody suites are operated by Lancashire police; how many cells are in each; and where they are; [100382]

(4) how many police cells have been taken out of action in Lancashire in the last 12 months; [100385]

(5) what the timescale is for re-opening police cells that have been closed in Lancashire. [100388]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 3 March 2003]:* I understand from the Chief Constable of Lancashire that there are nine custody suites operated by Lancashire Constabulary. These are located in Blackpool (30 cells), Lancaster (nine cells), Fleetwood (eight cells), Leyland (eight cells), Skelmersdale (17 cells), Preston (22 cells), Greenbank (36 cells), Burnley (16 cells) and Colne (eight cells).

Lancashire Constabulary intends to add about six cells to Leyland police station (South Ribble) within the next couple of years. It will retain its status as one of only two custody suites in Lancashire designed as suitable for the detention of terrorists and other Category A prisoners.

I will ask the Chief Constable of Lancashire to write to the hon. Member about the number of police cells taken out of action in Lancashire in the last 12 months.

The detailed information requested about arrests in Chorley, South Ribble and West Lancashire is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However, I understand from

Lancashire Constabulary that around 2,500 to 3,000 people per annum are arrested in each of these three areas.

Prison Inspectors

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many inspectors of HM Prisons were employed in each year since 1997. [99761]

Hilary Benn: The number of inspectors employed by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons for each year since 1997 is set out in the table. The number of core inspectors in column one covers full-time equivalent posts employed by or seconded to the Inspectorate, and includes the Chief and Deputy Chief Inspectors. The number of specialist inspectors in column two includes staff employed on both a full and part-time basis. Guest inspectors employed by other inspectorates, for example OFSTED, or those consultants used on an ad hoc basis, are excluded.

	Core Inspectors	*Specialist Inspectors*
1 December 1997—30 November 1998	10	7
1 December 1998—30 November 1999	10	6
1 December 1999—30 November 2000	12	6
1 August 2001—31 August 2002	14	10

Prison Service Chief

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reason the post of the Director General of HM Prison Service was not advertised. [99437]

Hilary Benn: The official appointed Director General of the Prison Service is an established civil servant of the same grade as the post. He also has all of the necessary competences for the job and, as the former Deputy Director General, is the most senior Prison Service operational manager and has the greatest experience. Given the circumstances outlined, the Civil Service Commission's rules permitted the post to be filled without advertisement.

Prison Food

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of prisons offer fresh fruit each day to prisoners. [99720]

Hilary Benn: All prison establishments are required to offer fresh fruit to prisoners daily.

Drug Treatment

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many offenders *(a)* in prison and *(b)* in the community were receiving treatment for drug problems in each of the last five years. [99537]

Hilary Benn: Information on the number of prisoners receiving treatment for drug problems was not collected centrally until 2001–02 and is given in the following table.

2001–02

	Number
Detoxification	40,865
Carats[1]	39,279
Rehabilitation	4,691

[1] Counselling, assessment, referral, advice, throughcare

Powers to impose a drug and/or alcohol treatment requirement, as part of a Community Rehabilitation Order or a Community Punishment and Rehabilitation Order were contained in the Powers of Criminal Courts Act 1973, now the Powers of Criminal Courts (Sentencing) Act 2000. However, these statistics do not differentiate between alcohol and drugs. From October 2000, when the Drug Treatment and Testing Order was rolled-out to courts in England and Wales, the power to attach a drug treatment requirement to a Community Rehabilitation Order or Community Rehabilitation and Punishment order was removed.

The table gives figures for Community Rehabilitation Orders and Community Punishment and Rehabilitation Orders that contain a drug and/or alcohol element for the years 1997 to 2001 and the number of Drug Treatment and Testing Orders made between October 2000-December 2001.

Persons starting probation service supervision with drugs/alcohol additional requirement attached to the main order— England and Wales

Type of additional requirement	*Number of persons*				
	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Community rehabilitation orders					
Residential drugs/alcohol treatment	346	299	276	236	192
Non-residential drugs/alcohol treatment	1,039	1,394	1,590	1,795	1,133
Drugs/alcohol treatment by/under qualified medical person	631	843	1,131	1,101	793
Total	2,016	2,536	2,997	3,132	2,118
Community punishment and rehabilitation orders					
Residential drugs/alcohol treatment	4	5	3	1	6
Non-residential drugs/alcohol treatment	165	238	238	175	143
Drugs/alcohol treatment by/under qualified medical person	92	105	110	1.31	71
Total	261	348	351	307	220

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what additional resources will be allocated for drug treatment and testing orders in each of the next two financial years. [99970]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 28 February 2003]*: Additional funding of £17.7 million and £40 million respectively over the next two financial years has been allocated for drug treatment and testing orders.

Rehabilitation

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on prison resources directed at the rehabilitation of 18 to 21 year-old young offenders. [99629]

Hilary Benn: I shall write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my reply in the Library.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the early provisional indications of the Cognitive Self-Change Programme for Prisoners. [99724]

Hilary Benn: Preliminary psychometric data is showing reductions in hostility, aggression and impulsivity for the small number of prisoners who have completed the programme. More information will be available as prisoners progress through the programme and further analysis is undertaken.

Renewable Energy

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what changes in unit payments for electricity have resulted from the switch by his Department to purchasing renewable energy which is exempt from the Climate Change Levy. [96484]

Beverley Hughes: For the financial year 2001–2002 the average unit price of the renewable electricity (inclusive of VAT) purchased by the Home Department was 4.6610p/kWh and the average unit price of standard electricity was 4.5918p/kWh so there was an increase of 0.82 per cent in the average price paid. These figures are for the non-Agency Home Office, other than minor occupations where electricity consumption is minimal and figures are not collected centrally.

Special Constabulary

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the remuneration of special constables. [99551]

Mr. Denham: We have introduced the Special Constabulary (Amendment) Regulations 2002 to allow Police Authorities, following a recommendation of the Chief Officer, to make proposals to pay a locally funded allowance to special constables appointed for their area (or part of their area). Such schemes will require the approval of the Secretary of State.

The change in Regulations will enable a number of trial schemes to be run to help establish what effect such locally funded payments have on Specials' recruitment and retention and the number of hours they are able to offer their force.

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the strength was of the special constabulary in each police authority area in *(a)* May 1997 and *(b)* May 2001; and what the strength is in each area. [99638]

Mr. Denham: Special constabulary numbers for this period are recorded centrally every six months in September and March. The latest figures available and the number of serving special constables in each police force area for March 1997 and 2001 are set out in the table.

Police force area	*March 1997*	*March 2001*	*March 2002*
Avon and Somerset	759	400	364
Bedfordshire	182	115	118
Cambridgeshire	303	218	207
Cheshire	475	290	191
Cleveland	160	93	85
Cumbria	189	156	102
Derbyshire	428	275	260
Devon and Cornwall	1,148	796	689
Dorset	289	267	253
Durham	184	146	134
Essex	634	445	381
Gloucestershire	297	183	154
Greater Manchester	685	367	338
Hampshire	621	454	444
Hampshire	621	454	444
Hertfordshire	297	198	206
Humberside	340	212	207
Kent	589	392	327
Lancashire	483	360	363
Leicestershire	415	162	143
Lincolnshire	271	166	155
City of London	86	43	36
Merseyside	401	541	468
Metropolitan Police	1,714	774	680
Norfolk	402	259	244
Northamptonshire	316	188	177
Northumbria	533	300	256
North Yorkshire	362	182	185
Nottinghamshire	620	335	341
South Yorkshire	308	188	206
Staffordshire	685	402	384
Suffolk	379	349	308
Surrey	297	149	187
Sussex	472	306	306
Thames Valley	656	418	356
Warwickshire	381	221	209
West Mercia	582	399	339
West Midlands	945	617	598
West Yorkshire	690	415	349
Wiltshire	154	152	147
Dyfed-Powys	283	191	157
Gwent	157	137	142
North Wales	341	207	125
South Wales	361	254	277
Total all forces	19,874	12,722	11,598

Since March 1998, information on the strength of special constabularies for each Police Force has been published in the Home Office Statistical Bulletins on police strength in England and Wales, copies of which are available in the Library.

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will make a statement on the outcome of the Special Constabulary Weekend of 21–23 February. [99639]

Mr. Denham: The initial responses that we have received following the National Specials Weekend have been very positive, showing the impressive contribution that specials make to policing. Some of the activities of the Weekend will form the basis of an article to be published in March in 'Specialbeat' (an internal Special Constabulary magazine). An article on the Weekend's outcomes will also appear on the new website www.specialconstables.gov.uk which was launched at the same time as the Weekend. I am grateful to the hon. Member who replied to my invitation to support the Weekend.

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make further funding available to chief constables to finance allowances under the Special Constables (Amendment) Regulations 2002 to assist schemes aimed at the recruitment and retention of special constables; and if he will make a statement; [99645]

(2) if he will investigate local schemes introduced under the Special Constables (Amendment) Regulations 2002 to assess the effect of payment on recruitment and retention of special constables; and if he will publish the findings of such an investigation; [99646]

(3) how many police authorities have applied to him for approval to introduce an allowance for special constables under the Special Constables (Amendment) Regulations 2002; how many he has *(a)* approved and *(b)* refused; and what measures he has taken to monitor schemes; [99647]

(4) what discussions he has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer to exempt special constables from income tax being levied on allowances paid under the Special Constables (Amendment) Regulations 2002; and if he will make a statement. [99644]

Mr. Denham: We recognise that some forces feel it would be helpful to use local funding to pay specials involved in particular schemes and introduced The Special Constables (Amendment) Regulations 2002, which came into force on 10 January 2003. Under these new regulations, Police Authorities may, following a recommendation by the Chief Officer, make proposals to pay a locally funded allowance to special constables appointed for their area (or part of their area). Proposals must have the approval of the Secretary of State.

It is for the Police Authority to propose the size and terms and conditions of an allowance appropriate to their area or scheme. It will be open to police authorities to obtain sponsorship to help fund the schemes or to fund them entirely from their existing resources. We expect that, when they are developing proposals, police authorities will take advice from the Inland Revenue on the likely implications of paying an allowance.

Several police authorities have expressed an interest in developing allowance schemes but we have yet to receive any formal proposals. We will be looking for a number of innovative trial schemes which will enable an evidence-based assessment to be made of the effect of local payment schemes on recruitment and retention and the number of hours offered by specials, and whether such schemes offer value for money.

Civil Contingencies

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received from *(a)* the St John's Ambulance and *(b)* the Red Cross concerning contingency civil defence (i) planning and (ii) readiness in the event of an NBC terrorist attack in (A) London, (B) the South East, (C) England and (D) the United Kingdom. [96252]

Mr. Blunkett: I have received no representations from the St John's Ambulance or the Red Cross concerning any aspect of civil contingency planning or preparedness.

My hon friend the Minister of State in the Cabinet Office, (Mr Alexander) has provided further details of how voluntary organisations have been involved in civil defence preparedness, Official Report, column 495W.

I am aware that my rt hon friend the Secretary of State for Health met Sir Nicholas Young, the British Red Cross Chief Executive, on 7 January this year to discuss ways of strengthening and deepening strategic partnerships between the Department of Health and the Red Cross. There are a number of key common interests including emergency response. Work on these common interests continues. The Department of Health is also closely involved in the work of the National Aid Societies' Emergency Committee (NVASEC) which comprises the Red Cross and St John Ambulance. NVASEC has responsibility for planning such requirements as may be agreed with the Government for the provision of support to the medical services of the Armed Forces, the Health Service of Local Authorities in all encompassing peace time and wartime support role.

Traffic Accidents (Havering)

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make a statement on the rate of road traffic accidents in the London Borough of Havering; [99744]

(2) what recent communication he has had with the police in the London Borough of Havering regarding road traffic accidents. [99743]

Mr. Denham: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that there were 957 reported road traffic accidents in Havering in 2001 and 801 in the period from January to November 2002, the latest for which figures are available. This shows an encouraging downwards trend. Havering Borough continues to demonstrate its commitment to road safety by the deployment of two dedicated road safety officers. The National Policing Plan provides that all police forces and local authorities should include in their local policing plans targeted and intelligence-led strategies for reducing deaths and injuries on the road and achieving a safe environment for all road users.

Young Prisoners

Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what new instructions have been issued to prison and social service staff as a result of the judicial review brought by the Howard League for Penal Reform on the Children's Act. [100282]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 3 March 2003]:* Following the High Court judgment in the judicial review brought by the Howard League on the application of the Children Act 1989 to children in young offender institutions (YOIs), guidance has been issued to all Area Managers, Governors and Directors, with responsibilities for children in custody. The guidance states that the Act does apply to children in YOIs and the duties imposed on local authorities do not cease to arise merely because a child is in a YOI.

The possible need for further guidance for other audiences is being considered as part of the Government's response to Recommendation 2.8 of the

Joint Chief Inspectors' report 'Safeguarding Children', which recommends that the Home Office and the Youth Justice Board should issue revised guidance to the Prison Service and the area child protection committee member organisations on the requirements and arrangements to safeguard children in prisons and YOI.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many young people in prison are on the Duke of Edinburgh awards scheme *(a)* in each prison and *(b)* in total; and if he will make a statement; [99786]

(2) how many young people in prison have achieved a Duke of Edinburgh award *(a)* in each prison and *(b)* in total in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [99785]

Hilary Benn: Full awards under the Duke of Edinburgh scheme in Prison Service establishments holding juveniles and young offenders over the period August 2001—February 2003 inclusive are set out in the table. Information on awards obtained before August 2001 is not available. Information on the number of individual prisoners undertaking the Duke of Edinburgh awards scheme is not recorded centrally.

Establishments	*Bronze Award*	*Silver Award*
Aylesbury	4	
Bullwood Hall	8	
Castington	2	
Deerbolt	10	
Doncaster	4	
Feltham	10	
Moorland	11	
Onley	9	
Swinfen Hall	10	
Thorn Cross	4	
Wetherby	8	1

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Small Businesses

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the Government is doing to maintain the number of small manufacturers; what efforts are being made to improve resources and funding for the small business service; and if she will make a statement. [100298]

Nigel Griffiths: The Government's manufacturing strategy highlights the importance of increasing the uptake of best practice and improving skills, capital investment and innovation as key to the long-term survival of UK manufacturers. The Small Business Service (SBS) works closely with DTI colleagues responsible for the Manufacturing Advisory Service (MAS). In all regions the MAS is being delivered in close association with Business Links Operators. In addition SBS runs a number of national programmes which include the provision of specific assistance to manufacturing companies, including the Inside UK Enterprise programme of best practice visits, and the Benchmark Index, which includes a report focused on SME manufacturing, aimed at making it easier for individual manufacturing companies to compare their performance with that of their competitors, and to learn from each other. In "Small Business and Government—The Way Forward", published in December 2002, the Government set out its policy framework towards small business, including the key role of the SBS as a centre of expertise on small business issues in Government. The resources for the SBS in 2003–04 are being considered in the context of the development of its Business Plan for that year, which will be published on www.sbs.gov.uk.

Auditing/Accounting

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will publish minutes of her meetings with the President of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales. [100522]

Miss Melanie Johnson: In line with the common practice of this and previous governments, we do not publish such minutes under Exemption 2—Internal Advice and Discussion—of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will propose legislation under which plcs would be required to publish their accounts within 90 days of the year end. [100534]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Government's plans for a revised reporting regime for all companies were contained in the White Paper "Modernising Company Law" (Cm 5553), published in July 2002. This included the proposal that public companies should be required to file their annual reporting documents with Companies House within six months of the year end as opposed to seven months at present. In addition, quoted public companies would normally publish these documents on the internet within four months of the year end.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will introduce legislation under which accountants would be forbidden from acting as reporting accountants for a bank and then becoming liquidators and receivers on behalf of the same. [100538]

Miss Melanie Johnson: We do not intend to introduce such legislation. Under existing guidelines for liquidators, where there has been a prior material professional relationship no principal or employee of the firm acting as reporting accountants should accept appointment as liquidator of an insolvent company. If the company is solvent, the insolvency practitioner should nevertheless give careful consideration to all the implications of his accepting appointment as liquidator.

Under existing guidelines for receivers, any insolvency practitioner proposed to be appointed administrative receiver of a company after acting as reporting accountant should take steps to satisfy himself either that the company does not object to his acceptance of the appointment or that the circumstances are such that, in accepting the appointment, he will be able to act, and be seen to act, independently and effectively.

Under the Enterprise Act 2002 the circumstances in which the holder of a floating charge will be able to appoint an administrative receiver will be significantly reduced.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will publish her Department's correspondence with the Accounting Standards Board over the implementation and compliance with FRS17. [100762]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Department has had no correspondence with the Accounting Standards Board over the implementation and compliance with FRS17.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when officials of her Department had meetings with partners in Arthur Andersen to discuss the firm's role in *(a)* Enron and *(b)* WorldCom. [100525]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Officials in the Department had no meetings with partners in Arthur Andersen to discuss the firm's role in Enron and WorldCom.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what regulatory action was taken by her Department against the auditors of the Bank of Credit and Commerce International. [100521]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Supervisory Bodies of the accountancy profession are currently responsible for taking action against individual auditors. In the case of the Bank of Credit & Commerce International, action was taken against the auditors/firms by the Institute of Chartered Accountants of England and Wales (ICAEW), through the Joint Disciplinary Scheme (JDS). The results were published by the press.

Arrangements for monitoring and disciplining audit firms are to change as a result of the recent Review of the Regulatory Regime of the Accountancy Profession. Copies of the Review Report have been placed in the Libraries of House.

Carbon Dioxide

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the environmental consequences of depositing carbon dioxide on the seabed. [99794]

Mr. Wilson: We have, of course, no plans to deposit carbon dioxide on the seabed. We are, however, currently investigating the environmental impact and associated risks of the geological sequestration of carbon dioxide deep beneath the seabed and its use in enhancing the recovery of oil from our reserves in the North Sea. We expect to report our findings on this in the Spring when the Report of the Feasibility of CO_2 Capture and Storage in the UK is published.

Company Financial Statements

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make it her policy to propose legislation to make company directors personally liable for the authenticity of company financial statements. [100763]

Miss Melanie Johnson: This is already the case under section 233 of the Companies Act 1985.

E-Commerce

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentage of the total UK GDP was constituted by e-commerce transactions in *(a)* 2000, *(b)* 2001 and *(c)* 2002. [97234]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 11 February 2003]:* Sales and purchases over the internet are measured by the Office of National Statistics (ONS) as a proportion of the total value of sales and purchases. For statistical reasons this is more useful than measuring them as a proportion of GDP. GDP is a measure of economic activity, and therefore includes only the value added at each stage of development of a product or service. Data for 2002 will not be available until October 2003.

ONS E-Commerce Survey of UK Businesses: Sales and Purchases Made Over the Internet (excluding those for the finance sector[1])

Year	*Sales over the internet £ billion*	*Sales over the Internet as % of total value of sales*	*Purchases over the internet £ billion*	*Purchases over the internet as % of total value of purchases*
2001	18.4	1.0	23.4	1.7

The 2000 ONS survey only covered enterprises with 10 or more employees, and slightly fewer areas of the economy[2]. The 2001 figures shown below are on a consistent basis to give year on year comparability.

2001	*£17 billion*	*1.0%*	*£19.5 billion*	*1.7%*
2000	*£12 billion*	*0.9%*	*£15.6 billion*	*1.6%*

Notes:

[1] There are particular measurement difficulties associated with capturing e-commerce activity and turnover in the financial sector, preventing the calculation of a reliable estimate for the value of e-commerce in this sector. ONS is working with international organisations (Eurostat, OECD) to help identify a solution but as yet no agreed method has been identified.

[2] The 2000 survey also covered slightly fewer areas of the economy, with the following sectors added for 2001: health and social work; recreational, cultural and sporting activities; other service activities. Sectors covered in both years were: manufacturing, utilities, construction, wholesale and retail, hotels and restaurants, transport and communication, finance and other business services.

Enron

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the inquiries that her Department made into the auditing standards of Arthur Andersen as a result of the Enron case. [100544]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Department has made no such enquiries. The Joint Monitoring Unit of the Consultative Committee of Accounting Bodies and the ACCA Monitoring Unit are currently responsible for monitoring audit firms.

Arrangements for monitoring and disciplining audit firms are to be strengthened as a result of the recent Review of the Regulatory Regime of the Accountancy Profession. Copies of the Review Report have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Equal Treatment Directive

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress she has made on implementing the EU Equal Treatment Directive. [100649]

Ms Hewitt: We are currently carrying out a detailed analysis of the amended Equal Treatment Directive to identify all changes which may be needed to the Sex Discrimination Act. We used the recent consultation exercise on implementing the Article 13 Employment and Race Directives to consult at the same time on those provisions in the amended Equal Treatment Directive where the line taken is similar.

Magnet Sales

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what investigations her Department has conducted into the end use to which magnets sold by the British company Endshire Export Marketing were put by the German buyer. [100073]

Nigel Griffiths: None. These allegations relate to 1992 and earlier, and any investigations are the responsibility of Her Majesty's Customs and Excise.

Mobile Phones

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what assessment she has made of the response of mobile phone operators to the Competition Commission's proposals on mobile phone charges, seeking to reduce their charges; [100091]

(2) what assessment she has made of the effect of the Competition Commission's proposals on mobile phone charges on the rollout of third generation mobile phones; [100094]

(3) what assessment she has made of the impact of implementing the Competition Commission's proposals on mobile phone charges on the mobile phone operators in the United Kingdom. [100090]

Mr. Timms: This is a matter for the Competition Commission. The report itself is currently subject to judicial review. The Competition Commission is independent from Government.

All mobile operators across Europe are facing financial constraints due to the overall state of the industry.

However the UK will be the first major market in Europe to roll out 3G with all five operators still on track to launch in 2003. This is in marked contrast to other European markets where operators have postponed their 3G launch—Orange for example have delayed their 3G roll-out across Europe except in the UK—and this is a vindication of the Government's policy in bringing in a new entrant to increase competition.

Money Laundering

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action she has taken against accountancy firms who do not report suspicions of money laundering to the National Criminal Intelligence Service. [100542]

Miss Melanie Johnson: This Department is not responsible for prosecutions for failure to report suspicions of money laundering to the National Criminal Intelligence Service.

It is a matter for HM Treasury.

PLC Accounts

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the steps that her Department takes to monitor the quality of accounts published by public limited companies. [100905]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Financial Reporting Review Panel has responsibility for the enforcement of accounting standards for both listed and large private companies.

Pollution

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many *(a)* complaints, *(b)* court actions and *(c)* fines against industry for problems related to (i) odours, (ii) water pollution, (iii) air pollution and (iv) human health impact (A) in total, (B) in each region and (C) per site there have been in each year since 1995. [99213]

Alun Michael: I have been asked to reply.

The Environment Agency does not collect all the requested information and has relevant data only since 1999. All the pollution control systems listed below address human health impact, although figures are not kept separately for offences relating to actual or potential human health impacts. No data are held on complaints. The following information is available from the Agency's database.

Data on odours are not kept separately but are included in data for waste licensing, the total fines for which were as follows:

Date	*Total (£)*	*Regional breakdown (£)*
1999	46,650	Anglian 8,000, Midlands 11,750, NE 11,000, NW 6,400, Southern 9,500
2000	226,400	Anglian 27,000, Midlands 107,500, NE 8,000, NW 43,200, Southern 16,200, Thames 1,500, Welsh 23,000
2001	124,834	Anglian 3,000, Midlands 72,500, NE 4,334, NW 7,500, Southern 23,500, Welsh 14,000
2002	176,800	Anglian 30,500, Midlands 12,600, NE 6,000, NW 72,500, SW 2,500, Southern 41,450, Thames 6,000, Welsh 5,250

Of these fines below, the following related to offences under section 33(1)*(c)* of the Environmental Protection Act: to treat, keep or dispose of controlled waste in a manner likely to cause pollution of the environment or harm to human health.

Total fines in England and Wales in respect of integrated pollution control and integrated pollution prevention (which also includes odour offences) were as follows:

Date	*Total (£)*	*Regional breakdown (£)*
1999	100,050	Anglian 1,000, Midlands 1,750, NE 9,000, SW 4,300, Thames 59,000, Welsh 25,000
2000	352,500	Midlands 50,000, NE 166,000, NW 70,000, SW 30,000, Thames 44,000, Welsh 2,500

Date	*Total (£)*	*Regional breakdown (£)*
2001	92,000	Midlands 33,000, Thames 44,000, Welsh 15,000
2002	22,750	Midlands 5,000, NE 10,000, NW 7,500, Welsh 250

Total fines in England and Wales in respect of water pollution were as follows:

Date	*Total (£)*	*Regional breakdown (£)*
1999	46,450	Anglian 8,000, Midlands 11,750, NE 11,000, NW 6,400, Southern 9,500
2000	226,400	Anglian 27,000, Midlands 107,500, NE 8, 000, NW 43,200, Southern 16,200, Thames 1,500, Welsh 23,000
2001	124,834	Anglian 3,000, Midlands 72,500, NE 4,334, NW 7,500, Southern 23,500, Welsh 14,000
2002	176,800	Anglian 30,500, Midlands 12,600, NE 6,000, NW 72,500, SW 2,500, Southern 41,450, Thames 6,000, Welsh 5,250

Of these fines below, the following related to offences under section 33(1)*(c)* of the Environmental Protection Act: to treat, keep or dispose of controlled waste in a manner likely to cause pollution of the environment or harm to human health.

Date	*Total (£)*	*Regional breakdown (£)*
1999	123,100	Midlands 30,350, NE 81,500, NW 5,500, Southern 2,500, Welsh 3,250
2000	47,835	Midlands 24,135, NW 2,500, SW 4,000, Soutehrn 3,000, Thames 1,000, Welsh 3,200
2001	85,950	Anglian 6,000, Midlands 51,050, NE 1,000, NW 2,500, Southern 4,000, Thames 12,000, Welsh 9,400
2002	123,700	Anglian 52,000, Midlands 33,000, NW 10,000, SW 16,000, Thames 3,000, Welsh 9,700

Total fines in England and Wales in respect of integrated pollution control and integrated pollution prevention (which also includes odour offences) were as follows:

Date	*Total (£)*	*Regional breakdown (£)*
1999	704,755	Anglian 145,000, Midlands 28,950, NE 64,700, NW 148,500, SW 19,305, Southern 91,050, Thames 137,000, Welsh 70,250
2000	1,178,450	Anglian 226,250, Midlands 188,500, NE 81,600, NW 78,400, SW 77,800, Soutehrn 123,000, Thames 264,350, Welsh 138,550
2001	1,306,700	Anglian 233,300, Midlands 112,100, NE 125,950, NW 175,150, SW 96,150, Southern 101,950, Thames 243,600, Welsh 218,500
2002	1,943,766	Anglian 267,950, Midlands 214,700, NE 69,000, NW 391,900, SW 181,550, Southern 85,580, Thames 387,586, Welsh 145,500

Local authorities also regulate air pollution from industry. The Department does not collect information about numbers of complaints or distinguish between the different court actions. Data on prosecutions from the Department's annual statistical report on the Local Air Pollution Control regime, available from 1997, is as follows.

Date	*Total (£)*	*Regional breakdown (£)*
1997–98	62,400	West Midlands 17,750, NW 9,000, Yorks & Humber 1,000, NW 16,500, Wales 12,500, East Midlands 650, East of England 5,000
1998–99	88,900	NE 10,000, West Midlands 38,250, NW 7,000, East of England 8,000, Wales 5,000, SE 12,650, East Midlands 8,000
1999–00	175,500	South East 4,000, Yorks & Humber 21,500, East Midlands 4,000, Wales 146,000
2000–01	87,510	East of England 72,400, West Midlands 2,000, Yorks & Humber 5,500, SW 7,250
2001–02	62,500	Yorks & Humber 10,500, West Midlands 15,000, SE 29,000, Welsh 8,000

The Department holds no data on odour. This information is available from the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health.

Regulatory Bodies

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many inspection staff have been employed by *(a)* the Office of Fair Trading and *(b)* the Employment Agency Standards Inspectorate in each year since 1997. [100213]

Miss Melanie Johnson: *(a)* The number of inspection staff employed by the Office of Fair Trading in each year since 1997 is as follows:

1997	0
1998	0
1999	0
2000	12
2001	12
2002	12
2003	15

(b) The number of inspection staff employed by Employment Agency Standards Inspectorate in each year since 1997 is as follows:

1997	9
1998	9
1999	9
2000	13
2001	13
2002	14
2003	14

For both sets of figures, the term inspection staff has been taken to mean investigations staff authorised to enter premises.

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many *(a)* staff and *(b)* inspection staff were employed by the Office of Telecommunications in each year since 1997. [99762]

Mr. Timms: The numbers of staff employed by Oftel since 1997 by financial year are set out below.

Year	*Number of Staff Employed*
1996–1997	161
1997–1998	176
1998–1999	181
1999–2000	195
2000–2001	208
2001–2002	232
2002–2003	235 (estimated)

Oftel does not employ any inspection staff.

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many *(a)* staff and *(b)* inspection staff have been employed by the Office of Fair Trading in each year since 1997. [99764]

Miss Melanie Johnson: *(a)* The total number of staff employed by the Office of Fair Trading on 1 April each year since 1997 is as follows:

1997	413
1998	417
1999	428
2000	449
2001	461
2002	556
2003 (January)	645

(b) The number of inspection staff employed by the Office of Fair Trading on 1 April each year since 1997 is as follows:

1997	0
1998	0
1999	0
2000	12
2001	12
2002	12
2003 (January)-	15

The term inspection staff has been taken to mean investigations staff authorised to enter premises.

Small Firms Loan Gurantee Scheme

Mr. Russell Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many firms in Dumfries and Galloway made use of the small firms loan guarantee scheme in 2001–03; and what the total value of those loans was. [100161]

Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 4 March 2003]*: Fifteen loans at a value of £486,500 have been guaranteed for small firms in Dumfries and Galloway between April 2001 and February 2003.

Special Purpose Vehicles (Offshore)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will investigate how many UK companies trade through special purpose vehicles located in offshore financial centres. [100757]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I have no plans to do so.

St. Charles Site, Brentwood and Ongar

Mr. Eric Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the future of the St Charles site in Brentwood and Ongar. [98446]

Hilary Benn: The Youth Justice Board (YJB) for England and Wales is responsible for commissioning and purchasing secure accommodation for juveniles from the Prison Service, private sector, and local authority secure children's homes, and for setting and monitoring standards.

Planing permission was obtained last year to build a 40 bed secure training centre at the St Charles site. The project has been under review pending the final outcome of the last spending review, but I can confirm that it will go ahead. The Youth Justice Board hope to restart the bidding process in May 2003.

Tax Avoidance

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proposals she has to require companies to publish the details of tax avoidance schemes operated by them within their annual accounts. [100908]

Miss Melanie Johnson: None.

Timber (Burma)

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the value of imports of timber from Burma was in the past two financial years; and which companies imported the timber. [97220]

John Healey: I have been asked to reply.

HM Customs and Excise are the Department responsible for collecting and recording statistics on the movement of goods with other countries. Information on individual importers and consignments is recorded from customs documents submitted at import but cannot be disclosed for reasons of commercial confidentiality; Exemption 13 of the Open Government Code applies. The value of timber and wood imports from Burma, which is published in Overseas Trade Statistics and is available on Customs' website (www.uktradeinfo.com), is:

Apr 00—Mar 01	£3,434,228
Apr 01—Mar 02	£3,623,984

The above figures include timber and processed wood products such as plywood, but exclude made-up articles of wood.

Unfair Terms

Mr. Hopkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how the Unfair Terms in Consumer Contracts Regulations 1999 will affect tenancy agreements for local authority and housing association tenancies. [100331]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Unfair Terms in Consumer Contracts Regulations 1999 require that unfair terms should not be used in standard contracts made between sellers or suppliers and consumers. An unfair term will not bind the consumer. The Director General of Fair Trading has a duty to consider complaints about unfair terms and can act to prevent their continued use. The Regulations apply to residential tenancy agreements including those used by local authorities or housing associations with their tenants.

HEALTH

Air Fresheners

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent research has been conducted into the impact upon *(a)* indoor air quality and *(b)* human health of the use of air fresheners; what advice has been given to the public relating to their use; and if he will make a statement. [99214]

Ms Blears: I am not aware of any research that has been conducted specifically on the impact of air fresheners on indoor air quality. The Buildings Research Establishment national representative survey on air quality found that 41.9 per cent. of households reported using air fresheners. The dominant determinant of total volatile organic compounds in the survey was painting and decorating. Volatile organic compounds are a wide range of different organic chemicals, some of which may be released into the indoor air by the use of air fresheners. However, there are also many other potential sources of the same or similar chemicals such as building materials, furnishings, environmental tobacco smoke and other consumer products.

The Avon longitudinal study of parents and children in Bristol has found associations between air freshener use and ear infections in infants, headache in mothers and depression in mothers. If these associations represent true effects, the mechanisms involved are not entirely clear. Further research is needed to confirm these findings.

No advice has been given to the public on air fresheners specifically.

Abortions

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many abortions were carried out in England and Wales in 2002 under the provisions of the Abortion Act 1967; what the commonest medical conditions were for which they were performed; what checks his Department carried out to determine the suitability of the medical conditions given; and if he will make a statement. [100326]

Ms Blears: Information for 2002 will not be available until later this year.

In 2001, 186,274 abortions were performed in England and Wales, of which 176,364 were on resident women. 97 per cent. were performed under Section 1(1a) of the Abortion Act 1967, as amended—that the pregnancy has not exceeded its twenty-fourth week and that the continuance of the pregnancy would involve risk, greater than if the pregnancy were terminated, of injury to the physical or mental health of the pregnant woman — and the most common medical conditions reported were mental and behavioural disorders.

Under Section 2(2) of the Act, registered medical practitioners must notify the Chief Medical Officer of every completed termination of pregnancy they perform. The notification form contains detailed information relating to the procedure, including the doctors who certified there were grounds under the Act, gestation, method used and place of termination. Every form is checked and monitored by Departmental officials to ensure that the abortion was performed within the provisions of the Act.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer of 3 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 100W, on abortions, if he will provide a breakdown of the figures by age of mother; and how many of the abortions in the answer were undertaken in private clinics in *(a)* Hampshire and *(b)* the Isle of Wight. [99332]

Ms Blears: The information requested is shown in the table. None of the abortions were undertaken in private clinics in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight.

NHS funded abortions for Isle of Wight residents, 1997–2001 by age of woman

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Under 15	3	1	0	3	0
15	1	3	3	8	5
16	12	9	11	11	9
17	12	14	11	14	23
18	18	17	8	10	18
19	8	13	14	19	19
20–24	44	31	36	32	62
25–29	27	30	32	45	33
30–34	21	43	24	24	27
35–39	26	22	18	16	24
40–44	9	8	9	12	6
45 and over	0	3	0	1	1
Total	181	194	166	195	227

Note:

Prepared by Statistics Division 3G, Department of Health.

Acute Trusts (Funding)

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total cash income from *(a)* non-recurring and *(b)* recurring finance provided by his Department and primary care trusts to each NHS acute trust in each of the past three years. [96474]

Mr. Lammy: Information on the total income for each national health service trust provided by the Department of Health has been placed in the Library. Almost all the income is received from commissioners rather than directly from the Department. The Department does not identify income as non-recurring or recurring. The variations year-on-year indicate increasing income in most cases, however with the establishment of primary care trusts some services may transfer from continuing NHS trusts resulting in a fall in income.

Audiology Services

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the waiting times are for audiology services in each hospital trust. [97881]

Jacqui Smith: Information on waiting times is published quarterly on the Department's website. The information can be accessed at http://www.doh.gov.uk/waitingtimes/index.htm

Care (Elderly People)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action the Government is taking to ensure elderly people are being given the free care to which they are entitled; and if he will make a statement. [100294]

Jacqui Smith: The Department issued guidance on continuing care in June 2001 and this included information on the agreement of eligibility criteria for National Health Service continuing care criteria. Strategic health authorities are currently ensuring that a single set of valid criteria applies across their areas and that everyone is assessed against these.

Since 1 October 2001, the NHS has also been responsible for funding the nursing care of self funding residents of care homes providing nursing care.

Tobacco Sponsorship

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what his policy is towards the sponsorship of darts championships by tobacco companies; and if he will make a statement; [97797]

(2) what measures the Government is taking to assist the British Darts Organisation to find alternative sources of sponsorship; [97798]

(3) if the Government will extend the transitional arrangements for the sponsorship by tobacco companies to cover the World Professional Darts Championship; and if he will make a statement. [97796]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 13 February 2003]:* The Government has looked very carefully at how best to achieve an end to tobacco advertising and promotion including the prohibition of tobacco sponsorship, where the purpose or effect is to promote a tobacco product, whilst at the same time considering those who currently hold tobacco sponsorship agreements. A phased approach has been adopted to the introduction of the prohibition.

All new sponsorship agreements where the purpose or effect is to promote a tobacco product will be prohibited from 14 February 2003. Existing agreements which were in place on 11 July 2001 or have been renewed since then will have until either 30 July 2003 or until 31 July 2005 before being prohibited, so long as they meet criteria specified in The Tobacco Advertising and Promotion (Sponsorship) Transitional Regulations 2003. One of the criteria for qualifying for the 31 July 2005 extension is that tobacco sponsorship agreements need to have been to the value of £2.5 million in the 12 months ending 11 July 2001. The regulations were drawn up following a public consultation which ended on 15 November 2002. The British Darts Organisation responded to that consultation.

The Government does not intend to amend the regulations relating to tobacco sponsorship, and in particular exceptional global events, but does want to work with those sports that do not qualify for the 2005 extension to seek alternative sources of funding.

The Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) has recently met representatives from the English Pool Association and World Snooker Ltd. to discuss the progress those sports have made in their efforts to find alternative sponsorship. DCMS will remain available to meet other individual sports to provide advice and discuss any concerns they may have during the transition away from tobacco sponsorship.

Domestic Violence

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to *(a)* raise awareness of domestic violence in the health profession and *(b)* provide health services and counselling for victims of domestic violence. [97749]

Ms Blears: The Department of Health published Domestic Violence: A Resource Manual for Health Care Professionals in March 2000. The resource manual provides a solid foundation for local multi-agency work and supports health care professionals and managers in developing their domestic violence policies, protocols and services to ensure victims receive the support they need. The Department is providing funding under the Section 64 Scheme to the Women's Aid Federation of England (WAFE) for their health and domestic violence project to help implement the resource manual in the national health service. As part of this project, WAFE has also published a directory of new health and domestic violence initiatives and undertaken a range of activities to raise awareness of domestic violence among health professionals.

The Government remains absolutely committed to tackling domestic violence, a serious and abhorrent crime and has set up a Ministerial Group working across Government to provide co-ordinated and concerted action on this issue at the highest level. One of the key areas of the Group's work is to develop early and effective health care interventions. As 30 per cent.[1] of domestic violence is known to start in pregnancy and existing abuse often escalates at that time, the initial focus for this work is in maternity care. The Department of Health is funding an innovative study at the University of the West of England and North Bristol NHS Trust to pilot routine ante-natal questioning about domestic violence. Outcomes from the Bristol pilot will inform the future provision of NHS maternity services.

[1] Confidential Enquiries into Maternal Deaths in the United Kingdom 1997–99

Drugs

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the drugs helpline advertised on the new style cards is *(a)* confidential and *(b)* available 24 hours a day. [100032]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 28 February 2003]:* The National Drugs Helpline is a confidential service that operates 24 hours a day.

Elvy Court Nursing Home

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he will take on Southern Cross Healthcare's retention of the NHS funded nursing care element from fees paid by residents at Elvy Court Nursing Home, Sittingbourne. [100245]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 3 March 2003]:* I understand that local inspectors of the National Care Standards Commission home are currently investigating this issue at Elvy Court. I await the outcome of the investigation with interest.

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the West Kent National Care Standards Commission's report on Elvy Court Nursing Home, Sittingbourne will be published. [100246]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 3 March 2003]:* Publication of the Elvy Court Nursing Home inspection report is scheduled for 14 April.

Corticosteroid Therapy

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance his Department is giving to doctors following the recent Royal College of Physicians research into glucocorticoids. [99553]

Ms Blears: The National Institute for Clinical Excellence is currently consulting on the draft scope of a clinical guideline on the prevention, assessment and treatment of osteoporosis and osteoporotic fractures, which will cover osteoporosis of all origins, including men and women on long-term corticosteroid therapy. The guidance is due to be published in 2005.

The Royal College of Physicians is one of the invited consultees for both the appraisal and guideline. They will be consulted throughout the guideline development process, and will have the opportunity to submit evidence and comment on each draft of the guidance.

Health Care (East Riding)

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many job vacancies in the *(a)* Hull and East Riding Hospitals Trust, *(b)* Hull and East Riding Community Health Trust, *(c)* West Hull Primary Care Trust and *(d)* East Yorkshire Primary Care Trust there were in each year since 1997, broken down by job type; and how many of these vacancies were filled. [97728]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested has been placed in the Library.

Health Protection Agency

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to announce the funding allocation for the Health Protection Agency. [95737]

Ms Blears: My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State has confirmed the overall funding envelope for the Health Protection Agency, the Public Health Laboratory Service and the central support for microbiological diagnostic work, carried out by those laboratories transferring to national health service trust management. The total sum (in round numbers) in £104 million revenue and £10 million capital.

Paediatric Continence Services

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether his Department has conducted an audit of paediatric continence services in the United Kingdom. [100417]

Jacqui Smith: No. The provision of these services in England is a matter for primary care trusts, which are responsible for determining the level of services required to meet the needs of their local population. Common childhood conditions, including enuresis and paediatric continence, will be considered under the forthcoming national service framework for children, young people and maternity services, which is currently developing national standards.

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in England have been waiting *(a)* up to 12, *(b)* between 12 and 15 and *(c)* between 15 and 18 months for in-patient treatment in each of the last 12 months. [97841]

Mr. Hutton: The table shows the number of patients awaiting elective inpatient admission by the time-bands requested.

Patients waiting for elective admission: position at month end (responsible population based)

	Patients waiting for admission by months waiting		
Month	*Less than 12 months*	*12–14 months*	*15–17 months*
January 2002	1,014,841	26,400	3,156
February 2002	1,010,704	23,873	1,942
March 2002	999,735	21,645	224
June 2002	1,016,516	20,425	23
July 2002	1,019,403	18,899	12
August 2002	1,021,189	18,202	10
September 2002	1,014,355	16,669	14
October 2002	1,016,895	15,490	9
November 2002	1,012,623	12,509	6
December 2002	1,027,564	10,897	5

Note:

Data for April and May 2002 was not published due to data quality issues post Shifting the Balance of Power.*Source:*

Department of Health form QF01 and monthly monitoring

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in Greater London have been waiting *(a)* up to six months, *(b)* between six and 12 months, *(c)* between 12 and 15 months and *(d)* between 15 and 18 months for hospital treatment in each month since October 2001. [97823]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is shown in the table.

Patients waiting for elective admission within London DHSC area: Position at month end (responsible population based) Patients waiting for admission by months waiting

Month	*Less than 6 months*	*6–11 months*	*12–14 months*	*15–17 months*
	0–6	*6–12*	*12–15*	*15–18*
October 2001	98,224	30,077	5,948	1,693
November 2001	99,522	29,220	5,306	772
December 2001	100,508	31,906	5,124	733
January 2002	100,896	32,660	4,700	484
February 2002	103,218	31,431	4,523	252
March 2002	103,720	31,045	4,403	0
June 2002	105,236	31,674	4,288	0
July 2002	106,274	31,028	3,774	1
August 2002	105,497	32,081	3,683	0
September 2002	105,208	32,129	3,411	2

Patients waiting for elective admission within London DHSC area: Position at month end (responsible population based)
Patients waiting for admission by months waiting

Month	*Less than 6 months*	*6–11 months*	*12–14 months*	*15–17 months*
October 2002	105,034	31,356	3,195	7
November 2002	106,214	29,106	2,447	5
December 2002	107,602	30,012	2,054	3

Note:
Data for April and May 2002 was not published due to data quality issues post Shifting the Balance of Power.
Source:
Department of Health form QF01 and monthly monitoring

Neurology Services

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much was spent on *(a)* medical, *(b)* social and *(c)* applied research into (i) causes, (ii) treatment and (iii) management of neurological conditions in the last year for which figures are available. [99377]

Jacqui Smith: The main Government agency for research into the causes of and treatments for disease is the Medical Research Council (MRC) which receives its funding via the Department of Trade and Industry. The MRC spent an estimated £24.6 million in 2001–02 on its neurological disorders portfolio; this covers all the areas of research referred to in the question.

The Department of Health funds research to support policy and the delivery of effective practice in the national health service. The Department spent an estimated £2 million in 2001–02 on directly commissioned research projects on the treatment and management of neurological conditions. In addition to specific projects, the Department also provides support for research commissioned by charities and the research councils that takes place in the NHS. Management of much of the research supported by NHS research and development funding is devolved and expenditure at project level is not held centrally by the Department. The total investment is therefore considerably greater than just the spend on directly commissioned projects.

Nursing Homes

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the national ratio is of care workers to residents in state nursing homes. [99623]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is not available because it is not collected centrally: much of the provision of care homes providing nursing is commissioned by local authorities from the private sector. The National Care Standards Commission (NCSC) does not collect information about the numbers of care workers or nurses in care homes providing nursing. Rather, it inspects staffing levels to see that they are appropriate at all times to the assessed needs of service users, the size, layout and purpose of the home. The NCSC will make information available later in the year to the public and Government about registered services.

Elderly People

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what he estimates to be the cost of *(a)* all injuries as a result of a fall, *(b)* hip fractures and *(c)* osteoporosis to the national health service in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [100115]

Jacqui Smith: Standard Six of the national service framework for older people estimated that hip fractures cost the national health service in England around £1.7 billion per year. No estimate has been made of the cost to the NHS of all injuries resulting from a fall, or the cost of osteoporosis.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much is spent on the funding of falls co-ordinator posts in 2002–3. [100116]

Ms Blears: The information requested is not available centrally.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many designated falls co-ordinators are in post in England. [100117]

Ms Blears: The information requested is not available centrally.

Public Health Laboratory Service

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer of 4 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 226W, on PHLS laboratories, whether he will instruct PCTs to maintain funding levels to NHS laboratories beyond one year after the laboratories are subsumed into local trusts. [99071]

Ms Blears: National health service trust boards are being encouraged to ensure that the level of funding available for routine diagnostic microbiology services from 1 April 2003 to 31 March 2005 is not less than contracted with the Public Health Laboratory Service during 2002–03.

For the same period, the proposed Health Protection Agency (HPA) will ensure that the level of funding to HPA laboratories for specialist services they provide and which they commission from transferred laboratories are at least at the same level as for 2002–03.

Smoking Cessation Services

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans the Government have for the expansion of smoking cessation services. [100069]

Ms Blears: We have plans for a substantial expansion in National Health Service smoking cessation services, and have allocated £138 million to the NHS over the three years from April 2003 for this purpose.

We have set the NHS a target of 800,000 smokers to have quit at the four week follow-up stage between 2003 and 2006. We have also set a target to reduce by one percentage point a year the smoking prevalence rate for women who continue to smoke throughout pregnancy and a target to update practice based registers so that patients with coronary heart disease continue to receive appropriate advice and treatment.

Social Services

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which statements he has made concerning social services where service developments and extra spending are to be met from the 6 per cent. real terms increase in the personal social services spending. [100672]

Jacqui Smith: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has made a number of general statements referring to service improvements that should be possible with the 6 per cent. annual average real terms increase for personal social services for each of the next three years, 2003–04 to 2005–06. It is of course for local councils to decide on their relative spending priorities taking account of local needs and priorities.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received from overseas governments regarding the recruitment of social workers. [100143]

Jacqui Smith: The Department has not received representations from overseas governments regarding the recruitment of social workers. Local authorities are responsible for managing their own recruitment policies and practices, whether recruiting in this country or from overseas.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had with local authority leaders regarding the recruitment of social workers *(a)* in general and *(b)* from abroad. [100489]

Jacqui Smith: The Department is working closely with local authorities to reduce vacancies across the social care workforce and has committed funding of £1.5 million to the national social work recruitment campaign, which aims to increase the number of applications to social work. We have worked closely with key stakeholders to develop a resource pack to provide material which can be used by authorities for their own recruitment initiatives. Local authorities are responsible for managing their own recruitment from abroad.

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he is taking to provide opportunities for home care workers and health care assistants to train to become *(a)* social workers and *(b)* nurses; and if he will make a statement. [100588]

Jacqui Smith: At the Association of Directors of Social Services (ADSS) conference in October 2000, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, announced funding for a three year student support scheme for those studying for first level professional social work qualifications.

The funds for this scheme were put into a ring-fenced sub-programme of the training support programme (TSP) grant and local councils have been invited to apply for funds to support both their own experienced care staff and those staff of voluntary and private organisations that are contracted to provide social services, who wished to undertake the Diploma in Social Work (DipSW). For the coming year these funds may also be used to support staff who wish to undertake programmes for the new social work degree, which commences in September 2003.

The funds available in this TSP sub-programme are shown in the table.

Year	*Amount (£ million)*
2001–02	3
2002–03	13
2003–04	13

A new social care training grant, the national training strategy grant, starts in April 2003. The conditions surrounding the use of this grant will be out for consultation by the end of March. There is £6 million ring-fenced within this new grant for a trainee social worker scheme which is to be used to support social care workers who wish to undertake either the DipSW or the new social work degree. Although this grant is to be paid to local councils, it has been suggested that 50 per cent. of the amount that is allocated to each local council is offered to those voluntary and private organisations that are contracted to councils to provide services. This will include organisations providing home care.

Health care assistants have been able to prepare for nurse training through a cadet scheme or by undertaking a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) at level 3. The Department is taking forward a number of steps to support and facilitate the expansion and coverage of cadet schemes. We are also nearing the end of the second year of an ongoing major investment programme, £60 million in 2002–03, to enable health staff without work related professional qualifications access a national health service learning account or dedicated NVQ training. Between April 2001 and September 2002, over 21,000 undertook NVQ training to levels 2 or 3.

Additionally, we are aiming to increase health care assistant secondments to nurse training from 15 per cent. of the overall national training population in 2003–04 to 24 per cent. of the population in 2005–06. This approach to nurse training has proved to be very popular and there are now some 2,300 new health care assistants and other NHS employees supported each year under the initiative.

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the level of vacancies is for social workers in *(a)* elderly care, *(b)* children care and *(c)* mental health in (i) London, broken down by borough and (ii) England. [100589]

Jacqui Smith: We do not hold information centrally on social worker vacancies in each local authority or London borough. A survey undertaken by the Employers Organisation found that across all local authority social services in England as at 30 September 2001, around 10 per cent. of all field social worker posts were vacant.

TB

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people received immunisation against TB in *(a)* the last year for which figures are available, *(b)* the previous 12 months and *(c)* 1996. [97812]

Ms Blears: Information about the number of people receiving BCG vaccinations against tuberculosis is contained in tables 4 and 5 of the Statistical Bulletin NHS Immunisation Statistics, England: 2001–02. A copy of the bulletin is available in the Library. It can also be found on the Department's website at www.doh.gov.uk/public/sb0218.htm

WORK AND PENSIONS

Benefit Fraud

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many successful home visits to claimants were made by local authority benefit fraud officers in each of the last three years. [86992]

Malcolm Wicks: Over the last three years, we estimate Local Authorities made around 170,000 visits every year.

The estimate does not include returns from all Local Authorities.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Dysphasia

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the prevalence and management of dysphasia in Northern Ireland. [99766]

Mr. Browne: The prevalence of dysphasia is not held by Departmental recording systems. The management of dysphasia is largely based around speech therapy and improving communication. There is a wide range of causes of dysphasia including head injury, stroke, learning disabilities, cancer etc. and supportive management of communication difficulties may be only one aspect of the treatment required.

Energy Efficiency Grants

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what energy efficiency grants are available to agricultural projects in Northern Ireland for *(a)* farmers and *(b)* processors. [99322]

Mr. Pearson: The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) is implementing Measure 1.9 of the EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation. This measure may assist farmers, working in groups, to implement solutions to specific environmental problems. The assistance available is in the form of a grant to implement remedial actions on individual holdings. Such actions could improve energy efficiency on farms.

Also DARD's Rural Development Programme (2001/2006) is broad based and there may be scope for individual farmers, farmers groups, collectives and co-operatives to bring forward proposals for consideration. The scope for funding an energy efficiency project or programme will depend on the nature of the proposal. All projects or programmes will be economically appraised and must meet the appropriate Programme/measure criteria.

Community Fund (Belfast)

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what criteria will be applied to the spending of the money which the Prime Minister recently allocated for interface areas of Belfast. [100427]

Mr. Browne: On 12 February 2003 I announced the establishment of a new Local Community Fund with an initial budget of £3 million per year. The overall aim of the Fund will be to bolster communities that feel they have been left behind by the political process whether in Belfast or beyond. No decisions have yet been made on the areas to be targeted by the Fund nor on mechanisms for delivery. Work in ongoing on these issues and an announcement will be made in the near future.

Physiotherapists

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland why the advertised vacancy for a physiotherapist in Loane house, South Tyrone hospital is for a temporary full-time position; and what funding will be made available to recruit a permanent full-time physiotherapist. [100430]

Mr. Browne: A full-time physiotherapist post in Loane house has been advertised on the basis of a temporary contract because this is an additional post to the complement that existed following the transfer of services from the South Tyrone site. The Trust is currently undertaking a review of its physiotherapy workload, which will determine the longer-term need for the post and, therefore, the funding requirements.

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland at what locations in the Southern Health and Social Services Board area physiotherapy treatment is available; and how many physiotherapists are based at each location. [100431]

Mr. Browne: Details of the locations at which physiotherapy treatment is available in the Southern Health and Social Services Board area, together with the number of whole-time equivalent staff based at each of these locations at 31 December 2002, are shown in the following table.

Number of physiotherapy staff by location, SHSSB area, 31 December 2002

Location	*Staffing levels*[1]
Armagh Community Hospital	2.90
South Tyrone Hospital	4.49
Fivemiletown Health Centre	0.10
Willowbank Surgery, Keady	0.10
Armagh and Dungannon Trust	7.59
Craigavon Area Hospital—General Outpatients	2.90
Lurgan Hospital—General Out-patients	4.49
Craigavon and Banbridge Community Trust	7.39
Craigavon Area Hospital—General Outpatients	4.60
Craigavon Area Hospital—A & E Clinic	1.20
Lurgan Hospital—General Outpatients	3.00
Banbridge Polyclinic—General Outpatients	2.00
Craigavon Area Hospital Group Trust	10.80
Daisy Hill Hospital—General Out-patients	5.00
Health Centres	1.60
Newry and Mourne Trust	6.60
SHSSB Area	32.38

[1] Whole-time equivalent

Notes:

1. The locations shown in the table are those in which physiotherapy out-patient activity is carried out. Staffing levels are expressed as whole-time equivalents, as this method reflects the activity of the staff based at the relevant locations.
2. The services at Craigavon Area hospital and Lurgan hospital sites are provided by physiotherapists from Craigavon and Banbridge Community and Craigavon Area Hospital Trusts, who both use the same sites.
3. Health centres included in Newry and Mourne Trust figures are: Rathfriland, Newtownhamilton, Crossmaglen, Warrenpoint and Mourne Hospital.

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many physiotherapy outpatients were treated each week for the last three months, broken down by location, in the Southern Health and Social Services Board area. [100432]

Mr. Browne: The number of physiotherapy attendances during the quarter ending 31 December 2002 (the latest three-month period for which such information is available), in the Southern Health and Social Services Board area, is shown according to location in the following table.

Number of physiotherapy attendances, SHSSB area, quarter ending 31 December 2002

Location	*Average weekly attendances*	*Total quarterly attendances*
Armagh Community Hospital	200	2,598
South Tyrone Hospital	168	2,190
Fivemiletown Health Centre	4	56
Willowbank Surgery, Keady	7	97
Armagh and Dungannon Trust	379	4,941
Craigavon Area Hospital—General Outpatients	8	103
Lurgan Hospital—General Outpatients	13	166
Craigavon and Banbridge Community Trust	21	269
Craigavon Area Hospital—General Outpatients	150	1,948
Craigavon Area Hospital—A&E Clinic	52	680
Lurgan Hospital—General Outpatients	104	1,350
Banbridge Polyclinic—General Outpatients	51	669
Craigavon Area Hospital Group Trust	357	4,647
Daisy Hill Hospital—General Outpatients	323	4,204
Health Centres	35	461
Newry and Mourne Trust	358	4,665
SHSSB Area	1,115	14,522

Notes:

1. The data in the above table refer to outpatient attendances rather than to the number of individual outpatients. It is possible for a person to attend as an outpatient more than once in each week or each quarter.
2. It is not possible to provide information on attendances for each week of the relevant quarter, as for many locations only a quarterly total is available. However, it is possible to provide average weekly attendances for each location, and these are shown in the table.
3. The services at Craigavon Area Hospital and Lurgan Hospital sites are provided by physiotherapists from Craigavon and Banbridge Community and Craigavon Area Hospital Trusts, who both use the same sites.
4. Health centres included in Newry and Mourne Trust figures are: Rathfriland, Newtownhamilton, Crossmaglen, Warrenpoint and Mourne Hospital.

Textile Industry

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress is being made in implementing the Kurt/Salmon report into the textile industry in Northern Ireland. [100429]

Mr. Pearson: The Kurt Salmon report includes a series of recommendations, the majority of which are for the industry itself to implement. Since the textile industry's endorsement of this Strategy, in 2000, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (through Invest NI) has implemented a comprehensive programme of support in line with its key recommendations. This support has included financial assistance for companies implementing these recommendations and the establishment of Catalyst, an industry grouping whose role is to provide the strategic focus, dynamic leadership and expertise to the sector. In addition, Invest NI has provided support in the areas of innovation, training, and product and trade development. A customised package of support has also been implemented on targeted sector initiatives and supporting industry trade associations to assist in the delivery of the strategy. Initiatives to date include Irish Linen plus Lycra, the Brand to Win programme, and the recent Medical Textiles conference held in Belfast's Odyssey Arena.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

NHS (Fraud)

Richard Ottaway: To ask the Solicitor General what progress has been made in the investigation of suspected fraud in the National Health Service announced by the Serious Fraud Office on 10th April 2002. [100293]

The Solicitor-General: The investigation concerns an allegation of a suspected price fixing cartel among those supplying prescribed penicillin based antibiotics and Warfarin to the National Health Service.

A large volume of paper documents and electronic material was seized in searches conducted in April 2002 at 28 addresses in England, Wales and Scotland.

The search involved over 150 officers drawn from the Metropolitan Police Fraud Squad, the Strathclyde Police and the National Crime Squad. Lawyers, accountants and forensic computer specialists from the SFO, other government departments, provincial police forces and private sector agencies, supported the Police.

The Director of the SFT assures me that good progress is being made and that the investigation is progressing.

Paul Skuse

Tony Baldry: To ask the Solicitor-General if she will make a statement on the Attorney-General's decision not to refer the case of Paul Skuse to the Court of Appeal. [95934]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 11 February 2003]*: The Attorney-General decided, after very careful consideration of this sensitive and unusual case, not to pursue his application to the Court of Appeal as an unduly lenient sentence.

The Attorney wrote to the hon. Member to set out his reason on 23 January 2003 as he believes the sentence passed — two and a half years imprisonment plus an extended licence period of two and a half years — was not unduly lenient in this very unusual case, and taking all matters into account was of the view that the Court of Appeal would not increase the sentence.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Afghanistan

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the funds delivered to Afghanistan in 2002 for aid and reconstruction by the *(a)* USA, *(b)* EU, *(c)* UK and *(d)* Japan, and the total funds promised to that country in the Tokyo agreements. [100985]

Clare Short: At the international donor conference in Tokyo in January 2002 donors made pledged covering 1–5 years, totalling $4.5 billion for humanitarian and reconstruction assistance in Afghanistan. The total estimate for money disbursed in 2002 is $1.8 billion. The Afghan Assistance Co-ordination Authority (AACA) records show that Afghanistan received the following amounts of support in 2002 from: *(a)* USA, $602,167,421; *(b)* European Union (all member states), $452,820,329; *(c)* UK, $58,685,499; and *(d)* Japan, $142,698,441. However the UK actually disbursed $135,494,011 in 2002 and we believe that the AACA figures for the other donors are also underestimates.

Hospitality

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what her Department's hospitality budget *(a)* is in 2002–03 and *(b)* was in each of the last three years; and how much was left unspent at the end of each financial year. [99593]

Clare Short: My Department does not have a hospitality budget as such. Actual expenditure by DFID on official entertainment in the last three financial years was as follows:

1999–00	£62,000
2000–01	£48,000
2001–02	£55,000

We estimate we will spend some £74,000 on entertainment in 2002–03.

All expenditure on official entertainment is made in accordance with published departmental guidance on financial procedures and propriety, based on the principles set out in "Government Accounting".

Iraq

Mr Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of the humanitarian consequences of a war with Iraq; and if she will make a statement. [100264]

Clare Short: Most Iraqi people are very vulnerable to humanitarian crisis. The majority of Iraqi's live in urban areas, with a dependence on water, sanitation and food distribution systems which could be disrupted in the event of military action. People's private coping strategies have been worn away by years of misrule. There is also the very worrying danger that Saddam might use chemical or biological weapons causing injuries to civilians, and that any conflict might lead to large population movements creating enormous humanitarian needs. My Department is in regular discussion with the Ministry of Defence, the UN, Governments and humanitarian actors about minimising the humanitarian risks of any conflict to the Iraqi people, and responding to any crises which might arise.

EU Sugar Market

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development which countries within the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group will continue to have preferential access to the EU sugar market when the Everything But Arms countries have completed transition to free access. [100627]

Clare Short: All those members of the ACP group that are least developed countries (LDC) will benefit from continued preferential access to the EU sugar market, since they are also eligible for EBA preferences. These countries are as follows: Angola, Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Kiribati, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Niger, Rwanda, Samoa, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands, Somalia, Sudan, Togo, Tuvalu, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, Vanuatu and Zambia. For non-LDC members of the ACP, it is not possible at present to indicate whether they will have continued preferential access to the EU sugar market from 2009 since this depends on the provisions for sugar in the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPA) which are due to replace the Cotonou Agreement in 2008. Negotiations on EPAs have only just started but the UK is pushing for all ACP countries, not just LDCs, to benefit from duty and quota free access to the EU from 2008. EPA provisions on sugar will in turn be affected by the way the EU sugar regime is reformed.

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much sugar entered the EU from the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries under the Cotonou agreement in the last 12 months. [100628]

Clare Short: In the period June 2001 to July 2002, 1.51 million tonnes of sugar were imported into the EU, from ACP countries and India, under the EU Sugar Protocol and the Special Preferential Sugar import arrangements.

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what estimate she has made of the potential impact of production of sugar by Brazil on the economies of the African, Caribbean and Pacific and Everything But Arms countries if a global free market in sugar were to be established. [100629]

Clare Short: Winners from a free world sugar market are likely to be low-cost producers with the ability to compete on an open market, whereas the high-cost (thus less efficient) producers are likely to lose, unless their industries are restructured.

Brazil is estimated to be the lowest cost producer in the world and has the potential to respond very quickly to increased demand and supply large quantities of sugar at around the current world price. It is hard to predict what the situation would be like under complete liberalisation, although it is expected that Brazil will absorb a large share of the world market, as will Australia. However, among the ten lowest cost producers in the world (1993–98) are also Zimbabwe (before Australia), Zambia, Malawi and Swaziland who are therefore also potential winners.

Some ACP countries like Swaziland are low cost producers and therefore likely to benefit from further liberalisation. Also efficient ACP LDCs, like Malawi, Zambia and Mozambique stand to gain. For ACP countries like Jamaica and Madagascar who are high cost producers and heavily dependent on the preferential access granted by the EU, the sugar industry might need some restructuring to be able to compete.

Mr. James Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what estimate she has made of the total sugar production of the Everything But Arms countries *(a)* at present and *(b)* at the end of the transition period to free access to the EU. [100631]

Clare Short: Figures from the Statistical Bulletins of the International Sugar Organisation (January 2003) report a total production of sugar from EBA countries of 1.15million tonnes in 2001. No estimate has been made of possible future production levels for these countries.

SCOTLAND

Departmental Works of Art

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what her estimate is of the total value of art and antiques *(a)* possessed by and *(b)* used by the Scottish Office; and if she will make a statement. [90381]

Mrs. Liddell: A comprehensive estimate of the value of the art, furniture and other antique items on display in the buildings used by the Scotland Office is not available. The majority of such items are on loan from other sources.

External Consultants

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much *(a)* her Department and *(b)* each agency and non-departmental public body spent on external consultancy in each year from 1995–96 to 2002–03 (planned); and if she will make a statement. [92242]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999.

Since then, expenditure on external consultancy has been as follows:

	£
1999–2000	0
2000–01	5,465
2001–02	17,864
2002–03 (Estimated)	6,100

Gaelic Language

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much the Government provided to support the production of television programmes in the Gaelic language in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2002. [100993]

Mrs. Liddell: Expenditure on this matter is for the Scottish Executive.

Liquefied Petroleum Gas

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) whether she has issued guidelines to local authorities in Scotland on the introduction of facilities for the provision of retail and fleet liquefied petroleum gas; [96463]

(2) whether she has issued guidelines to local authorities in Scotland on the introduction of facilities for the provision of compressed natural gas. [96462]

Mrs. Liddell: Facilities for the provision of Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) and Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG), like all hydrocarbon fuels, are licensed by local petroleum authorities (LPAs) under the Petroleum (Consolidation) Act 1928.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) together constitute the Competent Authority (CA) that enforces the Control of Major Accident Hazards Regulations (Scotland) 2000 which apply to such facilities. Those facilities are also subject to the land-use planning system administered by local planning authorities subject to guidance issued by the Scottish Executive.

Scotland Office

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* special advisers, *(b)* press officers, *(c)* senior management, *(d)* ministerial private offices, *(e)* information divisions and *(f)* policy divisions there have been in the Scotland Office in each year from 1999–2000 to 2002–03, giving the total cost of each for each year; and if she will make a statement. [90374]

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* special advisers and *(b)* press officers have been employed by her Department in each year from 1994–95 to 2002–03; and at what cost in each year. [92484]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999.

Details of the number and costs of Special Advisers were given in the reply from my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Cabinet Office on 31 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 1056W.

The number of Press Officers employed by my Department from 1999–2000 to 2001–02 and their costs in each of these years are as follows:

	Numbers of Press Officers in January of each year	Cost
1999–2000	4	[1]44,078.16
2000–01	4	139,705.16
2001–02	4	134,702.43

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[1] Part year cost

Mrs. Liddell: My Department, which includes the Office of the Advocate General for Scotland, has two special advisers, nine senior civil servants, three ministerial private offices, three policy divisions and one information division, which includes four press officers.

Individual costs are not available in the form requested; but the details of administrative expenditure can be found in the Departmental Report and Resource Accounts for the Scotland Office.

Sickness Absence

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the rate of staff *(a)* absenteeism and *(b)* sickness was in her Department in each year from 1990–91 to 2002–03; what the target set is for her Department; and if she will make a statement. [93512]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999.

Details of staff absenteeism are given in the following table:

Dates	*Working days lost due to sickness*
1 July 1999 to 31 March 2000	396
1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001	662.5
1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002	601.5
1 April 2002 to 30 November 2002	479

My Department is committed to reducing the levels of sick absence and has recently introduced a new management attendance procedure. Absence will continue to be monitored closely but no targets have yet been set.

LORD CHANCELLOR

Northern Ireland Court Service

Mr. Laws: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what reasons underlie the change in spending by the Northern Ireland Court Service between 1998–99 to 2003–04; and if she will make a statement. [99827]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The following table reflects the net resource outturn, both actual and estimated, for the Northern Ireland Court Service for the period from 1998 to 2004.

	Net resource outturn
Appropriation account	
1998–99	42,924.00
Resource account	
1999–2000	63,160.00
2000–01	70,749.00
2001–02	80,369.00
Estimate	
2002–03	97,764.00
Planned	
2003–04	94,540.00

The Northern Ireland Court Service has increased spending over the past number of years in order to deliver a substantial increase in customer service.

1. Expenditure on Legal Aid, which is designed to ensure that all sections of the community have access to justice, is demand led and has increased by 59 per cent. over this period.

2. The Northern Ireland Court Service has taken on additional responsibilities, such as the provision of security at courthouses (previously undertaken by the police), the implementation of the Northern Ireland Criminal Justice Review, and the development of reforms such as the Justice (NI) Act 2002 and the Access to Justice (NI) Order 2003.

3. The adoption of resource accounting has led to the introduction of non-cash charges such as depreciation being added in to the cost of running the organisation, which has increased spend by in excess of £10 million.

4. In order to develop modern systems and infrastructure to support the administration of justice and to meet Government targets on electronic delivery of services, the department entered into two PFI arrangements during the period. These arrangements saw the introduction of modern information technology and the construction of the high-tech Laganside Courts Complex in Belfast.

5. In order to achieve these improvements in service delivery, there have been corresponding increases in staff and accommodation.

Public Records Office

Mr. Laws: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will make an assessment of the effects of privatising the Public Records Office; and if she will make a statement. [100391]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Public Record Office was subject to a Quinquennial Review in 1997–98, which concluded that its core functions in relation to its oversight of records management in other government departments and its custody of historical public records can only be carried out from within government. Quinquennial Reviews have now been replaced by other business improvement processes in Government.

The PRO will be joining up with the Historical Manuscripts Commission to form the National Archives on 1 April 2003, and the new organisation will strive to offer services which offer even better value for money than those provided separately by the two organisations.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Welsh Language

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what steps she is taking to *(a)* protect and *(b)* promote the Welsh language, with particular reference to broadcasting; and if she will make a statement; [100990]

(2) what her Department's plans are to protect and promote *(a)* the Gaelic language and *(b)* the Welsh language, with specific regard to broadcasting; and if she will make a statement. [100622]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 4 March 2003]:* The Government's plans for Gaelic language broadcasting are contained within the Communications Bill. The Bill establishes a new Gaelic broadcasting body, the Gaelic Media Service (Seirbheis nam Maedhanan Gàidhlig) with broader powers to secure that a wide and diverse range of programmes are broadcast or otherwise transmitted for reception in Scotland. The Gaelic Media Service will build on the strengths of the existing Gaelic Broadcasting Committee (CCG), but will have a broader representative base, including the main broadcaster interests and others responsible for the development of Gaelic language and culture.

For the Welsh language, the Government is maintaining index-linkage of the grant in aid to the Welsh fourth channel, S4C, as well as the requirement for the BBC to provide at least 10 hours a week of free programmes to the Welsh Authority. The Communications Bill will update the regulatory structure for the Authority, including a system of approvals for new public and commercial services.

Channel 4

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of the effects of privatising Channel Four; and if she will make a statement. [100338]

Dr. Howells: The Government considered the future of Channel Four in the context of developing its proposals for broadcasting in the Communications Bill. Channel Four's current structure as a non-profit making statutory corporation works well, and it remains a central element in the Government's vision for the broadcasting industry in the digital future. I expect Channel Four to continue to fulfil a vital role in providing diverse and innovative public service programming of high quality.

Cheltenham Art Gallery and Museum

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if the grant made to Cheltenham Art Gallery and Museum through the Regional Renaissance initiative is additional to funding of the museum as a result of its status as a Designated Collection. [100466]

Dr. Howells: The award received by Cheltenham Art Gallery and Museum from the Designated Challenge Fund for 2002–04 is separate from the funds that will be allocated to the South West Regional Hub through the Renaissance in the Regions initiative.

Departmental Spending

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what her estimate is of public spending on her Department and its predecessors in each year from 1983–84 to 2003–04 (planned); and if she will make a statement. [99836]

Dr. Howells: Expenditure on the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and its predecessor, the Department of National Heritage (which was formed in 1992) is shown in the following table. The figures exclude depreciation and cost of capital charges.

£ million

Financial year	*Total administration expenditure*
1992–93	16.1
1993–94	21.7
1994–95	20.1
1995–96	20.4
1996–97	21.6
1997–98	21.4
1998–99	22.7
19992000	27.5
2000–01	30.0
2001–02	30.7
2002–03 (plan)	39.1
2003–04 (plan)	36.0

Free Television Licences

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many people aged 75 or above receive free television licences in the Tooting constituency. [101052]

Dr. Howells: TV Licensing, who administer the free licence scheme as agents for the BBC, are not able to provide geographical breakdowns of the number of free licences issued. However, estimates based on the 1991 Census indicate that there were approximately 5,800 people aged 75 or over living in the Tooting constituency.

Licensing Bill

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport under the terms of her proposed Licensing Bill, what licensing arrangements would apply to *(a)* a village green and *(b)* other public open space which was used for licensable activities on more than five occasions per year. [98826]

Dr. Howells: The Licensing Bill provides that premises means any place. The Bill therefore applies in relation to outdoor places and events to the same extent as it does to indoor ones, save in the case of sporting events. Under the Bill, a premises licence would therefore be required in respect of a village green or other public space which is to be used for licensable activities on more than five occasions in the same year in the same way as it would for any other premises. Part 5 of the Bill provides for permitted temporary activities which may take place on a premises on up to five occasions in a year.

Press Releases

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many press releases have been issued by her Department in each *(a)* year and *(b)* quarter from 1995–96 to 2002–03; and if she will make a statement. [92467]

Dr. Howells: The number of press releases issued by the Department for Culture Media and Sport in each year from 1995–96 to 2002–03 is as follows:

	Number
1995–96	299
1996–97	414
1997–98	315
1998–99	338
1999–2000	294
2000–01	370
2001–02	227
2002 to date (25 February 2003)	185

Quarterly figures for the past seven years could be supplied only at disproportionate cost.

Smoking in the Workplace

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what policy her Department has adopted on smoking in the workplace. [100935]

Dr. Howells: Following consultation with the staff a smoking room was designated in each building. Smoking is not allowed anywhere else in departmental buildings.

Special Advisers and Press Officers

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many *(a)* special advisers and *(b)* press officers have been employed by her Department in each year from 1994–95 to 2002–03; and at what cost in each year. [92468]

Dr. Howells: The number of press officers employed by DCMS in each year from 1997–98 to 2002–03 (at 1 April in each year) and their remuneration is as follows.

Date	*Number*	*Remuneration (£)*
1997	8	227,207
1998	[1]9	207,619
1999	8	236,150
2000	9	245,039
2001	8	265,631
2002	10	275,177

[1] Includes two staff working part-time.

Financial and Human Resource information for periods prior to, and including 1996–97 is not held on the Department's databases and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

With regard to the number of Special Advisers employed by DCMS in each year from 1994–95 to 2002–03 I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Cabinet Office on 31 January 2003, *Official Report*, columns 1056–57W.

Supermarkets

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport under what circumstances supermarkets selling alcohol may also sell motor transport fuel from the same business site. [98490]

Dr. Howells: Section 9 of the Licensing Act 1964 sets out circumstances in which persons and premises are disqualified from holding or receiving justices' licences for the sale of alcohol. It includes provision that "premises shall be disqualified for receiving a justices' licence if they are primarily used as a garage or form part of premises which are primarily so used". It further provides that "the reference to use as a garage is a reference to use for any or more of one of the following purposes, namely, the retailing of petrol or derv or the sale or maintenance of motor vehicles".

Television Subtitling

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what action she plans to take to provide information to those who would benefit from television subtitles about *(a)* their existence and *(b)* how to gain access to them. [100265]

Dr. Howells: The Communications Bill gives OFCOM a duty to draw up a code relating to the provision of television services for the deaf and visually impaired. This will give guidance as to the means by which the understanding and enjoyment of the services by the deaf or hard of hearing should be promoted and might include guidance to broadcasters on the provision of information about subtitles. It is in the broadcasters own interests to actively promote the availability of the services they are providing.

TV Licensing Agency

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many staff were employed by the TV Licensing Agency in each year since 1997. [100456]

Dr. Howells: The information requested is not held centrally. The BBC has statutory responsibility for the administration of the television licensing system but the day to day administration is contracted out to several organisations, operating jointly as TV Licensing. The number of staff employed by each of those contractors to fulfil the terms of their contracts is a matter for them.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Advanced Skills Teachers

Angela Watkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what changes in funding will take place from April for advanced skills teachers to share their expertise in neighbouring schools. [100223]

Mr. Miliband: Funding for Advanced Skills Teachers (ASTs) in 2003–04 will be based on the same principles as now, but with additional funding available to allow for the planned expansion of the AST grade. Funding is provided to LEAs at an average of £14,500 per post of which £5,700 is for the outreach costs. The additional costs of AST posts are met through a broadly even mix of DfES funding through the Standards Fund (SF) and matching funding by the LEA. The amount currently available to LEAs in 2002–03 is £38.9 million of which the departmental contribution is £20.2 million. For 2003–04, the overall SF allocation to support ASTs is £66.4 million of which the DfES share is £33.2 million.

In addition to the matched funded grant we have made £17.7 million available in 2002–03 to support AST posts without a matching LEA contribution to work on specific Government priorities. There will be no new posts funded under these special schemes in 2003–04, although the match-funded grant allocations for 2003–04 include funding to enable LEAs to provide continuing support for existing posts when funding at the 100 per cent. grant rate finishes.

Examination Results

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of pupils obtained A*-C grades in all three core subjects in *(a)* wholly comprehensive local authority areas and *(b)* wholly selective local authority areas, in each of the last five years. [91583]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 20 January 2003]*: Within wholly comprehensive LEAs the following percentages of pupils achieved GCSE grades A*-C in all of the three core subjects of English, Mathematics and Science.

	Percentage
2002	38
2001	34
2000[1]	33
1999	32
1998	30

Within the LEAs deemed wholly selective for grammar school ballots purposes the following percentages of pupils achieved GCSE grades A*-C in all of the three core subjects of English, Mathematics and Science.

	Percentage
2002	43
2001	42
2000[1]	42
1999	40
1998	39

The following percentages of pupils in all schools in England achieved GCSE grades A*-C in all of the three core subjects of English, Mathematics and Science.

	Percentage
2002	39
2001	38
2000[1]	37
1999	36
1998	34

[1] From and for the year 2000, in line with general performance tables practice, figures for LEAs aggregates have been adjusted for asylum seekers and refugees, but national information has not been adjusted for these pupils.

The increase in the proportion of pupils achieving a grade A*-C in each of English, maths and science in wholly selective LEAs—4 percentage points since 1998—is half the increase (of 8 percentage points) for pupils in wholly comprehensive authorities. In addition, the above figures have not been adjusted to take into account pupil's prior attainments at KS2 or KS3, or socio-economic circumstances of schools.

For example, the proportion of pupils in mainstream, maintained schools 'known to be eligible for free school meals' in the 10 LEAs deemed wholly selective for grammar school ballots purposes is 11 per cent., compared with 17 per cent. in wholly comprehensive authorities, and nationally. Research has shown that lower levels of performance outcome are associated with lower levels of prior attainment and with higher levels of socio-economic disadvantage.

General Studies

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the content of general studies lessons is; whether general studies covers guidance on how to complete *(a)* health, *(b)* benefits and *(c)* career-related forms; and if he will make a statement on the value of general studies periods. [100438]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: All National Curriculum subjects in England provide opportunities to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Explicit opportunities to promote pupils' development in these areas are provided in religious education, citizenship and the non-statutory framework for personal, social and health education (PSHE).

PSHE helps to give pupils the knowledge, skills and understanding they need to lead confident, healthy, independent lives. They learn how to make confident, informed choices and decisions about issues that affect their health and well-being. They learn to use a range of financial tools and services, including budgeting and saving, in managing personal money; and to use career services to help them develop career management plans.

Young people in years 9, 10 and 11 receive advice and support on careers and work, including career-related forms, through careers education and guidance programmes delivered by their school, supported by independent information, advice and guidance on learning and career options from the Connexions Service.

There is no GCSE or pre-16 subject of general studies. The awarding bodies do offer an A level course in general studies.

Higher Education

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimates were made of the delay times in repayments to the Treasury if graduate tax were adopted in place of tuition fees, when drawing up the proposals in the policy document, The Future of Higher Education; and if he will make a statement. [98132]

Margaret Hodge: The length of time to realise a particular tax revenue depends critically upon the assumptions being made. Given the number of variables, there is no single answer. In particular, it is sensitive to assumptions about the rate of additional tax and the threshold above which the tax is paid.

For example, the income threshold at which repayments begin under the loans system is higher than for most taxes (currently £10,000, rising to £15,000 in April 2005), but the rate at which repayments are made is also substantially higher than would be likely under a graduate tax system (9 per cent. of income over the threshold until the loan is fully recovered). Moreover, students and employers have the option to repay early any sums owed and evidence shows a significant number do so. This combination of factors means that the Government are more likely to recover "repayments" more quickly under a loans system than under a graduate tax system.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what arrangements he will make for accreditation of the *(a)* professional and *(b)* teaching skills of (i) full-time and (ii) part-time further education lecturers in connection with conditions on their continuing ability to teach in colleges. [100153]

Margaret Hodge: "Success for All" sets out our aim of a fully qualified workforce in further education colleges by 2010. Regulations introduced in 2001 require new lecturers to be qualified to teach within two years if they are full-time, or four years if they are part-time. There is no requirement for existing staff to become qualified, but we have set a target that 90 per cent. of full-time staff and 60 per cent. of part-time staff will be qualified to teach, or enrolled on appropriate courses, by 2006. Enabling powers to make further regulations were secured in the Education Act (section 136). The Learning and Skills Council is currently consulting on arrangements to achieve this and other targets.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment he has made of the annual cost of compliance with access regulation requirements falling on the higher education sector. [100302]

Margaret Hodge: The last review on regulatory requirements falling on the higher education sector was carried out by the Better Regulation Task Force. I am placing a copy of the report in the House Library for reference. From this month, Professor VandeLinde, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Warwick, will be chairing a task force to ensure that the burden of bureaucracy in higher education is reduced and kept to a minimum. The task force will help to ensure that significant new initiatives such as access regulation, will not place any disproportionate new burden on the sector.

National Curriculum

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what periods of history are studied in the schools curriculum from year 7 to year 13; and what choice is available to students wanting to specialise in certain areas; [100436]

(2) if he will require the history syllabus in the schools curriculum to cover all periods of history by year 11. [100437]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: History is a compulsory part of the national curriculum in England for all pupils in years 1–9, that is key stages 1–3.

The programmes of study for history require that pupils are taught knowledge, skills and understanding through various areas of study. At key stages 2 and 3 these include studies of local history, British history, European and world history. Certain periods are compulsory including at key stage 2, the Romans, Anglo-Saxons, or Vikings in Britain, the Tudors and, either the Victorians, or Britain since 1930. At key stage 3 all pupils have to study key features of British history in a time span ranging from 1066 to the impact on Britain of the Cold War. Primary and secondary schools do have some discretion over the detailed content of their history courses as long as the statutory requirements are met.

The full requirements of the history national curriculum can be seen at www.nc.uk.net.

Beyond key stage 3 of the national curriculum, history is an optional subject and the content of courses are determined by the awarding bodies through their examination specifications for GCSE and A level history. QCA is responsible for approving these specifications. There is considerable choice in the GCSE, AS and A levels currently available, and it is up to schools to choose which course of study best meets the needs of their students.

We are committed, as part of our review of 14–19 education, to introducing an entitlement for students to study the humanities in years 10 and 11.

Learning and Skills Council

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the running costs of the Learning and Skills Council are in 2002–03; what the estimated figure is for *(a)* 2003–04 and *(b)* 2004–05; and if he will make a statement. [99813]

Margaret Hodge: The Learning and Skills Council (LSC)'s core administration budget in each of the three years, 2002–03, 2003–04 and 2004–05 is £218 million. In addition, a further £17.9 million has been made available in 2002–03 mainly to cover one-off transition costs associated with establishing a new organisation. The LSC's core administration costs represent 2.9 per cent. of its total current budget from the Department for Education and Skills of £7,606 million, falling to 2.5 per cent. of its planned total budget in 2004–05. This represents good value for money and a saving of over £50 million on the cost of predecessor organisations.

Radioactive Waste

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what co-ordination has taken place with the Department for Trade and Industry to ensure that sufficient skills capacity is developed to deal with current and future volumes of radioactive waste through training in universities and research institutes. [100043]

Margaret Hodge: In 2002, the Department for Trade and Industry (DTI) co-ordinated a study of the skilled population required for the application of nuclear and radiological technology, including waste management, power generation, health and defence. This was sponsored by several departments. The study considered the supply of skilled people over the next 15 years and recommended in its report that workforce development arrangements be included within the work of the evolving network of Sector Skills Councils. My Department is working closely with the Sector Skills Development Agency and the DTI to ensure that the nuclear industry is represented in the network.

Science

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of pupils educated in the state sector attained *(a)* level 5 and above and *(b)* level 6 and above in Key Stage 3 science in each year from 1999 to 2001. [99754]

Mr. Miliband: The percentage of pupils in maintained schools who achieved *(a)* level 5 or above and *(b)* level 6 or above in Key Stage 3 science in each year from 1999–2001 is shown in the tables:

	Key Stage 3 science test		*Key Stage 3 Science teacher assessment*	
	(a) Level 5 or above	*(b) Level 6 or above*	*(a) Level 5 or above*	*(b) Level 6 or above*
All maintained schools				
1999	55	24	60	29
2000	59	29	62	30
2001	66	34	64	32
Maintained mainstream schools only				
1999	55	24	61	30
2000	60	30	63	31
2001	67	34	65	32

Demountable Classrooms

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills pursuant to his answer of 6 February 2003, *Official Report,* column 357W, on demountable classrooms, whether he is now able to plan a visit to the St. Andrews junior and infant schools in Colchester to inspect the demountable classrooms. [99609]

Mr. Miliband: Further to the answer given on 6 February by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State London Schools, I would hope to include a visit St. Andrew's Junior and Infant Schools when I am next in the Colchester area.

Tuition Fees

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what representations he has received on collusion between higher education institutions in the setting of tuition fees; and what mechanism he uses to prevent collusion. [100304]

Margaret Hodge: Under current arrangements, the level of tuition fees for full-time undergraduate courses in England is fixed and the question of collusion does not arise.

Our future plans for higher education make clear each university will need to have in place an Access Agreement with the independent Access Regulator before they are allowed to increase tuition fees above the current fee. Each university will be treated independently.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many named day written questions were tabled to the Department between 15 October 2002 and 24 February 2003; how many that received a holding answer were given a substantive answer *(a)* within three days, *(b)* within seven days, *(c)* within 14 days, *(d)* within 28 days and *(e)* over 28 days later; and what procedures the Department has in place to monitor performance on answering (i) parliamentary questions and (ii) ministerial letters. [99434]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The information requested is contained in the following table:

	Number of questions
Total number of named day written questions tabled to this Department between 15 October 2002 and 24 February.	409
Number of questions answered on the named day	167
Number of questions for which a holding reply was issued and a substantive reply sent within three business days	154
Number of questions for which a holding reply was issued and a substantive reply sent between four and seven business days	68
Number of questions for which a holding reply was issued and a substantive reply sent between eight and 14 business days	15
Number of questions for which a holding reply was issued and a substantive reply sent between 15 and 28 business days	5
Number of questions for which a holding reply was issued and a substantive reply sent after 29 business days	0

The provision of quality responses in a timely manner to both parliamentary questions and ministerial letters is one we take very seriously. Outstanding parliamentary questions are monitored on a daily basis by the parliamentary section and reviewed weekly by the parliamentary clerk. The Cabinet Office, on an annual basis, publishes a report to Parliament on performance of departments in replying to ministerial correspondence. The report for 2001 was published on Friday 24 May 2002, column 674W. The report for 2002 will be published in due course.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 6 March 2003

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Combined Heat and Power

11. **Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what action she proposes to take to encourage *(a)* operation and *(b)* development of combined heat and power plants. [101122]

Mr. Meacher: A number of new support measures for CHP were announced in the Energy White Paper, recognising the important role that CHP has to play in helping the UK tackle climate change and the difficult market conditions the industry faces. Together with the measures set out in the draft "Government's Strategy for CHP to 2010", I believe that these will set the sector on course to achieve our target of 10GWe in 2010.

Inland Flood Defence

12. **Mr. Leigh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on recent progress made by *(a)* her Department and *(b)* the Environment Agency in implementing the recommendations made by the Committee of Public Accounts in its report on inland flood defence. [101123]

Mr. Morley: In their report, the Committee recognised that improvements had been made but rightly focused on areas where, in their opinion, we could do more. Many of their recommendations fall directly to the Environment Agency as the country's main provider of flood defences and because of its supervisory and flood warning responsibilities. We continue to work with them to address the Committee's recommendations.

Animal Disease

13. **Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on her Department's policy on claiming money from the European Commission to tackle animal disease. [101124]

Mr. Morley: The Department's policy is to make an application on a UK basis in support of selected programmes for each year. The Commission Deadline for the submission of claims is 1 June, both for the submission of programmes for the following calendar year and for detailed claims for the past calendar year.

Beaches (Disabled Access)

16. **Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had with the Environment Agency about improving disabled access to beaches where flood defence work has taken place. [101128]

Mr. Morley: I have had no such discussions. However, I can say that the Environment Agency's Southern Region has commissioned safety consultants to undertake an R&D pilot study for the provision of disability access to EA coastal and fluvial defences.

The report, only recently completed, proposes a common methodology for surveys on future provision of disability access. This work will contribute to a better understanding and awareness of the needs of disabled people and will further work required for developing policy.

The Agency has also appointed recreation officers in all its regions and one of their roles is to champion access in the consideration of flood defence schemes.

Horse Passports

17. **Mr. Cameron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she expects to publish legislation on compulsory horse passports; and if she will make a statement. [101129]

Alun Michael: In the next few weeks I expect to issue for comment a draft of the legislation implementing the Government's decision that all equids must have passports, as required by EU legislation.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether every country in the EU is implementing the Directive regarding horse passports; what recent discussions she has had with the European Commission on further derogation to exempt the UK from compulsory horse passports; what further consultation there will be with the UK horse industry on the implementation of the horse passport scheme; and if she will make a statement. [101253]

Alun Michael: Commission Decision 2000/68/EC, must be implemented by all member states and there have been no discussions with the European Commission about exempting the UK from its requirements.

A draft of the legislation for England implementing the requirements that all horses must have passports will be issued in the next few weeks for consultation. The draft will take account of the views expressed during the discussions with the horse industry that have already taken place.

Fishing Fleet

18. **Ann Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the effect of the forthcoming expansion of the European Union on the economic viability of the United Kingdom's fishing fleet. [101130]

Mr. Morley: We do not expect the forthcoming accession of new member states to affect the economic viability of the UK fishing fleet.

Flood Protection (Rural Areas)

20. **Mr. Swire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the money made available to fund flood protection in rural areas in 2002–03. [101133]

Mr. Morley: Defra provides grant aid on capital flood and coastal defence projects that meet specified criteria and an appropriate priority score. Decisions regarding which projects to promote and their timing rests with operating authorities. It is therefore not possible to say how much of the funding has been directed to rural areas until after the financial year has ended. The figures will depend on the definition of "rural areas", as many schemes classified as "urban" are to protect communities within what would normally be considered as rural areas. ODPM allocate funding to support local authorities' expenditure on flood defence on the basis of their past expenditure.

Flooding

21. **Mr. Goodman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she last met the Environment Agency to discuss flooding. [101134]

Mr. Morley: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, meets with the Environment Agency regularly to discuss a range of issues. The last time she met Sir John Harman and Baroness Young to discuss flooding was on 15 January 2003. I also hold meetings with the Environment Agency and flooding is discussed regularly. Our last meeting was held on 9 December 2002 and I am due to meet with them again later today.

Broiler Chickens

Dr. Palmer: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will commission further research on the impact of intensive rearing of broiler chickens on *(a)* human and *(b)* animal health. [101118]

Mr. Morley: The Government are committed to funding research to both protect the public and welfare of farmed animals. Defra currently spends £3.5 million per annum on research into food-borne zoonoses and £1.2 million per annum on poultry welfare and disease research. The Government are committed to the continuing development of a comprehensive Animal Health and Welfare Strategy which will help to inform future research priorities.

Forestry (Africa)

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if her Department will raise the management of *(a)* forest products and *(b)* bushmeat at the forthcoming Africa Forest Law Enforcement and Governance Ministerial Conference in April. [101324]

Clare Short: I have been asked to reply.

My Department will raise the subjects of the international trade in forest products and bushmeat at the Africa Forest Law Enforcement and Governance Ministerial Conference in April.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which ministers and civil servants will attend the Africa Forest Law Enforcement and Governance Ministerial Conference in April. [101326]

Clare Short: I have been asked to reply.

The UK will be represented by the Under-Secretary of State, Department for International Development, her Private Secretary, DFID's Senior Forestry Adviser and a representative of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's Environmental Security Team.

Overfishing (North Sea)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what changes she is proposing to the Common Fisheries Policy to tackle overfishing of white fish in the North Sea. [101125]

Mr. Morley: The Government stands ready to consider any proposals, beyond those already agreed, which will help to bring stocks back within safe biological limits.

Rural White Paper

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the progress her Department has made in implementing the Rural White Paper. [101126]

Alun Michael: Defra is responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Rural White Paper. Government continues to make good progress in delivering the commitments set out in the Rural White Paper. As of 31 December 2002, over 150 of these have been completed, or are in progress. Around 90 have targets for completion in the future.

Meat Imports (Foot and Mouth)

Mr. Roger Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the risk of meat imports that carry foot and mouth virus. [101131]

Mr. Morley: Over the last year, the Veterinary Laboratories Agency has been undertaking a risk assessment to help us get a better understanding of the risk of meat imports being contaminated with foot and mouth, and infecting susceptible livestock in Great Britain. The final report is currently subject to quality assurance and peer review, prior to publication in the next few weeks.

CABINET OFFICE

Looked-after Children

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office when the Social Exclusion Unit will publish its report on the education of looked-after children; and what the reasons are for the delay in publication. [99389]

Mrs. Roche: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on 24 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 261W. The report will reflect the proposals in the forthcoming Green Paper on "Children at Risk", announced by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 30 October 2002, also due for publication in the spring.

Accountancy Services

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what the total cost to his Department was for accountancy services in 2002. [101566]

Mr. Alexander: My Department does not keep central records of this information, therefore the answer can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

HAZMOD Project

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office which company is running the HAZMOD Intranet (HI) project; how much has been spent on the project; when the project will go live; and if he will make a statement. [99381]

Mr. Alexander: The HAZMOD Extranet (previously referred to as HAZMOD intranet) was a small pilot project, managed by a research group within the Home Office and subsequently the Cabinet Office, which investigated the access to maps by emergency planners and others using internet technology. The project lasted two and a half years and cost £175,000.

Recent analysis undertaken by the Cabinet Office showed that better and faster approaches to securing the same information are now available elsewhere and are already in use by a range of organisations. The Government therefore consider that it can best support local authority emergency planners through the provision of advice on the development of geographical information systems. Emergency planners at the local level will also continue to draw data from Police Commanders, who have direct access to information from central Government.

A letter explaining the position was sent on 24 February 2003 by the Cabinet Office to all the emergency planners involved in the project. The letter was also published on the UK Resilience website www.ukresilience.info.

Overseas Trips

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will list the overseas trips made by himself and other members of his ministerial team in 2002; and what the *(a)* purpose and *(b)* cost was in each case. [101486]

Mr. Alexander: I refer the hon. Member to the answer which I gave to the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws) on 22 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 334W.

Senior Civil Service

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what level of appraisal is required at each grade within the senior civil service; and if he will make a statement. [100590]

Mr. Alexander: Each member of the Senior Civil Service is subject to an annual assessment by their manager based on the achievement of objectives, development of competences and use of professional skills. Their annual performance related pay award is based on this assessment.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Accountancy Firms (Competition)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proposals she has for investigating the extent of competition among the big-four accountancy firms. [100758]

Miss Melanie Johnson: As a result of a recommendation in the Interim Report of the Coordinating Group on Audit and Accounting Issues (CGAA), the Office of Fair Trading has looked at the competition implications of the high concentration in the market for audit and accountancy services following the demise of Andersens. They concluded that there was no case for an immediate Competition Commission referral or market referral, but that the market should be kept under review.

Agricultural Produce

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent assessment she has made of the existence of market dominance on the part of purchasers of perishable raw agricultural produce in the *(a)* dairy, *(b)* livestock meat, *(c)* arable, *(d)* poultry meat, *(e)* horticultural and *(f)* other sectors. [96954]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Issues of market dominance are for the competition authorities to analyse in the first instance. Dominance, and more particularly abuse of dominance by single firms is for the Office of Fair Trading to consider under the Competition Act 1998. Problems arising from collective dominance are more likely to be dealt with by reference to the Competition Commission (CC). Over the past four years, the CC has reported on three such references. On 10 October 2000, it reported on the supply of groceries from multiple stores. On its recommendation, the Government published a Code of Practice governing relations between the large supermarkets and their suppliers.

On 22 December 2000, the CC published a report on the supply of fresh processed milk to middle ground retailers in Scotland and on 6 July 1999, the CC published a report on the supply of raw cow's milk in Great Britain.

Auditing

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proposals she has for raising the audit threshold for small and medium-sized companies. [100907]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Department is carrying out a programme of research to assess the impact of the previous increased to £1 million turnover in the audit exemption threshold. The information provided will be used to inform a further consultation proposed on whether the audit threshold should be increased or maintained at its current level.

Auditors

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the consultancy services that auditors are not permitted to sell to their audit clients. [100526]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The UK system of auditor regulation is based on principles rather than rules. The key principles are that auditors should not perform management functions or make management decisions; that auditors should not audit their own work; and that auditors should not act as advocates for their clients. There is no list of banned services in the UK.

The recently published Final Report of the Coordinating Group on Audit and Accounting Issues deals with the issue of the provision of non-audit services by auditors to their clients, in particular in Chapter 1 (auditor independence) and Chapter 2 (corporate governance and the role of audit committee).

Consumer Contracts Regulations

Mr. Hopkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many *(a)* local authority and *(b)* housing association tenancy agreements have been received by the Office of Fair Trading for investigation under the Unfair Terms in Consumer Contracts Regulations 1999. [100879]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, East (Ms Prentice), 11 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 650W.

Defective Accounts

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many companies have been forced to revise defective accounts by the Financial Reporting Review Panel; and how many auditors have been disciplined as a result. [100761]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Since 1991, 14 companies have been required to revise their financial statements by issuing corrected accounts after investigation by the Panel. Over 50 other companies have been required to take alternative corrective action in respect of defective accounts.

The Panel always alerts the relevant professional bodies whose members have been involved in either the preparation or audit of accounts requiring correction. It is for these bodies to decide what action is appropriate. The Panel is informed of their decisions and is aware that disciplinary action is taken in appropriate cases.

DTI Inspectors' Reports

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the DTI inspectors' reports that have not yet been presented to Parliament but have been released to third parties. [100759]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Inspectors' reports are made to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, not to Parliament.

Financial Reporting Council

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what financial contribution the Government will be making to the operations of the Financial Reporting Council and its associated bodies. [100830]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Report of the Review of the Regulatory Regime of the Accountancy Profession (published on 29 January) recommended that

> "the annual running costs of the independent regulator should be broadly shared by Government, business and the professional bodies".

Chapter 8 of the report, copies of which have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses, looks at funding issues in detail. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made it clear in her Statement on 29 January, when accepting this recommendation, that while the Government will pay its share of core running costs, she also expects companies and the profession to contribute.

J.S. Bass Group

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry pursuant to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby's correspondence with her, if she will commission an independent inquiry into the liquidation of J S Bass Group of companies. [100910]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I am not persuaded that there are any grounds to justify the commission of an independent inquiry into the liquidation of John S Bass & Co. Ltd., or other companies in the same group.

Money Laundering

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many accountants have been prosecuted by her Department for failure to report suspicions of money laundering to the National Criminal Intelligence Service. [100524]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: I have been asked to reply.

The table gives the number of defendants proceeded against in England and Wales for the offence of failing to disclose knowledge or suspicion of money laundering under section 52 of the Drug Trafficking Act 1994 during the period 1994 to 2001.

It is not possible separately to identify which of these defendants are accountants in the statistics collected centrally.

The Drug Trafficking Act offence has been replaced by section 330 of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 which came into force on 24 February 2003. This new offence only applies to persons who suspect money laundering in the course of a business in the regulated sector. Accountants will be brought within the regulated sector by means of new Money Laundering Regulations to be made later this year.

Number of defendants proceeded against at magistrates' courts and found guilty at all courts for 'failure to disclose knowledge or suspicion of money laundering'[1], England and Wales 1994 to 2001[2]

	Defendants proceeded against	*Defendants found guilty*
1994	—	—
1995	1	—
1996	—	—
1997	—	—
1998	—	—
1999	1	—
2000[3]	1	—
2001	—	—

[1] Offence is under Drug Trafficking Act 1994, Sec 52.

[2] These data are on the principal offence basis.

[3] Staffordshire Police were only able to submit sample data for persons dealt with at magistrates' courts in 2000. Although sufficient to estimate higher orders of data, these data are not robust at a detailed level and have been excluded from this table.

Receiverships (Completion)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many receiverships, administrations and liquidations that commenced *(a)* more than 20 years ago and *(b)* more than 10 years ago have not been finalised; for what reasons they have not been finalised; and what steps her Department takes to ensure timely completion. [100828]

Miss Melanie Johnson: As of 31 January 2003 there were 18,585 liquidation cases open, of these 440 cases (2.4 per cent.) were over 36 months old. There is no information available for previous years.

There is no information available for the length of time taken to finalise receiverships or administrations.

Regulatory Bodies

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many staff were employed by the Insolvency Service in each year since 1997, and how many were inspection staff. [100015]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The numbers of staff employed in the Insolvency Service are published in the agency's Annual Report and Accounts.

Rugby Football Union

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has had with the Office of Fair Trading on its investigation into restrictive and anticompetitive practices with respect to the Rugby Football Union. [100240]

Miss Melanie Johnson: None.

TRANSPORT

Pollution

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the cost per kilogram saved of *(a)* carbon dioxide emissions and *(b)* other harmful gases arising from (i) the lower duty on LPG, (ii) the lower duty on biodiesel and (iii) the proposed 20p reduction for bioethanol [100626]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 5 March 2003]:* There is a large number of factors influencing the cost of abatement of carbon dioxide and local air quality emissions. For example, the CO_2 life-cycle benefits of biofuels can be heavily influenced by the feedstocks, farming practices and processing methods used to manufacture the fuel. In addition, it should be noted that LPG is promoted primarily as a means of improving air quality rather than as a carbon-saving measure.

However, illustrative figures have been set out for carbon and the main air quality pollutants, PM10 and NO_x based on current fuel duty levels for LPG and the main biofuels, where reliable emissions data exists. These figures do not take account of the other benefits of fuel diversification, such as fuel security issues, agricultural diversification and quieter engines.

	Revenue cost of abatement[1]		
Fuel	*Carbon*	*PM*	*NO_x*
LPG (conversion from new Euro III petrol)	3.2	63,000	920
LPG (conversion from new Euro III diesel)	4.6	700	50
Biodiesel (from recovered vegetable oil)	0.26–0.30	Some expected benefit. DfT plans to undertake further emissions testing work on this fuel.	No benefit
Biodiesel (from dedicated crops)	0.28–0.50	Some expected benefit. DfT plans to undertake further emissions testing work on this fuel.	No benefit
Bioethanol (from dedicated sugar and starch-rich crops)	0.28–0.50	1,200–1,800	No benefit

[1] £ per kg—all figures approximate

Note:

Figures for the air quality benefits of biofuels assume use as a 5 per cent. blend with conventional mineral fuels.

A27

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the incidents of *(a)* fatalities and *(b)* serious injuries recorded on the A27 between Lewes and Polegate in each of the last 10 years. [100772]

Mr. Jamieson: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency, Mr. Tim Matthews to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Tim Matthews to Mr. Nigel Waterson, dated 6 March 2003:

I have been asked by the Transport Minister, David Jamieson, to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about accidents on the A27 between Lewes and Polegate, in each of the last ten years.

The figures available are shown in the table below. They represent the number of accidents involving fatalities or serious injuries. When both fatal and serious injuries are involved in the same accident, it is recorded in the highest severity classification (ie fatality).

Year	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
Fatal	4	0	1	2	3	0	4	2	3
Serious	5	4	16	17	9	11	7	12	14

All the figures provided are for the length of the A27 from Ashcombe Roundabout (west of Lewes) and the A22 junction at Polegate. Prior to 1994 our records are incomplete and I am unable to provide accident figures covering those years.

If you would like further information about accident issues on the A27 between Lewes and Polegate, the Area Manager, Mark Kumar, at our Dorking office would be pleased to help you. His telephone number is 01306 878115.

Air Accidents

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about the relationship between *(a)* the Warsaw Convention and *(b)* EC Regulation 2027/97 (Air carrier liability in the event of accidents) in (i) its present form and (ii) as it will be amended by EC Regulation 889/2002. [R] [101149]

Mr. Jamieson: Council Regulation (EC) No. 2027/97 was adopted to provide a greater level of consumer protection than that found in the Warsaw Convention. Although the regulation applies in a different way to the Convention, legal advice presented by the European Commission at the time of adoption of the regulation indicated that the proposed Community legislation was compatible with the Warsaw Convention. Council and Parliament Regulation (EC) No. 889/2002 was adopted to align the provisions of Regulation 2027/97 with those of the Montreal Convention, except that the intention of Regulation 889/2002 is that it will apply to Community air carriers in respect of all carriage undertaken. Again, legal advice presented at the time of adoption of the amending regulation was that the proposed Community measure is compatible with both the Warsaw and Montreal Conventions.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the different methods of securing compliance with the amended notice provisions of EC Regulation 2027/97 (air carrier liability in the event of accidents) which will apply after the Montreal Convention has come into force. [R] [101150]

Mr. Jamieson: In the UK compliance with the information provisions of Council Regulation (EC) No: 2027/97 is secured by the Air Carrier Liability Order 1998. When the date of coming-into-force of Regulation 889/2002 (which is linked to the coming-into-force of the Montreal Convention) is known, the Air Carrier Liability Order will be amended to reflect the amended Community legislation. The sanction of a fine not exceeding level 5 on the standard scale was thought to be more appropriate than withdrawal of the right to fly or an administrative fine.

Airports Review

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how he estimates the Internal Rate of Return and Net Benefit assessed for Packages 20 and 21 in Annex D of the February 2003 South East and East of England Regional Air Services (SERAS) document would be affected by a requirement that a developer should bear *(a)* 15 per cent. *(b)* 25 per cent. and *(c)* 30 per cent. of the surface access cost associated with those packages as assessed at SERAS Stages 2 and 3. [100860]

Mr. Jamieson: The capital costs of the options at Gatwick and Cliffe used for the economic and financial appraisals of SERAS packages 20 and 21 included 100 per cent. of the costs of the surface access schemes associated with the airport development. The surface access schemes and costs for the two and four runway options at Cliffe are specified in Table 11.3 of the SERAS Stage 2 report and for the two single runway options at Gatwick in Table 2.2 of the SERAS Stage 3 report.

Congestion Charging

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will be able to provide an assessment of the changes to passenger mileage travelled by *(a)* bus, *(b)* coach, *(c)* train and *(d)* private car in the counties surrounding London consequent on the introduction of congestion charging. [100746]

Mr. Jamieson: Transport for London will be assessing the effect of congestion charging on transport patterns within the London area, and intend to publish a comprehensive report early next year.

Finsbury Park Station

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the total cost of investment is in the refurbishment of Finsbury Park Station by *(a)* the Department and *(b)* other sources; and if he will make a statement on progress of the scheme. [100270]

Mr. Jamieson: I understand that London Underground Limited are currently reviewing options for refurbishing Finsbury Park station, in conjunction with Transport for London, the London Borough of Islington and Network Rail.

London Underground

Martin Linton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he next plans to meet the Strategic Rail Authority to discuss the SRA Plan 2003, with particular reference to the proposals for the extension of London Underground's East London Line. [100896]

Mr. Jamieson: Ministers regularly meet the Chairman of the SRA to discuss a variety of matters. The business case for the East London Line Extension is currently being considered. I hope an announcement will be made shortly.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received from the London Underground PPP, Consortia, and their component companies, for new legislation to restrain the Mayor of London and Transport for London in their operations; how he has responded; and if he will make a statement. [100997]

Mr. Jamieson: The Secretary of State is not proposing to legislate to constrain the Mayor or Transport for London in their operations, and has not received any representations that he should. The Government have proposed legislation, in the Railways and Transport Safety Bill currently before the House, to ensure that when London Underground is transferred to Transport for London, its contracts can continue to operate as intended.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the starting date is for full operation of the contract with Tube Lines and each of the two contracts with Metronet as part of the London Underground PPP; and if he will make a statement. [100998]

Mr. Jamieson: The contract with Tube Lines was completed on 31 December 2002. The Government expects the contracts with Metronet to be completed this spring.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what the benchmarks relating to average performance on the London Underground are; how they were arrived at; if he will make a statement on their significance; at what level in relation to those benchmarks the infrastructure companies in the London Underground PPP can operate without incurring a penalty; and if he will make a statement; [101003]

(2) how the figures at the commencement of the London Underground PPP contracts for the measurement of *(a)* bonuses and abatements and *(b)* passenger compensation will be determined for (i) lost customer hours and (ii) attributable delays; what the initial standards will be; and if he will make a statement. [101002]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer my hon. Friend to my answer to the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) on 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, columns 508–09W.

The payment of refunds to passengers under London Underground's Customer Charter is not a matter for the infrastructure companies and is therefore not covered by the PPP contracts.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he plans to alter the period of the contract with the London Underground PPP Infrastructure Consortia; and if he will make a statement. [101749]

Mr. Jamieson: My right hon. Friend has no such plans.

Montreal Convention

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the United Kingdom will ratify the Montreal Convention.[R] [101151]

Mr. Jamieson: The United Kingdom will ratify the Montreal Convention when all 15 member states of the EU are in a position to do so simultaneously. Although the UK stands ready to deposit its instrument of ratification, a number of member states are not.

Railways

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport for what reason public funds are being used to pay for the rectification of the shortage of power on the rail network in southern England; why the power supply problems were not realised at the time the order for new trains was placed; when the power supply upgrade will be completed; what effect he estimates this will have on the Government's target for increasing passenger traffic in the coming decade; and if he will make a statement. [100301]

Mr. Jamieson: The power supply upgrade is necessary to allow new trains to be introduced which will replace Mark 1 rolling stock, as required by the Railway Safety Regulations 1999. The Strategic Rail Authority is working with Network Rail on an approach to funding the upgrade that does not require the investment of public funds. The belated appreciation of the need for the upgrade reflected a failure of communication within the industry. The first phase of the power supply upgrade began in 2002 and is forecast to continue through to 2005. The upgrade is not in itself expected to affect the volume of passenger traffic on the network.

Road Improvements

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what guidance he gives to the Highways Agency on assessing road improvement schemes associated with accident black spots. [103393]

Mr. Jamieson: The Highways Agency are responsible for monitoring and analysing accidents on the Trunk Road network, and taking appropriate action. "Tomorrow's Roads—Safer for Everyone" gives guidance on the Governments safety strategy and sets casualty reduction targets for 2010, including those that are to be achieved by the Highways Agency.

A number of techniques are used to analyse and assess prospective improvements, but it is for the Highways Agency to decide which are used to determine the types of road safety schemes and priorities.

South West Trains

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many new trains are on order to South West Trains; how many of the new trains are expected to enter service on schedule; and if he will make a statement. [100299]

Mr. Jamieson: South West Trains have 785 new vehicles on order. The first new trains are expected to enter service in spring 2003 subject to completion of all necessary testing. Thereafter new trains will enter service on a regular basis through to the end of 2004 subject to power supply availability.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Correspondence

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when he will reply to the letter of 28 November 2002 from the hon. Member for Manchester, Central on the collection and recording of information on pupils' ethnic background. [100288]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: My hon. Friend the Minister of State for School Standards replied to my hon. Friend's letter of 28 November 2002 on 28 February.

Career Development Loans

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many people obtained career development loans in Redcar and Cleveland in each of the last five years, broken down by *(a)* age and *(b)* course studied. [101223]

Margaret Hodge: The following tables show the number of people in the Redcar and Cleveland area who have been awarded a Career Development Loan (CDL), for every year since 1998. The tables break down the awards into age groups, and show the type of learning that the CDL was intended to help fund. Information is not collected on the actual course studied.

Number of CDLs by course type—1998

	Age range					
	Under 20	*20–29*	*30–39*	*40–49*	*Over 49*	*Total*
Commercial and Professional	—	2	1	1	—	4
Computer Skills	1	2	2	1	—	6
Management	—	1	1		—	2
Driving Occupations	—	2	5	1	2	10
Post Graduate (other)	—	1	—	—	—	1
Sport Leisure and Tourism	—	—	1	—	—	1
Total	1	8	10	3	2	24

Number of CDLs by course type—1999

	Age range					
	Under 20	*20–29*	*30–39*	*40–49*	*Over 49*	*Total*
Commercial and Professional	—	5	1	—	—	6
Computer Skills	—	3	5	—	—	8
Driving Occupations	—	1	1	1	1	4
Art and Drama	—	1	—	—	—	1
Environment Studies	—	—	1	—	—	1
Service/Selling occupations	—	—	—	—	1	1
Science and technology	—	—	2	—	—	2
Other	—	2	—	—	—	2
Total	—	12	10	1	2	25

Number of CDLs by course type—2000

	Age range					
	Under 20	*20–29*	*30–39*	*40–49*	*Over 49*	*Total*
Commercial and Professional	—	1	—	—	—	1
Computer Skills	—	13	13	3	1	30
Health, Training, Welfare	—	2	—	—	—	2
Management	1	1	—	—	—	2
Driving Occupations		2	—	2	—	4
Art and Drama	1	2	—	—	—	3
Environment Studies	—	1	—	—	—	1
Flying Occupations	—	1	—	—	—	1
Science and technology	—	1	—	—	—	1
Other	—	6	—	1		7
Total	2	30	13	6	1	52

Number of CDLs by course type—2001

	Age range					
	Under 20	*20–29*	*30–39*	*40–49*	*Over 49*	*Total*
Commercial and Professional	—	2	1	—	—	3
Computer Skills	—	16	7	4	—	27
Health, Training, Welfare	—	—	3	1	—	4
Management	—	1	—	—	—	1
Driving Occupations	—		1	3	—	4
Environment Studies	—	1	—	—	—	1
Sport/Leisure/Tourism	—	1	—	—	—	1
General Career Counselling	—	—	1	—	—	1
Total	—	21	13	8	—	42

Number of CDLs by course type—2002

	Age range					
	Under 20	*20–29*	*30–39*	*40–49*	*Over 49*	*Total*
Computer Skills	1	8	10	4	2	25
Health, Training, Welfare	—	2	1	—	1	4
Management	—	—	—	1	—	1
Driving Occupations	—	1	2	—	—	3
Art and Drama	—	2	—	—	—	2
Environment Studies	—	1	—	—	—	1
Engineering	—	—	—	1	—	1
Other	—	1	1	2	—	4
Total	1	15	14	8	3	41

Note:

These tables cover postcodes starting TS5, TS6 and TS10–14 inclusive, as confirmed with the borough of Redcar and Cleveland.

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what action is taken to publicise the availability of career development loans. [101224]

Margaret Hodge: Since they were launched in 1988 Career Development Loans (CDLs) have helped over 180,000 people fund vocational learning to improve their career prospects. CDLs are publicised via the CDL website on the Department's website, by learning providers, and participating banks. Information is also available via learndirect, Learning and Skills Councils, Information Advice and Guidance partnerships and various publications such as the leaflet "money to learn", the BBC's Career Essentials booklet and CDL advertising posters sent to learning providers and Jobcentres. The most recent national press publicity campaign was carried out in 1998. As CDLs are being considered as part of the review of funding of adult learning, there are no plans to further publicise the programme at present.

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many people in the borough of Redcar and Cleveland *(a)* applied for and *(b)* obtained career development loans in each of the last five years; and what the rate of default is on repayment in each of the last three years. [101225]

Margaret Hodge: The exact number of Career Development Loan (CDL) applications by people in the borough of Redcar and Cleveland is not known. The rate of successful applications varies between the banks, but the overall success rate is around 75 per cent. of applications received. The number of successful applications in each year since 1998 is as follows:

	Number
1998	24
1999	25
2000	52
2001	42
2002	41

Note:

This table covers postcodes starting TS5, TS6 and TS10–14 inclusive, as confirmed with the borough of Redcar and Cleveland

The net default rate on CDLs taken out in the borough of Redcar and Cleveland is:

2000—4.0 per cent

2001—6.23 per cent.

2002—no loans have defaulted to date

The national underlying net default rate for CDLs since the programme began is 10.13 per cent. This compares to the 15 per cent. maximum operating default limit agreed with the banks to cover the higher level of risk they take in making these particular loans.

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what guidance the Department gives for *(a)* rates of repayment and *(b)* income levels for the commencement of the repayment of career development loans. [101226]

Margaret Hodge: Career Development Loans (CDLs) are commercial bank loans and the rates of repayment are decided by the participating banks. The banks have an agreement with the Department that the interest rate they charge will normally be no greater than the interest rate applicable to their normal personal loans, at the time that the CDL was granted.

CDLs are not income-contingent therefore the Department does not give any guidance to the participating banks on income levels for starting repayment. However, an individual may be able to postpone the start of their repayments for up to 17 months if, when they are due to start repaying they are:

unemployed and claiming related benefits;

employed and receiving certain benefits (such as Income Support);

taking part in a Government Training programme and in receipt of a training Allowance; or

still attending the course for longer than expected due to ill health or other special circumstances.

Classroom Assistants

Mr. Simmonds: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) if he will make a statement on the proposed funding for schools to employ classroom assistants; when this money will be paid; and how much each *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary school in (i) Lincolnshire, (ii) Nottinghamshire, (iii) Leicestershire and (iv) Boston and Skegness constituency will receive; [95703]

(2) if he will make a statement on the proposed funding for schools to employ persons under the rural area student teacher placement apprenticeship scheme; when this money will be paid; and how much each *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary school in (i) Lincolnshire, (ii) Nottinghamshire, (iii) Leicestershire and (iv) Boston and Skegness constituency will receive. [95704]

Mr. Miliband: The Government are committed to remodelling the school workforce in support of high quality teaching and learning. As part of this process, we are providing sufficient funding to enable schools to recruit at least 50,000 new full-time equivalent support staff over the course of this Parliament. The overall increase in revenue funding for schools, after specific identified pressures have been taken into account, will be £1.1 billion in 2003–04, £2 billion in 2004–05 and £3 billion in 2005–06—schools will be able to use some of this additional funding for workforce reform, including recruiting additional teaching assistants and other support staff members, if they choose to. These increases in funding are in addition to existing school budgets which many schools are already using to remodel the school workforce and recruit new support staff. Decisions about how many support staff to recruit, and the roles they fulfil, will continue to be taken by individual schools.

For 2003–04 we are making available to authorities a total of £268 million (at 50 per cent. grant rate) to specifically cover the costs of recruiting school support staff (including teaching assistants) and extra administrative help, particularly for small schools. Of this £4,254,627 will go to Lincolnshire, £4,343,284 to Nottinghamshire and £3,155,825 to Leicestershire. The grant must be fully devolved to schools but it will be for LEAs to decide how to devolve this funding to schools. We therefore have no information available on Boston and Skegness constituency or on individual schools.

I am unaware of the rural area student placement apprenticeship scheme to which the hon. Member refers.

Higher Education Funding

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what arrangements are in place for departmental and Funding Council monitoring of the access arrangements to higher education institutions. [100156]

Margaret Hodge: Access to higher education institutions is monitored through the Performance Indicators published by the Higher Education Funding Council for England.

IT Provision

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the Government's policy is on the provision of disabled people's IT needs; and if he will make a statement. [98697]

Mr. Charles Clarke *[holding answer 25 February 2003]:* All education and training provided through my Department, including IT training, is available to disabled people.

Since the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 came into force in September 2002 it has been unlawful to discriminate against disabled students by treating them less favourably than others. In addition, responsible bodies have a duty to provide reasonable adjustments to provision where disabled students might otherwise be substantially disadvantaged. From September 2003 that duty will include adjustments involving the provision of auxiliary aids and services.

My Department is working with the Disability Rights Commission, the Learning and Skills Council, the Higher Education Funding Council and other partners in the post-16 sector, to help providers implement the new duties with additional funding, guidance and training. £172 million has been allocated over the years 2002–04 to support this work.

Provision of Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

E learning and ICT can help disabled learners, and we recognise that the provision of assistive technologies can make a significant impact on their lives. My Department is working with the Department for Work and Pensions to improve coherence of access to and delivery of ICT equipment, services and information for disabled people. This is particularly relevant as they move from education to employment. It would also enable disabled people to use ICT provided for learning to also be used for employment or leisure.

Many of the 6,000 plus UK online centres are equipped to meet the immediate, basic, access requirements of a large majority of learners. Some centres are specifically targeted at groups of people with disabilities to encourage not only learning but also inclusion into society. Work is currently under way to provide centres with adaptive technologies and training to enable them to provide a better service for disabled users. We will be evaluating their usage next year.

Ufi/learndirect are implementing a specialist disability specific service for learning centres and individual learners, available through the learndirect help-line. The service is provided by AbilityNet, a national charity and the UK's leading provider of expertise on computing and disability, offering advice, information and guidance on hardware and software applications to improve accessibility and usability.

DEFENCE

Animals (Armed Forces)

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many animals, broken down by species, are employed by the armed forces; and in what capacity they are used. [100369]

Dr. Moonie: The Armed Forces employ 1,175 dogs and 452 horses. Dogs are categorised as Protection dogs, used to guard military installations etc and Specialist dogs, used to detect specific items, eg arms, explosives, drugs. Horses are all used in ceremonial roles.

Armed Forces Recruitment

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to change the restrictions on prospective soldiers who have served time in prison from joining the armed forces. [101164]

Dr. Moonie: All three Services apply the provisions of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act in considering applications from ex-prisoners. At the present time there are no plans to change any restrictions on joining the armed forces.

Aviation Security

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration he has given to the impact on the armed forces of the potential use of hand-held surface to air missiles on aviation security. [100718]

Mr. Ingram: The lead responsibility for counter-terrorism in the United Kingdom rests with the Home Office and the police. They work closely with the Department for Transport and the transport industries to counter threats against civil aviation and other transport mfrastmcture. As well as being responsible for the security of our own estate and assets, the Ministry of Defence provides support to the civil authorities ni responding to the terrorist threat, through the use of the Armed Forces and the provision of scientific and technical expertise. In particular, we have, on a number of occasions, provided support to the police in enhancing civil aviation security, most recently during the security alert at Heathrow last month. Similar support will be made available in future should the need arise.

Diego Garcia

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what the current deployment is of British forces in Diego Garcia; and under whose command they operate; [100274]

(2) how many UK forces are normally deployed in Diego Garcia, broken down by rank; and how many, broken down by rank, are currently deployed. [101236]

Mr. Ingram: The standard scheme of compliment of the Naval Party on Diego Garcia is 41 personnel, consisting of three officers, including Britmilrep, and 38 other ranks.

The current deployed strength which carries out civil administration of the territory on behalf of the Commissioner for the British Indian Ocean Territory is 39 personnel. These personnel are currently under the operational command (OPCOM) of Commander-in-Chief Fleet, but on 1 April 2003 they will come under the command of the Chief of Joint Operations as part of a rationalisation of operational command responsibilities.

The personnel broken down by rank is as follows:

1 × Commander RN

1 × Major RM

1 × Captain RM

Other ranks—Navy

2 × Chief Petty Officers

3 × Regulating Petty Officers

12 × Leading Hands

Other ranks—Royal Marines

1 × Colour Sergeant

1 × Sergeant

5 × Corporals

12 × Marines

Extended Range Ordnance/ Modular Charge System

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether a new in-service date has been decided for the extended range ordnance/modular charge system; and if he will make a statement. [99803]

Mr. Ingram: *[holding answer 3 March 2003]:* The In Service Date for the Extended Range Ordnance/ Modular Charge System is under review as a result of technical difficulties that have been experienced with the programme.

Initial Training

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the Ministry of Defence's *(a)* suggested and *(b)* average supervisory ratios for initial training are; and if he will make a statement. [100172]

Mr. Ingram: I assume that by initial training the hon. Member is referring to both Phase 1 training (recruit training) and Phase 2 training (initial specialist training).

There are two aspects of supervision: formal training class size and pastoral care out of working hours. The level of supervision varies accordingly, such that meaningful data on average ratios is not readily available. The Ministry of Defence does not currently recommend supervisory ratios.

In the case of class size, while there are no formal guidelines, there is a general acceptance of a benchmark ratio of 1:16. Actual class size varies by Service and depends on the subject being taught, the nature of the training activity and the facilities available.

For pastoral care out of working hours, individual commanders across the Services set the ratios they deem appropriate to meet the needs of recruits and their training organisations. However, there is general agreement that a ratio of 1:12 is appropriate for Phase 1 training and this is broadly in place across the Services. In the case of Phase 2 training, these ratios increase and there are wider differences in Service practice. Current ranges of Phase 2 pastoral care staff/trainee ratios are as follows:

RN—1:25 to 1:50

RM—1:12

Army—1:40 to 1:75

RAF—1:16 to 1:32

The recent Appraisal of Initial Training by the Directorate of Operational Capability announced on 10 February 2003 recommended that central direction be introduced on supervisory ratios of initial training. An action plan was published at the same time to carry forward this and the report's other recommendations.

IT Contracts

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list IT contracts in his Department above £50 million in each of the last 10 years; what the inception date for each system was; when it became fully functional; when it became fully debugged; and what the cost of over-runs has been. [98997]

Mr. Ingram: This information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Meteor Programme

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the estimated total cost to the UK for its share of the Meteor programme is; what the total estimated cost was in *(a)* May 2002 and *(b)* December 2002; how many Meteor missiles will be procured by his Department; and how many missiles were on order in (i) May 2002 and (ii) December 2002. [99601]

Mr. Ingram: The current estimated total cost to the United Kingdom for its share in the Meteor programme is £1.16 billion (at outturn prices); this is the same as the forecast in December 2002. The forecast in May 2002 was £1.13 billion. The £30 million increase is solely due to the transfer of 5 per cent. of the development programme workshare from Germany to the United Kingdom.

The United Kingdom is currently the only nation to have placed an order for production missiles. I am withholding details on the numbers being procured in accordance with Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, which relates to Defence, Security and International Relations. However, our requirements have not changed since my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence announced (in May 2000) that Meteor had been selected to meet our Beyond Visual Range Air-to-Air Missile (BVRAAM) requirement. We expect to order additional quantities of Meteor on behalf of the other Partner Nations, once they have confirmed their production requirements.

The Development and Production contract was placed with MBDA on 23 December 2002 and as such no missiles were on order in May 2002.

MOD Vehicle Fleet

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what the annual rate is at which his Department renews its vehicle fleet, by *(a)* volume and *(b)* percentage for each category of (i) vehicle, (ii) type of power unit, and (iii) type of fuel; [97972]

(2) what the annual rate is at which the Army renews its on road vehicle fleet, by *(a)* volume and *(b)* percentage for each category of (i) vehicle, (ii) type of power unit, and (iii) type of fuel; [97974]

(3) what the annual rate is at which the Royal Navy renews its on road vehicle fleet, by *(a)* volume and *(b)* percentage for each (i) category of vehicle, (ii) type of power unit, and (iii) type of fuel; [97976]

(4) what the annual rate is at which the Royal Air Force renews its on road vehicle fleet, by *(a)* volume and *(b)* percentage for each (i) category of vehicle, (ii) type of power unit and (iii) type of fuel. [97978]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence's non-operational fleet, which might be regarded as the road vehicle fleet, is supplied under the terms of a contract for service provision and the Department does not own the fleet.

MOD also operates a large range of operational vehicle fleets. These fleets are not replaced under a rolling programme, but on the basis of the operational capability requirements of the Department. The information requested is not held centrally for these fleets and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

When procuring new operational vehicles MOD ensures compliance with current domestic and EU legislation and the current NATO single fuel policy. Since the acceptance and implementation of this policy by the UK in 1991, all operational vehicles procured are propelled by diesel engines with the capability to use aviation fuel (Avtur) in operational theatre. All in-service operational vehicles are either fitted with diesel engines or are subject to dieselisation programmes.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what progress has been made, by *(a)* volume and *(b)* percentage for each category of (i) vehicle, (ii) type of power unit and (iii) type of fuel, on an annual basis, over each of the past three years, in renewal of his Department's vehicle fleet on a lower emission basis; [97973]

(2) what progress has been made, by *(a)* volume and *(b)* percentage for each category of (i) vehicle, (ii) type of power unit and (iii) type of fuel, on an annual basis, over each of the past three years, in renewal of the Royal Navy's vehicle fleet on a lower emission basis; [97977]

(3) what progress has been made, by *(a)* volume and *(b)* percentage for each category of (i) vehicle, (ii) type of power unit and (iii) type of fuel, on an annual basis, over each of the past three years, in renewal of the Army's vehicle fleet on a lower emission basis; [97975]

(4) what progress has been made by *(a)* volume and *(b)* percentage for each category of (i) vehicle, (ii) type of power unit and (iii) type of fuel, on an annual basis, over each of the past three years, in renewal of the Royal Air Force's vehicle fleet on a lower emission basis. [97979]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence operates a large and diverse vehicle fleet. The detailed information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Reducing vehicle emissions is a key transport issue, which has been agreed as a priority across Government. Against a baseline year of 2002–03, all Departments are aiming by 31 March 2006 to reduce road transport vehicle carbon dioxide emissions by at least 10 per cent. and requiring at least 10 per cent. of all fleet cars to be alternatively fuelled.

Progress against these targets will be reported in the Sustainable Development in Government annual report. The first full report against the Framework will be in 2003, reporting against the baseline year of 2002–03.

MOD is committed to complying with the letter and spirit of UK air pollution control policy and legislation, including that derived from EC Directives on vehicle emissions. A copy of the relevant Joint Service Publication—418—can be found in the Library of the House.

In addition, as part of the Framework for Sustainable Development on the Government Estate, MOD has published a draft transport strategy, which includes targets and measures to (i) reduce the total business mileage of land-vehicles; (ii) improve the average fuel efficiency of land-vehicles; and (iii) reduce total fuel consumed, including working with our contractors for the non-operational fleet and hire cars to demonstrate increasing use of alternatively fuelled vehicles.

New projects for equipment acquisition are required to adhere to the spirit of the MOD travel strategy.

A copy of the draft MOD travel strategy can be found at: http://www.mod.uk/linked_files/dsef/sus_dev/sdt_strategy.pdf.

Naval Hulls

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the hulls of Royal Fleet Auxiliary vessels of the *(a)* Leaf, *(b)* Rover and *(c)* Wave classes are categorised as (i) single, (ii) single reinforced and (iii) double. [98717]

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many RFA Ships have a double hull. [99146]

Mr. Ingram: Royal Fleet Auxiliary Leaf and Rover Class vessels are single hulled and are fully compliant with current regulations and hold valid IOPP (International Oil Pollution Prevention) certificates.

The Ministry of Defence's policy remains that, where practicable, we will comply with standards required by legislation. The implementation of a recent amendment to the regulations will, however, result in RFA tankers becoming non-compliant with MARPOL (the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships 1973 and the Protocol of 1978). A programme is in place to replace progressively the RFA single hulled tanker fleet which, subject to sufficient funding being identified, will result in MOD reaching compliance by 2010.

The WAVE Class has been built in accordance with current regulations for new tankers and are therefore double hulled.

None of the current RFA Fleet is double-hulled. However, the two new WAVE CLASS RFAs, that are undergoing trials before they enter service this spring, have been built with double-hulls.

Organophosphates

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what training and guidance is being given to British troops and hygiene units on the use of organophosphate pesticides in any potential conflict with Iraq; and if he will make a statement. [94733]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 3 February 2003]:* Guidance on the safe and effective use of pesticides, including organophosphate insecticides, is provided in the Joint Services Manual on Pest Control. This covers safety requirements including the use of protective equipment, and states that insecticides may only be used by appropriately trained personnel. Environmental health briefs are issued to British forces deploying to the Gulf region as part of routine preparations.

Peacekeeping Duties

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many British personnel are on peacekeeping duties, broken down by *(a)* regiment and *(b)* location. [101170]

Mr. Ingram: There are presently some 3,400 British personnel deployed on peacekeeping operations throughout the world; some 500 are deployed to six UN operations, around 2,600 are deployed in support of NATO operations in the Balkans, and approximately 300 are deployed to Kabul as part of the International Security and Assistance Force (ISAF).

The core of the United Kingdom's contribution to the UN Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) is provided by elements from 47th Regiment Royal Artillery. The United Kingdom's commitment to the Balkans includes a Battalion in Bosnia and Herzegovina, currently 1st Battalion The Royal Scots, and a Battalion in Kosovo, currently 1st Battalion The Staffordshire Regiment. The 21st Engineer Regiment provides a Squadron in Bosnia and 26th Engineer Regiment provides a Squadron in Kosovo. In Afghanistan, a Company from 2nd Battalion The Royal Anglian Regiment will shortly provide the key United Kingdom contribution to ISAF.

The bulk of Service personnel on peacekeeping duties are not deployed as part of formed regiments. They fulfil a variety of command, specialised and supporting roles, such as engineering, communications and logistics for formed national and multi-national headquarters.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to change the number of personnel on peacekeeping operations in *(a)* Bosnia, *(b)* Kosovo, *(c)* Sierra Leone and *(d)* Afghanistan. [101171]

Mr. Ingram: In Bosnia and Kosovo we intend to reduce by the spring to the levels my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence announced in September last year. In keeping with the reductions in SFOR (Bosnia) and KFOR (Kosovo) planned as part of NATO's review of peacekeeping operations, the United Kingdom is reducing its forces from some 4,350 troops in September last year to some 2,500 by the spring of this—some 1,500 in Bosnia and 900 in Kosovo.

The UK provides 21 UK personnel to the UN Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), which is responsible for providing assistance to the Government of Sierra Leone in order to maintain law, order, peace and stability throughout the country. There are currently around 14,000 troops in UNAMSIL, which is expected to draw down by mid-2004.

There are currently no plans to reduce the number of personnel in Afghanistan.

QinetiQ

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the £200 million to be received from the first stage of the PPP involving QinetiQ is net of the estimated £80 million restructuring costs; how much more he estimates the MOD will receive from the sale of QinetiQ *(a)* as a gross figure and *(b)* net of costs;

whether the £80 million costs incurred is an increase on his Department's initial estimate for the PPP; and if he will make a statement. [99598]

Dr. Moonie: The £200 million to be received from the sale of a stake in QinetiQ to The Carlyle Group is a gross figure. Of the approximately £80 million costs of the PPP process, around £58 million were incurred by either the DERA Trading Fund or by QinetiQ plc. The impact of these costs is shown in QinetiQ's accounts and would have been taken into consideration by the purchaser when valuing the company. The £200 million receipt from the initial transaction therefore already includes any adjustment resulting from these costs. The remaining £19 million costs incurred directly by the Ministry of Defence (in addition to some £3 million borne by the Dstl trading fund) should be deducted from the £200 million receipt in order to determine MOD's net proceeds from the transaction so far. It would however be misleading to view these costs solely in the context of the initial receipt as a significant proportion of them relate to the formation of QinetiQ as a separate commercial entity and consequently they need to be assessed against the total receipts from all stages of the PPP process.

Any attempt to produce a precise estimate of likely proceeds or costs arising from the future sale of our remaining stake in QinetiQ would be purely speculative at this stage. The size of receipt is likely to be hundreds of millions of pounds, but will depend on the commercial success of the company as well as market conditions at the time of transaction. Although we anticipate that the sale will take place by means of a flotation in around three to five years, the final choice of timing and transaction will depend on value for money considerations. This choice will have an influence on the costs which are incurred.

The total cost of £80 million is in line with the estimate given to the HCDC in May 2001. This estimate included an approximate expected cost of some £6.5 million for consultancy advice to MOD on the whole DERA PPP, but we now expect the final total for this element of the costs to be around £17 million. A significant proportion of this increase results from additional work necessary to respond to difficult market conditions. This included the need to keep open both the options of a flotation as well as a strategic partnership. Extra work was also carried out to analyse and apportion liabilities following loss of capacity in the insurance markets after the events of 11 September 2001.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answer of 15 January, *Official Report*, column 687W, on QinetiQ, when he expects his Department to receive payment of the £100 million outstanding. [99599]

Dr. Moonie: When QinetiQ was created as a plc it purchased assets from the Ministry of Defence with a combination of shares and an obligation in the form of an interest bearing loan note to pay a further £150 million to the MOD. QinetiQ paid £50 million principal plus accrued interest in February 2002.

As part of the transaction with The Carlyle Group, a further £50 million of the loan notes will be repaid before the end of this financial year (2002–03). The remaining £50 million is secured against property at Chertsey and will be repaid to the MOD as payments are received from the sale. The detailed timings of these payments are still the subject of commercial negotiations with potential purchasers.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the estimated market value of QinetiQ is; and what the value of the company was on 1July 2001. [99602]

Dr. Moonie: Carlyle placed an overall enterprise value on the company of £500 million following a competitive sale process. The £500 million was based on the futurecash-flows of the business and did not take into account liabilities, other obligations or outstanding debt. The liabilities, other obligations and outstanding debt were £375 million leaving an equity value for the business of £125 million.

When QinetiQ was vested as a plc in July 2001 it was required to purchase its assets from the Ministry of Defence. At this point there was no means to establish the market value of the business, and the price paid for the assets was based on the net book value of £495 million shown in QinetiQ's accounts. It is important to note that this figure does not reflect the value of QinetiQ as an ongoing business nor, given the very specialised nature of many of QinetiQ's assets, does it reflect their potential sale value on the open market.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish the most recent pro forma accounts for QinetiQ. [99603]

Dr. Moonie: QinetiQ was formed as a public limited company on 1 July 2001. In accordance with the Companies Act 1985 publication of accounts is the responsibility of the plc's management. The next full year accounting period end for QinetiQ is 31 March 2003 and QinetiQ's management will be required to publish these results within the timescales laid down in the Companies Act 1985. The Ministry of Defence cannot independently publish pro forma accounts for the plc.

RAF (Overflight Rights)

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which countries have refused the UK's armed forces overfly rights in the last three months; and what reasons were provided in each case. [100150]

Mr. Ingram: There are currently no countries that have refused to grant the United Kingdom armed forces overflight rights. Diplomatic clearance is sought, through normal channels, on an individual basis for each flight.

RAF Continuous Attitude Survey

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answer of 25 February, ref. 99186, where and how the RAF Continuous Attitude Survey was published in September 2002; and if he will make a statement. [101369]

Dr. Moonie: The RAF continuous General Attitude Survey was published for limited internal use only in September 2002; a copy was not placed in the Library of the House. We are currently reviewing the range of survey material to release and appropriate ways of putting it in the public domain.

RAF Fairford

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the operational status is of RAF Fairford. [101172]

Mr. Ingram: RAF Fairford is a NATO designated standby base made available to the United States Visiting Force. We have recently agreed to a US request to deploy 14 B-52 aircraft to RAF Fairford as part of our contingency planning designed to maintain the flexibility of our military options. The deployment does not represent a decision to take military action.

The use of United Kingdom bases, including RAF Fairford, by US forces for combat operations against Iraq would be a matter for joint decision by the UK and US Governments at the appropriate time.

Reservists

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many inquiries from *(a)* reservists and *(b)* the families of reservists he has received concerning miscalculation of their enhanced pay since being called up. [101231]

Dr. Moonie: None.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the *(a)* allowances and *(b)* enhanced pay paid to reservists were last increased. [101232]

Dr. Moonie: Pay levels for members of the armed forces (including the reserve forces) are set by the Armed Forces Pay Review Body (AFPRB), whose annual report was published on 7 February 2003. A copy is available in the Library of the House. Its recommendations have been accepted in full, and will come into force on 1 April with the exception of the changes to Longer Separated Service Allowance (LSSA) and Longer Service at Sea Bonus (LSSB), which were implemented on 1 March.

Those allowances not set by the AFPRB are reviewed biannually by the Ministry of Defence, with changes usually coming into effect in August.

When called out into permanent service, reservists receive the same basic pay and allowances as their regular counterparts. In addition, members of the reserve forces whose civilian earnings are greater than their military pay may claim financial assistance under regulations set out in the Reserve Forces (Call-Out and Recall) (Financial Assistance) Regulations 1997 (Statutory Instrument 1997/309).

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he plans to lay orders before the House increasing the allowances and enhanced pay to reservists. [101233]

Dr. Moonie: Directed letters setting out the new pay rates for reservists, as well as the levels of training bounty, were dispatched on 24 February. These reflect the recommendations of the Armed Forces Pay Review Body's report of 7 February, a copy of which is available in the Library of the House.

The regulations governing financial assistance for reservists ("The Reserve Forces (Call-Out and Recall) (Financial Assistance) Regulations 1997"—SI 1997/309) are currently under review.

South Korea

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many British personnel are attached to the United Nations staff in South Korea. [101163]

Mr. Ingram: One British Naval lieutenant is currently working for the United Nations Command Military Armistice Commission (UNCMAC) on a six month attachment. In addition, the Defence Attaché (a Brigadier) and the Naval/Air Attaché (a Group Captain) are accredited to UNCMAC in their capacities as Commonwealth Member of the MAC and Chief of the UK Advisory Group respectively.

US Ballistic Missile Defence

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what timetable has been set for a decision on the upgrade and use of *(a)* RAF Fylingdales and *(b)* RAF Menwith Hill as part of the US Administration's Ballistic Missile Defence System. [99912]

Mr. Hoon: As I informed the House on 5 February 2003, *Official Report*, columns 11–12WS, the Government has agreed to the US Administration's request to upgrade the early warning radar at RAF Fylingdales for missile defence purposes. The upgrade work is expected to begin towards the end of this year and take about two years to complete.

In advance of the work beginning, the Government needs to negotiate a detailed agreement with the US covering both the upgrade itself and future arrangements for the upgraded radar, while the US also need to undertake comprehensive design work, site surveys, budgetary planning and other preparatory work.

No request has been received for the use of RAF Menwith Hill for missile defence purposes.

US Bases

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what arrangements exist for members of the US National Guard to be deployed at US bases in the UK; and if he will make a statement. [101235]

Mr. Ingram: Any deployment of members of the US National Guard to bases made available to the US Visiting Force in the United Kingdom falls within the arrangements laid down by the NATO Status of Forces Agreement 1951.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Community Legal Services

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment has been made of the impact of Amendment 3 of the Community Legal Services (Financial) Regulations 2001; and what assessment has been made of the impact on people with disposable incomes of between £263 and £695 per month. [100465]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Amendment 3 of the Community Legal Services (Financial) Regulations 2001 revised the financial eligibility criteria for Community Legal Service (CLS) funding. The primary intentions behind the eligibility reforms were to simplify the procedure for gaining Legal Representation (while broadly preserving the numbers qualifying), and to bring the eligibility level for Legal Help closer to that for Legal Representation.

Data provided by the Legal Services Research Centre from its applicant survey showed that if we are to target the most needy, the gross income cap should be maintained and certain state benefits should be disregarded from the gross income test.

The impact on people with a disposable income between £263 and £695 per month who are required to make a contribution to their funding has been limited. There has been no significant increase in the mean contribution required.

HM Land Registry

Mr. Laws: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the market value is of each property owned by HM Land Registry; how many staff work in each office; and if she will make a statement. [99826]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Land Registry's policy is to obtain a professional valuation of its freehold and long leasehold land and buildings every three years. In the intervening years, the figures are updated by "desktop" valuations. The last full valuation was carried out in January 2002 and the market value for each of the Registry's freehold buildings from that valuation is shown in the following table.

Freehold property	*Market value 2002 (£)*
Southfield House, Durham	3,700,000
Earle House, Hull	1,640,000
Birkenhead House, Lytham	3,900,000
Old Market House, Birkenhead	3,550,000
Warton Camp, Lytham	4,400,000
Lincoln's Inn Fields	8,970,000
Forest Court, Tunbridge Wells	6,850,000
Brickdale House, Stevenage	6,000,000
Henlow Camp, Stevenage	150,000
St. Andrew's Court, Portsmouth	5,319,000
Plumer House, Plymouth	5,500,000
Drake's Hill Court, Plymouth	1,676,000
Ty Bryn Glas, Swansea	2,825,000
Manselton, Swansea	50,000
Parkside Court, Telford	4,195,000
Rosebrae Court, Birkenhead	4,985,000
Boldon House, Durham	3,400,000
Melcombe Court, Weymouth	5,400,000
Chalfont Drive, Nottingham	4,000,000
Westbridge Place, Leicester	4,500,000

The current staffing level at each of the Land Registry's offices is listed as follows. Part-time staff have been treated as whole units.

Land Registry Office	*Staffing*
Birkenhead (Old Market House)	319
Birkenhead (Rosebrae)	269
Coventry	349
Croydon	233
Durham (Boldon)	357
Durham (Southfield)	401
Gloucester	492
Harrow	274
Hull	338
Lancashire	219
Leicester	319
Lytham	366
Nottingham (East)	307
Nottingham (West)	421
Peterborough	463
Plymouth	440
Portsmouth	285
Stevenage	424
Swansea	291
Telford	367
Tunbridge Wells	315
Wales	430
Weymouth	425
York	155
Headquarters	334
Computer Services, Plymouth	389
Land Charges	89

Legal Aid Budget

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the Legal Aid budget was in 1996; and what the budget is this year. [95481]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I apologise for the delay in replying. For the financial year 1996–97, provision for Legal Aid was £1,456 million; provision for this financial year (2002–03) is £1,871 million.

Legal Services

Mr. Laws: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how much has been spent on publicly funded legal services in each year from 1989–90 to 2003–04 (planned), in real terms at 2000–01 prices; and if she will make a statement. [99828]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The figures requested, covering the period from 1989–90 to 2002–03, are shown in the table in real terms at 2000–01 prices. Plans for 2003–04 are not yet finalised. Expenditure options are being considered in the light of the Department's Spending Review settlement.

Net Expenditure in Cash Terms

£ million

	Civil	*Criminal*	*Total*
1989–90	339	476	815
1990–91	400	515	915
1991–92	548	596	1,144
1992–93	717	619	1,336
1993–94	815	629	1,444
1994–95	860	670	1,530
1995–96	887	705	1,592
1996–97	897	739	1,636
1997–98	851	790	1,641
1998–99	884	816	1,700
1999–2000	786	801	1,587

Net Expenditure in Cash Terms

£ million

	Civil	*Criminal*	*Total*
2000–01	791	873	1,664
2001–02	717	959	1,676
2002–03[1]	776	1,053	1,829

[1] Estimated.

The implementation of the Access to Justice Act has brought a measure of control to civil public funding and enabled the private sector to support money claims, thereby leaving public funding to help tackle social exclusion and support families. The increase in criminal public funding contributes towards the Government's agenda for tackling crime and improving confidence in the criminal justice system.

Magistrates Courts

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will make a statement on the success of warrant enforcement by the magistrates courts committees since 1 April 2001. [99873]

Yvette Cooper: There are wide variations in the performance of the magistrates courts committees (MCCs). Some are very successful while the performance of others is completely unacceptable.

The MCCs are independent bodies, however, the new Performance Contracts, which are being set for next year, will enable each MCC to receive extra resources conditional on their improved performance and that their future plans are credible and achievable.

My Department is currently in the process of encouraging the sharing of good practice among the MCC community. The poorer performing MCCs are getting increased support and have met with Ministers to discuss their concerns and future plans.

There are new provisions in the Courts Bill including new powers to improve fine enforcement and the Unified Administration which will introduce a proper performance management framework to address unacceptable performance.

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will make a statement on the procedure for the collection of outstanding fines imposed by magistrates' courts. [99872]

Yvette Cooper: On 1 April 2001, MCCs took on formal responsibility from police forces for executing all fines and breach warrants. MCCs employ a variety of approaches to enforce fines and other payments. They may employ their own civilian enforcement officers, contract work out to approved enforcement agencies, contract work back to the local police force or use a combination of these methods. Some MCCs also use private bailiffs, as meets their local needs.

Motor Injury Claims

Mr. Watts: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if the Lord Chancellor will introduce legislation to set a minimum limit for disability suffered before court actions arising from motor injury claims may be proceeded with. [100305]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Government have no plans to introduce legislation in this area.

Special Advisers/Press Officers

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many *(a)* special advisers and *(b)* press officers were employed (i) full-time, (ii) part-time and (iii) on a contract basis by her Department in (A) 2001–02 and (B) 2002–03. [97946]

Ms Rosie Winterton *[pursuant to the answer, 13 February 2003, Official Report, c. 978W]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws) on 24 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 20W. The Lord Chancellor's Department has one special adviser who was employed full-time during 2001–02 and 2002–03.

All press officers were employed full-time during 2001–02 and 2002–03. The Lord Chancellor's Department has not employed any press officers on a part-time or contract basis.

Unpaid Fines

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will issue guidance to magistrates courts committees on the recovery of outstanding fines imposed by magistrates courts. [100336]

Yvette Cooper: Guidance on the enforcement of financial penalties was issued in 1996 (amended in 1997) and a revised version issued in 2001 following the transfer of responsibility of warrant execution. The guidance is currently being updated and consolidated.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Commonwealth Games

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessments have been made of the economic and social impact of the 2002 Commonwealth Games on *(a)* the city of Manchester and *(b)* the UK. [100341]

Mr. Caborn: A full economic and social impact assessment of the 2002 Commonwealth Games was commissioned by Manchester city council. The study was undertaken by Cambridge Policy Consultants (CPC) and identified the impact of the Games at a range of spatial levels—East Manchester, North West and the UK.

The full report and executive summary was published in April 2002, and was made available to all key partners. The executive summary was publicly available, and the full report was available by request. The executive summary was then revised post-Games by CPC to assess the robustness of their original analysis. The revised summary was made available in October 2002. Work is under-way on the development of an evaluation framework which will continue to measure the legacy of the Games. I will arrange for copies of the report to be placed in the Library of the House.

The Public Sector Funders and Manchester 2002 defined the following shared objectives in relation to the Games;

To position the UK as a Centre of International Sport, and to demonstrate the UK's ability to host a major international sporting event. To view the games as one means of strengthening sports participation at all levels

To strengthen the economic and social capacity of the City/Region, recognising the importance of capturing maximum benefits to justify the significant capital investment in facilities

To advance policies for greater social inclusion, promotion of diversity, access to sport and volunteering

To showcase Britain internationally and to raise the profile of the Commonwealth

An assessment of how well these objectives were achieved was included in an independent 'lessons learned' report, jointly commissioned by my Department, Manchester city council and Sport England in June 2002.

This full published report can be viewed on the DCMS website at www.culture.gov.uk.

National Lottery

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what progress has been made in increasing Lottery funds allocated to coalfield areas. [100291]

Mr. Caborn: The Government have encouraged Lottery distributors to work with each other and with local organisations and agencies to increase the capacity within coalfield areas to produce successful Lottery applications. In addition, a number of coalfield areas are benefiting from the Fair Share Initiative launched in June 2001. Prior to the Lottery reforms in August 1998, the amount awarded per capita to coalfield areas was approximately 45 per cent. of the amount awarded to Great Britain on a per capita basis since the Lottery's inception. This figure had increased to 62 per cent. by November 2002.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list Lottery grants awarded to projects connected with *(a)* mental health among young people and *(b)* combating antisocial behaviour. [100773]

Mr. Caborn: Lottery distributors have funded a range of projects connected with mental health among young people and combating anti-social behaviour. For example, the New Opportunities Fund Healthy Living Centres programme has made awards worth over £204 million to 257 projects in England. Of these, 75 per cent. stated on their application forms that they would be undertaking work to promote good mental health. A significant number of these schemes are also working with young people.

The New Opportunities Fund has made £38.75 million available to its Activities for Young People programme, which has opened up opportunities for school leavers who are at risk of social exclusion. The Fund has also awarded £8.8 million to the Youth Justice Board to run projects engaging young people most at risk of offending through a diverse range of activities.

The Community Fund has estimated that, over the last 12 months, it has made 94 grants totalling £7,699,694 to projects aimed at young people with mental health issues, and 60 grants totalling £6,203,333 to projects aimed at combating anti-social behaviour among young people.

Obesity

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what local exercise action pilots have been introduced by Sport England in collaboration with the Countryside Agency and the Department of Health to tackle obesity and increase physical activity. [100425]

Mr. Caborn: The Local Exercise Action Pilots Programme is a joint initiative funded by the Department of Health, Sport England and the Countryside Agency, with support from the Local Government Association, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, the Department for Education and Skills and Department for Transport. Nine local Primary Care Trust led pilots are being developed to test out and investigate effective approaches to increasing access to, and levels of, physical activity. The pilot sites will be announced this month.

Sports Participation

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what action she is taking to increase the number of *(a)* Muslim and *(b)* Asian people involved in (i) sport and (ii) contact sports; and if she will make a statement. [100587]

Mr. Caborn: Sport England provides a range of programmes to promote accessibility to sport for marginalised groups. The monies allocated for this purpose will in future be administered in the regions which will improve the targeting of funds to where they are most needed, including to the Muslim and Asian communities where appropriate.

DCMS also part funds the initiative Sporting Equals, a collaboration of Sport England and The Commission for Racial Equality to promote racial equality in sport.

Through their policy document Game Plan, Government are concentrating efforts to lessen the barriers to participation of the most sedentary groups, and in this way will tackle sporting marginalisation in other key groups including those from ethnic minorities.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Afghanistan

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of whether UN Security Council Resolution 1325 is being implemented in the work of reconstruction in Afghanistan. [101227]

Clare Short: The international community continues to support enhanced protection of Women's rights in Afghanistan following the fall of the Taliban. A key milestone will be the forthcoming draft of the new constitution, to be presented at the Constitutional Loya Jirga. The international community (including the UK and the EU) are working to ensure that women's rights are fully protected in the constitution.

Progress on improving women's rights varies according to locality, but there are encouraging signs in many areas. Approximately 3 million children have now returned to school, of whom about 30 per cent are girls. However, the proportion of women and girls involved in education varies according to region.

The position of vulnerable women, such as widows and orphans, is still a major concern, particularly in urban areas. WFP and FAO are hoping to expand their employment and livelihood activities (bakery and poultry co-operatives that recruit vulnerable women and girls) in an effort to improve the situation.

Kyrgyzstan

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will grant additional resources to the Kyrgyzstan police project above the money already awarded. [99446]

Mr. MacShane: I have been asked to reply.

We have agreed to support the second phase of an Organisation for Security and Co-operation (OSCE) police assistance project in Kyrgyzstan.

Her Majesty's Government's Global Conflict Prevention Pool (GCPP) has so far pledged voluntary funding of €400,000 over two Financial Years. This support of the second phase, however, is conditional upon sufficient pledges from other states being offered to make it reasonably certain that the project can be completed.

Oil for Food Programme

Mr. Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the cost of the aid that would be required to replace the Oil for Food Programme following a military campaign in Iraq. [100290]

Clare Short: 60 per cent. of the Iraqi population are dependent on the UN Oil For Food Programme. Current annual expenditures under the programme run at around $10 billion, the largest elements of which are the food allocation ($3 billion) and basic service delivery supplies (health, education, water and sanitation and electricity—$2 billion). Should there be conflict, the UK will aim to minimise any disruption to the programme and work towards its re-establishment as quickly as possible.

Poverty Reduction Strategies

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what action her Department is taking to increase the participation of civil society in poverty reduction strategies. [99340]

Clare Short: DFID provides support directly through country programmes and indirectly through Partnership Programme Agreements to build up the capacity of civil society organisations in developing countries to engage in PRS processes. For example Catholic Church institutions have played a significant role in the PRS process in Zambia.

Smoking

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what policy her Department has adopted on smoking in the workplace. [100939]

Clare Short: DFID has a no smoking policy throughout our offices, except in designated smoking rooms/areas that are equipped with specific individual smoke extraction and ventilation systems.

Sudan

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps she is taking to address the humanitarian situation in the Southern Blue Nile region of Southern Sudan. [100970]

Clare Short: We have not funded any interventions in Southern Blue Nile recently. Our humanitarian support is targeted accorded to demonstrated humanitarian need. If these needs are found in Southern Blue Nile we will certainly consider making a response.

A number of recent assessments have taken place (e.g. a joint World Food Programme/UNICEF team visited the region 17–23 February); their findings, once they are made known, will inform our decisions. Our representative in the British Embassy in Khartoum liaises with the UN and other agencies working in-country to keep our information up to date.

Swaziland

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what impact she estimates the national crop survey conducted by the World Food Programme and Food and Agriculture Organisation findings will have on the levels of aid provided by her Department in Swaziland. [100918]

Clare Short: The recent preliminary crop assessments by the Food and Agriculture Organisation have indicated that there will be another very poor harvest in the lowveld. Over the last year we have already provided £250,000 to the World Food Programme for their humanitarian operations in Swaziland. We are finalising support to both UNICEF (£200,000) to improve the water and sanitation facilities at 80 schools, and to Save the Children (£70,000) to provide a livelihoods economist to help plan recovery programmes in the most vulnerable areas.

Once more reliable figures for this harvest are available we will consider further support through the World Food Programme's regional humanitarian programme covering also Mozambique, Malawi, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Lesotho, and Angola.

Zimbabwe

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what changes her Department will make to its humanitarian aid programme in Zimbabwe as a result of the announcement of the Famine Early Warning Systems Network that food aid will be required for another 12 months. [100973]

Clare Short: It has been evident for some months that food production in Zimbabwe would be affected for the third year in succession by the combination of disruption to farming; economic policies that are a disincentive to production; lack of agricultural credit and inputs, and patchy rains. Current DFID and WFP feeding programmes extend until June 2003. DFID is already working with the international community to assess needs for the year ahead, and to identify the extent to which the international community needs to assist in meeting the gap.

PRIVY COUNCIL

Smoking

Chris Grayling: To ask the President of the Council what policy his Department has adopted on smoking in the workplace. [100922]

Mr. Robin Cook: My Department has adopted a non-smoking policy. Smoking is not allowed in communal and working areas and is permitted only in the designated areas provided. This policy applies to staff working in both 9 Downing street and 2 Carlton Gardens.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Crown Prosecution Service

Mr. Laws: To ask the Solicitor General what the reasons were for the change in total public spending on the Crown Prosecution Service between 1998–99 and 2003–04; and if she will make a statement. [99831]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 4 March 2003]*: Since 1998–99 funding for the Crown Prosecution Service has increased, both in response to increasing workload and to support the departmental reform and modernisation programme.

As part of the SR 2000 Spending Review plans, the Treasury created a Criminal Justice Reserve worth £100 million in 2001–02 and £525 million over the three years up to 2003–04. We are investing in the CPS an additional £30 million in 2001–02, £59 million in 2002–03 and £76 million in 2003–04 from the Reserve.

The increase in funding allowed the Crown Prosecution Service to recruit the lawyers and caseworkers needed to handle more cases, better, and provided for programmes and initiatives dealing with victims and witnesses and information technology. The Crown Prosecution Service has successfully completed the first stage of its programme to modernise IT, electronic communications systems and the office environment for approximately 6,800 staff across 100 sites.

The CPS will also focus resources on closer partnership, working with the police by providing early advice and assuming responsibility for charging.

Serious Fraud Office

Mr. Laws: To ask the Solicitor General how many *(a)* investigations and *(b)* prosecutions by the Serious Fraud Office there were in each year since 1988; how many prosecutions led to a conviction in each year; what the total cost was; and if she will make a statement. [99832]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 4 March 2003]*: The following table provides all the relevant Serious Fraud Office statistics in relation to investigations, prosecutions and the total cost from the inception of the SFO in April 1988 to date (end of February 2003).

Financial year (April to April)	*Active caseload at year end*	*Trials completed in year*	*Number of defendants in trials completed*	*Number of convictions in trials completed (by defendant)*	*Annual total cost £ million*
1988–89	66	9	14	10	6.86
1989–90	61	17	32	24	9.21
1990–91	56	27	72	45	13.19
1991–92	60	28	58	38	17.71
1992–93	57	25	49	35	20.99
1993–94	48	23	54	32	19.03
1994–95	50	13	31	16	18.03
1995–96	70	11	23	18	17.33
1996–97	82	8	14	12	16.58
1997–98	78	14	39	37	16.3
1998–99	65	18	38	31	16.1
1999–2000	81	8	12	11	15.9
2000–01	70	24	58	51	19.7
2001–02	75	8	13	10	23.03
2002–03	72	13	26	17	[1]28.09
Total	991	246	519	377	258.05

[1] Provisional

I draw attention to the second column of the table 'Active Caseload at Year End', where the figures represent those cases actually under investigation, those awaiting trial and those where a trial had been commenced but had not been formally concluded with a verdict or verdicts. I feel the other statistics speak for themselves.

Since its inception, the conviction rate of the Serious Fraud Office as an average, is 84 per cent. by number of trials in which at least one defendant was found guilty and 73 per cent. by number of defendants, which I am sure the hon. Gentleman will agree is a respectable record.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Afghanistan

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps are being taken to encourage Afghanistan to ratify CEDAW. [101228]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We believe that adherence to international human rights norms, including the UN Charter and CEDAW (the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, which a previous Afghan Government signed in 1980, but did not ratify) are key to restoring the rights of women in Afghanistan.

We continue to encourage the Afghan Transitional Administration to work towards ratification of CEDAW. We raised this most recently with the Afghan Minister for Women, Habiba Sarabi, when she visited the UK from 9–15 February 2003. We also co-sponsored the 2002 UN Commission on the Status of Women Resolution on Afghanistan, which urged the Afghan authorities to give high priority to ratification of CEDAW, and to consider signing and ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Convention.

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress is being made on women's access to justice in Afghanistan. [101230]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Lack of capacity in the judicial and legal sector means that access to justice remains difficult for all Afghans. Women face particular problems including in exercising their rights to property and to divorce. Women are represented on the Drafting Committee of the Constitutional Commission, tasked with drafting a new constitution, and on the Judicial Commission, responsible for overseeing development of the legal system. This should help to ensure that women's needs are taken into account in the reform process.

We have recently pledged £1 million to support the United Nations Development Programme's work on rebuilding the justice sector in Afghanistan, in partnership with the Judicial Commission. A major focus of their work will be to improve women's access to justice.

Biological and Toxic Weapons Convention

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will take steps to encourage signatories to the Biological and Toxic Weapons Convention to monitor their compliance with its terms. [100251]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The first meeting of BWC technical experts, which will take place in Geneva from 18 to 29 August this year, will focus on national implementation, including penal legislation and bio-security. This meeting will provide a major opportunity to encourage states parties to take steps to monitor their own compliance with the Convention.

The UK will table papers setting out some of the specific requirements which may need to be included in national measures to implement the Convention and in penal legislation. We will use our own experience in health, safety and physical security legislation to outline minimum standards for other states parties to follow, where they are presently without comparable legislation. The UK will also use this meeting to argue the case for a sustained international process to encourage all states parties to put in place legislation and effective measures to ensure implementation of the Convention.

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he will reply to the letter to him dated 28 January 2003 from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mr. John Meah. [100683]

Mr. Straw: I apologise to my right hon. Friend for not replying to his earlier letter. This was due to a clerical error. I will write to him about Mr. Meah's case this week.

David Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the hon. Member for Walsall, North will receive a reply to his letter of 16 January regarding a constituent. [101086]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I have replied to my hon. Friend. There was a delay in reply due to an administrative oversight and I apologise for that.

Falun Gong

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the Chinese Government's attempts under Article 23 legislation to curtail the practice of Falun Gong in Hong Kong without consultation with the people of Hong Kong; and whether this is in contravention of safeguards given to the people of Hong Kong when the territory was returned to China. [100470]

Mr. Rammell: Under Article 23 of the basic law, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) Government is required to "enact laws on its own to prohibit any act of treason, secession, sedition, subversion against the Central People's Government, or theft of state secrets, to prohibit foreign political organisations or bodies from conducting political activities in the region, and to prohibit political organisations or bodies of the region from establishing ties with foreign political organisations or bodies".

The SAR Government published a consultation document outlining its proposals to implement this requirement on 24 September 2002. Following a public consultation exercise lasting three months, the SAR Government published draft legislation on 14 February 2003. This incorporated several changes to the initial proposals, in response to concerns expressed during the consultation period. We welcome this demonstration of the SAR Government's willingness to take account of views expressed. The legislation has now been submitted to the Legislative Council (LegCo). It is anticipated that there will be lengthy discussions in LegCo, including public hearings, before the legislation is agreed. Once the law has come into force, any decisions made on the implementation of the new legislation will be open to judicial review in the Hong Kong courts which, under the "One Country, Two Systems" policy, are independent from the legal system in mainland China.

We issued statements about the original proposals in November 2002. In these, we referred to concerns in Hong Kong about the outline proposals concerning the proscription of organisations. These concerns were voiced by many individuals and organisations, including Falun Gong. We are now studying the precise wording of the draft legislation. We have, however, noted that the Hong Kong Secretaries for Justice and Security have both said that this legislation would not be aimed at imposing sanctions on any group such as the Falun Gong.

On a visit to Hong Kong in January 2003, I discussed Article 23 in some detail with senior members of the SAR Government. I made clear to them our concerns about the proposals. On a visit to Beijing before arriving in Hong Kong, I also took the opportunity to discuss Article 23 with Chinese Assistant Foreign Minister, Zhang Yesui.

The SAR Government have given repeated assurances that the final legislation will be compatible with the basic rights and freedoms laid down in the Joint Declaration and guaranteed by the basic law. These include the requirement that the legislation will be compatible with the provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. It is vital for the future prosperity of Hong Kong that its people and the international community perceive this to be the case when legislation is finally passed. We shall continue to watch this crucial issue very carefully.

United States

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what joint foreign policy initiatives have been *(a)* planned and *(b)* agreed with the US Administration in the last 12 months. [100392]

Mr. Rammell: We work in close collaboration with the US on a wide range of foreign policy issues including, for example, the war on terrorism and the security sector reform of Afghanistan.

We work particularly closely with the United States on international security, economic and third world development policy, and will continue to do so in the future.

Hospitality

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his Department's hospitality budget *(a)* is in 2002–03 and *(b)* was in each of the last three years; and how much was left unspent at the end of each financial year. [99589]

Mr. Rammell: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws) on 27 January 2003, *Official Report,* column 567W on FCO expenditure on entertainment. Overseas missions and UK departments are allocated budgets which they are free to assign to purposes such as entertainment in order best to achieve their objectives. They also reallocate within their overall budget as the year passes. So there is no centrally-administered entertainment budget which would be underspent at the year's end.

Indonesia

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations his Department has made to the Indonesian Attorney General's Office on the case of Mr. Peters and Mr. Rennie since August 2000. [100469]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: In August 2001, the then Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr. Bradshaw) raised our concerns about the Balibo murders with the Indonesian Attorney General when he visited Indonesia. In August 2002, the EU, at our request, urged the Attorney General to co-operate with the UN investigation. On 7 October 2002, the EU Presidency gave the Attorney General a copy of the letter from the UN Special Representative to East Timor requesting Indonesian co-operation in the investigation.

Iraq

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action has been taken on UN Resolution 57/232 on human rights and Iraq. [101229]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Lynne Jones) today (UIN 100931).

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps the Government are taking in support of the implementation of UN General Assembly Resolution 57/232 of December 2002. [100931]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The UK helped to draft and sponsored this resolution, which condemns the appalling human rights situation in Iraq. Together with international partners, we take every opportunity to raise the human rights situation in Iraq. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office's report on Iraq's human rights violations, published on 2 December 2002, exposes the sheer brutality of the Iraqi regime.

We also take practical measures to protect those suffering repression. We take part in patrols of the northern and southern No Fly Zones. These were established in support of UN Security Council Resolution 688 to prevent Saddam Hussein from once again repressing the people in those regions.

Israel

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions his Department has had with the Israeli government on *(a)* the imprisonment of citizens for refusal to serve in the occupied territories and *(b)* Palestinians held in custody without charge. [99999]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We regularly raise with the Israeli authorities our concerns about their holding Palestinians in custody without charge. Israel, like all states, has the right to defend itself against terrorism, but it must act within international law.

We have not lobbied Israel about Israeli citizens imprisoned for refusing to serve in the Occupied Territories.

Israel

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations his Department has made to the Israeli Government on compensation of the UN for the destruction of food aid supplies on 30 November 2002. [99989]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We deplore the destruction of a World Food Programme storage facility in Gaza on 2 December 2002 by the Israel Defence Forces. Food aid, including EU-funded contributions, was destroyed. The EU has raised its concerns with the Israeli Government about the destruction of infrastructure and goods funded by the EU and wider international community in the Occupied Territories, and has discussed the issue of compensation to the World Food Programme for the destruction of the Gaza warehouse. The European Commission is responsible for monitoring and costing damage to EU-funded aid projects, and the EU reserves the right to seek compensation.

Myanmar

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations have been made to the Government of Myanmar regarding *(a)* human rights violations and *(b)* the use of forced child labour. [100583]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: In November 2002, the UK co-sponsored a resolution at the United Nations General Assembly condemning the human rights situation in Burma, including the use of forced labour there. I issued a press statement strongly supporting the resolution. With EU colleagues, we are currently drafting a resolution on human rights in Burma for presentation at the United Nations Commission on Human Rights. We will also be taking action at the March 2003 meeting of the International Labour Organisation to make clear our concern that forced labour in Burma remains widespread and systemic.

Small Arms

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance the Government is providing to countries in Eastern Europe and the Balkans to *(a)* address the proliferation of small arms in their regions, *(b)* reduce their availability and *(c)* strengthen controls on their transfer. [99543]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The UK's Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) strategy, jointly funded by FCO, DFID and MOD, supports a range of initiatives tackling both the supply and demand for small arms. From the £20 million allocated to SALW under the Global Conflict Prevention Pool in 2001–04, £7.5 million has been allocated to United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to provide advice, support and technical assistance for global weapons collection, management and destruction programme. This work includes projects in Albania and Kosovo, where UNDP has organised public destruction of weapons, awareness raising, voluntary surrender of arms in return for development projects and training for law enforcement and security officials. It also covers UNDP support for the South Eastern Europe Clearing House for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SEESAC), which is working towards the implementation of a regional Stability Pact Implementation Plan to combat the proliferation of SALW and related munitions.

Since the start of 2001, inter-departmental UK Government teams have in addition visited Ukraine, Romania, Bulgaria and Serbia and Montenegro to exchange information on and offer advice with export control policy and procedures.

In addition, HMG funds work by the NGO Saferworld with governments and civil society to combat small arms proliferation in Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans, and the work of the Small Arms Survey which publishes a yearbook on global small arms issues that includes Eastern Europe and the Balkans.

Small Arms

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what preparations his Department is making for the July 2003 Biennial Meeting on national, regional and global implementation of the UN Programme of Action on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons. [100007]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We are committed to a successful and productive first Biennial Meeting on the implementation of the Programme of Action (PoA) of the 2001 United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in all its respects. The formal meeting in July is limited to looking at work that has been undertaken in the last two years in implementation of the PoA. It is not a negotiating meeting. The UK has an excellent track record in initiatives to curb the proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW), and we will be preparing a report that details its active work, including its use of the £20 million we have committed (2001–04) to this work.

But we will also be taking advantage of the Biennial Meeting to take forward the work we started at Lancaster House on strengthening export controls on small arms on 14 to 15 January 2003. The Conference itself is a major part of the UK's preparation for the meeting, and we will widen that contribution to include states that did not attend. We are currently preparing the ground for that work.

Brazil

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Brazil regarding the disappearance of street children. [100205]

Mr. Rammell: We maintain an on-going dialogue with Brazil on human rights issues covering both the international and domestic dimension. Our embassy in Brasilia are in regular touch with relevant Brazilian institutions on a range of human rights concerns, including allegations of abuses against the most vulnerable groups in Brazil such as women, the indigenous and street children. We attach particular importance to work with the Brazilian Police Service and Prison Service where there remain a number of important human rights concerns to be addressed.

I look forward to taking these discussions forward when I next visit Brazil in May 2003.

Turkey

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions have been held with his Turkish counterpart concerning the decision of the Turkish parliament on their Government's request to allow UN troops to use Turkey as a place from which to attack Iraq; and if he will make a statement. [101234]

Mr. MacShane: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs has not discussed the decision of the Turkish Parliament on the deployment to Turkey of foreign troops with his Turkish counterpart.

West Papua

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been made to the Government of Indonesia on human rights abuses in West Papua; and if he will make a statement. [100275]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Shortly after the murder of Papuan leader, Theys Eluay, in November 2001, a representative of the British embassy in Jakarta met the Coordinating Minister for Security and Political Affairs and the Minister for the Development of Eastern Indonesia to raise our concern and disappointment, and to call for a thorough investigation. The EU issued a statement expressing its concern at Theys Eluay's murder. The UK also took part in an EU mission to Papua in March 2002 to examine the issue of human rights, and met Indonesian Government officials in Papua to voice our concerns. British embassy staff regularly visit Papua and raise the issue of human rights with Indonesian Government representatives there.

NORTHERN IRELAND

BBC (Ulster-Scots)

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether the Linguistic Diversity Branch of the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure has offered guidance to the BBC in Northern Ireland on how, as a public service broadcaster, it might meet the obligations of the Council of Europe Charter for Regional and Minority Languages in relation to the Ulster-Scots language. [100441]

Angela Smith: The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages does not place specific obligations on public service broadcasters in relation to the Ulster-Scots language. Linguistic Diversity Branch has however engaged with the BBC in meetings at both production and managerial level aimed at encouraging increased awareness of the Ulster-Scots language and culture and UK Government commitments in relation to linguistic diversity.

Building Regulations

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when Part R of the Northern Ireland Building Regulations will be revised. [101004]

Mr. Pearson: In line with normal practice, work on the revision of Part R of the Northern Ireland Building Regulations will commence when the amended Regulations in respect of access for disabled people are published in England and Wales.

Industrial and Provident Society Legislation

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to reform Industrial and Provident Society legislation in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement. [87885]

Mr. Pearson: As I advised in my replies to questions Nos. 86628 and 86630, I announced on 29 November details of a major review of Industrial and Provident Society law in Northern Ireland. It is timely to carry out such a review to ensure that legislation meets the needs of members and a modern Northern Ireland economy, and work has already commenced.

Post-primary Education

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many Department of Education officials are involved in the Review of Post Primary Education; and how officials in the Department are progressing the issue of pupil profiles contained in the Review of Post-Primary Education in Northern Ireland. [88795]

Jane Kennedy: A team of 11 officials, including support staff, is taking forward the Review of Post-Primary Education. No decisions have been taken about pupil profiles. This is one of the issues for discussion in my round of meetings with political parties and in the meetings between Department of Education officials, the education sector and representatives of parents to discuss the next steps in the post-primary review.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if it is his policy to retain a system of selection in post-primary education; and if he will make a statement. [88921]

Jane Kennedy: No decisions have been taken about selection in post-primary education. In the responses to consultation a range of suggestions were made for future post-primary arrangements, including options involving academic selection. I am currently meeting political parties and Department of Education officials have met with the education sector and will be meeting representatives of parents, to discuss these options and the next steps in the post-primary review.

Springvale Campus Project

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether the Springvale Campus project Outline Business Case has satisfied the Treasury Taskforce Guidelines with respect to signing off criteria. [100067]

Jane Kennedy: In the preparation of the Outline Business Case (OBC) for the Main Campus of the Springvale project the University of Ulster determined that the project was not affordable or viable from its perspective. Consequently, no OBC was presented to the Department for Employment and Learning for assessment.

Stranmillis College

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to legislate to regularise the legal standing of Stranmillis College under devolution. [100065]

Jane Kennedy: The Department for Employment and Learning, in consultation with the Board of Governors, is currently considering whether to recommend any change to the legal status of Stranmillis University College.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Fuel Allowance

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the cost was of the fuel allowance in 2001–02. [99152]

Mr. McCartney: Latest estimated figures for winter 2001/2 show that expenditure on Winter Fuel Payments was £1.7 billion.

Pension Fund Trustees

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what requirement is placed or is planned to be placed upon pension fund trustees who state that account is taken of the social, ethical and environmental issues to report to members on performance and outcome. [99264]

Mr. McCartney: Section 35 of the Pensions Act 1995 requires trustees to produce a Statement of Investment Principles in which they are required to state the extent to which social, environmental or ethical considerations are taken into account. They are also required to produce an annual investment report.

From March 2003, we are undertaking an evaluation of pension scheme trustees' investment decision-making in the light of the Myners report on institutional investment in the UK. Information on socially responsible investment will also be collected as part of this evaluation, and we will consider whether further measures are appropriate following that review.

Benefit Payments

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what guidance he has given to the Benefits Agency regarding the payment of benefits from April in cash from Post Offices. [98080]

Malcolm Wicks: I refer my hon. Friend to the written answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Kidney) on 27 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 650W.

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps he has taken to publicise the availability of Post Office card accounts to those who wish their benefits to be paid in cash at Post Offices; and if he will make a statement. [98081]

Malcolm Wicks: Customers will be supplied with information which clearly sets out their account options and enables them to freely choose the account which is right for them. This information will include details on accounts available at Post Office branches.

Health and Safety Executive

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many investigations of *(a)* incidents and *(b)* complaints were carried out by local offices of the Health and Safety Executive in each year since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [97948]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 13 February 2003]:* The following table shows the number of investigations of incidents and complaints carried out by HSE's operational directorates 1997–98 to 2001–02:

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
FOD					
Incidents	10,631	7,805	9,754	14,279	12,455
Complaints	20,653	20,916	23,878	24,386	23,729
HID					
Incidents	747	808	793	773	1,090
Complaints	538	471	411	489	473
RI					
Incidents	342	340	332	371	450
Complaints	489	428	394	546	317
Total					
Incidents	11,720	8,953	10,879	15,423	13,995
Complaints	21,680	21,815	24,683	25,421	24,519

Notes:

1. 'Incidents' includes injuries, diseases, dangerous occurrences and gas safety incidents.

2. FOD: Field Operations Directorate; HID: Hazardous Installations Directorate;
RI: Railways Inspectorate.

3. The data are not available for all HSE's offices for each year in the form requested. Even where data by office is available it could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

4. The figures do not include details of investigations of incidents at civil nuclear sites as these are not recorded centrally in an easily retrievable form. They could be provided only at disproportionate cost

Hospitality

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his Department's hospitality budget *(a)* is in 2002–03 and *(b)* was in each of the last three years; and how much was left unspent at the end of each financial year. [99519]

Mr. McCartney: The Department does not allocate specific budgets for hospitality. For the Department's expenditure on hospitality I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws), on the 24 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 21–22W.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what hospitality has been offered at public expense in the last 12 months, by each Minister in his Department to outside interest groups, broken down to *(a)* restaurant, *(b)* recipient and *(c)* cost in each case; [99595]

(2) what criteria Ministers in his Department use when determining whether to offer hospitality in restaurants to interest groups at public expense; and if he will make a statement; [99594]

(3) how often Ministers in his Department have received hospitality in restaurants from outside groups. [99518]

Mr. McCartney: All offers of hospitality are made in accordance with published departmental guidance on financial procedures and propriety, based on the principles set out in Government Accounting. The giving and receiving of hospitality is conducted fully in accordance with the guidance set out in the Ministerial Code, and Guidance on Contacts with Outside Interest Groups including Lobbyists. The detailed information requested is not held centrally, and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Maternity Pay

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his estimate is of the change in statutory maternity pay in real terms from 1995–96 to 2003–04 (planned); what his estimate is of the amount of this benefit received by each decile of the UK income distribution; and if he will make a statement. [97360]

Maria Eagle: Employers pay Statutory Maternity Pay (SMP) to employees who meet the qualifying conditions. Currently it is paid for a total of 18 weeks; the first six weeks at a weekly rate equal to 90 per cent. of the woman's average weekly earnings and the remaining 12 weeks at £75.00. For women expecting babies on or after 6 April 2003, the payment period will be extended to 26 weeks. In addition from 6 April 2003, the weekly rate for all women (payable after the first six weeks) will be increased to £100, unless this is more than 90 per cent. of her average weekly earnings, in which case payment continues at the 90 per cent. rate.

The available information is in the table.

Benefit expenditure: Statutory Maternity Pay (GB) 1995–96 to 2003–04

	£ million, 2002–03 prices
Outturn	
1995–96	628
1996–97	[1]396
1997–98	565
1998–99	606
1999–2000	617
2000–01	664
Estimated outturn	
2001–02	673
Planned	
2002–03	697
2003–04	946

[1] This figure includes a re-statement, by the Government Actuary, of estimated recoveries over preceding years.

Notes:

1. Reliable estimates of benefit received by decile of income distribution are not available.

2. On average employers are compensated for 93 per cent. of SMP paid to employees. The table does not include the amount for which employers are not compensated.

Source:

Benefit expenditure tables, pre-Budget report 2002.

Minimum Income Guarantee

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his latest estimate is of the cost of minimum income guarantee in the last three years. [100529]

Mr. McCartney: The information is shown in the table below:

		£ million
	Cash terms	*Real terms (2002–03)*
2000–01 outturn	4,095	4,288
2001–02 estimated outturn[1]	4,486	4,598
2002–03 plans	4,470	4,470

[1] Exenditure for 2001–02 reflects the latest estimate of out turn for the year and not the amounts voted by Parliament.

Notes:

All estimates are consistent with the PBR2002 forecasts

Pension Forecasts

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people have requested a pension forecast more than six months before reaching pensionable age, in each of the last five years for which records are available. [99954]

Mr. McCartney: A customer can obtain a pension forecast until they are within four months of State pension retirement age. The only figures we have available are people who have applied for forecasts who are more than four months from state pension retirement age, rather than six months.

Number of forecasts sent to customers per year

Financial year	*Number of forecasts produced*
1997–98	570,522
1998–99	537,198
1999–2000	557,976
2000–01	622,104
2001–02	620,794

RPFT have also produced 579,273 forecasts this financial year up to, and including 31 January 2003.

Pensioners

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his latest estimate is of *(a)* take-up and *(b)* administrative cost of Minimum Income Guarantee of pensioners in the last three years. [100528]

Mr. McCartney: The latest available estimate of take-up of Minimum Income Guarantee relates to financial year 1999–2000 and is presented in the DWP report "Income Related Benefits Estimates of Take-up in 1999–2000". A copy of the publication is available in the Library. The next edition of the report containing statistics for 2000–2001 will be released on 27 March 2003.

Information about the administrative cost of the minimum income guarantee is not currently available in the format requested. The Department now accounts for its administration and benefit expenditure by Strategic Objective, as set out in its Public Service

Agreements (PSA), and by individual Requests for Resources (RfRs), as set out in the Departmental Estimates and Accounts.

Pensions

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pursuant to his answer of 13 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 967–68W, on pensions, what the median income is of each quintile of the income distribution for pensioners over 80. [99728]

Mr. McCartney: The information requested is in the following table.

The median net income of pensioner units aged 80 and above by quintile of the net income distribution, 2000–01.

	Quintiles of the Income distribution					
	Bottom fifth	*Next fifth*	*Middle fifth*	*Next fifth*	*Top fifth*	*Overall mean*
Net-income before housing costs						
Pensioner couples	136	171	211	274	476	282
Single pensioners	78	107	132	164	231	151
Net income after housing costs						
Pensioner couples	123	150	184	261	464	262
Single pensioners	61	85	104	132	198	127

Notes:

1. The estimates are from the Pensioners' Incomes Series 2000–01, which uses data from the Family Resources Survey 2000–01, and is the latest year for which results are available. The survey covers Great Britain and does not include people living in residential care or nursing homes.
2. Incomes are in £ per week and are at 2000–01 prices.
3. Estimates have been rounded to the nearest 1.
4. Single pensioners are defined as single (non-cohabiting) people over state pension age (65 and over for men, 60 and over for women). Pensioner couples are defined as couples (married or cohabiting) where the man is over state pension age.
5. Pensioner units are allocated to an age category according to the age of the head. The head of a couple is defined as the man.
6. The distribution of income is based on unequivalised net income (unequivalised income refers to the actual cash amount directly received by pensioner units), and has been calculated separately under the before and after housing costs measures of income. The distribution of income has also been calculated separately for singles and couples, e.g. estimates for pensioner couples show income for each quintile of the pensioner couples' income distribution.
7. As with data from any survey, these estimates should not be treated as exact as they are subject to sampling error. In particular, great care should be taken when comparing groups with similar incomes since random sampling fluctuations mean that estimates should be regarded as a broad indication of trends only.

Second Pensions

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for City of York (Hugh Bayley) of 9 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 362W, on second pensions, if he will place in the Library the research that shows combined pension forecasts have the potential to encourage many people to save more. [92509]

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pursuant to his answer of 13 January 2003, to the hon. Member for City of York (Hugh Bayley), *Official Report*, column 362W, on second pensions, if he will make a statement on the research on the impact of occupational pension forecasts; and if he will place a copy in the Library. [92051]

Mr. McCartney: The combined pension forecasting service, an initiative jointly pursued by the Department for Work and Pensions and the pensions industry with the support of the Association of British Insurers and National Association of Pension Funds, was introduced following a series of pilot exercises with representatives from the private sector.

During the pilot phase, almost 33,500 combined statements were issued. Individual detailed results demonstrating the impact of the combined statement and their potential to encourage people to save more for their retirement are commercially sensitive. We do not have the permission of all the participating companies to release all the data. It would, therefore, be inappropriate to publish this information. However, in total some 98 per cent. of those who received a forecast found it useful and 31 per cent. sought further information about increasing their pension provision.

The Government are committed to ensuring that people of working age have the information they need to help them take personal responsibility and plan for their financial future.

Currently the combined pensions forecast service is a voluntary one. Our proposals in the Green Paper "Simplicity, Security and Choice: working and saving for retirement", Cm 5677, would place a statutory requirement on employers and pension providers to issue combined pension forecasts which would ensure that the total potential audience enjoys the benefits of the service. We are consulting on this.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Approved Development Programme

Mr. Horam: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many lecturers working in further education colleges have purchased homes with assistance from funds from the Housing Corporation's Approved Development Programme. [100455]

Mr. McNulty: The home ownership schemes within the Housing Corporation's Approved Development Programme (ADP) give priority to social tenants and those on the housing waiting list. Depending on their circumstances, lecturers working in further education colleges may have benefited from ADP funding. Information is not held centrally on the number of lecturers that have benefited and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Business Bureaucracy

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the forms that his Department requires private sector businesses to complete and return. [98088]

Mr. Leslie: The list of all such forms as recorded centrally by the office of the Deputy Prime Minister is as follows:

Business Entity Record (Debtor)

Channel Tunnel Rail Link Appeal; Channel Tunnel Rail Link Act 1996, Schedule 6 Appeal to the Secretary of State

CORE (Continuous survey of new RSL lettings)

Details of Suppliers and Creditors

ETF Project/Placement Environmental Output Information Form

Housing and Planning Act 1986; Section 16 Tenant Empowerment Grants—Application for Development Grant

Housing and Planning Act 1986; Section 16 Tenant Empowerment Grants—Application for Renewal of Development Grant

Housing and Planning Act 1986; Section 16 Tenant Empowerment Grants—Application for Pre-Feasibility Grant

Housing and Planning Act 1986; Section 16 Tenant Empowerment Grants—Application for Feasibility Grant

Housing and Planning Act 1986; Section 16 Tenant Empowerment Grants—Quarterly Grant Claim Form; Pre-Feasibility/Feasibility and Options Study Grant

Housing and Planning Act 1986; Section 16 Tenant Empowerment Grants—Quarterly Grant Claims for Development Grant

Housing and Planning Act 1986; Section 16 Tenant Empowerment Grants—Application for Options Study Grant

Neighbourhood Management (MM) Stage 2: Statement of Grant Expenditure

P2 Return—monthly housebuilding data from the National House Building Council

Post Office Fund for Urban Deprived Areas: Application form

Regulatory and Statistical Return (RSR)

Report of fire

Survey of Mortgage Lenders (SML)

Energy Conservation

Mr. Watts: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has for encouraging the use of double and triple glazed windows to improve energy conservation in *(a)* homes and *(b)* commercial buildings. [101117]

Mr. Leslie: Amendments to the building regulations that became effective in April 2002 included setting window energy performance standards for all buildings that in most cases can only be met by triple glazing and the better types of double glazing. They also included application to replacement windows as well as to new construction. The Energy White Paper indicates our intention of aiming to bring into effect a further major revision in 2005.

Fire Services

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what is the minimum number of fire fighters recommended to attend a domestic dwelling in order to meet the requirements of *(a)* breathing apparatus procedures, *(b)* safe working systems and *(c)* command and central procedures; and what records does his Department hold on the extent to which these criteria are met in each Brigade area. [99631]

Mr. Raynsford: Current guidance recommends that a minimum of seven firefighters attend any incident requiring breathing apparatus to be worn in order to meet the requirements of breathing apparatus procedures. Guidance on incident command is set out in the Fire Service Manual, Volume 2 (Fire Service Operations: Incident Command), published by Her Majesty's Fire Service Inspectorate. Safe working systems are determined on an individual basis by a dynamic risk assessment carried out by the incident commander, and command and control procedures vary according to the size and complexity of each incident. As incidents are assessed on an individual basis under the dynamic risk assessment process, no records are held on the number of firefighters attending different incidents.

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment has been made of the additional *(a)* resources and *(b)* personnel each fire brigade would require as a result of the Save Life methodology set out in the Review of Standards Emergency Cover; and if he will make a statement. [99633]

Mr. Raynsford: I assume that my hon. Friend is referring to the Fire Service Emergency Cover Methodology, which was developed by the Task Group on the Fire Cover Review.

That methodology was used by the Task Group to predict resources and personnel requirements for the brigades in the Pathfinder trials and, by extrapolation, nationally. Two alternative ways of allocating firefighting resources to cover risk were modelled; one by the Task Group and one later by the Fire Research Division of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. Both sets of findings were reported on the website of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister at the end of last year[1].

However, the early research encountered a number of teething problems. These led the Task Group to reject the detailed calculations from the model it had used which is also regarded as being more indicative than precise. Further research is currently under way to resolve these issues.

Housing Transfers

Mr. Hopkins: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) how council tenants and council leaseholders will be able to receive independent advice on the implications of the Unfair Terms in Consumer Contracts Regulations 1999 for the consultation procedures involved in housing stock transfer; [100880]

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[1] www.safety.odpm.gov.uk/fire/fepd/fcr/fcrhome.htm

(2) what advice he has given to local authorities and housing associations on the implications of the Unfair Terms in Consumer Contracts Regulations 1999 for the housing stock transfer process. [100881]

Mr. McNulty: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, East (Ms Prentice) on 24 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 265W.

Light Rail Links

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans the Government Office for the South East has to facilitate a light rail link between High Wycombe and Bourne End. [101370]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

It is for Buckinghamshire county council as the local transport authority to decide whether to develop proposals for a light rail line between High Wycombe and Bourne End. Officials from my Department and from the Government Office for the South East regularly provide advice to local authorities wishing to develop public transport schemes.

Local Government Grant Settlement

Harry Cohen: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the six per cent. real terms increase in the local government grant settlement equates to in cash terms; how much has been distributed to local authorities in cash terms under the settlement; and if he will make a statement on the purposes for which the difference between the two sums will be used. [101020]

Mr. Raynsford: The local government finance settlement for 2003–04 distributed £43,894 million of formula grant, made up of revenue support grant, redistributed business rates, and police grant. That is £2,449 million or 5.9 per cent. more in cash terms than was distributed in 2002–03. It is for local authorities to decide how they spend this increased grant. On top of that, there will be increases in specific and special grant, bringing the overall increase over 2002–03 to £3,819 million or eight per cent. in cash terms. Some of these grants are ring-fenced to particular purposes.

Parish Councillors

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many parish councillors have declined to sign the model code of conduct since November 2001. [101218]

Mr. Leslie: The Standards Board and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister have been directly informed of 95 resignations by parish councillors unwilling to accept the code of conduct, out of an estimated total of some 70,000 parish councillors. There is no requirement for local authority members to inform the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister of resignations, for whatever reason.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what right of appeal parish councillors have if suspended from their duties by an adjudication panel. [101219]

Mr. Leslie: Where a case tribunal of the adjudication panel decides that a parish councillor has failed to comply with the code of conduct, that councillor may appeal to the High Court.

Residential Care (Funding)

Mr. Drew: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what account is taken in the Supporting People budget for re-allocation of funding between those local authorities who choose to place residents in other local authorities for the purposes of residential care. [100541]

Mr. McNulty: Supporting People funding is paid to the authority that is actually contracting to provide Supporting People services in its area, irrespective of Social Services arrangements concerning 'usual' residency.

Starter Homes Initiative

Mr. Horam: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when the next round of the Starter Homes Initiative will begin. [100454]

Mr. McNulty: The Starter Homes Initiative runs until 2004. From 2004–05, funding for the provision of key worker housing for rent and home ownership will be integrated into the Housing Corporation's main affordable housing programme. Funding will be allocated for this in the light of advice from Regional Housing Boards. The Housing Corporation expects to invite bids for key worker housing schemes at the same time as bids for other affordable housing schemes, around September 2003.

Sustainable Communities Plan

Norman Baker: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether an environmental appraisal has been undertaken for the Sustainable Communities Plan. [100365]

Mr. McNulty: No overall Environmental Impact Assessment was carried out for "Sustainable Communities: Building for the Future", as this document covers a number of areas and delivery agendas. However, Environmental Impact Assessments will be carried out for the individual elements where appropriate, at [illegible]uitable point in the delivery process.

HEALTH

"Getting Ahead of the Curve"

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether a formal assessment was made of the resource neutrality of organisational changes set out in "Getting Ahead of the Curve". [95867]

Ms Blears: "Getting Ahead of the Curve" stated that the proposed changes would be cost neutral in terms of public expenditure—that is, the ongoing costs of the Health Protection Agency (HPA) would be met from the funding already made available to the Department of Health—and in particular to those entities transferring to the HPA—via the spending review 2002. It was recognised in the consultation document, published in June 2002, that there might be some short-term transitional costs in establishing the HPA, which would also be met from within existing resources.

"Primary Care" Magazine

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost of *(a)* producing and *(b)* distributing Primary Care magazine is; and how many copies have been circulated of each issue in the last 12 months. [100503]

Mr. Lammy: NHS Magazine now has two editions, each issued 10 times a year. NHS Magazine is distributed to around 27,000 senior staff in acute and secondary health care teams. Primary Care Magazine is distributed to around 31,000 staff in primary health care teams.

Production and distribution costs can be different for different issues, depending on content, advertising revenue and whether any specific staff groups are being sent material of specific interest. Costs for each issue are reduced by income from advertising.

The normal average costs of production and distribution are shown in table 1. The number of copies of each issue circulated in the last 12 months is shown in table 2.

Table 1

£

	NHS Magazine	*Primary Care Magazine*
Production	50,386	32,876
Distribution	12,500	13,500
Total (gross)	62,386	46,376
Income from advertising	7,900	7,900
Total (net)	54,486	38,476

Table 2

Month	*NHS Magazine*	*Primary Care Magazine*
February 2002	35,892	26,166
March 2002	35,745	26,080
April 2002	30,836	30,919
May 2002	29,092	31,387
June 2002	26,919	31,921
July 2002	26,826	31,926
August 2002	n/a	n/a
September 2002	27,266	32,364
October 2002	27,199	32,319
November2002	27,108	32,243
December 2002	27,173	32,177
January 2003	n/a	n/a
February 2003	[1]34,485	[1]35,366

[1] Includes bulk copies distributed to workforce development confederations; this issue contained a personal development supplement.

Age Diversity in Employment

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when his Department completed its diagnostic review for compliance with the Government's Code of Practice for Age Diversity in Employment; and what changes his Department plans to make following the review. [99418]

Mr. Lammy: The Department took steps to embed the provisions of the Government's code of practice on age diversity in employment when it integrated age into its equal opportunity policies in accordance with the performance and innovation unit's "Winning the Generation Game" report. The Department is fully committed to ensuring that older people are never unfairly discriminated against.

A diagnostic review of progress was completed in February 2003. A number of recommendations are currently being discussed with the Department's trade unions.

Alcohol Strategy

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the responses from the consultation on the National Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy. [100535]

Ms Blears: The Cabinet Office Strategy Unit and the Department of Health carried out a joint consultation on the National Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy. The consultation ran from 15 October 2002 to 15 January 2003 and the results will be published shortly on both the Strategy Unit and the Department of Health websites.

Aspartame

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the Government will issue health warnings about the use of aspartame in food. [100720]

Ms Blears: I am advised by the Food Standards Agency that they have no plans to issue health warnings about the use of aspartame in food.

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent review has been undertaken of the safety of aspartame. [100766]

Ms Blears: I am advised by the Food Standards Agency that the European Commission's Scientific Committee on Food published its updated opinion on aspartame on 10 December 2002. Following a review of all the data available to date, the Committee reiterated its previous advice that aspartame is safe for use. The Committee also concluded that there is no need to revise the previously established acceptable daily intake calculation for aspartame of 40 milligrams per kilogram of body weight per day.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the cost to the NHS in each of the last five years of asylum seekers *(a)* in Greater London and *(b)* in England. [101251]

Ms Blears: National Health Service funding is allocated direct to 303 primary care trusts to secure health services for the local population, including asylum seekers. There are no separate records of services provided to asylum seekers.

Bush Meat

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the health risks posed by the illegal importation of bush meat into the UK. [100350]

Ms Blears: The Food Standards Agency (FSA), which has responsibility for food safety matters, advises me that a public health risk assessment has not been made in respect of illegal import of bush meat into the United Kingdom. The FSA has advised local authorities, which are responsible for enforcement of imported food and food safety legislation, that all illegally imported food products, including bush meat, should be removed from the human food chain. As illegal imports, these products have evaded official controls, either in the country of origin, or at the port of entry, designed to verify compliance with food safety standards, and as such, cannot be legally valid in the UK. The FSA is also working closely with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and Her Majesty's Customs and Excise to assist in the targeting of enforcement work to detect illegal imports.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research he has conducted into whether there have been outbreaks of diseases in the UK that can be traced back to have resulted from the illegal importation of bush meat from Africa. [100351]

Ms Blears: The United Kingdom public health bodies involved in the investigation of outbreaks of infectious intestinal disease have not traced any outbreaks of human disease in the UK to the illegal importation of bush meat. Studies of the routes of transmission of a range of food-borne bacteria have not shown bush meat consumption to be a vehicle of infection.

Child Care

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much remuneration an NHS child care co-ordinator will receive. [100500]

Mr. Hutton: The remuneration of national health service child care co-ordinators is a matter for local determination. Guidance issued by the Department of Health in 2001 recommended a starting salary in line with General Whitley Council pay scales for administrative and clerical staff (Grade 6/7, Spring Point 24–32). In 2002–03, this equates to £19,592 to £27,887 per annum.

Clinical Negligence

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to make an announcement on the actions of the Chief Medical Officer's review of clinical negligence compensation. [99613]

Mr. Lammy: I know that the outcome of the Chief Medical Officer's review of clinical negligence is eagerly awaited. Professor Sir Liam Donaldson has reviewed a wide range of options to tackle the complex issues involved in improving the present system for handling clinical negligence claims; these are under consideration by Ministers. We hope to publish our proposals for reform soon.

Coronary Disease

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance has been issued to PCTs about prescribing drug eluting stents for the management of coronary heart disease; and what assessment he has made of the benefits of drug eluting stents for the management of coronary heart disease. [101075]

Ms Blears: Primary care trusts, as local commissioners of services, decide in consultation with local acute trusts and clinicians what services and treatment to provide for their local population. Drug eluting stents were referred to the National Institute for Clinical Excellence on 20 May 2002 for technology appraisal. Guidance on this device and its deployment is expected to be published in August this year. During this interim period, the national health service has standing guidance that it should make local decisions about whether to fund a particular intervention on the basis of the available published information.

Diabetes

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps are being taken to ensure diabetic patients receive retinopathy screening through the national health service. [99628]

Mr. Lammy: A systematic retinopathy screening programme was one of two specific national targets published as part of the diabetes national service framework delivery strategy on 9 January 2003. It states that, by 2006, a minimum of 80 per cent. of people with diabetes are to be offered screening for the early detection and treatment, if needed, of diabetic retinopathy as part of a systematic programme that meets national standards, rising to 100 per cent. coverage of those at risk of retinopathy by the end of 2007.

A copy of the diabetes national service framework delivery strategy has been placed in the Library.

Electronic Patient Records

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which NHS trusts in England have introduced electronic patient records. [91849]

Mr. Lammy: These are Chelsea and Westminster national health service trust, Wirral hospital NHS trust, Burton hospitals NHS trust, north Hampshire NHS trust and the Royal Cornwall hospitals NHS trust.

Food Procurement

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his Department's policy is on the procurement of food that is *(a)* local and *(b)* British. [99366]

Mr. Lammy: The Department, including its agencies, does not procure food directly but uses tendered catering services.

The Department's policy with all procurements is to obtain value for money through competitive tendering ensuring fair and open competition. Existing procedures already allow consideration of a wide range of criteria in the evaluation of tenders within the framework of the Government's value for money policies and the European Community procurement rules.

It is the policy of our main catering contractor to endeavour to purchase from United Kingdom sources when practicable.

Foundation Hospitals

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the hospital trusts which have indicated an interest in foundation status. [101376]

Mr. Hutton: Preliminary applications for national health service foundation trust status have been received from the following 32 NHS trusts:

Addenbrooke's NHS Trust
Aintree Hospitals NHS Trust
Basildon and Thurrock General Hospitals NHS Trust
Bradford Hospitals NHS Trust
Calderdale and Huddersfield NHS Trust
City Hospitals Sunderland NHS Trust
Countess of Chester Hospital NHS Trust
Doncaster and Bassetlaw Hospitals NHS Trust
East Cheshire NHS Trust
Essex Rivers Healthcare NHS Trust
Frimley Park Hospital NHS Trust
Gloucestershire Hospitals NHS Trust
Guy's and St. Thomas' Hospital NHS Trust
Homerton University Hospital NHS Trust
King's College Hospital NHS Trust
Moorfields Eye Hospital NHS Trust
Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Trust
North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Trust
Nuffield Orthopaedic Centre NHS Trust
Papworth Hospital NHS Trust
Peterborough Hospitals NHS Trust
Queen Victoria Hospital NHS Trust
Rotherham General Hospitals NHS Trust
Royal Devon and Exeter Health Care NHS Trust
Royal Marsden NHS Trust
Royal National Hospital for Rheumatic Diseases NHS Trust
Sheffield Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust
Southern Derbyshire Acute Hospital Services NHS Trust
Stockport NHS Trust
University College London Hospitals NHS Trust
University Hospital Birmingham NHS Trust
Walsall Hospitals NHS Trust

General Practitioners (Shropshire)

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patient appointments were seen by general practitioners in each year since 1997 in Shropshire. [99722]

Mr. Lammy: The information is not collected either centrally or locally.

General Practitioners

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many general practitioners there are per 100,000 people in *(a)* England and *(b)* each health authority. [100083]

Mr. Hutton: The most recent information available on the ratio of general practitioners to population is for 2001. This is shown in the table.

Strategic health authority name	*All practitioners[1] per 100,000 population*
England	64.7
Cheshire and Merseyside	65.9
County Durham and Tees Valley	62.1
Cumbria and Lancashire	63.0
Greater Manchester	61.3
North and East Yorkshire and Northern Lincolnshire	66.6
Northumberland, Tyne and Wear	66.8
South Yorkshire	64.4
West Yorkshire	67.6
Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire	62.8
Birmingham and the Black Country	63.1
Coventry, Warwickshire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire	64.8
Essex	53.5
Leicestershire, Northamptonshire and Rutland	58.7
Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire	66.6
Shropshire and Staffordshire	57.3
Trent	61.5
North Central London	69.4
North East London	60.6
North West London	68.7
South East London	62.3
South West London	64.5
Avon, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire	72.1
Hampshire and Isle of Wight	66.0
Kent and Medway	59.7
Dorset and Somerset	76.2
South West Peninsula	76.7
Surrey and Sussex	65.1
Thames Valley	66.7

[1] All practitioners includes: UPEs, restricted principals, assistants, GP registrars, GP retainers, salaried doctors (para 52 SFA) and PMS others.

Note:

Population rates based on 2001 resident estimates.

Source:

Department of Health General and Personal Medical Services Statistics.

ONS 2001 Population Census.

Haemophilia

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to the statement of 12 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 51WS, on Haemophilia (Recombined Clotting Factors), how much will be allocated to *(a)* Chesham and Amersham and *(b)* Buckinghamshire. [100956]

Ms Blears: Over the coming months we will be working with key stakeholders including the Haemophilia Society, clinicians, primary care trusts (PCTs) and others to put in place a strategy to implement the availability of recombinant clotting factors. The amounts to be allocated to each PCT will be determined once a strategy is agreed.

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to monitor the use of the allocation of money to NHS haemophilia treatment centres in England for treating patients with genetically engineered recombinant instead of products made from human blood; when the first patients will receive the new treatment; how long it will take for all patients to be offered it; how much funding will be allocated in the first year; for how many years the funding will last; and if he will make a statement. [99652]

Ms Blears: Haemophilia patients up to the age of 21 are already receiving recombinant clotting factors. The £88 million will begin the process of extending these products to the remaining haemophilia patients aged over 21. The extra funding has been allocated over three years—£13 million in 2003–04, £21.7 million in 2004–05 and £53.4 million in 2005–06.

The Government's aim is that by March 2006 the vast majority of haemophilia patients should be receiving recombinant clotting factors. The Government will work with key stakeholders including the Haemophilia Society, the United Kingdom Haemophilia Centre Doctors Organisation, primary care trusts and others to put in place a strategy to roll out access to these products. This will include plans to monitor the implementation of this strategy. We aim to begin the roll out as soon as possible in the next financial year.

Care Homes (Yorkshire)

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent representations he has received concerning the shortage of nursing and residential care home places in York and North Yorkshire. [95203]

Jacqui Smith: I have had a number of representations regarding the situation in York and North Yorkshire.

York has been given a Building Care Capacity Grant of £658,000 for 2002–03 while North Yorkshire has been given £754,000. The councils have largely spent this on stabilising the local care home market.

Health Grants

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the grants funded by his Department for health *(a)* protection and *(b)* promotion for which individual members of the public and organisations may apply; how much such funding was made in the last financial year; how many awards were made; and what their administrative costs were. [99948]

Mr. Lammy: The Department makes grants to individuals and organisations, but the information is not held centrally.

The administration of grants is carried over by a number of different units within the Department to which a wide range of staff make a contribution. It is not possible to provide an accurate estimate of these costs.

Health Service Finance (Worcestershire)

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the deficit was of *(a)* the South Worcestershire Primary Care Trust, *(b)* the Wyre Forest Primary Care Trust, *(c)* the Bromsgrove and Redditch Primary Care Trust, *(d)* the Worcestershire Mental Health Trust, *(e)* the Hereford and Worcester Ambulance Trust and *(f)* the Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust at the beginning of the current financial year; and what his most recent estimate is of the deficit of each of the Trusts by the end of the financial year. [99659]

Mr. Lammy: The information requested is shown in the table.

	Beginning year deficit £ million	*Current forecast deficit £ million*
South Worcester PCT	0(1.3)	5.05
Wyre Forest PCT	0 (0.2)	0.85
Redditch & Bromsgrove PCT	0 (0.7)	2.40
Worcester Mental Health Trust	0	0.00
Hereford & Worcester Ambulance	0	0.00
Worcester Acute	0	7.30

Each primary care trust (PCT) was a new organisation as of 1 April 2003 and hence had no brought forward deficit. However, the figures in parentheses represent the subsequent allocation of the deficit incurred by Worcestershire Health Authority, their predecessor organisation.

Source:

West Midlands South Strategic Health Authority

Health Services (Children)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many paediatric intensive care nurses have been employed in the NHS in each of the last six years, expressed as whole time equivalent posts. [100492]

Mr. Hutton: Information on the number of paediatric intensive care nurses employed in the national health service is not collected centrally. Paediatric intensive care nurses are included in the total for paediatric nurses. The number of paediatric nurses employed in the NHS is shown in the table.

NHS Hospital and Community Health Services (HCHS): Qualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff employed in the paediatric area of work in England as at 30 September each year

	Whole-time equivalents	*Headcount*
1996	12,590	15,520
1997	12,590	15,340
1998	13,080	16,270
1999	13,380	16,690
2000	13,640	16,920
2001	14,000	17,640

Notes:

Figures are rounded to the nearest 10.

Figures exclude agency staff.

Source:

Department of Health Non-Medical Workforce Census.

The number of whole-time equivalent paediatric nurses employed in the NHS has increased by 1,410, or 11 per cent., between September 1996 and 2001.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will ask the National Institute for Clinical Excellence to appraise the evidence relating to treating infant medical health problems. [100556]

Jacqui Smith: It is the role of the National Institute for Clinical Excellence to provide patients, health professionals and the public with authoritative, robust and reliable guidance on both individual health technologies, including medicines, medical devices, diagnostic techniques, and procedures and the clinical management of specific conditions—some of these relating specifically to treating infant medical health problems.

Hospital Food

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will publish figures for 2003 on the six key targets of the Better Hospital Food Programme. [100410]

Mr. Lammy: Details of the number of hospitals meeting the key targets will be announced in due course.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the second stage of the Better Hospital Food Programme consists of. [100411]

Mr. Lammy: An announcement will be made at the Hospital Caterers Association Annual Conference on 24 April 2003.

Mental Health Acute Hospital (Northampton)

Mr. Tony Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the negotiations for public-private projects in regard to the Mental Health Acute Hospital in Northampton. [100802]

Mr. Lammy: A new facility, with a capital value of £20 million, is to be procured via the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) in South Northamptonshire, including Daventry and South Northants Primary Care Trust and Northampton Primary Care Trust, to develop the provision of in-patient acute mental health care for the south of the county. 13 expressions of interest were received and evaluated to six who received the pre-invitation to negotiate (ITN).

The pre-ITN responses were evaluated and three bidders were selected to receive the final ITN. The trust anticipates issuing the best and final offer instructions to the three remaining bidders in May 2003, based on the revised clinical model (similar bed numbers, different configuration) and provision of hard facilities management services only. This mirrors the trust's PFI re-provision for the north of the county where they are at preferred bidder stage, anticipating financial close in May-June 2003.

Ministerial Visits

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which hospitals have been visited by his ministerial colleagues in the Department since 1 January 2002. [100416]

Mr. Lammy: Since 1 January 2002, Department of Health Ministers have visited 79 hospital sites. A number of these sites have been visited on more than one occasion, resulting in a total of 100 ministerial visits.

A full list of hospitals visited has been placed in the Library.

Mixed Sex Wards

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to the answer of 27 January 2003, *Official Report*, columns 679–80, on mixed sex wards, which NHS trusts in England have mixed-sex sleeping accommodation. [95378]

Mr. Hutton: We have no plans to publish the names of the trusts which have or have not met the target.

I refer the hon. Member to the Written Ministerial Statement I made on 14 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 23WS.

Motor Neurone Disease

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money the Government are investing in researching motor neurone disease in 2002–03; and if he will make a statement. [100103]

Jacqui Smith: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the member for Reading, East (Jane Griffiths) on 4 February 2003, *Official Report*, columns 223–24W.

MRI Scans

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number and percentage of MRI scanners that are used for fewer than *(a)* five and *(b)* two days a week. [101206]

Ms Blears: Data are not collected centrally by the Department about the number of days per week that magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scanners are operational. However, an Audit Commission report on radiology, published in July 2002, showed that almost all MRI scanners in the national health service were operated for more than eight hours per day.

A total of 705,706 MRI investigations were carried out at NHS hospitals in 2001–02 and a breakdown of this total by NHS trust is available in the following publication:

Source:

"Department of Health: Imaging & Radiodiagnostics, England, Financial Year 2001–2002. KH12 return".

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many mobile MRI scanners there are *(a)* in the NHS and *(b)* in the private sector. [101209]

Ms Blears: There is one mobile magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scanner that is owned by the national health service and this facility is shared between University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Trust, George Eliot Hospital NHS Trust and South Warwickshire General Hospitals NHS Trust. The MRI scanner on board the mobile was provided as part of the New Opportunities Fund living with cancer initiative.

There are a further 28 mobile MRI scanners that are available for hire by NHS hospitals on a contractual basis. These are owned by private sector and charitable organisations and are also offered for hire to the non-NHS sector.

Myopic Degeneration

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent assessment he has made of the appraisal by NICE of the treatment available for myopic degeneration which is not age-related; and if he will make a statement. [99919]

Mr. Lammy: There is currently no National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) appraisal of the treatment available for myopic degeneration. NICE is, however, carrying out an appraisal of Photodynamic Therapy (PDT) as a treatment for age related macular degeneration. It has not yet published any guidance to the National Health Service on this topic. NICE prepared its final appraisal determination on PDT and circulated it to consultees on 16 January. We understand this document has been appealed against. NICE will now consider any appeals before publishing its final guidance.

National Institute for Clinical Excellence

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether appraisal suggestions rejected by NICE for lack of evidence are considered by the Department of Health Research Programme for further research. [100545]

Ms Blears: Yes.

Information Technology

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the report commissioned by the Department to assess the capacity of the supplier market in relation to the National Programme will be published. [100932]

Ms Blears: The analysis and report to assess the capacity of the information technology supplier market in relation to supporting the national programme for IT in the national health service was commissioned by the Department as input to the ongoing procurement process for the programme. It was not intended for publication and its use is covered by the normal rules around safeguarding the privacy of commercially confidential and sensitive information.

We must consider legal advice, the stage at which the formal procurement process is at and the requirement to ensure access to relevant information is made available to all potential suppliers. Assuming that all due requirements are met, a summary of the key findings will be covered in a presentation to be made at the healthcare computing conference in Harrogate on 25 March 2003. The key points will also be subsequently made available on the Department's website.

NHS Ambulance Trusts

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance exists for NHS ambulance trusts regarding *(a)* procurement, *(b)* servicing and *(c)* lifespans of NHS ambulance vehicles. [99911]

Mr. Lammy: There are two types of ambulance procured by ambulance trusts: patient transport service ambulances and accident and emergency ambulances.

Both types of vehicles can be procured either by outright purchase or by leasing, depending on the individual trust's preference.

For the outright purchase of patient transport service ambulances, the National Health Service Purchasing and Supply Agency (PASA) has a national contract in place which is due to expire on 30 June 2003. A new contract will be put in place later this year. In the meantime, PASA will help trusts by giving advice and putting in place a procurement guide. This will offer guidance on how to tender effectively for ambulances.

For the outright purchase of accident and emergency ambulances, PASA already offers assistance to trusts in the form of a procurement guide. PASA is at tender stage with a new national accident and emergency contract and hopes to have it in place by the summer.

Trusts tender on their own behalf for the lease of both patient transport service and accident and emergency ambulances. However, for trusts who do not have knowledge of European Union tendering, PASA offers advice and assistance on putting together all tender documentation and associated paperwork.

Once the new patient transport service and accident and emergency ambulance contracts are in place, PASA will introduce a new national leasing contract for both types of ambulance.

The servicing of ambulances is normally carried out by trusts themselves or by a nominated dealer. Leased vehicles can have the servicing incorporated into the lease agreement, which can be carried out by the trust or a nominated dealer. There are presently no national contracts in place for the servicing of ambulance vehicles.

The lifespan of patient transport service and accident and emergency vehicles is determined by individual trusts and is dependant on a number of factors, including operational demands and annual mileage.

On average, the majority of patient transport service ambulances have a lifespan of seven years. Accident and emergency ambulances have an average lifespan of five years.

Nursing Agencies

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nursing agencies based overseas who provide agency nurses to the NHS subscribe to the NHS's Code of Practice in recruiting overseas nurses; and which countries these agencies are based in. [100515]

Mr. Hutton: There are two nursing recruitment agencies that are based overseas that provide healthcare professionals to the national health service that subscribe to the code of practice for NHS employers.

These agencies are based in Germany and the Republic of Ireland.

Organ Donor Register

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in the UK are not on the NHS organ donor register. [97861]

Mr. Lammy: Currently, 10.2 million people, or 17.4 per cent., of the total United Kingdom population of 58.7 million, have registered on the national health service organ donor register.

Overseas Nurses

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the Assistant Chief Nurse Officer have had about the recruitment of nurses from South Africa; what steps his Department is taking to ensure that no nurses from South Africa are actively recruited; what mechanisms he has in place with the South African Government to ensure that such a scheme is effective; and if he will make a statement. [99759]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 3 March 2003]:* Actively recruiting from South Africa is against the code of practice for National Health Service employers involved in the international recruitment of healthcare professionals. Workforce development confederations are responsible for performance managing the trusts in their area to ensure compliance with the code of practice. This is being monitored through quarterly monitoring.

Officials from the Department have met with South African officials to discuss co-operation on workforce, recruitment and other health related issues.

The Department would investigate any alleged breach of the code of practice brought to its attention by the South African Government.

Overview and Scrutiny Committees

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many Overview and Scrutiny Committees have been set up since 1 January. [96720]

Mr. Lammy: This information is not available. The Department will be monitoring the implementation of the powers to scrutinise health services as it rolls out across England.

Parliamentary Questions

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will answer the parliamentary questions numbered *(a)* 79796, *(b)* 79800, *(c)* 79804, *(d)* 79805 and *(e)* 79806 tabled by the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon. [98989]

Mr. Lammy: These questions were tabled towards the end of the last parliamentary Session. As the Session ended before the questions received replies, responses were sent to the hon. Member by letter, copies of which were also placed in the Library.

Prescription Charges

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what recent assessment he has made of the help available to medical students for meeting NHS prescription charges; and if he will make a statement; [99918]

(2) what plans he has to increase the support that the NHS Low Income Scheme gives to medical students; and if he will make a statement. [99923]

Mr. Lammy: Young people under 16 and those under 19 who are in full time education are entitled to full help with health costs, including National Health Service prescription charges. Those aged 19 and over, including medical students, can apply for help with their health costs through the NHS low income scheme. The extent of any help is based on a comparison between the student's weekly income and requirements at the date the claim is received. We have no plans to change the current arrangements.

Patients who need frequent prescriptions may benefit from purchasing a prescription prepayment certificate.

Primary Care Trusts (Directors)

Mr. Boris Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of applicants for the post of non-executive director of primary care trusts have declared themselves, on the application form, to be active in the *(a)* Conservative Party, *(b)* Liberal Democrat Party and *(c)* Labour Party; and what percentage of applicants were successful in each case. [100252]

Mr. Lammy: Reliable information about applications made for non-executive posts to primary care trusts is not currently available. Application data held by the NHS Appointments Commission are currently being validated, and it is expected that they will be published in early April 2003.

Royal Shrewsbury Hospital

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the reasons for the Board of the Royal Shrewsbury Hospital not approving a new diabetes centre. [100084]

Mr. Lammy: I understand that this matter, which is properly a matter for the Board of the Royal Shrewsbury Hospital National Health Service Trust, will be considered again at its next public meeting on 25 March 2003. Departmental officials have, however, brought this matter to the attention of the Shropshire and Staffordshire Strategic Health Authority, which will consider whether any further action should be taken after the Trust has deliberated.

Tobacco Products

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to make public information on the ingredients and additives in tobacco products, their purpose and their effects gathered under the Manufacture, Presentation and Sale of Tobacco Products Directive (2001/37/EC). [99282]

Ms Blears: Regulations to transpose the Directive on the Manufacture, Presentation and Sale of Tobacco Products (2001/37/EC) require manufacturers and importers of tobacco products to submit a list of ingredients contained in their products to the Secretary of State by 28 February 2003. The Department is continuing to analyse this information before making it available to the public later this year.

Transplants

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* kidney, *(b)* liver, *(c)* heart and *(d)* lung transplants have taken place in each of the last 10 years. [97882]

Mr. Lammy: The table shows data on kidney, liver, heart and lung transplants which have taken place in each of the last 10 years.

Solid organ transplants in the United Kingdom, 1993–2002, by organ transplanted

Organ	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*	*Total*
Kidney	1,714	1,746	1,801	1,716	1,699	1,621	1,624	1,709	1,743	1,719	17,092
Liver	534	620	669	639	671	667	692	671	684	712	6,559
Heart	302	314	319	279	266	264	230	204	171	159	2,508
Lung	95	116	112	116	103	88	110	98	93	112	1,043
H/L	36	52	58	53	44	52	50	33	33	16	427
Total	2,681	2,848	2,959	2,803	2,783	2,692	2,706	2,715	2,724	2,718	27,629

Notes:

1. Includes cadaveric and living donor transplants.
2. Multi-organ transplants are counted for each organ type, e.g. a heart, lung and kidney transplant is counted as a kidney transplant and a heart/lung transplant.

Unnecessary Prescriptions

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment has been made of the extent to which general practitioners accept financial inducements from pharmaceutical companies to prescribe unnecessary drugs to patients without their consent; and what plans he has to introduce measures to prevent this practice. [99489]

Mr. Lammy: Measures to prohibit the offer by pharmaceutical companies to general practitioners of financial or other inducements to prescribe medicines are contained in the Medicines (Advertising) Regulations 1994. Where medicines are being promoted, the Regulations prohibit the offer of any gift, pecuniary advantage or benefit in kind unless it is inexpensive and relevant to the practice of medicine. It is also an offence for a prescriber to solicit any prohibited inducement.

Any complaint concerning the offer by pharmaceutical companies of an inducement to prescribe medicines is investigated by the Medicines Control Agency and as appropriate, the industry self-regulatory body, the Prescription Medicines Code of Practice Authority. Allegations of the acceptance of an inducement may also be referred to the General Medical Council.

Welfare Food Scheme

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received from the dairy industry about the proposed changes to the welfare food scheme. [101127]

Ms Blears: A public consultation on the proposed reform of the Welfare Food Scheme was held between October and December 2002. Dairy industry interests accounted for 15 per cent. of the total 500 written responses. The Department of Health also held five meetings with dairy industry representatives during the consultation period.

A report on the outcome of the consultation will be published later in March 2003.

TREASURY

Departmental Preferred Suppliers

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will allow Government Departments to place orders with preferred suppliers. [100608]

Mr. Boateng: Each Department is responsible for its own procurements, within the framework of the Government's procurement policy and the EC procurement rules. This policy and EC framework requires procurements to be conducted in a transparent, non-discriminatory and competitive way, with each contract awarded to the tenderer offering best value for money for the particular requirement.

Government Procurement Policy

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on Government procurement policy. [100606]

Mr. Boateng: The Government's procurement policy is that all public procurement of goods, works and services is to be based on value for money, having due regard to propriety and regularity. Value for money is the optimum combination of whole life cost and quality (or fitness for purpose) to meet the user's requirement.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of weighting value for money against ethical and socially constructive approaches to business in the selection of suppliers for Government Departments. [100607]

Mr. Boateng: Within the Government's procurement policy and the EC procurement rules, it is possible to take account of environmental, social and ethical factors where they are relevant to the subject of the contract and do not undermine value for money for the taxpayer. Relevant factors can be reflected in appropriate, non-discriminatory specifications and can feature, where appropriate, in whole life cost and quality award criteria.

Aquaculture

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will use his power of direction under the

Crown Estate Act 1961 to reduce the rents paid by aquaculture industries for use of the seabed in the event of negotiations with EU partners in Brussels on 20 February 2003 failing to secure a continued protection against salmon dumping. [98507]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 24 February 2003]:* I have been asked to reply.

Neither my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer nor I have any plans to exercise the power in question.

Aviation Industry (Pollution)

Tom Brake: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with shareholders about the most effective economic instruments for *(a)* limiting and *(b)* reducing the aviation industry's contribution to (i) climate change, (ii) local air quality and (iii) noise pollution. [101514]

John Healey: The Chancellor announced in the 2002 Pre-Budget Report that the Government would discuss with stakeholders the most effective economic instruments for ensuring the aviation industry is encouraged to take account of, and where appropriate reduce, its contribution to global warming, local air and noise pollution. These discussions will be taking place shortly. The Government is also publishing a background document to facilitate the discussions. The Government will set out its views in the Air Transport White Paper which it intends to publish later this year.

Budget

Mr. Howard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will announce the date of the Budget [101080]

Mr. Gordon Brown: I announced yesterday that I plan to deliver the Budget Statement on Wednesday 9 April.

Computer Misuse

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to his answer of 11 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 653W, on computer misuse, what assessment he has made of the level of computer misuse within the Inland Revenue. [101140]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) of 27 January 2003, *Official Report*, columns 605–06W.

Economic Output

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he is taking to increase output per head of population in the UK economy. [101055]

John Healey: The Government are committed to raising the rate of UK productivity growth over the economic cycle, improving competitiveness and narrowing the productivity gap with the US, France and Germany. The Government's approach to raising productivity is set out in "Productivity in the UK: The Evidence and the Government's Approach", which was published alongside the 2000 pre-Budget report.

The Government report on steps to increase productivity in every Budget and pre-Budget report. Recent key steps include the Enterprise Act 2002, the introduction of R&D tax credits, the reduction of corporation tax rates, implementation of major reforms to capital gains tax, increased investment to raise standards in education, and a comprehensive review of capital markets through the Myners, Sandler and Higgs reviews.

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the output per head of population in the UK economy was in each year since 1975. [101056]

John Healey: Output per head of population in each year since 1975 can be found in National Statistics publication: "Economic Trends Annual Supplement, 2002 edition, table 1.5", a copy of which is in the Library.

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the output per head of population in the economy of each of the G7 countries was in each year since 1997. [101057]

John Healey: Output per head of population for the G7 can be found in the monthly OECD publication: "Main Economic Indicators" (p277), a copy of which is in the Library.

Government Contingent Liabilities

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the Government's contingent liabilities. [101276]

Mr. Boateng: There are transparent arrangements in place for the reporting of contingent liabilities. These are in accordance with the principles underpinning the Government's fiscal framework, Contingent liabilities are already reported to Parliament, in line with the requirements of Government Accounting 2000 (Chapter 26), when they arise. They are also disclosed in Departments' resource accounts (under the requirements of FRS12) and have been drawn together in the annual Supplementary Statements to the Consolidated Fund and National Loans Fund Accounts.

Landfill Tax Credit Scheme

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment HM Treasury has made regarding reform of the Landfill Tax Credit Scheme; what research he has commissioned into the effectiveness of the scheme; and if he will make a statement. [101054]

John Healey: The Government reviewed the role of the Landfill Tax Credit Scheme following consultation with stakeholders last summer. In addition, the Public Accounts Committee, the Environment, Transport and Regions Select Committee, and the National Audit Office have all published reports on the scheme. These have all concluded that evaluation of the scheme is difficult or impossible given the way in which it has been set up with no central collection of information on its outcomes. The select committee reports have criticised the effectiveness of the scheme and these comments were taken into account in the Government's decision to reform the scheme.

The Government have been discussing with stakeholders the best ways of addressing the most serious criticisms in the operation of the successor tax credit scheme. Any plans for reform of the successor scheme will be set out on a Budget timetable.

Dr. Ladyman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much has been contributed to environmental projects as a result of the Landfill Tax Credit Scheme. [101132]

John Healey: Contributions by landfill operators to environmental projects through the Landfill Tax Credit Scheme are published by ENTRUST in its Annual Reports, copies of which are being placed in the Library of the House.

National Asset Register

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether it is his policy that all buildings should be valued in the National Asset Register on the basis of *(a)* their existing use and *(b)* the maximum market value for alternative use; and if he will make a statement. [92564]

Mr. Boateng: Assets in the National Asset Register are valued in accordance with the Resource Accounting Manual, which follows UK accounting standards for the valuation of assets. The Accounting Standards Board's Financial Reporting Standard 15 sets out how different types of asset should be valued.

National Insurance (Married Women)

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the yield of increasing the rate of national insurance contributions payable by married women by 1 per cent. of the reduced rate. [101418]

Dawn Primarolo: The estimated full-year yield from increasing the primary Class 1 contribution rate for reduced rate married women optants by one percentage point in 2003–04 is £5million. This estimate has been provided by the Government Actuary Department and is consistent with the November 2002 Pre-Budget Report.

Public Sector Net Investment Statistics

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what methodology is used to calculate monthly public sector net investment statistics; and if he will make a statement. [101758]

Ruth Kelly: The methodology used is set out in note four of the Background Notes to the monthly National Statistics First Release on the Public sector finances, issued jointly by the Office for National Statistics and HM Treasury.

Spending Review

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a sustainable development appraisal of the Spending Review 2002. [101505]

Mr. Boateng: Chapter 4 of the SR2002 White Paper set out how the Government had used the Spending Review process to promote their sustainable development objectives.

On 24 February the Government published their annual report on sustainable development, setting out progress against 15 headline indicators. The report illustrates how the whole range of Government policies have contributed to delivering our sustainable development objectives. The report itself and relevant press releases can be found on www.sustainable-development.gov.uk.

Tax Credits

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what external evaluation has been made of the advertising for *(a)* the Working Families' Tax Credit and *(b)* the Children's Tax Credit; and if he will place the conclusions in the Library. [96601]

Dawn Primarolo: Like all Inland Revenue advertising, the campaigns to raise awareness and understanding of the Working Families' Tax Credit and the Children's Tax Credit were all monitored to assess their effectiveness. The monitoring was carried out by independent external agencies managed by COI Communications on behalf of the Inland Revenue. Such monitoring generally takes place at key stages in the development of a campaign. The findings are used to inform the design of subsequent campaigns—or stages of the same campaign—and are not prepared for publication.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether the impact of the advertising campaign for the new tax credits will be externally evaluated. [96602]

Dawn Primarolo: All Inland Revenue advertising campaigns are monitored at key stages in their development to assess their effectiveness in raising awareness and understanding among their target audiences. Such monitoring is carried out by an independent external agency managed by COI Communications on behalf of the Inland Revenue. The findings are used to inform the design of subsequent campaigns. The publicity campaigns to promote awareness of the Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit will be subject to a similar cycle of monitoring.

Tax Returns

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many self assessment taxpayers have not submitted a tax return for financial year 2001–02; and if he will make a statement. [101760]

Dawn Primarolo: 9,246,131 SA tax returns for 2001–02 were issued up to 31 October 2002 and 8,371,251 received back by the January deadline. I gave these figures in a written statement on 25 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 12WS. 874,880 returns therefore remained outstanding at that date.

Windfall Tax

Martin Linton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the amounts from the Windfall Tax spent on *(a)* each of the New Deal programmes for helping people into work, *(b)* the New Deal for Schools and *(c)* other items of expenditure; and if he will estimate what proportion of the Windfall Tax remains unspent. [100899]

Mr. Boateng: Information on the allocation of the Windfall Tax for each New Deal programme and other items of expenditure can be found on table 4.1 of the pre-Budget report published in November 2002. The amount of Windfall Tax allocated to the New Deal for Schools is included in Capital costs on table 4.1.

Information on the allocation of the Windfall Tax will be updated in Budget 2003.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Animal Welfare

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many convictions there have been for animal cruelty in each of the last five years; [100352]

(2) how many arrests there have been for animal cruelty in each of the last five years; and how many of them resulted in a prosecution. [100353]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The statistics collected centrally on arrests relate to notifiable offences only, so do not cover arrests for animal cruelty.

Persons proceeded against and those found guilty for various offences connected with animal cruelty are shown in the table for England and Wales, 1997 to 2001.

Statistics for 2002 will be available in the late autumn.

Number of defendants[1] proceeded against at magistrates courts and convicted at all courts for offences relating to animal cruelty

England and Wales 1997–2001 — *Number of defendants*

Statute	*1997* *Defendants proceeded against*	*1997* *Defendants convicted*	*1998* *Defendants proceeded against*	*1998* *Defendants convicted*	*1999* *Defendants proceeded against*	*1999* *Defendants convicted*
Protection of Animals Act, 1911 (as amended)	1,051	867	1,107	889	1,050	828
Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981 Sec 8	8	8	2	2	1	1
Performing Animals (Regulation) Act 1925	—	—	—	—	—	—
Protection of Animals Act, 1934	6	4	4	4	—	—
Docking and Nicking of Horses Act, 1949	—	—	—	—	2	—
Pet Animals Act, 1951	4	4	7	6	10	9
Cockfighting Act, 1952	—	—	—	—	—	—
Protection of Animals (Amendment) Act, 1954	34	30	23	20	25	21
Animal Health Act, 1981, Secs 40–42, 46 and 49 and Orders made under Secs 8, 9, 37, 38, 39 and 43	76	68	87	73	56	51
Slaughterhouses Act, 1974	—	—	3	3	4	4
Abandonment of Animals Act, 1960, Sec 1	26	21	36	26	17	12
Animal & Animal Products (Import & Export) Regulations 1988	—	—	—	—	—	—
Animals (Cruel Poisons) Act, 1962	1	1	1	—	—	—
Animal Boarding Establishments Act, 1963	2	2	7	7	8	6
Riding Establishments Acts, 1964 and 1970	1	—	1	1	—	—
Slaughter of Poultry Act, 1967	6	3	18	15	8	7
Agriculture (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 1968, Secs 1, 2 and 6	10	9	5	5	15	11
Protection of Badgers Act, 1992 (except Sec 13)	44	25	19	4	30	10
Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981 Sec 9	5	3	—	—	3	—
Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981 Sec 11	2	—	3	3	4	3
Wild Mammals (Protection) Act 1996	7	3	8	7	—	—
Breeding of Dogs Acts 1973 and 1991	5	4	5	4	5	4
Breeding and Sale of Dogs (Welfare) Act 1999	•	•	•	•	•	•
Diseases of Animals Act	97	81	103	80	72	5[illegible]
Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, Secs 1, 3, 5, 6, 7 and 17	84	63	68	42	157	118
Total	1,469	1,196	1,507	1,191	1,467	1,138

England and Wales 1997–2001 — *Number of defendants*

Statute	*2000* *Defendants proceeded against*	*2000* *Defendants convicted*	*2001* *Defendants proceeded against*	*2001* *Defendants convicted*
Protection of Animals Act, 1911 (as amended)	1,074	861	975	754
Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981 Sec 8	6	4	3	3
Performing Animals (Regulation) Act 1925	—	—	—	—
Protection of Animals Act, 1934	1	1	—	—
Docking and Nicking of Horses Act, 1949	2	2	—	—
Pet Animals Act, 1951	19	14	11	8
Cockfighting Act, 1952	—	—	—	—
Protection of Animals (Amendment) Act, 1954	24	15	15	11
Animal Health Act, 1981, Secs 40–42, 46 and 49 and Orders made under Secs 8, 9, 37, 38, 39 and 43	31	23	32	23
Slaughterhouses Act, 1974	—	—	1	—
Abandonment of Animals Act, 1960, Sec 1	26	13	25	19
Animal & Animal Products (Import & Export) Regulations 1988	4	—	1	—
Animals (Cruel Poisons) Act, 1962	—	—	1	1
Animal Boarding Establishments Act, 1963	11	4	13	8

England and Wales 1997–2001 *Number of defendants*

Statute	2000 Defendants proceeded against	2000 Defendants convicted	2001 Defendants proceeded against	2001 Defendants convicted
Riding Establishments Acts, 1964 and 1970	3	2	1	1
Slaughter of Poultry Act, 1967	—	—	—	—
Agriculture (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 1968, Secs 1, 2 and 6	15	10	17	5
Protection of Badgers Act, 1992 (except Sec 13)	21	4	9	5
Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981 Sec 9	—	—	4	3
Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981 Sec 11	—	—	2	—
Wild Mammals (Protection) Act 1996	5	4	10	4
Breeding of Dogs Acts 1973 and 1991	3	2	1	1
Breeding and Sale of Dogs (Welfare) Act 1999	—	—	—	—
Diseases of Animals Act	26	22	201	154
Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, Secs 1, 3, 5, 6, 7 and 17	96	80	67	46
Total	1,368	1,061	1,389	1,046

* = Not applicable.

[1] Principal offence basis.

[2] Staffordshire Police were only able to submit sample data for persons proceeded against and convicted in the magistrates courts in 2000.

CCTV

Mr. Bill O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what research he has analysed on the benefits of extending CCTV to small towns and villages to help combat crime and anti-social behaviour; and if he will make a statement. [100323]

Mr. Denham: To help ensure maximum impact and sustainability of CCTV, a £1.5 million Home Office funded national evaluation programme is being carried out by the Scarman Centre, University of Leicester, on 17 approved CCTV Initiative schemes, including a mobile scheme in rural Kent.

The final evaluation report will not be published until 2004 but interim reports will be available before then. The first—providing guidance for practitioners on implementation of CCTV schemes—is due for publication shortly.

Mr. Bill O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what additional funding will be made available to police authorities for CCTV schemes in *(a)* 2003–04, *(b)* 2004–05 and *(c)* 2005–06; and if he will make a statement; [100324]

(2) if he will make a statement on funding for local authorities for CCTV schemes in *(a)* 2003–04, *(b)* 2004–05 and *(c)* 2005–06. [100325]

Mr. Denham: Opportunities for funding for CCTV currently exist through the funds available to Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships, on which the police and local authorities are partners. Funding of £94 million is being provided for local crime and drugs spend, including capacity building, for 2003–04.

In addition, a special £50 million Basic Command Unit (BCU) fund is being distributed to local police commanders in 2003–04 to tackle the problems that matter most in their communities. Police will be able to target the extra resources at local level problems, like anti-social behaviour and drugs, deploying CCTV where appropriate.

Funding for 2004–05 and 2005–06 has yet to be finalised.

Child Protection

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to his answer of 12 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 770W, on child protection, how many forces and authorities failed to submit their three year plans to him; and what action he will take against those forces and authorities who fail to comply with the 31 March submission date. [100484]

Mr. Denham: As the submission date of 31 March has not yet been reached, it is not possible to say how many forces and authorities have failed to submit their three-year plans. They are under a statutory duty to do so by virtue of section 92 of the Police Reform Act 2002. Any failure to submit a plan would be in breach of that statutory duty.

Children at Risk

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many times last year police officers from *(a)* the Metropolitan and *(b)* Sussex police force areas accompanied social workers to addresses of abusive and intimidating parents and guardians of children deemed at risk. [100486]

Mr. Denham: This information is not collected centrally, or by the Metropolitan and Sussex police forces.

The standard operating procedure in the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) Child Protection Group is that in cases where there are criminal allegations, social workers will be accompanied by the police. There may be other instances where, although no criminal allegations have been made, a risk assessment will be conducted to determine whether the presence of the police is necessary.

In 2002, Sussex Police received 3,783 referrals of possible child abuse. In the overwhelming majority of cases of this kind, Sussex Police carry out joint visits to the child's home with the relevant social worker. This is irrespective of whether the allegation is made against the parent/carer or whether the parent/carer is believed to be aggressive or intimidating. Given that this is the normal practice, Sussex Police do not keep separate records of joint visits or quantitative information about intimidating parents.

Community-based Sentencing

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will take steps to promote to the public the *(a)* use, *(b)* effectiveness, *(c)* range of initiatives and *(d)* suitability of community based sentencing. [98878]

Hilary Benn: Increasing confidence in the Criminal Justice System is the subject of a Public Service Agreement target (PSA 10). The creation of the National Probation Service and the establishment of the Youth Justice Board have provided clearer structures, substantial changes in practice based on evidence of effectiveness in reducing crime and new community-based sentences. A task force, based within the Home Office, has recently been established to further inter-departmental work towards the PSA target.

To increase the use, effectiveness, range of disposals and suitability of community based penalties, the National Probation Service and the Youth Justice Board are working with the courts to ensure sentences are targeted appropriately. This includes ensuring that accredited programmes and recently introduced disposals, like drug treatment and testing orders and the intensive supervision and surveillance programme (ISSP), are used appropriately and their potential to reduce reoffending and protect the public fully exploited.

Ways are also being developed to increase sentencers' awareness of new assessment techniques that act as a guide to the suitability of community sentences and accurately reflect risk factors that sentencers must take into account. The implementation of new disposals, or changes to existing sentences such as the "enhancement" of community punishment (formerly community service), will include effective communications.

As it becomes available both the National Probation Service and Youth Justice Board regularly publish relevant information on reconviction data, practice and policy developments and performance. The National Probation Service is currently reviewing the communications capacity of the 42 local probation areas and increasing national resources for communications, including work with the media. This, and future work, will be evaluated against and informed by surveys of public and sentencer perception.

Computer Fraud

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many laptop computers were used by *(a)* Ministers and special advisers and *(b)* officials in his Department in each year since 1995; how many were (i) lost and (ii) stolen; what their cost was; and if he will make a statement. [97500]

Hilary Benn: Information on the issue of laptop computers by year is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Three laptop computers have been provided over the last 26 months to Ministers and special advisers and none have been reported either lost or stolen.

A further 4,721 laptop computers have been issued to officials including those within the Executive Agencies.

In both 1995 and 1996 no laptop computers were reported lost. In 1997 one was reported lost. In 1998 four were reported lost. In 1999 two were reported lost, although one was subsequently recovered and since then no laptop computers have been reported lost.

In terms of thefts we have reported to the House before seven laptop computers were reported stolen in 1995 with a combined value of £3,924. Nine were reported stolen in 1996 with a value of £20,300. In 1997 a further nine laptop computers were reported stolen with a value of £25,000. In 1998 a single laptop was stolen but no reliable data has been recorded regarding its value. In 1999 a number of laptops were stolen from a storeroom and were valued at £20,421. During 2000 a further 18 thefts of laptop computers were reported. The total value for these losses was £53,429 but the figure is distorted by at least one machine having no formal value recorded against it and in another case a PowerPoint Projector being included in the financial loss. From 2000 through to 13 February 2003 a further 39 further thefts were reported, with one subsequent recovery but a financial value is not available. In part this is because 897 laptop computers are now provided as a managed service from a Private Finance Initiative (PFI) partners. Where loss occurs the financial risk has been passed to the partner organisation.

In addition to these figures 14 laptop computers have been lost from the Forensic Science Service at a cost of £1,200 each since 1995.

Computer Hacking

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* internal hacking and *(b)* external hacking incidents categorised as (i) access denied, (ii) browsing, (iii) password abuse, (iv) privilege abuse, (v) data stolen/disclosed, (vi) files deleted/damaged, (vii) fraud and (viii) other were reported by each Department contributing to the Unified Reporting and Alert Scheme. [100166]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: There has been a very substantial reduction in the figures over the previous year. Analytical work is still in progress; I will reply in more detail as soon as I am able.

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reason he has not replied to the letter to him dated 15 January 2003 from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mrs. Huda Abdulwahed. [100685]

Mr. Blunkett: I wrote to my right hon. Friend on 28 February 2003.

Crime

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his estimate is of the change in the volume of crime in *(a)* total and *(b)* by major category, on (i) a British Crime Survey basis and (ii) a police statistics basis, comparing (A) 1978–79 with 1996–97 and (B) 1996–97 with 2002–03; and if he will make a statement. [99810]

Mr. Denham: The earliest estimates available for the British Crime Survey (BCS) are for the 1982 survey, which measured crime in 1981. Likewise, the closest BCS data to 1996–97 is from the 1998 BCS (crime in 1997). The latest available (provisional) data on trends in the numbers of incidents of crime were published in January 2003 in Home Office Statistical Bulletin 02/03, reporting on the results of BCS interviews that took place in the year ending September 2002.

Trends in the number of BCS incidents of crime for the major crime categories, 1981 to year ending September 2002

Interviews (in thousands)

	1981	*1997*	*Year ending September 2002*
Burglary[1]	749	1,621	982
All vehicle thefts[2]	1,751	3,511	2,388
All BCS violence	2,160	3,664	2,712
All BCS crime	11,041	16,692	12,251

[1] Burglary includes burglary with entry and attempts.

[2] All vehicle thefts includes thefts of and from vehicles and associated attempts.

The percentage changes in the number of incidents of crime, as recorded by the BCS from 1981 to 1997, are therefore:

	Percentage increase
Burglary	116
All vehicle thefts	101
All BCS violence	70
All BCS crime	51

Additionally, the percentage changes from crime in 1997 to the results of BCS interviews conducted in the year ending September 2002 are:

	Percentage decrease
Burglary	39
All vehicle thefts	32
All BCS violence	26
All BCS crime	27

Police-recorded crime statistics are available for the financial years 1978–79, 1996–97 and the latest data are for the year ending September 2002. The offence coverage of the British Crime Survey and recorded crime differs. For example, the BCS excludes victimless crimes, crimes against those under the age of 16 and against those living in institutions, to name a selection. Home Office Statistical Bulletin 07/02 provides further details on the coverage and comparability of the two measures, and the need for the use of a comparable subset of offences for any comparison of the two.

Trends in the number of recorded crimes of the major categories

	1978–79	*1996–97*	*October 2001 to September 2002*
Burglary in a dwelling[1]	253,878	581,985	447,100
All vehicle thefts[2]	592,279	1,245,052	998,400
All violent crime	123,276	348,032	909,300
Total recorded crime	2,514,660	4,930,678	5,797,100

[1] Burglary here includes only burglary from a dwelling.

[2] All vehicle thefts includes thefts of and from vehicles and associated attempts.

The percentage changes in the number of recorded crimes from 1978–79 to 1996–97 are therefore as follows.

	Percentage increase
Burglary in a dwelling	129
All vehicle thefts	110
All violent crime	182
Total recorded crime	96

The percentage changes from recorded crime in 1996–97 to the year ending September 2002 are:

	Percentage change
Burglary in a dwelling	Decreased 23
All vehicle thefts	Decreased 20
All violent crime	Increased 43
Total recorded crime	Increased 3

The percentage changes since 1996–97 have been adjusted for the effects of the revisions in April 1998 to the way recorded crimes are counted and classified. This has had a large impact on the changes in violent crime and total recorded crime, but a negligible impact on those for burglary and vehicle crime. Recorded crime figures have also been affected by the National Crime Recording Standard. The Standard, which was introduced formally in all forces in April 2002 and informally in other forces prior to this date, has had the effect of increasing recorded crime statistics by at least 10 per cent. in the year ending September 2002. This means that, but for the Standard, there would have been a fall in total recorded crime between 1996–97 and the 12 months to September 2002.

Crime Statistics (Wales)

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* robberies, *(b)* gun-related crimes and *(c)* recorded crimes there were in each police force area in Wales in each year since 1997. [100247]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 3 March 2003]:* The requested information is given in the table. The figures include the number of recorded crimes in which Firearms were reported to have been used.

There was a change in counting rules for recorded crime on 1 April 1998, which would have the tendency to increase the number of offences counted. Numbers of offences before and after this date are therefore not directly comparable.

As a result of three of the four police forces in Wales adopting the principles of the National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS) in advance of its official introduction across England and Wales on 1 April 2002, numbers of offences recorded for 2001–02 may have been inflated.

Recorded crime: number of offences, by police force areas in Wales

	Robbery	*Offences involving Firearms*	*Total crime*
Dyfed Powys			
1997[1]	34	61	18,098
1998–99[2]	42	60	24,588
1999–2000	28	45	23,709
2000–01	23	68	22,878
2001–02	26	—	24,003
Gwent			
1997[1]	156	129	47,268
1998–99[2]	173	215	58,738
1999–2000	216	248	60,132
2000–01	244	197	56,728
2001–02	215	—	46,938
North Wales			
1997[1]	112	109	40,684
1998–99[2]	127	94	43,848
1999–2000	146	104	44,606
2000–01	163	74	47,708
2001–02	194	—	54,116
South Wales			
1997[1]	509	295	130,886
1998–99[2]	511	222	134,820
1999–2000	519	315	127,040
2000–01	460	275	111,131
2001–02	595	—	116,708

[1] Offences were recorded on a calendar year basis up to 1997, and thereafter on a financial year basis.

[2] The number of crimes recorded in that financial year using the expanded offence coverage and revised counting rules which came into effect on 1 April 1998.

Notes:

1. Three of the four Wales forces adopted the principles of the National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS) in advance of its official introduction across England and Wales on 1 April 2002; Dyfed Powys (January 2002), North Wales (October 2001) and South Wales (January 2002). This may have increased the number of offences recorded in 2001–02.

2. 2001–02 figures for Offences involving Firearms have not yet been published.

Criminal Justice Bill

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the desert model in appendix 8, paragraph 3 of Making Punishments Work, in the sentencing framework of the Criminal Justice Bill. [100137]

Hilary Benn: The Criminal Justice Bill adopts the approach to sentencing advocated by John Halliday in his report "Making Punishments Work", which is based on a modified version of the "just desserts" theory of sentencing. The set of principles which guide sentencers in determining the seriousness of the offence (in chapter 1, part 1 2) incorporate the principle that the punishment should always be proportionate to the seriousness of the offence, on which the "dessert" is based. They have been modified in one respect, again as advocated by John Halliday, so that recent and relevant previous convictions act as aggravating factors in determining sentence seriousness. The Government believes that persistent offenders must know that there will be a steady progress to custody, increasing in length, if they continually offend and fail to respond to previous sentences.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether Clause 126 of the Criminal Justice Bill complies with Principle A2 of the Council of Europe's recommendation on consistency of sentencing 1992. [100138]

Hilary Benn: Clause 126 makes explicit the purposes of sentencing on the face of the Bill. We want to encourage sentencers to address more directly than at present the purposes of crime reduction (through reform and rehabilitation, and deterrence) and reparation, alongside the continuing key and prominent aims of public protection and punishment. These purposes are not in conflict and it will be up to sentencers to determine what weight to accord to each in a particular case. This may vary in different cases; for example a purely punitive intervention may be required, in others rehabilitation will feature more heavily.

We do not, therefore, consider Clause 126 to be in conflict with Principle A2 of the Council of Europe recommendation. Our goal is to achieve consistency of approach in sentencing, through the consistent application of explicit principles and standards, recognising that these may result in justifiably disparate outcomes. Clause 126 which sets out the general purposes of sentencing, and those that follow which establish a set of principles to guide the sentence in determining the seriousness of an offence, will help achieve this, as will the establishment of the new Sentencing Guidelines Council which I will produce a set of consolidated guidelines for all criminal courts.

Criminal Policy Group

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the purpose is of the Criminal Policy Group within his Department; what his estimate is of its cost for each year from 1996–97 to 2004–05 (planned); and if he will make a statement. [99804]

Hilary Benn: The Criminal Policy Group shared the purpose of the Home Office in building a safe, just and tolerant society in which the rights and responsibilities of individuals, families and communities are properly balanced and the protection and security of the public are maintained. The Group had responsibility to deliver two of the principal Home Office Aims, Aim 3 (To ensure the effective delivery of justice) and Aim 4 (To deliver effective custodial and community sentences to reduce reoffending and protect the public). Following changes in senior management arrangements in the Department on 5 February, the Group was renamed the Criminal Justice Group and its correction functions (including its responsibility for Aim 4) moved to report to the Commissioner for the Correctional Services and Permanent Secretary for Human Resources.

Costs for the Criminal Policy Group each year are as follows:

	£ million
1996–97 Outturn	77
1997–98 Outturn	90
1998–99 Outturn	93
1999–2000 Outturn	187
2000–01 Outturn	159
2001–02 Outturn	89
2002–03 Estimated Outturn	109
2003–04 Planned	177
2004–05 Planned	195
2005–06 Planned	217

Notes:

1. The outturn figures include expenditure on current (resource) and capital budgets. Figures prior to 2001–02 are taken from the Home Office Annual Report 2000–01 and 2001–02.

2. Planned figures are for the Criminal Policy Group before recent changes and include correction functions.

3. All figures exclude expenditure by non-departmental public bodies.

Custody

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what records are kept by the police of the time a person spends in custody *(a)* in England and *(b)* by Merseyside Police; for what period of time the police retain such records; who has access to this information; whether this information is publicly available; and within what period the police must respond to a request for details of custody. [100135]

Mr. Denham: The detention of people arrested for criminal offences in England and Wales is governed by the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE) and the PACE Codes of Practice. Merseyside Police record the detention of all persons in custody in accordance with this Act and Codes of Practice.

Section 37(4) and Section 39(1)*(b)* of the Act provides that custody records must be kept on all detained persons. PACE Code C Section 2 sets out the responsibilities of the custody officer and what details must be given on the custody record, including the time of a person's arrival in custody and either the time of subsequent release or transfer to court.

Police must retain custody records for 12 months after the detainee has been released from police custody (PACE Code of Practice C paragraph 2.4). No maximum period is specified. Merseyside police currently keep custody records for three years, but are considering extending this period to seven years.

While a person is still in detention, a solicitor or appropriate adult may inspect the record as soon as is practicable after their arrival at the police station. (This is provided for under PACE Code of Practice C paragraphs 2.4 to 2.5). When a person leaves police detention, he himself, his legal representative or an appropriate adult may request a copy of the original custody record for up to 12 months after release provided reasonable notice is given. The information contained in the custody record is not otherwise publicly available. The police must respond to requests for details of the custody record as soon as practicable (paragraph 2.4).

Custody Suites

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance he gives on the health and safety requirements for custody suites. [100337]

Mr. Denham: There are no health and safety organisations with a specific interest in custody suites of which I am aware. The management of health and safety within police forces, including custody suites, is the responsibility of the chief officer, employing specialist advice from the Home Office, force health and safety advisers and the Health and Safety Executive as appropriate.

In police forces where custody suite provision has been contracted out to a service provider, the organisation which owns the custody suite premises is responsible for health and safety.

The Home Office has published a generic risk assessment relating to hazards which may arise in the custody of detainees. Generic risk assessments are available on the Home Office website.

The Police Buildings Design Guide 1994, together with the draft 2001 Custody update, provides guidance in respect of the design and construction of custody suites to ensure the health and safety of police officers and detainees alike.

Electronic Finger Printing

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police forces have introduced electronic finger printing scanning; what proposals he has to encourage other forces to do so; and if he will make a statement. [99642]

Mr. Denham: There are currently 175 electronic fingerprint scanning units (known as Livescan) deployed across 27 police forces in England and Wales.

The Police Information Technology Organisation has established the central capability to handle Livescan data (known as NAFIS—the National Automated Fingerprint Identification Service), and set up the Framework Agreement under which forces contract for the Livescan service. However, the decision to use Livescan is an operational matter for each police force, based on its own business case.

Due to economies of scale, the business cases for the deployment of Livescan are generally stronger in larger forces, such as the Metropolitan Police, which has 53 units.

The use by the police of Livescan and NAFIS will also be included in an analysis of forensic performance by police forces to be undertaken by the Police Standards Unit in the Home Office.

Firearms

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his estimate is of the number of illegally held firearms in each police force area in Wales. [100148]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 21 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 295W.

Guide Dogs

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* guide dogs for the blind and *(b)* hearing dogs for the deaf are employed in the UK. [100372]

Beverley Hughes: I understand that there are about *(a)* 4,800 guide dogs; and *(b)* 600 hearing dogs currently at work in the UK with their blind or deaf owners.

These figures have been supplied by *(a)* the charity, Guide Dogs for the Blind Association; and *(b)* the charity, Hearing Dogs for Deaf People.

HMP/YOI Holloway

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he plans to reopen the Bail Office at HMP/YOI Holloway; and if he will make a statement. [100226]

Hilary Benn: The Bail and Legal Aid Office at Holloway will reopen as soon as a member of staff is in place. A candidate has been selected and is due to start work at Holloway on 7 April 2003. After a period of induction and suitable training, the Bail and Legal Aid office should be fully operational from early June.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the Youth Justice Board will announce its decision on funding for HMP/YOI Holloway's work with prisoners subject to detention and training orders; if he will investigate the reason for *(a)* previous lack of funding for this project and *(b)* the delay in the announcement; and if he will make a statement. [100237]

Hilary Benn: The Youth Justice Board (YJB), as purchaser and commissioner of juvenile secure accommodation, are currently negotiating with the Prison Service the content of the Service Level Agreement for the coming financial year. They expect to include funding for a limited number of juvenile girls to be held in Holloway this year, including those who require facilities for continuing medical treatment.

The decision had previously been delayed because of changes last year in overall population levels and the need to review the timetable for meeting the commitment to remove 15 and 16 year old girls from Prison Service custody. The Board have announced that this will be met later this year, but Holloway will continue to hold 17 year old girls and some 15 and 16 year olds in the meantime.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects the Prisoners Advice and Care Trust to take over the running of the visitors' centre booking line at HMP/YOI Holloway; and if he will make a statement. [100238]

Hilary Benn: Holloway will have its telephone system upgraded in July 2003 and the Governor will then introduce changes to the existing arrangements. Proposals include the separation of professional and social telephone booking line arrangements whereby prison staff will continue to organise and run professional visits but a separate line for social visits will be staffed by a telephone operator. The system will be based in the prison and will have a line which would enable people who are finishing their visits to book the next visit before they leave the prison.

Discussions with the Prisoners Advice and Care Trust are not yet concluded but the Governor of Holloway expects to finalise arrangements in the next month ahead of the new system being put in place later this year.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners at HMP/YOI Holloway have been detained longer than necessary because home detention orders paperwork was not completed correctly, since 2001; and if he will make a statement. [100239]

Hilary Benn: Specific information about the number of prisoners detained longer than necessary because home detention orders paperwork has not been completed correctly is not available without disproportionate cost. However, an area-wide review of home detention order paperwork was conducted by the Female Estate Operational Office in August 2002, and the arrangements at Holloway were found to be of a high quality.

HMPs Garth and Wymott

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the provision of a hospital wing at *(a)* HMP Garth and *(b)* HMP Wymott. [99908]

Hilary Benn: There is a small in-patient healthcare facility at Garth prison to which Wymott prison has access as appropriate. There are no plans to expand this unit as a new health care facility is currently scheduled to open at neighbouring Preston prison at the end of 2004. This is to be an area-wide facility, which can be utilised by both Garth and Wymott as necessary.

Metropolitan Police

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the resources made available to the Metropolitan police in the current financial year. [100602]

Mr. Denham: The police resources made available to the Metropolitan police authority by Central Government in 2002–03 are set out in the tables.

Revenue funding

	£ million
Home Office specific grant	1,015.9
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister Revenue Support grant	476.9
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister National Non Domestic Rates	183.5
Crime Fighting Fund	62.0
Free travel for officers	2.45
London Allowance	20.0
Street Crime Initiative	14.2
DNA processing and support costs	7.1
Airwave Revenue	5.0
Counter terrorism and Community Support Officers	46.0
Loan charge grant	3.6
Total	1,836.7

Capital funding

	£ million
Capital Grant and Supplementary Credit Approv	44.5
Premises Improvement Fund	1.0
Command Control and Communications Information System	[1]10.0
Airwave Capital	40.7
Total	96.2

[1] To date.

Note:

In addition, the Metropolitan police authority will raise around £361.4 million through the police precept on council tax.

Midnight Basketball Scheme

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what funding his Department will be providing *(a)* in 2003–04 and *(b)* in future years to the Midnight Basketball Scheme run by the National Playing Fields Association; and if he will make a statement. [100328]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 3 March 2003]:* Midnight Basketball has received funding locally in recent years from the Communities Against Drugs fund, the Children's Fund, from the Youth Justice Board and from Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships. Local partnerships are currently at the point of developing their funding plans for next year and it is open to them to provide funding for Midnight Basketball from Home Office funding streams, for example for the purposes of reducing youth crime, anti-social behaviour or substance misuse. Midnight Basketball is, therefore, unlikely to receive central Home Office funding.

In addition, from May this year, there will be a new single programme of positive activities for young people to provide year round out of school activities for eight to 19-year-olds. This will deliver activities to more young people than in previous years, providing support for those most at risk. It will be open to schemes such as Midnight Basketball to bid to provide diversionary, activities for young people as part of this programme.

Network and Forensic Investigators

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to his answer of 24 February 2003, ref 97541, how many *(a)* network and *(b)* forensic investigators he estimates will be trained in (i) the current year and (ii) each of the next three years. [100257]

Mr. Denham: Assessing the training requirements for existing and new staff in network and forensic investigation is a matter for individual chief officers. This information is not aggregated centrally.

The National Specialist Law Enforcement Centre for National High Tech Crime Training Centre (part of Centrex) was created to ensure that police staff are equipped with the knowledge and skills that will enable them to meet the challenges set by criminals who use technology in their criminal endeavours. Its course include the development of network investigation and computer forensics skills. Forces may also receive local training, from other providers.

In addition to the ongoing support for high tech crime, in December 2002 the Home Office provided a one-off payment of £500,000 to the Association of Chief Police Officers to support operations to combat child abuse on the internet. This money has been used in part to provide relevant hardware and software, and also to train 86 individuals within forces in basic forensic analysis this financial year.

Police

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the budget allocated to the North Yorkshire police force in 2003–04. [100053]

Mr. Denham: For 2003–04, North Yorkshire Police Authority has set a budget of £114.2 million. It has been allocated £70.4 million in police grant; revenue support grant and share of national non-domestic rates, an increase of three per cent. on the like-for-like figure for 2002–03. The balance of its budget is met from local resources.

In addition to general grants, the Authority will receive an estimated £4.55 million in specific grants as follows:

	£ million
Crime Fighting Fund	1.85
Rural Policing Fund	2.02
Airwaves	0.23
Basic Command Unit Fund	0.45
Total	4.55

The authority has been allocated capital grant and supplementary credit approval to borrow £1.47 million. This is an increase of four per cent. on 2002–03.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* police horses and *(b)* police dogs have been injured in the line of duty in the last year for which records are kept. [100371]

Mr. Denham: This information is not collected centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what protective equipment is *(a)* routinely worn by police horses and police dogs in their everyday work and *(b)* available to be used in more dangerous situations. [100373]

Mr. Denham: This information is not collected centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many officers have resigned voluntarily from each police force in each year since 1998–99. [100738]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 4 March 2003]:* Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) collects information annually about voluntary resignations from the police service. Figures for the years 1998–99 to 2001–02 (the latest available) are set out in the table.

While there were 485 more resignations from the police service in 2001–02 than in 1998–99, there were 4,824 more recruits in 2001–02 than in 1998–99. By

31 March 2002, police service strength had reached the record number of 129,603, on track for the Government's targets of 130,000 by March 2003 and 132,500 in 2003–04.

Force	*2001-02*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Avon and Somerset	15	21	16	22
Bedfordshire	9	11	17	25
Cambridgeshire	16	11	22	23
Cheshire	8	22	16	14
City of London	13	8	11	9
Cleveland	13	3	5	12
Cumbria	19	9	8	11
Derbyshire	4	3	12	5
Devon and Cornwall	9	20	18	22
Dorset	15	15	10	23
Durham	10	12	13	6
Dyfed-Powys	2	6	7	5
Essex	19	31	41	41
Gloucestershire	7	15	15	18
Greater Manchester	44	41	57	90
Gwent	7	9	6	8
Hampshire	23	34	67	48
Hertfordshire	23	35	58	40
Humberside	18	18	29	15
Kent	48	40	48	58
Lancashire	12	21	17	40
Leicestershire	30	24	19	39
Lincolnshire	12	7	6	15
Merseyside	12	17	22	21
Metropolitan Police	337	365	435	447
Norfolk	13	7	10	23
North Wales	7	6	9	7
North Yorkshire	12	11	3	11
Northamptonshire	23	9	10	7
Northumbria	27	30	31	37
Nottinghamshire	22	12	12	26
South Wales	18	13	23	28
South Yorkshire	27	22	23	22
Staffordshire	22	25	9	22
Suffolk	8	11	12	19
Surrey	27	26	38	44
Sussex	55	43	41	63
Thames Valley	54	68	90	69
Warwickshire	2	5	5	15
West Mercia	25	16	17	23
West Midlands	76	86	101	133
West Yorkshire	38	32	42	54
Wiltshire	8	15	18	15
England and Wales	1,189	1,235	1,468	1,674

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers, broken down by police force, have taken *(a)* medical retirement and *(b)* sick leave owing to traumatic brain injury in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [99653]

Mr. Denham: This information is not collected centrally. Overall the levels of medical retirement and sickness absence in the police service are decreasing reflecting work to encourage a healthy police service.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police authorities there were in England in each of the last 20 years. [99879]

Mr. Denham: There are 39 police areas in England and this has remained constant for the last 20 years. Each has a police authority responsible for maintaining an efficient and effective police force for that area. In the City of London, the police authority is the City Corporation. In the Metropolitan Police District, the police authority was the Secretary of State, until 3 July 2000, when the Metropolitan Police Authority was established under the Greater London Authority Act 1999.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the percentage increase in the police precept for a Band D property in each English police authority area between 2002–03 and 2003–04; and if he will make a statement. [99901]

Mr. Denham: The level of precepts is determined locally by each police authority.

Precepts must be set by 1 March each year and details should be notified to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister within seven days. Full figures for 2003–04 police authority precepts are not yet available.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* police officers and *(b)* operational police officers per head of population there were in each police authority in England in (i) 2001 and (ii) 2002. [99971]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 28 February 2003]*: The information requested is set out in the tables.

Police force	*Police Officers per 100,000 population*[1]	*Operational police officers per 100,000 population*[2,3]
2000–01		
Avon and Somerset	199.4	188.4
Bedfordshire	184.2	168.0
Cambridgeshire	178.8	155.4
Cheshire	203.8	180.2
Cleveland	253.0	230.8
Cumbria	213.0	201.7
Derbyshire	187.1	164.2
Devon and Cornwall	186.9	176.8
Dorset	195.5	185.3
Durham	262.8	236.2
Essex	179.1	171.4
Gloucestershire	208.7	184.4
Greater Manchester	268.1	248.3
Hampshire	193.0	182.9
Hertfordshire	184.3	170.3
Humberside	217.5	200.9
Kent	209.1	184.0
Lancashire	228.3	210.0
Leicestershire	217.5	199.7
Lincolnshire	191.3	178.9
City of London[4]	—	—
Merseyside	290.8	263.4
Metropolitan Police[4]	351.1	307.6
Norfolk	178.3	159.8
Northamptonshire	186.3	173.6
Northumbria	271.9	247.5
North Yorkshire	174.6	165.4
Nottinghamshire	220.3	204.2
South Yorkshire	245.4	214.0
Staffordshire	200.7	172.2
Suffolk	167.9	161.7
Surrey	191.6	163.0
Sussex	188.5	163.1
Thames Valley	175.0	164.5
Warwickshire	182.4	159.4
West Mercia	171.0	146.2
West Midlands	282.6	248.4
West Yorkshire	227.6	217.1
Wiltshire	183.6	169.5
Dyfed-Powys	219.4	211.6

Police force	*Police Officers per 100,000 population*[1]	*Operational police officers per 100,000 population* [2,3]
Gwent	229.0	213.5
North Wales	219.5	204.3
South Wales	254.0	226.4
Total all forces	234.3	211.9

[1] Calculated using police officer strength at 31 March 2001 and 31 March 2002 reported to Home Office Research and Statistics Directorate.

[2] Calculated using operational officer strength at 31 March 2001 and 31 March 2002 reported to Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary.

[3] Her Majesty Inspectorate of Constabulary figures count as "operational": any member of staff, including covert staff, whose primary role is to directly deliver the overarching aims of the police service.

[4] Officers per 100,000 population for City of London and Metropolitan Police are combined.

Police force	*Police Officers per 100,000 population*[1]	*Operational police officers per 100,000 population* [2,3]
2001–02		
Avon and Somerset	204.8	192.5
Bedfordshire	188.9	173.6
Cambridgeshire	186.5	153.4
Cheshire	209.2	181.5
Cleveland	262.5	232.1
Cumbria	224.0	211.1
Derbyshire	189.0	165.5
Devon and Cornwall	192.4	180.4
Dorset	197.8	186.4
Durham	266.0	238.1
Essex	180.8	172.6
Gloucestershire	209.4	189.3
Greater Manchester	279.1	262.1
Hampshire	194.8	183.1
Hertfordshire	173.7	162.1
Humberside	233.6	214.6
Kent	209.9	192.5
Lancashire	231.1	214.8
Leicestershire	223.7	204.1
Lincolnshire	188.9	175.5
City of London[4]	—	—
Merseyside	293.9	265.2
Metropolitan Police[4]	365.9	319.6
Norfolk	182.6	166.0
Northamptonshire	194.0	182.2
Northumbria	277.8	242.9
North Yorkshire	188.0	175.4
Nottinghamshire	225.9	206.3
South Yorkshire	245.8	216.2
Staffordshire	201.3	175.2
Suffolk	176.9	170.6
Surrey	184.3	155.9
Sussex	190.0	171.8
Thames Valley	176.8	165.2
Warwickshire	189.9	170.0
West Mercia	176.0	155.1
West Midlands	293.3	264.1
West Yorkshire	230.5	220.7
Wiltshire	188.7	174.0
Dyfed-Powys	234.5	227.6
Gwent	239.2	223.1
North Wales	228.1	214.0
South Wales	258.7	230.1
Total all forces	240.4	217.7

[1] Calculated using police officer strength at 31 March 2001 and 31 March 2002 reported to Home Office Research and Statistics Directorate.

[2] Calculated using operational officer strength at 31 March 2001 and 31 March 2002 reported to Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary.

[3] Her Majesty Inspectorate of Constabulary figures count as "operational": any member of staff, including covert staff, whose primary role is to directly deliver the overarching aims of the police service.

[4] Officers per 100,000 population for City of London and Metropolitan Police are combined.

Prison Service

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list construction projects in the Prison Service in each of the last 10 years that have overspent; and if he will make a statement. [100229]

Hilary Benn: This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he plans to review the Prison Service's contract with British Telecommunications; and if he will make a statement. [100230]

Hilary Benn: Following a competitive tender, the Prison Service entered into a contract with BT in 1998 to develop a new telephone system for prisoners. The new system provides improved security for prisoners by removing the need for telephone cards, which had become a source of bullying and "taxing" within prisons. It also improves security for victims and witnesses because it allows individual telephone numbers to be barred to individual prisoners. The system is now installed in more than half the prisons in England and Wales, and is expected to be installed in all prisons by next summer.

The contract was reviewed in the course of last year, and among the changes was a technical adaptation to enable foreign prisoners to make overseas calls at reduced cost. These arrangements are now being piloted in four prisons, and in the light of the conclusion of the pilots, it is hoped to extend the arrangements to all prison establishments later in the year.

Prisoner Numbers

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the projected numbers of inmates for UK prisons are for 2005; and what the capacity of UK prisons will be by 2005. [100340]

Hilary Benn: The projected annual average for the prison population in England and Wales in 2005 is 87,200. The projected useable operational capacity of the estate for 2005 is 77,000. These projected figures are used for the purposes of planning the Prison Service estate. As part of the Review of Correctional Services, the Government is looking to develop a long-term strategy to manage population pressures.

Information relating to Scotland and Northern Ireland is a matter for Ministers in the Scottish Executive and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland respectively.

Prisons

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what the *(a)* uncrowded capacity and *(b)* maximum capacity of prisons in England and Wales were in each year between 1995 and 2002; and if he will make a statement; [99621]

(2) what estimate he has made of the likely *(a)* uncrowded capacity and *(b)* maximum capacity of prisons in England and Wales between 2003 and 2006; [99622]

(3) what forecasts he has made of changes to the total *(a)* operational capacity and *(b)* population of prisons in England and Wales in the period 2003–06. [99608]

Hilary Benn: The information requested is shown in the following table. The terms "maximum capacity" and "uncrowded capacity" are understood as being the useable operational capacity and in-use certified normal accommodation (CNA) respectively. The projections given from 2003 onwards are used for planning purposes. As part of the Review of Correctional Services, the Government is looking to develop a long-term strategy to manage population pressures.

	Currently planned average in-use CAN	*Currently planned average useable operational capacity*	*Forecast average population*
2006	69,500	77,500	91,200
2005	69,000	77,000	87,200
2004	67,000	75,000	81,300
2003	66,000	74,000	74,100
2002	64,200	71,500	70,800
2001	63,500	69,400	66,300
2000	63,400	69,000	64,600
1999	62,400	68,100	64,800
1998	61,300	67,800	65,300
1997	56,300	61,800	61,100
1996	53,200	56,500	55,300
1995	50,200	54,200	51,000

Notes:

1. Population figures exclude the numbers of prisoners held in police cells during that year. The figures are based on data for the last day of each month.

2. In-use CNA: the uncrowded capacity of the estate after adjusting for accommodation out of use.

3. The projected population figures are taken from the Home Office statistical bulletin published on 9 December 2002. A copy of the bulletin has been placed in the Library.

4. Usable operational capacity: the measure used for long-term estate planning purposes. The maximum number of prisoners that the estate could normally hold is up to 2, 000 less than the total certified operational capacity.

Special Constables

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many special constables were serving in Sussex police in the last six months; and what steps he is taking with the Sussex Chief Constable to increase this number. [100485]

Mr. Denham: The latest available figures for the strength of the Special Constabulary are for March 2002, at which time there were 306 special constables serving in Sussex police. Police numbers are now published annually and the next publication will show figures as at 31 March 2003.

The National Policing Plan 2003–06 reaffirms our commitment to introducing measures to increase the numbers and effectiveness of the Special Constabulary. The National Specials Weekend which was held on 21–23 February provided an opportunity for Forces to

> "encourage more recruits by raising the profile of the Special Constabulary and recognising the enormous contribution made by its members to local policing".

And the new Specials website at www.specialconstables.gov.uk has been designed so that specials and their managers can keep abreast of developments and share good practice. Guidance on good practice in all aspects of Specials' local recruitment, management and deployment is being produced by the Home Office with the Association of Chief Police Officers, and will be published on this site.

Travellers

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans to bring forward legislation for stronger enforcement powers for the police to move on unauthorised traveller camps for *(a)* those local authorities who have adequate site provision in their area and *(b)* those local authorities who have been unable to provide sites in their area; and if he will make a statement. [99495]

Mr. Denham: Last July, we announced proposals for new eviction powers for police to deal with unauthorised encampments. These new powers will allow police to take firm action against unauthorised encampments, without the pre-conditions found in the current legislation, where local authorities have made adequate site provision which may be temporary. We will bring forward legislation when parliamentary time allows. Where local authorities have not made adequate site provision, current eviction powers will still be available.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 7 March 2003

PRIME MINISTER

Spain

Mr. Spring: To ask the Prime Minister whether the *(a)* Convention on the Future of Europe and *(b)* Gibraltar were discussed at his meeting with the Spanish Prime Minister on 27 February; what the outcome of the discussions was; and if he will make a statement. [101375]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 6 March 2003]:* My talks with the Spanish Prime Minister on 27–28 February covered a wide range of issues, foremost of which was Iraq. We discussed the Convention on the Future of Europe, and issued a joint statement on the future institutional framework of the European Union. Gibraltar was also discussed briefly. Copies of the statements agreed at the summit have been placed in the Library of the House. The full texts are also available on the website of the British Embassy in Madrid, www.ukinspain.com.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Air and Seaports Police

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what discussions his Department has had with the Home Secretary's Department with a view to creating a combined air and seaports police for the whole of the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [90131]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Whilst security is kept under continual review, especially so following the terrorist attacks in the United States on 11 September 2001, there have been no discussions between the Home Office and the Northern Ireland Office to create a combined air and seaports police for the UK.

However, on 19 December last year, and following a Governments led review of aviation security, the Secretary of State for the Department for Transport did announce the development of a capability to place covert, specially trained armed police officers aboard UK civil aircraft.

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what discussions have been held with the Belfast Harbour Police about extending their jurisdiction to include providing an armed police presence at Belfast City Airport. [90130]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The need for an armed police presence at Belfast City Airport was identified as part of the continual review of security measures at the Airport. As the airport is located within the wider Belfast Harbour estate, it is right and proper that the Belfast Harbour Police should be included in consultations on how to meet the required level of service. These discussions are currently being taken forward by the airport authorities.

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement about security at Belfast City Airport; and when he intends that uniformed armed police will be introduced. [90132]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Security at Belfast City Airport is kept under continual review. The need for an armed police presence was identified as part of this on-going process. This measure should be in place in the very near future.

Broadband Telecommunications

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when broadband telecommunications access will be made available throughout Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement. [100876]

Mr. Pearson: Telecommunications provision is a matter for the private sector. The Government's role is to work with the private sector to encourage the provision of broadband services across Northern Ireland.

To this end the government, through the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, is involved in a range of activities including: technology trials and pilot action work under the UK Broadband Fund; a satellite programme in non-ADSL enabled areas; and a flagship call to stimulate broadband applications, content and services.

In addition, the Government is conducting a feasibility study into broadband aggregation in preparing a telecommunications strategy for the region, taking powers to enable it to provide supportive funding; and working on a Local Access Call which is consistent with EU State Aid Requirements. It is also working with the relevant RoI authorities on the preparation of a Call for cross-border telecommunications infrastructure projects with funding from the third EU Integrated Regional Development Programme (Interreg III).

West Belfast Task Force

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made in implementing the report of the West Belfast Task Force. [100426]

Mr. Pearson: The report of the West Belfast and Greater Shankill Task Forces contained a wide range of recommendations relevant to the work of most Northern Ireland Departments. The Executive provided an initial response in June 2002.

An updated Government response document, detailing progress and planned actions, was provided to the two Task Forces in December and I met and discussed it with them on 23 January. There is regular contact between Departments and the Task Forces liaison group and I plan to meet local representatives again soon to ensure that this momentum is maintained.

TRANSPORT

Railway Standards and Safety Board

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport to which organisations the proposed Railway Standards and Safety Board will report. [98338]

Mr. Jamieson: The Office of the Rail Regulator has proposed that the Rail Safety and Standards Board will follow the company limited by guarantee model used for Network Rail and as such will be accountable to its membership drawn from the rail industry.

Crossrail

Martin Linton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the completion date for *(a)* Crossrail 1 and *(b)* Crossrail 2; and if he will make a statement. [100898]

Mr. Jamieson: Completion dates for Crossrail 1 and 2 would depend on decisions yet to be taken on whether, and if so how, either project should be taken forward.

Airports (South-East)

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how he estimates the demand forecast in the February 2003 South East and East of England Regional Air Services document for Packages 20 and 21 in Annex D would be affected by Packages 6 and 9 in Annex D on the basis of availability of capacity in *(a)* 2011 and *(b)* 2024; and how Packages 6 and 9 would affect the Internal Rate of Return and Net Present Value of Packages 20 and 21. [100859]

Mr. Jamieson: Although not specifically modelled, the impact of one or two additional Gatwick runways (package 6 or package 9) on package 21 (four new runways at Cliffe) would be to lower the economic benefits and financial internal rate of return from investing at Cliffe. Delaying the opening of a new Gatwick runway in package 20 (two runways at Cliffe in 2011 plus a narrow-spaced runway at Gatwick) from 2021 to 2024 reduces the present value of net economic benefits from that package by £180 million; there may also be a small impact on financial returns.

Chancery Lane Accident

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what indications he has received that the Automatic Train Operation System was a contributory factor in the recent Chancery Lane accident on the London Underground; and if he will make a statement. [101321]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer my hon. Friend to my answer of Wednesday 5 March 2003.

Low-cost Airlines

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 11 February, *Official Report*, columns 625–26W, on low-cost airlines, if he will establish rules to provide for compensation for consequential loss to air passengers whose flights are cancelled more than two weeks before departure. [101804]

Mr. Jamieson: Passengers suffering losses as a result of the cancellation of their flight may, if the flight was not part of an ATOL bonded package, seek redress via the courts. Determination of the extent of an airline's liability towards its passengers depends very much on the circumstances of each case, making the establishment of rules on compensation for consequential loss very difficult. The Government therefore does not intend to establish rules but to rely on existing judicial procedures for the settlement of claims.

Invalid Carriages

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what representations he has received from suppliers of *(a)* invalid carriages, *(b)* electric scooters and *(c)* power chairs regarding the road safety implications of their use; and if he will make a statement. [101803]

Mr. Jamieson: I have not received any representations from suppliers of powered wheelchairs or powered scooters (both of which are described in law as "invalid carriages") about their road safety implications.

I will, however, shortly be launching a comprehensive review of the construction and use requirements of these vehicles and suppliers will be among those whose views we will be seeking.

CABINET OFFICE

Smoking

Mr. Grayling: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what policy his Department has adopted on smoking in the workplace. [100948]

Mr. Alexander: The Cabinet Office has a no smoking policy throughout the Department. Smoking is permitted in designated areas only.

Departmental Staff (Industrial Action)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many working days were lost owing to industrial action by staff in *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies in 2002. [101511]

Mr. Alexander: None.

Resilience Strategy

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what recent developments there have been in developing a UK resilience strategy; and if he will make a statement. [101643]

Mr. Alexander: I refer the hon. Member to the written statement my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary made on civil contingencies on Monday March 3, *Official Report*, column 7WS. This statement set out improvements in contingency planning that have taken place and announces the next steps in improving our resilience.

Award Schemes

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will list the award schemes in *(a)* 2001 and *(b)* 2002 promoted by the Department; what their scope was; when the relevant participating organisations are scheduled to be sent results; and whether other parties will be given notification of the results at the same time. [102058]

Mr. Alexander: The Cabinet Office promoted the following award schemes in both 2001 and 2002:

Charter Mark

Charter Mark promotes excellent customer service within the public sector. Applicants are required to demonstrate that they have met a demanding standard.

All 2001 applicants have been notified of the outcome as have most 2002 applicants. Some organisations have been allowed additional time because of changes to the scheme that necessitate a suspension of the assessment process in 2003. The final judging panel for Charter Mark 2002 meets on 19 March 2003.

Organisations are advised of the outcome of their application by letter, within two weeks of the judging panel meeting. hon. Members are then advised of any winners in their constituency.

Central Government Beacon Scheme

The Central Government Beacon Scheme helped share good practice across central government organisations. Beacons hosted study visits and other events. 2002 was the final year of this scheme.

All winners were notified immediately after a final judging panel. The results were published in a directory.

Public Servant of the Year Awards

The Public Servant of the Year Awards, organised by the Chartered Institute for Public Finance and Accountancy, recognise and celebrate individual's contributions to public service, promoting the exchange of ideas and good practice.

Winners for both 2001 and 2002 were announced at a public awards ceremony.

TNT Modernising Government Partnership Awards

The TNT Modernising Government Partnership Awards, organised by TNT UK Ltd, celebrated and encouraged successful partnership working across public services. 2002 was the final year of this scheme.

Winners for both 2001 and 2002 were announced at a public awards ceremony.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Global Fund

Dr. Tonge: Asked the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions she has had with the Global Fund directors on the funding available for the third round of grants in October 2003; and if she will make a statement. [100632]

Clare Short: My Department is in regular contact with the Global Fund.

The primary role of the fund is to provide drugs and commodities for the prevention and treatment of AIDS, TB and Malaria. The UK is firmly committed to fighting these three diseases. We have pledged $200m over 5 years to the Fund, $80m of which has been disbursed. In addition we have committed over £1.5 billion since 1997 to support the development of health systems in poorer countries. Strengthening such systems is vital if the drugs and commodities made available through the fund are to be safely and sustainably supplied to the poor.

Wherever possible the Global Fund should be providing support behind strategies that help deliver sustainable improvements in healthcare. The fund has strong founding principles in this regard but performance to date in this regard has been disappointing.

Our future support for the fund will depend on its effectiveness. It is one of several possible instruments designed to improve basic health care in poor countries.

Afghanistan

Joan Ruddock: Asked the Secretary of State for International Development which major construction projects are under way in Afghanistan with the support of the international community; and when they will be completed. [100986]

Clare Short *[holding answer 5 March 2003]:* There are hundreds of infrastructure projects that are currently underway in Afghanistan. Full details are held on the Afghanistan Transitional Administration's website: www. afghanistangov.org.

In the construction sector the main Kabul-Mazar—Herat-Kandahar refurbishment is due to start this summer and is expected to take between four and six years to complete. Provincial road-repair projects are also underway. Kabul and Balkh airport runways are being refurbished.

A German-funded nationwide rehabilitation of energy infrastructure has been completed. Other energy infrastructure projects are underway.

The World Bank's Emergency Infrastructure project is providing water and sanitation infrastructure to Kabul, Herat, Kandahar, Mazar-I-Sharif and other secondary cities. A nationwide well construction scheme for rural communities is underway.

Bridge, school and hospital rehabilitation and construction are all under way both in the provinces and Kabul, as is the construction of a nationwide network of Women's centres in 15 provinces. The construction of health clinics in provincial areas has begun.

Iraq

John Barrett: (1) Asked the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the impact which military attacks on electricity stations would have on the humanitarian situation in Iraq; [100884]

(2) what assessment she has made of the impact which military attacks on *(a)* roads, *(b)* railways, *(c)* bridges and *(d)* sea ports would have on the delivery of humanitarian relief to Iraq. [100883]

Clare Short: The people of Iraq are already in a fragile humanitarian situation. After years of misrule they are highly dependent on aid under the UN Oil For Food programme, which relies on an efficient distribution network and transport infrastructure. Many are also reliant on electrically pumped water and sanitation systems, especially those in urban areas. In the event of military action, the greater the damage and the longer the disruption to such infrastructure, the greater will be the humanitarian consequences. My Department has been holding close discussions with the Ministry of Defence and US Government about planning to minimise the humanitarian impact of any military action in Iraq. Following any such action, a key priority would then be to repair any critical infrastructure which has been damaged as quickly as possible.

Burundi

John Barrett: Asked the Secretary of State for International Development what steps are being taken to avoid food shortages in Burundi. [100972]

Clare Short: Early warning systems set up by the Food and Agricultural Organisation and operated in collaboration with the Government of Burundi, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), World Food Programme (WFP) and UNICEF have predicted low output from the September to October 2002 agricultural season. The effect of this low availability of food will be compounded by epidemic disease and by further disruption caused by continued conflict in some areas. Access to the worst-affected areas is limited by insecurity. WFP are planning to distribute food re[illegible]FID stands ready to support relief agencies that a[illegible]ng and able to assist those in greatest need.

John Barrett: Asked the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the levels of malaria in Burundi. [100971]

Clare Short: Burundi ranks near the bottom of the international league tables in terms of life expectancy. This is due in large measure to the burden of disease, inadequate nutrition, and poor services. Malaria is one of the major causes of death.

In January the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) quoted the Burundi Department of Epidemiology and Statistics as reporting an increased number of malaria cases for the period October to November 2002 in five provinces. The data are consistent with the occurrence of an epidemic.

Recently after efforts by NGOs the Government of Burundi has agreed to recommend a new drug for treatment as resistance had developed against existing drugs. The new drug is not, however, currently available in sufficient quantities. DFID remains ready to support relief agencies that are able to intervene on behalf of those most affected.

Malawi

John Barrett: Asked the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions she has had with the Government of Malawi regarding it's decision to sell 50,000 tonnes of stored maize; and if she will make a statement. [100919]

Clare Short: The Malawi Government has imported approximately 250,000 tonnes of the national staple grain, maize, for sale to the public with a 50 per cent. subsidy. Substantial imports by private traders from surplus areas in Southern Tanzania and Northern Mozambique are making available maize at prices even lower than the Government subsidised price. High levels of maize in the national grain reserves could seriously jeopardise the maize market following the expected harvest commencing in April.

My Department's officials in Lilongwe have met with the Government of Malawi, other donors and civil society organisations, and have endorsed the decision to reduce maize stocks. This will limit potential market distortion and reduce the heavy fiscal burden associated with the initial purchases of maize and the subsidy. Maize is being offered at the subsidised price to NGOs for their humanitarian programmes and 50,000 tonnes has been offered to private traders for local sales, to supplement their own imports. The Government of Malawi will increase their Strategic Grain Reserve from 60,000 to 100,000 tonnes. Donor-supported humanitarian programmes continue to provide free grain to more than 25 per cent. of the population.

John Barrett: Asked the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the projected levels of food production in Malawi. [100974]

Clare Short: The crop estimates issued by the Malawi Ministry of Agriculture at the end of January 2003 suggest a national maize crop of 2.05 million tonnes if the present good rains continue. The harvest will begin in April. Together with additional food from other crops, national self-sufficiency may be achieved this year. Substantial maize stocks in the strategic grain reserve and continuing humanitarian feeding programmes will mitigate localised areas of deficit.

Burkina Faso

John Barrett: Asked the Secretary of State for International Development what assistance her Department has given to the Government of Burkina Faso since the outbreak of meningitis. [100917]

Clare Short: We contribute to the World Health Organisation (WHO), which is working with national governments to tackle meningitis and other epidemics. In response to the latest meningitis outbreak WHO has provided 500,000 doses of vaccine to Burkina Faso with a further 1 million doses ready to be shipped. Our general assistance to Burkina Faso is provided through multilateral agencies, in particular the EU. Our share of the substantial EU programme is just over £5 million.

TREASURY

Cigarette Smuggling

Chris Grayling: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many Customs and Excise officers are dedicated to tackling cigarette smuggling; and how many are based at each port of entry. [100825]

John Healey: For the number of law enforcement staff within Customs and Excise I refer the hon. Member to the answer the then Financial Secretary to the Treasury gave my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz) on 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, columns 246W–47W.

Customs' law enforcement staff are deployed on the basis of risk assessment and intelligence, and regularly move between ports of entry and inland locations. No details can be given of the number of officers deployed in individual locations at particular times; Exemption 4 (Law enforcement and legal proceedings) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information applies.

DEFENCE

Service Personnel (Vaccination)

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the vaccines given to troops preparing to go to the Gulf, stating in each case *(a)* whether they have been approved by the Medicines Control Agency and *(b)* whether they are administered voluntarily or compulsorily; and if he will make a statement. [92142]

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish details of the current precautionary inoculation programme for troops likely to serve in the Gulf. [93200]

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the course of inoculations that are being given to HM Forces personnel being deployed for possible operations against Iraq; and which drugs are administered and over what period of time. [93646]

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what vaccines are being administered to UK troops deploying to the Gulf in addition to anthrax vaccine. [95926]

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what inoculations are being offered to members of the British armed forces for the purposes of health protection prior to potential conflict in the Gulf. [99677]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer January 2003]:* All vaccines offered to Service personnel are administered on a voluntary basis. The standard Service public health vaccinations or boosters listed below, all of which are licensed by the Medicines Control Agency, are offered to personnel deploying to the Gulf region if they are not already up-to-date with these vaccinations:

Hepatitis A/Typhoid
Meningococcal Meningitis C
Poliomyelitis
Tetanus/Diphtheria
Tuberculosis
Yellow Fever
Rubella (Female/healthcare personnel only)

In addition, all troops deploying on operations to the Gulf are being offered immunisation against anthrax. Immunisation against Hepatitis B is offered to certain groups at special occupational risk if they are not already up-to-date with this vaccination. Immunisation against Rabies is also offered to personnel deploying to the Gulf region who work with animals. These vaccinations are also licensed by the Medicines Control Agency.

Vaccination against smallpox is being offered to a cohort of specialist NBC personnel and certain medical personnel, some of whom are deploying to the Gulf region. The smallpox vaccine is not currently licensed, but has been tested for potency and is being used on the basis of expert medical advice.

All Service personnel deploying to the Gulf region are also being provided with antimalarial tablets which should be started a week before deployment, and continue until 28 days after leaving a malarial area.

Biological and Chemical Weapons

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the relative success rates using *(a)* in-vitro non-animal techniques and *(b)* animal experiments to develop antidotes to biological and chemical weapons in the last five years. [100403]

Dr. Moonie: The Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (Dstl) at Porton Down has the remit to provide the United Kingdom and its Armed Forces with safe and effective protection in the event of Chemical or Biological weapons being used against them. Wherever possible, scientists at Dstl Porton Down are developing in-vitro models to replace and reduce the numbers of animals involved. However, to undertake this research effectively necessitates some research involving the use of animals.

It is not possible to determine the relative success rates of the use of in-vitro techniques and animal experiments. However, both elements make an invaluable contribution to the medical countermeasures programme.

In-vitro non-animal techniques are routinely used to screen candidate therapeutic drugs and treatments. These include the use of donated human skin to screen prospective barrier cream formulations, and the use of cell and tissue cultures to evaluate new antibiotics and improved anti-convulsant drugs.

Over the last five years the research programme at Dstl Porton Down to develop new generation vaccines for plague and anthrax has continued to progress well: the candidate plague vaccine is already in clinical trials; and the candidate anthrax vaccine is expected to enter clinical trials later this year. Additionally, the results of several years' research has lead to the proposal for a new nerve agent pre-treatment and a change in one of the drugs contained in the triple therapy Combopen. These drugs are currently undergoing studies to satisfy the regulatory and licensing requirements. The Ministry of Defence is committed to these improvements in the provision of treatment for nerve agent poisoning as they offer not only an enhancement in survivability but also a significant decrease in incapacitation following poisoning by nerve agents.

Depleted Uranium

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what studies have been undertaken of the effects of the use of depleted uranium during the Gulf War of 1991 on *(a)* coalition forces, *(b)* Iraqi forces and *(c)* Iraqi civilians. [100277]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 3 March 2003]:* Many independent reports have been produced that consider the battlefield effects of using depleted uranium (DU) munitions, but none has found widespread DU contamination sufficient to impact the health of the general population or deployed personnel. These include work by the US RAND Corporation, the US Institute of Medicine, the Royal Society, the European Commission, the United Nation Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Health Organisation (WHO). The two Royal Society reports on "The Health Hazards of Depleted Uranium Munitions" (2001, 2002) support the Ministry of Defence's view that risks to the health of soldiers on the battlefield are minimal except for a small number of extreme cases.

Under the auspices of the independent Depleted Uranium Oversight Board, a test for DU in urine is currently being developed and we aim to make it available to all those who wish to be tested later this year. In parallel with this, we will also carry out an epidemiological study which will examine the link between exposure to DU and health.

No UK troops who served in the Gulf experienced the highest level of DU. However, thirty-three US soldiers were highly exposed when their vehicles were accidentally hit by DU rounds. Consequently, seventeen of them have retained embedded DU shrapnel for the last twelve years. The health of this group is closely monitored by the US Government and so far they do not show signs of health problems attributable to DU.

At the end of August 2001, the World Health Organisation (WHO) despatched a technical team to Baghdad to establish specific projects to explore areas of health concern in Iraq. These discussions, carried out in an atmosphere of full collaboration and co-operation with the Iraqis, culminated in four project proposals covering health surveillance of cancers, health surveillance of congenital malformations and renal diseases, studies to explore health effects of environmental risk factors (including DU) and an implementation plan for cancer control. The WHO sent details of the proposals to the Iraq Ministry of Health in the last quarter of 2001, but a response is still awaited.

Meanwhile, WHO has contracted the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) and the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm to complete the first phase of extensive epidemiological studies to investigate environmental factors that may lead to increased incidences of various cancers. The first meeting to schedule and detail the studies has been called for mid-March. The Iraqis will participate in the studies, in full collaboration with these institutes.

X-Bank Radar

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what research his Department will undertake into the radiation effects of an X-bank radar on UK soil; [100665]

(2) what discussions he has had with the US on the siting of *(a)* an X-bank radar and *(b)* interceptor missiles in the UK; and if he will make a statement. [100666]

Mr. Hoon: The Ministry of Defence keeps in touch with the United States Administration on possible future developments in missile defence. The United States has undertaken to extend missile defence coverage and make missile defence capabilities available to the United Kingdom, subject to technological developments and our willingness to participate in such a system. This would involve the siting of interceptors in Europe. Decisions on whether the UK should seek to acquire missile defences, and the location and provision of interceptors, are for the future, in the light of the prevailing security circumstances at the time. We have no reason to expect a request to site a missile defence X-band radar in the United Kingdom. The Ministry of Defence does not therefore intend to undertake or commission any research into radiation effects.

Reserves Forces

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of the Reserve Forces served with a call up notice have applied to the Hardship Fund; what percentage of Reserve Forces served with a call up notice this represents; how many applications to the fund have been approved; how many have been denied; and if he will make a statement. [100823]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 5 March 2003]:* Only members of the Reserve Forces who have been accepted into permanent service may apply for Reservist Standard Award (RSA) and Reservist Hardship Award (RHA). As at 4 March, 4, 111 Reservists had been accepted into Service. As at that date the Ministry of Defence had received 638 applications for RHA, representing 16 per cent. of those accepted for service. Of those applications received, 571 had been awarded; 13 had been refused; and 54 were under consideration.

Service Deaths (Property Return)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what rules govern the return of personal property, items and effects to the families of military personnel who die or lose their lives while on service at home or overseas; what items must be retained or held in order to send elsewhere; in what circumstances and at what rank discretion may be exercised over the return of property; what rules govern disclosure of information concerning withheld items; what remedy is available to families denied property; and what steps he will take to ensure that bereaved families are made aware of their rights. [101066]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Ministry of Defence Police

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the backlog is of refresher training for constables and sergeants in the Ministry of Defence Police; and what the equivalent figures were in each of the last five years. [101152]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence Police Agency does not keep data for the backlog in training in previous years. Until 11 September 2001 all essential training identified in the staff reporting system was conducted. Since then a backlog for some refresher training modules has built up. This is mainly due to officers not being available to undertake the training because of increased duty requirements, and a difficulty in back-filling essential posts for training because of restrictions on overtime working.

Currently 78 per cent. of the Force is qualified in Personal Safety Training which is approximately 7 per cent. short of the requirement. The force target for Firearms qualified personnel is 87 per cent., whilst currently the percentage of officers qualified is 88.9 per cent..

Territorial Army

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Territorial Army reservists have *(a)* died and *(b)* been injured while on service in each of the last 10 years. [101155]

Dr. Moonie: Although work is in progress to establish a comprehensive database of deaths, the following figures come from a manual trawl of information held in the Casualty and Compassionate Cell. The figures include six Service personnel whose documentation indicates that they were serving as TA Non-Regular Permanent Staff at the time of their death. It is not possible to provide figures for injuries since this information is not recorded centrally.

Year	*No. of TA & TA NRPS personnel deaths*
1992	6
1993	2
1994	1
1995	1
1996	5
1997	1
1998	1
1999	7
2000	6
2001	3
Total	33

Mr. David Johnson

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on his Department's treatment of Mr. David Johnson, a constituent, relating to his compulsory retirement. [101769]

Dr. Moonie: Mr. David Johnson is being retired at the normal retirement age for his grade in the Ministry of Defence, which is 60. I will write to the hon. Member about this case and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

National Lottery Grants

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the amount per head in National Lottery grants was in each *(a)* constituency and *(b)* county in the UK, in the last year for which figures are available. [100963]

Mr. Caborn: I will write to the hon. Member as soon as the information is available, placing copies of my letter in the Libraries of both Houses.

Paralympics

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the International Paralympic Committee's decision to ban events for athletes with an "intellectual disability" at the 2004 Paralympics in Athens. [101190]

Mr. Caborn: During the 2000 Paralympic Games in Sydney several athletes who were subsequently found not to have met the eligibility criteria competed in events for intellectually disabled athletes. As a result the International Sports Federation for Persons with Intellectual Disability (INAS-FID) had its membership of the International Paralympic Association (IPC) suspended and athletes with an intellectual disability were not able to compete in IPC events. Membership has since been reinstated. However, athletes with an intellectual disability will remain banned from IPC competitions until such time that the IPC are satisfied with the procedures regarding the eligibility of athletes with an intellectual disability.

In October 2002 the IPC decided on the programme of events for the 2004 Paralympic Games in Athens in order to meet deadlines for the organisation of the Games. The INAS-FID were given additional time to continue with the development of a new eligibility system. The IPC recognised that some progress had been made by INAS-FID on a more stringent verification procedure, but other areas such as the development and implementation of protest procedures were still not in line with IPC policy. The IPC felt that these events could not go ahead in a fair manner at the 2004 Paralympics and that there was a risk of ineligible athletes competing. As a result, a final decision was made on 1 February 2003 that events for intellectually disabled athletes would not be included in the Athens 2004 Paralympic Games.

The IPC has stated that they will continue to support the INAS-FID in its efforts to develop a system that does meet the conditions required by the IPC. Once an acceptable system is achieved the IPC will look at allowing athletes with an intellectual disability to participate in IPC events.

National Lottery (Scotland)

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and what plans she has to devolve the distributor arrangement for the operation of the National Lottery in Scotland. [101744]

Mr. Caborn: The Scottish Executive already issue directions in relation to the distribution of Lottery money to their Arts and Sports Councils as provided by the 1998 Scotland Act.

In February, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State met Elaine Murray, Deputy Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport in the Scottish Executive, to discuss the ongoing Lottery Review, and to consider how best to ensure that the distribution of Lottery money in Scotland meets Scottish needs and priorities.

My department intends to announce proposals in early Summer.

European Capital of Culture

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what she estimates to be the cost to public funds of the process for identifying a candidate city to be European Capital of culture in 2008. [101806]

Mr. Caborn: The competition to select the UK nomination for European Capital of Culture 2008 attracted twelve high-quality bids from cities across the UK. As part of the assessment process, the independent advisory panel met on several occasions and panel members visited all twelve cities, before recommending a shortlist. The panel is now considering the shortlisted bids in more detail. Panel members will visit the shortlisted cities and hold further meetings before deciding on their final recommendation to Ministers. Consultants have been engaged to support and advise the panel and the Department throughout the process.

The competition process is estimated to have cost £125,000 up to 28 February 2003. This figure covers the costs of consultancy advice, meetings of the advisory panel, and panel members' visits to the competing cities. It does not include staff costs.

It is not yet possible to be certain about the remaining costs of the process up to the final announcement of the UK nomination in June. However, we currently estimate that the overall total cost will be around £200,000 excluding staff costs.

Mr.Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if the recommendations of the independent advisory panel on which city should go forward as the UK nomination for European Capital of culture in 2008 will be published. [101805]

Mr. Caborn: We expect to announce the final choice of city to go forward as the UK nomination for European Capital of Culture 2008 in early June. Each of the shortlisted cities will be given feedback and a report on the competition, including the panel's final recommendation, will be published.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Cyprus

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will put a copy of the Annan 3, proposals for a Cyprus Summit in the Library. [R] [101248]

Mr. MacShane *[holding answer 6 March 2003]:* We have received a copy of the UN proposals for a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement in Cyprus, in our capacity as Guarantor Power. However, we continue to abide by the UN Secretary-General's request for confidentiality while the settlement process is ongoing. As soon as the UN Secretary-General makes his proposals public, we will arrange for a copy to be placed in the Library.

Economic Reform

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment the Government has made of whether the EU is on course to meet the Lisbon target of making the EU the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion by 2010; what method of assessment is being employed; and if he will make a statement; [101480]

(2) what evaluation the Government has made of the state of the Lisbon process; and if he will make a statement; [101478]

(3) what assessment the Government has made of enlargement's effect on the Lisbon strategic goal of making the EU the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion by 2010; and if he will make a statement. [101607]

Mr. MacShane: On 17 February 2003 HM Treasury published a detailed report entitled Meeting the Challenge: Economic reform in Europe. This report updates last year's White Paper Realising Europe's potential, evaluates progress on economic reform and identifies priorities for action in the short and medium term. It also considers the Lisbon process in the light of enlargement. The report finds that there has been clear progress towards the Lisbon goal in a number of areas. Nevertheless, there remains a great deal to be done. Copies of the Treasury report have been placed in the libraries of the House.

Convention on the Future of Europe

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a further statement on the Government's welcome for the Franco-German contribution to the debate on Europe's future. [101604]

Mr. MacShane: The Government welcomes the Franco-German contribution to the debate on Europe's future. Strong French and German engagement is essential to take the debate on the future of the EU forward towards a more democratic, accountable and effective European Union. The paper is good for the UK. It contains important proposals which the UK has advocated, such as a full-time Chair of the European Council. The UK will continue to engage with confidence in the debate on the Future of Europe.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the Government's policy is on the status accession countries due to join the EU in 2004 should have at the Inter Governmental Conference convened to agree any draft emerging from the Convention on the Future of Europe; and if he will make a statement. [101608]

Mr. MacShane: We warmly welcomed confirmation in the Copenhagen European Council conclusions that the new Member States will participate fully in the work of the next IGC.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Council Tax

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment his Department has made of the effect on England of having different council tax bands in Scotland, England and Wales. [101367]

Mr. Leslie: Since the inception of the council tax, the bands have been different in Scotland, England and Wales. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has not made any assessment of the effect of this.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, if he will bring forward legislation to make provision for differential regional council tax bands between London and the rest of the country. [101368]

Mr. Leslie: The existing powers in the Local Government Finance Act 1992 allows the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister to create regionally different council tax bands. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has announced that work will commence on a council tax revaluation in April 2005 coming into effect on 1 April 2007 and the banding structure will be decided nearer to the revaluation. No decisions have yet been taken.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what his policy is on the capping of police authority council tax precepts for 2003–04. [100732]

Mr. Raynsford: Individual authorities, not central Government, set council tax levels. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister will be looking very carefully at the level of council tax this year on a case by case basis when all the figures from local government have been received. The Office of the Deputy Prime does not rule out using our reserve capping powers to protect local council taxpayers.

Fire Services Act

John McDonnell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what reasons underlie *(a)* his proposal to remove his functions under section 19 of the Fire Services Act 1947 and *(b)* his decision not to seek to amend section 19. [100716]

Mr. Raynsford: The proposed amendment of section 19 of the Fire Services Act 1947—subsections 19(1) and (2) will be retained—is an essential element of the new framework for a modern fire service set out by the Independent Review of the Fire Service, chaired by Professor Sir George Bain. As the Review identified, the primary objective must be to make the service more responsive to local needs and better placed to deliver community safety. Moving to a flexible risk-based approach to fire cover, as part of a new integrated risk management planning process, offers a real prospect of reducing the incidence of fire, and deaths and injuries from fire, as well as from other threats to community safety. The repeal, rather than amendment, of part of section 19 will assist the early implementation of this approach.

The proposed repeal is also consistent with the principle of cutting back on consent regimes and red tape set out in the White Paper "Strong Local Leadership—Quality Public Services", published in December 2001. Repeal will place responsibility for decisions on local fire cover with democratically accountable local authorities, after consultation with their local communities.

Women's Unit

Mr. Laws: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the annual cost of the Women's Unit was for each of the past three years; what the projected cost is for 2003–04; and if she will make a statement. [99894]

Ms Hewitt: I have been asked to reply.

The budgets for the financial years specified were:

Year	£
1999–00	1,689,575
2000–01	1,742,557
2001–02	1,996,000
2002–03	2,631,000

For the financial year 2003–04, the budget figures are yet to be confirmed by DTI.

The Women and Equality Unit supports the Ministers for Women to bring about measurable improvements in the position of women which benefit society more generally and to promote equality for all.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Chorley Magistrates Court

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what categories of benches there are at Chorley Magistrates' Court. [100841]

Yvette Cooper: Family Panel, Youth Panel, Drug Testing and Treatment Order Panel, Out of Hours Applications Panel, Licensing and Betting Committee and the General Purpose Committee.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many magistrates operate on the bench at Chorley. [100840]

Yvette Cooper: Sixty four.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many courtrooms are available in Chorley. [100837]

Yvette Cooper: Three.

Smoking

Chris Grayling: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what policy the Department has adopted on smoking in the workplace. [100953]

Ms Rosie Winterton: My Department's smoking policies aim to provide smoke-free working conditions for those staff who want them, while offering limited facilities for smokers, and help for those who wish to stop smoking. Local arrangements may differ, but in general, those offices and courts with a smoking policy will enforce "no smoking" in staff corridors, toilets, lifts and other common areas, and at meetings and seminars. Before local arrangements are introduced the views of smokers and non-smokers are sought and any differences resolved by agreement.

Public Guardianship Office

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what complaints procedure is in place in the event of the Public Guardianship Office breaching its charter. [100930]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Public Guardianship Office (PGO) will shortly be publishing a new guide to complaint handling entitled "Putting Things Right". Copies of this booklet will be made available to customers of the PGO who ask for guidance on how to complain. The information contained within the booklet will be available on the PGO Website and the booklet will be capable of being downloaded from the website.

I will write to all MPs providing a copy of the booklet, and place copies in the Libraries of both Houses.

Court of Protection

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what steps are being taken to monitor the quality of judicial decisions, with particular reference to those of the Court of Protection. [100929]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Judicial decisions of the Court of Protection are subject to appeal in the ordinary way. There is a system for internal review under Rule 54 of the Court of Protection Rules 2001 of judicial decisions made (whether by the Master, Assistant Masters or Nominated Officers) without an attended hearing, and for appeal to the High Court and beyond under Rule 55 and section 105 of the Mental Health Act 1983.

The rules on appeals apply equally to appeals against decisions made under the Enduring Powers of Attorney Act 1985.

There are some schemes to appraise part-time judges. However, independence of the judiciary is paramount and the aim of any appraisal is not to question judicial decisions but to observe the judges approach to, and handling of, the case.

Financial Penalties

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will make a statement on the *(a)* maximum and *(b)* minimum penalties for non-payment of financial penalties imposed by magistrates' courts. [99874]

Yvette Cooper: When a defaulter is brought before the court, the magistrates will have a number of enforcement options available to them. The sanctions to ensure the payment of fines include an attachment of earnings order if the defendant is in employment or deductions from social security benefits if they are not working. The maximum amount that can be deducted from an unemployed person is £2.70 per week. Other options include the issue of a distress warrant, (which empowers the person executing it to seize a person's goods or money to the value of the sum owed), or as a last resort, the court may decide to commit the defaulter to prison. The Courts Bill currently before Parliament proposes a number of new arrangements to facilitate the enforcement of fines, including new penalties such as clamping vehicles and entering the fine in the Register of County Court judgments.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Housing Benefit

Sir Archy Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether he plans to change the capital limits in housing benefit. [100751]

Malcolm Wicks: We have no plans to change the capital limits in Housing Benefit.

However, with the introduction of the Pension Credit from October 2003, the upper capital limit will be abolished for those pensioners receiving the guarantee credit, and savings below £6,000 (£10,000 for care home residents) will have no effect on entitlement.

Sir Archy Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the expected changes to the IT that local authorities use following introduction of the housing benefit allowance pilots. [100748]

Malcolm Wicks: We are working with the pathfinder authorities and their software providers to identify the IT changes needed to introduce the new scheme and to collect the information required to evaluate it.

Sir Archy Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the new combined housing benefit/council tax benefit claim form to be introduced from April 2003; and whether it will be used for all claimants. [100753]

Malcolm Wicks: We are launching a new combined Housing Benefit (HB) and Council Tax Benefit (CTB) claim form from April 2003. The new form, called the HCTB1, will replace the NHB1(HB) and NHB1(CTB) forms currently issued to customers who claim Income Support, income-related Jobseeker's Allowance or the Minimum Income Guarantee, and the new Pension Credit from October.

The new form has been developed in consultation with local authorities and is designed to collect all the information needed by authorities to decide on a claim, thus removing the need for them to issue their own claim forms and for customers to complete three different forms to claim HB and CTB.

Local Authorities are responsible for administering HB and CTB, and remain responsible for designing and issuing their own claim forms to people who are not claiming another income-related benefit.

Sir Archy Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what additional training is planned for rent officers in preparation for the housing benefit allowance pilots. [100749]

Malcolm Wicks: The Standard Local Housing Allowances will be based on Local Reference Rents, which are currently determined by Rent Officers. Rent Officers therefore already have the necessary expertise to calculate the standard allowances. Detailed guidance will be issued to Rent Officers in the pathfinder areas before the pilot starts.

Sir Archy Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will introduce the housing benefit allowance reforms to the social rented sector using different timetables for Scotland, Wales and England. [100750]

Malcolm Wicks: We are considering developing a system of standard housing allowances for tenants in the social rented sector to be tested in a suitable pathfinder area. A timetable for introducing this scheme has not yet been decided.

Health and Safety

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment has been made of the potential health impact to employees of industries and businesses, with specific reference to dry cleaners, resulting from the use of perchloroethylene in day to day operations. [99267]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Health and Safety Executive has undertaken a comprehensive human health risk assessment of perchloroethylene (perc) under the EU Existing Substances Regulation (ESR). HSE acts jointly with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to form the UK Competent Authority for ESR activities. The assessment, European Union Risk Assessment Report: Tetrachloroethylene. Draft ESR Risk Assessment Report, August 1996, includes workers exposed as a result of dry cleaning, copies of which have been placed in the Library.

In the workplace, perc is subject to the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002. Employers are required to ensure that exposure to perc is reduced to at least the level of the Occupational Exposure Standard assigned to it (50ppm averaged over an 8 hour reference period, and 100ppm for a short-term exposure averaged over 15 minutes).

Winter Fuel Payments

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much money was spent last year on winter fuel payments. [101616]

Mr. McCartney: Latest estimated figures for Winter 2001–02 show that expenditure on Winter Fuel Payments was £1.7 billion.

Benefit Payments

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions for what reason people must obtain a personal invitation document before requesting a Post Office card account application form; and why the application form is not sent out alongside the personal invitation document. [100792]

Malcolm Wicks: The Post Office card account is only available to benefit, state pension and tax credit recipients. A Personal Invitation Document from one of the Paying Departments is the means by which the Post Office can identify such people and will be used by the Post Office as one form of identification for opening an account.

The Post Office card account is only one of three options available to customers wishing to access their money at the Post Office. The other options are a basic bank account or certain standard accounts.

The Post Office card account is a service provided by Post Office Limited and not the Government. It is, therefore, the role of the Post Office, like any other account provider, to issue application forms for its own products.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 10 February, *Official Report*, column 522W, on the Direct Credit Scheme (Pensions) what methods of payment will be available under the exceptions service. [98115]

Malcolm Wicks: Progress is being made towards an alternative method for paying those customers who we are unable to pay by Direct Payment. This is expected to be available from October 2004. The options for this service are still being developed and it will be available at a range of outlets which will include Post Office branches.

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners in Derbyshire have migrated from over-the-counter benefit payments to direct bank transfers. [98892]

Malcolm Wicks: The number of pensioners in Derbyshire that have migrated from payments collectable over the counter at post offices to payment into a bank or building society account is 293 as at 28 December 2002 compared with the same records from data available 4 weeks earlier.

Some customers who are paid direct into an account can also collect their benefit in cash at post offices through network banking arrangements at the Post Office. There is no data available on the number of benefit claims collected in this way.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether benefit claimants who have agreed to have their benefits paid direct into a bank account under the payment modernisation programme are allowed to change their mind and apply for a Post Office Card Account. [96599]

Malcolm Wicks: Customers will be provided with information to help them make an informed choice as to the type of account, most suited to their needs. Some customers may subsequently decide that their needs have changed and choose another type of account, including a Post Office card account.

Overseas Pensioners

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if all non-ACT pension payments to UK citizens living abroad are being made on time; and if he will make a statement. [99730]

Mr. McCartney: This is a matter for Alexis Cleveland, Chief Executive of The Pension Service to reply. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Alexis Cleveland to Mr. Steve Webb, dated 26 February 2003:

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions has asked me to respond to your recent Parliamentary Question asking if all non ACT pension payments to UK citizens living abroad are being made on time; and if he will make a statement.

During 2002, the Department for Work and Pensions International Mail contract was responsible for over 115 million items of mail to overseas destinations. Of these, 1,565,172 items related to retirement pensions.

Whilst every effort is made to ensure items destined for overseas customers arrive at their destination within the designated timescales, (5 calendar days for Europe and 10 calendar days for rest of the world destinations) unfortunately, sometimes delays are experienced.

The most common causes of delay to overseas customers payments are: problems within foreign postal authorities. For example, strikes and adverse weather conditions, which affect the transportation of mail. Also national holidays in the receiving country can add delay. In addition to this, many foreign destinations have introduced an increased security policy at ports and airports, which is resulting in delays before the mail enters the recipient country.

The Department for Work and Pensions has little influence in preventing delays in the receipt of payments once the items are handed over to the foreign postal authority.

However, all delays reported by customers are taken very seriously and every effort is made to ascertain the reason for the delay, and an estimation of the severity of the problem, although we are reliant on foreign postal authorities communicating delays or problems within their delivery network.

I hope that this is helpful.

Health and Safety Executive

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many *(a)* staff and *(b)* inspection staff were employed by the Health and Safety Executive in each year since 1997. [99763]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The information requested is as follows:

	Inspectors	*Staff in post (inc Insp)*
1st April 1997	1442	4077
1st April 1998	1437	3932
1st April 1999	1497	3880
1st April 2000	1507	3937
1st April 2001	1534	3894
1st April 2002	1625	4050

Unemployment

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what further measures he will take to help communities with high levels of long term unemployment. [96376]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Our active labour market policies, delivered by Jobcentre Plus, are helping people move from welfare into work in all parts of the country.

Since April 2002, Jobcentre Plus has helped over a million people into jobs and, since they started, the New Deals have helped more than three quarters of a million people move from welfare into work.

We are building on this success, providing more help for those who face the greatest barriers to work. Last year, for example, we launched StepUP in 20 pilot areas to provide transitional jobs for long-term unemployed people who have not secured sustained employment through the New Deals.

We have introduced Employment Zones specifically to help long-term unemployed people. These are based in some of the most employment deprived areas in the UK. The 15 Zones have already helped over 30,000 people move into jobs. From October 2003 we are extending the Employment Zone approach to lone parents and New Deal returners in existing Zone areas.

In addition, Action Teams for Jobs are assisting jobless people from a range of disadvantaged groups in the most employment deprived areas of the country. So far, the Teams have helped over 60,000 people move into work. We are enhancing the support provided by Action Teams, investing new funds, worth some £7 million per year, to help them support employment and transport projects that will benefit their local communities.

We are continuing to improve and extend the range of help available to people living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Beginning next year, we will pilot a programme of intensive support for people living in some of those areas that have the highest concentrations of worklessness.

HEALTH

Primary Care Services

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer of 18 January, *Official Report*, column 285W, on primary care services, what impact he expects this policy to have on the number of acute hospitals in England and Wales. [91591]

Mr. Hutton: Our intention is to provide more consultations and procedures outside hospitals and closer to where patients live. It is for local health communities to consider how their development of primary care services will affect demand for secondary care but the development of new or expanded services in primary care can be funded from the increased resources for primary care trusts which was announced in December 2002.

On 14 February, we published new guidance on configuring hospital services "Keeping the NHS local: a new direction of travel." It showed how smaller hospitals in particular have the potential to offer a wider range of services for local people than has previously been thought possible.

Research Ethics Committees

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many of the annual reports of multi-centre research ethics committees have been *(a)* written, *(b)* circulated to local research ethics committees and *(c)* made available for public inspection. [94745]

Mr. Lammy: The Central Office of Research Ethics Committees (COREC) has received annual reports for 2001–02 from all ten multi-centre research ethics committees in England. These reports are held by and available on request from COREC.

Specialised Health Services

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the statement made by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary during the Adjournment debate on 21 January on brain injury, *Official Report*, columns 50–52WH, what factors underlay his decision to postpone until 2004–05 the transfer of responsibility for specialist commissioning to consortiums of PCTs. [96768]

Mr. Hutton: No decision has been taken to postpone the transfer of responsibility for commissioning specialised services to primary care trust (PCT) consortia. PCTs have been commissioning specialised services since April 2002 on a collaborative basis via their regional specialised commissioning groups (RSCGs) and their local specialised commissioning groups. RSCG membership is made up of PCT representatives, who replaced health authority representatives last April.

Waiting Times

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in Greater London have been waiting more than 13 weeks to see a consultant at the latest available date. [97836]

Mr. Hutton: At 31 December 2002, within the London Directorate of Health and Social Care area, 45,222 patients where waiting more than 13 weeks for first consultant outpatient appointment following general practitioner written referral.

Call-up of Medical Reservists

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will assess which *(a)* strategic health authorities, *(b)* NHS trusts and *(c)* primary care trusts will be particularly affected by the loss of medical reservists if they are called up; and if he will make a statement. [99364]

Mr. Hutton: The number of medical reservists likely to be called-up is small. The Department is working closely with the Ministry of Defence and the National Health Service to ensure the effect of these call outs is kept to a minimum.

Clinical Waste

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what responsibility is retained by NHS trusts for clinical waste handled by a contractor. [99557]

Mr. Hutton: Section 34 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 places "duty of care" requirements on importers, producers, carriers, keepers, treaters or disposers of "controlled waste". As waste producers, National Health Service trusts have responsibility to take all such measures as are reasonable in the circumstances to prevent unlawful depositing, handling or disposal of waste; the escape of waste from their control; to ensure the waste is only transferred to authorised persons and that appropriate records are maintained.

Where a NHS trust employs a waste disposal contractor to dispose of its waste it must satisfy itself by a process of monitoring and auditing that the clinical waste collection and disposal process is adequate and complies with appropriate legislation.

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, if he will make a statement on the procedure for disposing of waste human tissue from the NHS. [99556]

Mr. Hutton: Identifiable human tissue is classified as clinical waste and needs to be dealt with by an authorised waste handling facility. The only appropriate treatment for identifiable human tissue is incineration.

The National Health Service will follow recognised procedures for appropriate segregation and disposal of waste human tissue, as laid down in advice and guidance documentation. NHS Estates has published *Safe disposal of clinical waste—whole hospital policy guidance* and the Health and Safety Commission has published *Safe disposal of clinical waste.*

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, if he will list the current contracts entered into by the NHS for the disposal of waste human tissue; and if he will place the terms of the contracts in the Library. [99555]

Mr. Hutton: This information is not collected centrally. The National Health Service Purchasing and Supply Agency (PASA) has no national contract in place and so NHS trusts negotiate their own contracts in this area.

Because of this, we are not able to place the terms of these contracts in the Library.

However, in the last 24 months waste management has been highlighted by PASA as an area with significant national spend and supply chain dynamics, suggesting that a national purchasing strategy should be developed. To this end, PASA has produced a procurement guide for total waste management and is working on a common set of terms and conditions for all trusts to use.

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, if he will make a statement on the judgement in the case of R *v.* Eurocare Environmental Services Ltd, at Chester Crown Court on 14 February. [99776]

Mr. Hutton: Any breach of the law with regard to clinical waste is a serious matter. We will consider the judgment carefully and identify any further action we should take.

Staff Numbers

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many staff were employed by the *(a)* Medical Devices Agency, *(b)* Meat Hygiene Service and *(c)* Medicines Control Agency in each year since 1997; and how many of these were inspection staff in each case. [100017]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is shown in the table.

Total Staff Numbers employed by the Organisations shown from 1997–98 to 2002–03

Agency	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–00*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
Medical Devices Agency (MDA)	131 (3,7)	137 (5,12)	139 (6,10)	136 (9,16)	151 (10,21)	155 (9,18)
Meat Hygiene Service (MHS)	1,384 (1,247)	1,543 (1,328)	1,485 (1,273)	1,489 (1,276)	1,498 (1,310)	n/a
Medicines Control Agency (MCA)	414 (23)	436 (24)	445 (21)	436 (19)	475 (25)	490 (27)

Notes:

1. The data for 1997–98 to 2001–02 inclusive are those published in the annual reports and accounts of the organisations. For 2002–03 the latest available estimate is shown, except in the case of the MHS where the data are not yet available.
2. Data in brackets are the number of inspection staff included in the total figure for the year shown. In the case of the MDA the data for inspection staff show the numbers of full-time and part-time staff respectively.

Clinical Quality Costs

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, if he will list the grants funded by his Department for clinical quality for which organisations may apply; how much funding was made in the last financial year; how many awards were made; and what their administrative costs were. [99950]

Mr. Hutton: The Department does not currently have a programme of grant funding in place, for which organisations are free to apply, which is targeted specifically as part of its clinical quality programme. National Health Service bodies are expected to fund clinical quality programmes from their mainstream budgets.

Camden and Islington Health Action Zone

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much was spent in each year since its inception by the Camden and Islington Health Action zone; and if he will make a statement on its future. [100532]

Mr. Hutton: Expenditure by Camden and Islington Health Action Zone has been as follows:

Year	*Expenditure*
1999–00	£1,453,000
2000–01	£1,893,000
2001–02	£1,904,000

Information on expenditure for 2002–03 is not yet available.

Resource allocations for primary care trusts were announced on 11 December 2002 by means of HSC 2002/012. The allocations include health action zone revenue resource allocations for 2003–04 to 2005–06, including those relating to Camden and Islington Health Action Zone. In line with Shifting the Balance of Power, Camden and Islington Primary Care Trusts will be responsible for decisions about how these resources will be used.

GP Contracts

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, what attempts the Government made to improve General Practitioners recruitment; what the Government are offering in new contracts for GPs; what incentives there are for women GPs who have taken career breaks to return to the profession; and if he will make a statement. [100300]

Mr. Hutton: The Government are committed to recruiting and retaining more general practitioners and has introduced a range of recruitment and retention initiatives to increase the workforce. These include: incentive payments and a returners scheme to encourage qualified general practitioners who have left general practice or have taken a career break to return; the extension of the flexible careers scheme to GPs to provide centrally supported opportunities for part-time and flexible working; the extension of the National Health Service childcare strategy to primary care; international recruitment and delayed retirement payments to encourage older GPs to extend their working lives.

The new GP contract, if accepted, will improve the attractiveness of family medicine as a career choice for doctors and encourage those who are already GPs to stay in the profession.

Inventures

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the variant bid for Inventures included in the unsuccessful William Pears Group bid was used in the successful bid from the Miller Group. [100572]

Mr. Hutton: There was no variant bid for Inventures. No variant bid from Health Estates was included in the Miller bid.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much he has spent on legal fees with regard to the Miller Group bid for Inventures. [100571]

Mr. Hutton: Approximately £27,000 has been spent on legal fees in connection with the sale of Inventures to Miller/Bank of Scotland.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who was privy to the heads of terms documentation between the Miller Group and NHS Estates regarding the sale of Inventures. [100414]

Mr. Hutton: The following organisations were privy to the agreed heads of terms documents between Miller/Bank of Scotland and NHS Estates:

Successful consortia and their advisors;
Department of Health, including NHS Estates and their advisors;
Her Majesty's Treasury and the National Audit Office.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, what discussions he has had with the fraud squad on the subject of the sale of Inventures. [100415]

Mr. Hutton: There have been no discussions with the fraud squad regarding the sale of Inventures.

NHS Workforce Statistics

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, when he plans to publish the annual NHS Workforce statistics. [100498]

Mr. Hutton: National Health Service workforce statistics will be published shortly.

Pharmacies

Mr. Pollard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had with the National Pharmaceutical Association regarding the Office of Fair Trading recommendations on pharmacies; and if he will make a statement. [100493]

Mr. Lammy: I met the National Pharmaceutical Association on 4 February this year to hear their preliminary views on the Office of Fair Trading's report.

These views and the Association's formal response received last month will help inform the Government response which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry is co-ordinating.

Departmental Policies (Northampton, South)

Mr. Tony Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will set out, including statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Northampton, South constituency, on the effects on Northampton of his Department's policies and actions since June 2001. [100811]

Mr. Lammy: In June 2001, there were 2,164 patients at the acute trust in Northampton waiting over 26 weeks for outpatient appointments. In December 2002 there were none. Similarly in June 2001, there were 594 patients waiting over 12 months for inpatient appointments. In December 2002, there were 224.

At the Northampton General, £300,000 of capital expenditure has been invested in modernising accident and emergency services. Northampton Primary Care Trust covering Northampton will receive increases in funding of over 28 per cent. over the next three years, to help local Modernisation.

A&E care performance at Northampton General has shown improvement, as a result of an additional £275,000 investment for the four-hour initiative and £115,000 funding for the establishment of the emergency care collaborative. Northampton General is confident to achieve the interim target of 90 per cent. by 31 March 2003.

This is just a small sample of "investment" in local Modernisation.

Parliamentary Questions

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will answer the parliamentary questions numbered *(a)* 98918 and *(b)* 98920 tabled by the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon and *(c)* 98919 tabled by the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) [101582]

Mr. Lammy: I refer the hon. Member to the replies I gave him on Monday 3 March 2003, *Official Report*, column 885W and column 887W, and to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) on Monday 3 March 2003, *Official Report*, columns 888–89W.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 10 February, ref, 95606, what his reasons are for not providing figures for the estimated financial out turn of NHS trusts; and if he will cite the section of the Code of Conduct on Access to Official Information on which he based his decision. [97947]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 13 February 2003]:* These figures are a snapshot in time and in many cases are subject to rapidly changing conditions. Their publication could be misleading. They are for internal discussion and advice only. They are not intended to replace published audited annual accounts which are the accepted vehicle for reporting National Health Service financial performance.

The figures are considered to be exempt under Part II of the Code of Practice on Access to Government information.

Youth Offending

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will ask the Home Secretary to incorporate the Commission for Health Improvement into the new inspection regime for youth offending teams. [100555]

Hilary Benn: I have been asked to reply.

A full-time representative of the Commission for Health Improvement (CHI) will take part in the inspection of youth offending teams (Yots). This post will be jointly funded. The inspections will cover the health of young people being dealt with by Yots.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Accountancy Services

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the total cost to his Department was for accountancy services in 2002. [101562]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Information on the costs classified as accountancy services in the accounts of the Department in 2002 is £120,136,44.

Age Diversity

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when his Department completed its diagnostic review for compliance with the Government's Code for Practice of Age Diversity in Employment; and what changes his Department plans to make following the review. [99421]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: My Department is committed to ensuring that there is no unfair discrimination on the basis of age. My Department took steps to embed the provisions of the Government's Code of Practice on Age Diversity in Employment following the completion of a diagnostic review in 2000. Age Diversity has been integrated into the Department's equal opportunity policies in accordance with the Cabinet Office's Performance and Innovation Unit report–"Winning the Generation Game" 2000.

In my Department, staff outside the Senior Civil Service can choose to retire between age 60 and age 65, subject to satisfying normal fitness and efficiency requirements.

Class Sizes

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, what proportion of primary school pupils in England are in classes of *(a)* 20 and under, *(b)* 24 and under, *(c)* 26 and under, *(d)* 28 and under and *(e)* 30 and under; and if he will make a statement. [99817]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The information requested is shown in the table.

Maintained Primary Schools (1): Number of Classes and Pupils (2)

January 2002
England

	Classes taught by one teacher		
	No. of classes	*No. of pupils*	*% of pupils*
Classes with:			
20 or fewer pupils	18,440	290,317	[illegible]
21 to 24 pupils	25,864	588,228	14.9
25 to 26 pupils	21,251	542,625	13.8
27 to 28 pupils	24,645	678,429	17.2
29 to 30 pupils	38,594	1,142,816	29.0
31 or more pupils	21,382	703,097	17.8
Total	150,176	3,945,512	100.0

Notes:

1. Includes middle schools as deemed.
2. Classes as taught during the one selected period in each school on the day of the census.

Source:
Annual Schools Census

The infant class limit of 30 or below became a statutory duty on admissions authorities from September 2001. Section 4 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, defines an infant class as one in which the majority of pupils will reach the age of 5, 6 or 7 in the course of the school year.

Political Studies

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans he has to include political studies as part of the school curriculum during GCSE years. [100439]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: Our document 14–19: opportunity and excellence sets out our plans for the curriculum at Key Stage 4. In the document we explain that the compulsory curriculum comprises those subjects that are essential for progression or personal development. Although there is no GCSE subject in political studies, Citizenship became a compulsory subject in schools in September 2002. Learning about democratic and political processes is an important part of Citizenship education. Pupils learn about the institutions, issues, problems and practices of our democracy and develop an understanding of the importance of playing an active part in the political process.

Free School Meals

Mr. Tony Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many extra children in Northampton, South will be entitled to free school meals when the child tax credit and working tax credit is introduced in April. [100786]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: Her Majesty's Treasury estimate that an additional 75,000 children in England will, from 6 April 2003, be entitled to receive free school lunches by virtue of their parents claiming appropriate tax credits. No local breakdown is available.

Smoking

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what policy his Department has adopted on smoking in the workplace. [100950]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: My Department has agreed a smoking policy with the trade unions which gives staff a non-smoking work environment, but provides separate smoking areas. Smoking is not permitted on any Departmental site other than in the small number of clearly designated smoking rooms.

My Department also provides details of organisations to help and support staff to give up smoking.

Work Placements

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many university students his Department and associated agencies has supported or sponsored with a work placement in the last year; what his policy is on work placements; what plans he has to develop such schemes; and what his policy is on paying their university fees. [98543]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: In 2002 my Department has sponsored:

12 sandwich students;

2 Windsor Fellows;

1 Kings Fund student;

3 students on work experience;

16 Ethnic Minority Summer Development Programme participants;

2 undergraduates employed on either part-time or vacation-only contracts.

Our policy is to support work placements as a means of enabling students to gain valuable experience of the workplace. We are currently considering the possibility of developing an additional work experience programme for students at higher education institutions around the Department's four sites. The Department does not normally pay the university fees of students on work placements.

Jigsaw Research

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, what the purpose is of the project being carried out by Jigsaw Research for his Department. [101399]

Mr. Stephen Twigg *[holding answer 6 March 2003]:* The Department's Strategic Framework *Delivering Results—A Strategy to 2006* sets out a commitment to deliver prompt, responsive and consistently excellent services to our customers. The research being carried out by Jigsaw Research, an independent market research company, is our way of measuring the quality of service we provide in response to letter, email and telephone enquiries and will help identify areas for improvement.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Health and Safety

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what guidance there is to *(a)* prevent and *(b)* deal with industrial accidents; and if she will make a statement. [100472]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I have been asked to reply.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is responsible for providing information and advice about health and safety at work.

HSE produces a very wide range of publications to reduce risks and protect people including guidance on the law, Approved Codes of Practice, leaflets, information sheets and booklets on the prevention of accidents, managing specific risks and hazards, and the management of occupational health and safety.

Last year, HSE produced over 300 new publications, sold nearly 1 million books and issued over 6 million free leaflets.

Ethics Advice

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what advice her Department gives to *(a)* consumers, *(b)* investors and *(c)* businesses on issues of (i) human rights, (ii) environmental protection, (iii) the use of forced labour and child labour and (iv) crime and corruption in overseas countries. [94484]

Ms Hewitt: The Department of Trade and Industry and other government departments provide a range of information, most accessibly through their websites, on conditions in a range of overseas countries. This will assist consumers, investors and businesses to make informed decisions for themselves on specific issues of concern to them. For example, the Foreign & Commonwealth Office's website (www.fco.gov.uk) offers country profiles, most of which include sections on human rights. Also published on this site is the FCO's Annual Report on Human Rights that gives comprehensive information on human rights for abuses worldwide and UK action. The Department for Work and Pensions provides information on the ILO's core labour conventions including those on forced and child labour in its sustainable development report (available at www.dwp.gov.uk), and contributes to a variety of other Government information sources, notably the Corporate Social Responsibility website (www.societyandbusiness.gov.uk). The FCO offers information to travellers on certain aspects of crime in some overseas countries and tailored information to UK firms and investors planning to do business in a specific overseas country. Information on this second topic is available on the TPUK website (www.tradepartners.gov.uk). The UK has also signed up to the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, a set of recommendations for good corporate behaviour that include amongst other things recommendations on human rights, bribery and the environment—they are available at www.oecd.org.

Sustainable Construction

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what involvement her Department had in the development of the Sustainable Communities Plan regarding sustainable construction. [100367]

Mr. Wilson: The Department was party to the development of the Sustainable Communities Plan and contributed on a number of issues including sustainable construction techniques and the principles of "Rethinking Construction" for new and refurbished house build.

North Sea Oil

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what has been the oil recovery rate from UK North Sea reserves for each year of production; and what steps she is taking to maximise this rate. [99792]

Mr. Wilson: UK North Sea oil production figures were provided in my answer of 16 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 799W. The table below set out UK Continental Shelf oil production for each year as a percentage of estimated remaining reserves. The Government is working closely with industry through PILOT, the oil and gas task force, to maximise economic recovery of the UK's hydrocarbon resources. A number of initiatives are being pursued helping to positively assist in this objective, including:

stimulating activity on fallow areas;

changes to the licensing regime to encourage more appraisal and exploration activity;

promotion of asset trading;

encouraging new entrants to the North Sea to ensure that assets are in the hands of those best placed to exploit them;

encouraging innovative approaches to maximising recovery from "brown" fields;

promoting the use of enhanced oil recovery techniques; and finding ways to maintain and enhance the skills base.

UK Oil Production as a percentage of remaining reserves

Year	*Percentage*
1975	0.09
1976	0.53
1977	1.53
1978	2.06
1979	3.10
1980	3.50
1981	3.89
1982	4.91
1983	5.75
1984	6.46
1985	6.79
1986	6.20
1987	6.39
1988	6.32
1989	5.07
1990	5.05
1991	4.66
1992	4.54
1993	4.78
1994	6.10
1995	6.87
1996	6.41
1997	6.36
1998	7.36
1999	8.23
2000	8.47
2001	8.17

Industrial Injuries

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many claimants have had final settlements through each of the top 10 claims handlers involved in the compensation claims for *(a)* chronic bronchitis and emphysema and *(b)* vibration white finger of former coalminers. [99964]

Mr. Wilson: The total number of full and final settlements is:

Top 10 Solicitors	*Respiratory Disease*
Thompsons	8,851
Hugh James Ford Simey	10,317
UDM	5,044
Raleys	6,174
Mark Gilbert Morse	2,188
Browell Smith & Co	3,583
Beresfords	831
Graysons	2,911
Watson Burton	1,977
Randall Lloyd Jenkins & Martin	1,091

Top 10 Solicitors	*VWF*
UDM	8,759
Thompsons	4,149
Browell Smith & Co	6,339
Raleys	3,999
Graysons	1,219
Hugh James Ford Sime	4,448
Watson Burton	1,830
Towells	1,674
Beresfords	540
Kidd & Spoor Harper	1,416

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, how much has been paid to claimants through each one of the top 10 claims handlers involved in the compensation claims for *(a)* chronic bronchitis and emphysema and *(b)* vibration white finger of former coalminers. [99966]

Mr. Wilson: The total compensation paid to claimants is:

Top 10 Solicitors	*Respiratory Disease*
	£ million
Thompsons	123.6
Hugh James Ford Simey	129.1
UDM	30.8
Raleys	67.9
Mark Gilbert Morse	18.7
Browell Smith & Co	44.0
Beresfords	2.4
Graysons	17.3
Watson Burton	13.5

Top 10 Solicitors	*VWF*
	£ million
UDM	102.2
Thompsons	7.5
Browell Smith & Co	64.7
Raleys	4.8
Graysons	2.9
Hugh James Ford Sime	44.4
Watson Burton	32.7
Towells	23.9
Beresfords	11.4

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much has been paid to date to each of the top 10 claims handlers involved in the compensation claims for *(a)* chronic bronchitis and emphysema and *(b)* vibration white finger of former coalminers. [99967]

Mr. Wilson: The amount of costs paid is:

Top 10 Solicitors	*Respiratory Disease*
	£ million
Thompsons	22.3
Hugh James Ford Simey	23.4
UDM	8.2
Raleys	10.3
Mark Gilbert Morse	4.4
Browell Smith & Co	7.9

Top 10 Solicitors	*VWF*
	£ million
UDM	8.4
Thompsons	7.4
Browell Smith & Co	6.4
Raleys	4.8
Graysons	2.9
Hugh James Ford Sime	4.6

Top 10 Solicitors	*Respiratory Disease*	*Top 10 Solicitors*	*VWF*
Beresfords	1.1	Watson Burton	2.6
Graysons	4.3	Towells	2.0
Watson Burton	3.7	Beresfords	0.8
Randall Lloyd Jenkins & Martin	2.7	Kidd & Spoor Harper	1.5

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many claimants have had interim payments to date through each of the top 10 claims handlers involved in the compensation claim for *(a)* chronic bronchitis and emphysema and *(b)* vibration white finger of former coalminers. [99965]

Mr. Wilson: The total interims payments made is:

Top 10 Solicitors	*Respiratory Disease*	*Top 10 Solicitors*	*VWF*
Thompsons	9,597	UDM	8,684
Hugh James Ford Simey	6,890	Thompsons	9,664
UDM	2,391	Browell Smith & Co	4,597
Raleys	4,343	Raleys	4,818
Mark Gilbert Morse	1,394	Graysons	4,334
Browell Smith & Co	3,568	Hugh James Ford Sime	3,194
Beresfords	126	Watson Burton	3,131
Graysons	1,556	Towells	2,125
Watson Burton	1,003	Beresfords	1,202
Randall Lloyd Jenkins & Martin	646	Kidd & Spoor Harper	1,276

Oil Stocks

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has had with her opposite numbers in the International Energy Agency since 1 January over strategic oil stocks; and when she next plans to hold discussions with them on this matter. [101808]

Mr. Wilson: My officials are in regular contact with the International Energy Agency about the oil market situation and strategic stocking arrangements, as are officials from other member states. Most recently the oil market situation was discussed, along with other agenda items at the routine IEA Governing Board meeting on 20 February. The next biennial IEA Ministerial Meeting is planned for the 28 and 29 April but the IEA Governing Board is ready to meet as, and when, circumstances require it to do so. Issue relating to oil stocks were also discussed at the EU Energy Ministerial informal meeting in Thessalonika on 22 February 2003, which I attended.

Iraq

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps the Government is taking to ensure that British companies are able fairly to compete for reconstruction work in post-conflict Iraq. [101372]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 6 March 2003]:* The Government's immediate focus is on the disarmament of Iraq. War is a last resort and is not inevitable. We will take full account of the interest of UK companies if and when the situation in Iraq changes.

Written Questions

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many named day written questions were tabled to the Department between 15 October 2002 and 24 February 2003; how many that received a holding answer were given a substantive answer *(a)* within three days, *(b)* within seven days, *(c)* within 14 days, *(d)* within 28 days and *(e)* over 28 days later; and what procedures the Department has in place to monitor performance on answering (i) Parliamentary Questions and (ii) ministerial letters. [99428]

Ms Hewitt: The information relating to named day parliamentary questions is as follows:

	Answered					
Total	*On named day*	*Within 3 days of holding reply*	*Within 7 days of holding reply*	*Within 14 days of holding reply*	*Within 28 days of holding reply*	*Over 28 days of holding reply*
423	176	191	40	16	0	0
		Per cent.				
	42	77	16	6	0	0

The department's parliamentary branch uses its internal database to closely monitor the progress on individual parliamentary questions from the time of tabling through to providing answers to hon. Members.

The Cabinet Office, on an annual basis, publishes a report to Parliament on performance of departments in replying to Ministerial correspondence. The Report for 2001 was published on Friday 24 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 674W. The Report for 2002 will be published in due course.

Post Offices

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what consultation took place when considering the design of the PIN pads installed in post offices to enable people to withdraw benefits and other payments in cash; over what period of time the consultation took place; how many meetings were held; and what the costs were of *(a)* the PIN pads, *(b)* installation, *(c)* training and *(d)* making the PIN pads available for use in post offices. [101360]

Mr. Timms: These are matters which fall within the day-to-day responsibility of Post Office Ltd. I have therefore asked the Chief Executive to reply direct to the hon. Member.

Employers' Liability Insurance

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent meetings the Construction Department in her Department has had with the insurance industry to discuss rising premiums for employers' liability insurance; and if she will make a statement. [100670]

Mr. Wilson: DTI's Construction Sector Unit (CSU) is a member of the Association of British Insurers working group on Health and Safety. Officials attended the meeting of the group on 10 February to discuss rising insurance premiums, especially associated risk management issues, with representatives of the insurance industry. Representatives of construction industry bodies also participated in the meeting. CSU will continue to work with its insurance and industry contacts in connection with the construction-specific aspects of the insurance difficulties.

The Department for Work and Pensions is currently undertaking a review of Employers' Liability Compulsory Insurance (ELCI), which is due to be completed by Spring 2003. It would be inappropriate to make a statement while that review is still in progress.

Quality Mark

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will extend the health and safety checks offered as part of the Quality Mark scheme to other sectors of industry. [101350]

Mr. Wilson: The Health and Safety checks offered within the QM Scheme are not exclusive to the Scheme, but merely standards within industry, which we have adopted as appropriate standards the scheme.

The Quality Mark link with CHAS (Contractors Health and Safety Assessment Scheme) is a commercial arrangement (a 20 per cent. discount is available on combined liability insurance premiums for firms with up to 20 manual employees).

To further reduce bureaucracy for both contractors and public sector clients, and to encourage improved health and safety standards, Constructionline and the CHAS are sharing data gathering, maintenance and display for mutually registered firms, and clients. This new arrangement means that contractors need to complete only one, standard application form. It also means Constructionline and CHAS clients can access both schemes from one location; thus saving time and money for all involved.

Carbon Risk Management

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if her Department will undertake an assessment of banks' carbon risk management strategies. [101353]

Mr. Wilson: The DTI has no specific plans to undertake an assessment of carbon risk management strategies for banks.

However, the DTI are co-sponsors, with DEFRA and DFID, of Project FORGE. In November 2000, Project FORGE published guidelines on environmental management and reporting for the financial services sector. The guidelines are aimed at helping the financial services sector to identify, understand, control and communicate environmental impacts, risks and opportunities.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a response to the recent findings in Carbon Finance and the Global Equity Markets published by the Carbon Disclosure Project. [101299]

Mr. Wilson: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and the Government has welcomed the recent report published by the Carbon Disclosure Project. The Government has no current plans to respond specifically to the findings of the report.

Renewables

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her estimate is of the impact on the cost of electricity generation as a result of meeting her target of 20 per cent. of electricity from renewable sources by 2020. [99685]

Mr. Wilson: We expect industry to respond to the framework that we have established and demonstrate they can achieve our goals at an acceptable cost. On that basis, as set out in the Energy White Paper, our aspiration is by 2020 to double renewables' share of electricity generation from our 2010 target and we will pursue policies to achieve this.

The impact on the cost of generation of a 20 per cent. share of renewables in 2020 will depend on the generation costs of the renewables technologies and those of the alternative forms of generation. There would also be additional systems costs as a result of the increase in forms of intermittent generation such as onshore and offshore wind.

A renewables strategy for the decade to 2020 will be elaborated in 2005–06, in the light of progress on the current Renewables Obligation. But if—purely as a working assumption—support were to be provided on the basis of a buyout price of 3p/kWh, as for the current Renewables Obligation, the maximum annual cost to consumers of moving from a 10 per cent. share to 20 per cent. could by 2020 be between £900m and £1.1 billion (assuming additional generation required of between 30 and 35TWh). For a lower buyout price the cost to consumers would be commensurately reduced. Additional annual systems costs could amount to between £140 million and £400 million.

General Agreement on Trade in Services

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, Minister for Women what consultations she has conducted with women's organisations regarding the negotiations in the General Agreement on Trade in Services. [100054]

Ms Hewitt: I meet regularly with the Women's National Commission on a range of issues, and women's organisations are represented on, and play an active part in, the Trade Policy Consultative Forum which myself or my noble Friend, the Minister for Trade and Investment, chair. On two occasions now the Forum has been dedicated to discussing the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) negotiations. Moreover, women's organisations were included as part of the public consultation that my Department recently undertook on these negotiations and, in February, my officials met again with the Women's National Commission to further discuss GATS issues.

Department Hospitality

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her Department's hospitality budget *(a)* is in 2002–03 and *(b)* was in each of the last three years; and how much was left unspent at the end of each financial year. [99573]

Ms Hewitt: The latest estimated expenditure on entertainment in 2002–03 of the Department of Trade and Industry is £1,193,000.

The expenditure for the previous three years was as follows:

	£000's
1999–00	887
2000–01	1,089
2001–02	1,165

Details of original budgets for these three years are not available.

Smoking

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what policy her Department has adopted on smoking in the workplace. [100925]

Ms Hewitt: Smoking is only permitted in designated smoking rooms and areas. My Department keeps this policy under review in response to emerging scientific and medical evidence.

BNFL

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether BNFL owns *(a)* BNFL Instruments Inc, *(b)* Manufacturing Sciences Corporation, *(c)* Sierra Nuclear Corporation, *(d)* Westinghouse Electric Company LLC and *(e)* ABB; and what the current market value of each company owned by BNFL is. [95967]

Mr. Wilson: BNFL owns 100 per cent. of the share capital of BNFL Instruments Inc, Manufacturing Sciences Corporation, and Sierra Nuclear Corporation. None of these entities has a material net worth in BNFL's balance sheet and there is currently no market valuation available.

BNFL acquired the Westinghouse Electric Company LLC in March 1999 for a total consideration of £641 million (which comprised a mixture of cash and liabilities assumed). This was disclosed in BNFL's annual report and accounts for 1998–99. The acquisition of ABB's nuclear business was completed in April 2000 for £300 million. This transaction is disclosed in BNFL's 1999–00 annual report and accounts and the business has now been fully integrated into the Westinghouse entity. In line with the requirements of the relevant accounting standard BNFL reviewed the carrying value of these acquisitions for potential impairment at the end of the first full financial year following acquisition. There was no evidence of impairment at that stage and there have been no subsequent events or changes in circumstances which might indicate that the carrying value may not be recoverable. This was disclosed under note 1,c in the 2002 Annual report and accounts.

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many claims for compensation BNFL inc has against the United States Department of Energy; and what the total amount being claimed is. [95968]

Mr. Wilson: BNFL operates at several sites in the United States owned by the United States Department of Energy. The company were awarded contracts at the Advanced Mixed Waste Treatment Plant (AMWTP) and the East Tennessee Technology Park (ETTP) worth circa $850 million and $250 million respectively. The contractual terms at each site are different and the process for claims can also vary. The amount of formal claims BNFL has at any site therefore will vary over time and is subject to continuous negotiation. However the total can represent a reasonable percentage of the contract value and run in to millions of dollars.

Oil Reserves

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, what *(a)* the current level and *(b)* the official required level of the national oil reserves is. [101161]

Mr. Wilson: Provisional data from oil companies suggest that at the end of January 2003, the UK had oil stocks equivalent to 78 days consumption of petroleum products, which is above the stock level of 67½ days worth of consumption of oil products that the UK is obliged to hold in accordance with EU legislation.

Viasystems Group

Mr. Moore: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what arrangements she has made with *(a)* Viasystems Group Inc and *(b)* others acting on its behalf in respect of the repayment of monies owed to the Government following the bankruptcy of the Viasystems Group Inc; and if she will make a statement. [96908]

Alan Johnson: We have received payments totalling £3m to date. Following Viasystems Group Inc.'s application for Chapter 11, the US court has approved a revised settlement agreement between the DTI, Viasystems Group Inc. and Viasystems Inc. in respect of the remaining £9 million owed to the Government. Under this agreement the £9m principal will be repaid in instalments over the period 2008–2010. The DTI will receive interest on the outstanding principal at 3 per cent. per annum through to 2008, and thereafter at Bank of England base rate plus 2 per cent.

The DTI will also seek to recover the outstanding £9 million through the realisation of its charge over the former Viasystems Tyneside Limited site in North Tyneside. Any recoveries that are made under this realisation will be applied to principal payments due under the revised settlement agreement in reverse order of maturity.

Business Insurance

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent assessment she has made of the effect of increases in the cost of insurance cover for businesses upon the competitiveness of British business; and if she will make a statement. [101060] [Transferred]

Nigel Griffiths: The Government is concerned by increases in the cost of insurance for businesses, particularly Employer's Liability Insurance (ELI). A recent survey of small businesses for the Small Business Survey found that only 2 per cent. of firms spontaneously cited insurance as a major obstacles to the success of the business, although when prompted 27 per cent. of firms said insurance was an obstacle to success. It is difficult to assess the effect on competitiveness of these increases in the cost of insurance. The Government's review of the ELI system, led by the Department for Work and Pension, aims to examine the impact of the current system on employers and make recommendations for change accordingly. It is due to report in Spring 2003; details are available at http://www.dwp.gov.uk/publications/dwp/2002/health-safety/eli-review/index.htm.

The Office of Fair Trading is currently engaged in a short study of the liability insurance market, also due to report in Spring 2003, which will help inform the Government's review of the ELI system.

Energy White Papers

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which press and broadcasting outlets were briefed on the Energy White Paper prior to its publication; and if she will set out the reasons she gave interviews to the media on the contents of the White Paper prior to her statement to Parliament. [100078]

Ms Hewitt: The Energy White Paper was laid before the House at 10am on Monday 24 February. Only after its publication did my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and I jointly hold a press conference at the Department of Trade and Industry.

As I reported to the House on 24 February, *Official Report*, column 27W drafts of the Energy White Paper were leaked to the press ahead of the publication. Such action is a discourtesy to the House and I deplore it wholeheartedly.

Prior to publication on the day of the White Paper I gave a limited number of broadcast interviews in which I discussed the Government's more general objectives in formulating a long-term policy for energy.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to paragraph 4.3 of the Energy White Paper, Cm 5761, what resources she plans to commit to keep open the nuclear option. [100080]

Mr. Wilson: The Energy White Paper does not rule out the possibility that at some stage in the future new nuclear build might be necessary, but does not include new measures or resources targeted at nuclear new build.

In December 2002 we published the results of a nuclear and radiological skills study. In response, a task group is being formed across the sector to develop and implement a workforce development strategy. This industry-led initiative will be important regardless of whether new build is pursued in future.

In addition, measures outlined in the White Paper to streamline the public inquiry process for major energy projects and to introduce the European emissions trading scheme could benefit the option of nuclear energy, were a decision taken in future to proceed with new nuclear power stations.

Sizewell B

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry for what purposes the spent nuclear fuel at the Sizewell B nuclear plant is being stored. [100037]

Mr. Wilson: This is a matter for British Energy. Decisions on whether to reprocess spent nuclear fuel, or to hold it in long-term storage for direct disposal or reprocessing at some time in the future, are a matter for the commercial judgement of the owner of the spent fuel within the overall regulatory framework.

Miners' Pension Funds

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress she has made in reviewing the division of surpluses on miners' pension funds. [100869]

Mr. Wilson: As I announced in a joint statement with trustees on 17 January 2002, the Government has been in discussion with the trustees of the British Coal Staff Superannuation Scheme and the Mineworkers' Pension Scheme on the future of the Government Guarantee for those Schemes, including the division of fund surpluses.

Against the background of large falls in world stock markets, which continue to have a major effect on investment performance, the trustees have been advised that the Government does not feel it would be right to adjust the current 50/50 surplus sharing arrangements.

A number of other changes to the Guarantee arrangements have been agreed. In addition, discussions were to have continued to consider different methods of paying for the Guarantee and other ways of guaranteeing bonuses, where these different methods might offer advantages to Scheme members whilst not representing a significant additional burden on the taxpayer. However, NACODS South Wales have instigated a Judicial Review concerning the Guarantee to which the Government is obliged to respond. As a consequence, until this has been resolved, the Government does not feel it would be right to continue those discussions with the Trustees.

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the value of the Government's share of surpluses on miners' pension funds was in each year from 1994. [100870] [Transferred]

Mr. Wilson: The cash value of receipts to Government from surpluses from the two schemes since payments began in 1996–97 are as follows:

Cash £ millions	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–00*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
BCSSS	39.5	39.5	107.1	107.1	110.3	216.0	216.0
MPS	0.0	113.0	113.0	0.00	315.0	196.0	196.0
Total	39.5	152.5	220.1	107.1	425.3	412.0	412.0

Bureaucracy

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the forms that her Department requires private sector businesses to complete and return. [98084]

Ms Hewitt: A list of the forms the Department requires private sector business to complete is not held centrally.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Municipal Waste

Norman Baker: To ask the secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Lewes of 24 February, *Official Report* column 98W, on municipal waste, what percentage of household waste she anticipates will be recycled or composted by 2005 and what percentage of household waste will have value recovered by 2005 based on current achievements; and in respect of the waste recovery targets, what percentage of each target she estimates will be delivered by incineration. [100386]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 3 March 2003]:* We are taking action aimed at delivering the targets for 2005 in Waste Strategy 2000, which were set out in my answer to the hon. Member of 26 February.

In 2000–01, 11 per cent. of household waste in England was recycled or composted; provisional estimates based on Best Value Performance Indicators suggest this figure may increase to almost 13 per cent. for 2001–02. In 2000–01 value was recovered from 21 per cent. of municipal waste, 9 per cent. of this was through incineration with energy recovery.

Big Cats

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many big cats she estimates are present in the wild in the UK. [99219]

Mr. Morley: The Department is not aware of any confirmed instances of big cats (i.e. lion, tiger, leopard, jaguar, cheetah, snow leopard, clouded leopard and puma) of unknown origin being found out of captivity in England in the last 20 years.

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her projection is for UK carbon dioxide emissions in each year from 2003 to 2020, *(a)* based on Kyoto criteria and *(b)* including international air travel. [99200]

Mr. Meacher: UK carbon dioxide emissions projections to the year 2020 were published in 2001 in the UK's Third National Communication to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The figures, which take account of effect of measures in the UK Climate Change Programme, are reported at five yearly intervals and are summarised in the table below. They are expressed as million tonnes of carbon per year (MtC/yr). The table includes the actual emissions data point for 2000. UK carbon dioxide emissions projections do not include emissions from international aviation which are reported separately, in accordance with international guidelines.

Year	*2000*	*2005*	*2010*	*2015*	*2020*
Total UK CO_2 emissions (MtC/yr)	152.1	141.7	133.0	134.3	134.0

Emissions from international aviation were about 7.8 MtC/yr in 2000, and projections made on the same basis as for the Third National Communication suggest that they may rise to about 8.6 MtC/yr in 2005 and 10.2 MtC/yr in 2010. Projections beyond 2010 are increasingly uncertain but emissions in 2020 could be between 14 and 16 MtC/yr.

Refrigerators

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the length of time needed to clear the backlog of refrigerators and freezers stored by local authorities in each region, assuming a continual arrival of more such appliances at the current flow. [99228]

Mr. Meacher: The current backlog of stored refrigerators and freezers is expected to be cleared within 9–12 months. There are no regional figures.

GM Crops

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the occasions since June 2001 when the Government has received representations from the US authorities in favour of *(a)* allowing GM crops to be planted in the UK and *(b)* encouraging the consumption of GM food. [99207]

Mr. Meacher: The Government and representatives of the US authorities are in regular contact and exchange views on issues relating to GM crops and food. However, details of these exchanges are not recorded centrally. In general, representations made to my Department from the US authorities relate to acceptance of imports of agricultural commodities from GM crops grown in the USA, rather than direct pressure to allow GM crops to be planted in the UK or encouraging the consumption of GM food.

Carbon Neutrality

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what support has been given or is planned to be given to local authorities to assist towards obtaining carbon neutral status. [99265]

Mr. Morley: In the recently published Energy White Paper the Government set out its strategy to help local authorities take a more proactive role in helping to create a low carbon economy. This includes establishing a new beacon councils theme on sustainable energy, promoting energy efficiency as areas to be considered for Public Service Agreements and reviewing guidance to Energy Conservation Authorities on complying with the requirements of the Home Energy Conservation Act.

The Carbon Trust and the Energy Saving Trust provide support to local authorities, through their various programmes, in reducing their carbon emissions and the development of a low carbon economy in the UK.

Defra officials are working with the Carbon Trust with the aim of developing a major new programme, to encourage local authorities to take a systematic approach to assessing their greenhouse gas emissions and setting challenging improvement targets. This builds on a pilot, involving 24 local authorities in England and Wales. "Councils for Climate Protection Programme" was established by Defra with the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) and the Local Government Association and ran from September 2000 until May 2002.

Hazardous Chemicals

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her policy is on the mandatory substitution of industrial chemicals that are intrinsically hazardous with those that are intrinsically less hazardous; and if she will seek to ensure that the new legislation on chemicals policy being drafted by the EU will determine that the existence of a practical and safer alternative will be sufficient grounds to refuse an authorisation to produce a chemical that has intrinsically hazardous properties. [99218]

Mr. Meacher: As the Government said in its Chemicals Strategy (Sustainable production and use of chemicals, December 1999):

> "Risk reduction strategies should always look at substitution of more hazardous chemicals by safer alternatives." (p34).

The position of the Government on the new EU chemicals strategy, as set out in its Position Statement of December 2002, is in line with this approach. The European Commission is yet to produce legislative proposals. When it does do, the UK will push for the availability of safer alternatives to be a major factor in determining whether an authorisation is refused for production, import or supply of hazardous chemicals meeting the criteria for authorisation.

Animal Welfare Bill

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether the issue of enriched cages for egg laying hens has been part of the consultation into the proposed Animal Welfare Bill; and what the Government's policy is on this matter. [100375]

Mr. Morley: The issue of enriched cages has been subject to a separate public consultation. A decision will be announced shortly.

Invasive Plants

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she intends to publish her report on invasive plants and if she will make a statement. [100406]

Mr. Morley: The Department, with the devolved administrations in Scotland and Wales, has convened a working group comprising a wide range of stakeholders, to undertake a fundamental review of policy and practice on non-native species. The report of the working group is due to be published later this month. I shall make an announcement at the time of publication.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what strategy she has adopted to deal with *(a)* Australian swamp stonecrop, *(b)* Japanese knotweed and *(c)* other invasive plants. [100407]

Mr. Morley: I am aware of the problems that can be caused by invasive non-native plants such as Japanese knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*) and Australian swamp stonecrop (*Crassula helmsii*). The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 provides measures for prohibiting spread of Japanese knotweed, and some other invasive plant species. It is an offence to plant or otherwise cause this species to grow in the wild. Waste containing Japanese knotweed is controlled under the Environment Protection Act 1990. Australian swamp stonecrop is not currently regulated.

The Environment Agency and English Nature, with the Centre for Aquatic Plant Management, produce detailed guidance for landowners and managers on how to control invasive non-native aquatic plant species. The Environment Agency also takes local measures to deal with problem plant species if flood defences are compromised. Similarly, English Nature may take local measures where conservation interests are threatened by these species.

The Department is to publish a working group report on non-native species policy later this month.

Cetaceans

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what actions she is taking to prevent dolphin deaths in European waters; and if she will make a statement. [100070]

Mr. Morley: Defra has already committed some £140,000 for trials into the use of exclusion devices developed by the Sea Mammal Research Unit (SMRU) to reduce the bycatch of cetaceans in pelagic trawl fisheries. The trial will be resumed in March in order to refine the system and further assess the grid's effectiveness in protecting dolphins and maintaining fish catch rates. If SMRU's trials are not successful, we will look at other mitigating measures and I do not rule out any approach at this stage—including arguing for EU restrictions on fishing, gear or seasonal closures.

For measures to reduce cetacean bycatch to be effective requires action on the part of all member states involved in the fisheries concerned and the Commission. This is why we raised the need for urgent action by the Commission and other member states at the January Council of Ministers' meeting. I have raised this issue with Commissioner Fischler on a number of occasions both in writing and in personal contacts. I have also recently written to the Commission to press for urgent action to widen observer coverage off the South West coast where a number of other Member States' vessels fish. I was pleased that the Commission included a commitment to take action in this area in papers produced as part of the recent reform of the Common Fisheries Policy. I am looking for positive action on this in response to our recent approaches.

Pesticides

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment. Food and Rural Affairs (1) what assessment she has made of the *(a)* 0.1mg and *(b)* 10mg limit on (i) active pesticide breakdown products and (ii) metabolites in groundwater; [100567]

(2) What recent *(a)* representations she has received and *(b)* discussions she has had regarding the limit of *(a)* pesticide breakdown products and *(b)* metabolites in groundwater; and if she will make a statement; [100568]

(3) If she will list those metabolites considered *(a)* relevant and *(b)* non-relevant with regard to the 0.1mg limit on (i) pesticide breakdown products and (ii) metabolites in groundwater. [100569]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 5 March 2003]*: The EU Pesticides Authorisations Directive (91/414/EEC) requires that pesticide active substances and their relevant metabolites, or breakdown products, should not exceed 0.1 micrograms per litre (0.1μg/L) in groundwater. This 0.1μg/L trigger value is the permitted level for pesticides and their relevant metabolites in drinking water. Its application to groundwater through Directive 91/414/EEC is designed to ensure that groundwater can be used for drinking water without treatment to remove pesticides. 0.1μg/L or 1 part in 10 billion is an extremely low level of contamination which ensures that consumers are protected from the most toxic pesticides.

The European Commission adopted a "guidance document on the assessment of the relevance of metabolites in groundwater of substances regulated under Council Directive 91/414/EEC" on 26 February 2003. This document will soon be made available on the Commission website at: http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/fs/ph ps/pro/wrkdoc/index en.htm

The aim is to lay down an approach to the determination of which metabolites are of concern and which are not. The Guidance has the support of all member states except Denmark. My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, received a letter from the Danish Environment Minister sent to all EU Ministers for the Environment seeking a Council debate on the document before its adoption. We have received no other recent representations on this issue.

The relevance of the soil metabolites of particular pesticides is considered on a case by case basis using the approach laid down in the Guidance Document. In general metabolites are relevant if they *(a)* have comparable intrinsic properties to the parent compound or *(b)* have unacceptable toxicological properties. The conclusions on the relevance of particular metabolites as judged by the Guidance Document will be available in the review report for that compound. However, since the Guidance Document has only recently been adopted, no conclusions have yet been reached.

The limit of 10 micrograms per litre (10 μg/L) on metabolites is not a legal limit. It is a trigger value in the Guidance Document applicable to "non-relevant metabolites" or metabolites of lesser concern. If a compound were to give rise to non-relevant metabolites above 10 μg/L then it would not be approved unless there was strong evidence that the metabolite was of no concern.

Ducks

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many ducks other than ruddy ducks, broken down by species, have been culled as a result of the ruddy duck control scheme. [101260]

Mr. Morley: Every effort was made to minimise casualties to non-target species during the regional control trial. The Standard Operating Procedures made it clear that there should be a high degree of vigilance over identification and that shooting should only take place if safe to do so without causing injury or death to non-target species

Two female tufted ducks and one juvenile long-tailed duck were shot in error during the ruddy duck control trial. During trap testing in spring 2002, seven young mallard chicks were killed during three separate incidents when they became trapped in netting.

Vegetable Imports (Kenya)

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what checks are carried out on vegetables imported from Kenya to detect illegal use of DDT. [99452]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 27 February 2003]:* DDT is a substance which is banned for use as an agricultural pesticide in the European Union under Council Directive 79/117/EEC. However, substances which are not approved in Europe may be used in other countries. Differences in approvals between countries can arise because different approval conditions are applied and because the need for specific pesticides in different countries differs. As far as we are aware, DDT still has public health use in Kenya. The fact that a compound is not approved in Europe does not mean that residues of that compound in imported produce are unsafe or illegal. However, any residues found must not exceed any agreed maximum residue levels set.

The government conducts a wide-ranging annual surveillance programme for pesticide residues in food including imported food. Some 4,000 samples are analysed annually and the programme generates results for over 100,000 pesticide/commodity combinations. All the results are published on a web-site.

www.pesticides.gov.uk/committees/PRC/prc.htm

The surveillance programme for 2002 included monitoring for DDT in green beans from Kenya. No residues were found.

Water Supply

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the total water use in each region that was supplied from *(a)* watercourses, *(b)* aquifers, *(c)* reservoirs and *(d)* other sources in (i) 1974, (ii) 1984, (iii) 1994 and (iv) 2002; and what her estimate is for *(A)* 2012 and *(B)* 2022. [99242]

Mr. Morley: The Environment Agency records data on abstractions as from either groundwater (aquifers) or surface water. Abstractions from reservoirs are recorded in the surface water figures.

The figures for abstractions of water in each Environment Agency region are expressed in the table below. Data for 1984 are unavailable in the format requested, but 1985 data have been provided as the total abstractions are comparable. Data for 2002 are currently being verified so abstractions for 2000 are given, representing the most recent year for which verified data is available.

There may be discontinuities in the trend data caused by the adjustment of data published by the former Department of the Environment for 1974 and 1984 to coincide with Agency boundaries, and by changes to classification.

Actual abstraction data by Environment Agency Region and source (million litres per day)

	1974			*1985*			*1994*			*2000*		
Agency Region	GW	SW	Total	GW	SW	Total	GW	SW	Total	GW	SW	Total
Anglian	948	1246	2194	988	964	1952	1054	1149	2203	1000	1668	2668
Midlands	1539	6895	8434	1066	5796	6862	1142	3106	4248	1085	4209	5294
North East	443	6024	6467	468	3394	3862	452	2982	3434	481	5728	6209
North West	904	5298	6202	476	4281	4757	366	2642	3008	268	2694	2962
South West	460	1112	1572	623	2657	3280	675	3969	4644	726	5225	5951
Southern	1052	961	2013	1263	358	1621	1336	1479	2816	1379	4379	5758
Thames	1734	2386	4120	1879	2599	4478	1569	3079	4649	1496	3310	4806
Wales	284	8397	8681	144	8516	8660	183	7012	7195	86	10603	10689
Total	7364	32319	39683	6907	28565	35472	6777.2	25419	32196	6521	37816	44337

Note:
Where: SW denotes surface water and GW denotes ground water

Estimates for future water use in each Environment Agency region are expressed in the below table, as an expected range. These are derived from figures given in the Environment Agency's water resources strategy, *Water Resources for the Future*, which looks specifically at the years 2010 and 2025. The estimates have not been split into sources of water, though it is anticipated that any additional resources required would tend to be from surface water, rather than groundwater.

Total predicted demand for 2010 and 2025 by Agency Region (million litres per day)

	2010 minimum	*2010 maximum*	*2025 minimum*	*2025 maximum*
Region				
Anglian	2563	2813	2013	4263
Midlands	4016	4516	3216	6313
North East	5916	6416	5066	7816
North West	2986	3386	2136	4686
South West	5924	6124	5624	7024
Southern	5451	5551	5051	6451
Thames	3994	4694	2994	6894
EA Wales	8960	9160	8520	9860
Total	39810	42660	34620	53307

Incinerators

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many licences to operate incinerators on farm premises have been issued in the last 12 months. [100774]

Mr. Meacher: The Environment Agency has issued two licences for the operation of incinerators on farm premises in the last 12 months. The sites are at Church Fenton in North Yorkshire and at Thornton in West Yorkshire and both licences authorise the operation of pet crematoria.

Fishing Industry

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment. Food and Rural Affairs how many fishing vessels will be restricted to 15 days at sea under EC Regulation 2371/2002 in *(a)* England and Wales, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* Northern Ireland; and how many will be (i) whitefish vessels using mesh size over 100mm, (ii) beam trawlers using mesh size above 80mm and (iii) gill netters. [99396]

Mr. Morley: The 15-day restriction applies to vessels using demersal towed gear of at least 100mm or beam trawl gear of at least 80mm in the designated areas. It is for owners to decide what gear they should use in the future, and thus determine how many vessels will be affected in 2002.

However, on the basis of activity during 2002, and excluding vessels that were decommissioned during the year, 807 over 10 metre UK vessels used the three gear types specified in the designated area at some time during the year. The breakdown of the nationality of these vessels is given below.

	England & Wales	*Scotland*	*Northern Ireland*	*UK*
Number of vessels using one or more of the three gear types specified during 2002	189	585	33	807
Of which, using:				
demersal trawl of at least 100mm mesh size	113	392	30	535
beam trawl of at least 80mm mesh size	45	3	3	51
gill nets and other static demersal nets	42	410	0	452

Notes:

1. Gill nets and other static demersal nets can be used for up to 16 days per month under the EU regulation.

2. Some vessels use more than one type of gear in a year. For example, in 2002 228 vessels used both demersal trawl of at least 100mm and gill nets in the designated area, and 3 vessels used both beam trawl and demersal trawls.

3. Under the Regulation, where a vessel uses more than one type of gear in a month it is entitled to the average of the number of days permitted for each gear type.

Game Licences

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many game licences were issued for the 2001–2 season; how much it cost to administer the game licence regime in 2001–2; and how much revenue was received. [100960]

Mr. Morley: In the year 2001–2002, the total number of game licences issued by Post Offices in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland was 48,385. The total gross annual revenue from those licences was £251,884. The total annual cost of administering the scheme for 2001–2002 is estimated at £261,900 + VAT.

In addition to the licences referred to above, district councils and London Borough councils issue licences to deal in game. No figures are collected centrally for the numbers of licences issued by councils. We understand that arrangements and charges vary.

Game Birds

Kali Mountford: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will take steps to prohibit the *(a)* partial beak amputation of pheasants and *(b)* use of bits and blinkers on these birds. [100320]

Mr. Morley: The department is currently reviewing legislation relating to the welfare of captive and domestic animals, including that which relates to the rearing of pheasants, with a view to introducing an Animal Welfare Bill. No decisions have been made as to the Bill's content but it is proposed that there will be a period of consultation on a draft Bill by the beginning of next year.

British Beef

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on sales of British beef to French markets. [99736]

Mr. Morley: Beef produced under the Date-based Export Scheme (DBES) has been exported to several EU countries. However, because only one establishment is currently approved to produce DBES beef, information about export consignments is commercially confidential.

Since the French agreed to lift the ban lifted last year, British beef has been eaten at several high profile events in France, including at a lunch attended by the Prince of Wales in Paris on 6 February.

Livestock Welfare

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will resubmit the draft Code of Recommendations for the Welfare of Livestock: Cattle for consideration by the Second Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation. [98144]

Mr. Morley: The Code of Recommendations for the Welfare of Livestock: Cattle will be re-laid shortly for approval in both Houses.

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what progress has been made since the outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease to strengthen measures for dealing with any new outbreak. [100551]

Mr. Morley: The Government's Response to the Reports of the Foot and Mouth Disease Inquiries (Cm 5637, November 2002) sets out measures taken and work in hand to implement the lessons learned from the 2001 outbreak. Progress has been made in many areas. Measures of particular note are:

the Animal Health Act 2002, which adds to powers to deal swiftly with outbreaks in England and Wales. Similar legislation is in preparation in Scotland.

an improved Foot and Mouth Disease Contingency Plan which is currently subject to consultation prior to being laid before Parliament at the end of this month; this includes enhanced preparedness for emergency vaccination;

tighter controls on animal movements and markets, and higher standards of biosecurity in use of livestock vehicles.

In addition preventive measures have been taken, for example to minimise illegal imports of meat and meat products and to ban swill feeding.

Cleve Farm

Diana Organ: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how long the parallel pyres at Cleeve Farm, Westbury on Severn, Gloucestershire, were active. [96229]

Mr. Morley: Eleven pyres were constructed at Cleeve Farm, Westbury-on-Severn, and that the first one was lit on or around 24 March 2001 and the last one on or around 2 April 2001. I understand that the pyres were active for two weeks, although they would have smouldered for several weeks after this.

Bureaucracy

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the forms that her Department requires private sector businesses to complete and return. [98085]

Mr. Morley: The statistical survey forms required to be completed by private businesses are shown below together with frequency and the number of forms received during 2001.

	Number of Responses	*Frequency*
Agricultural and Horticultural Census—June	28,749*	Annual
December Agricultural Survey	21,503	Annual
Earnings and Hours of Agricultural and Horticultural Workers	1,783	Annual
Vegetables and Flowers Survey	3,458	Annual
Glasshouse Survey	2,226	Annual
Orchard Fruit Survey	576	Annual
Production and Marketing of Hatching Chicks & Eggs	880	Monthly
Return of Stock Slaughtered by Type of Animal	6,735	Weekly and monthly
Bacon and Ham Produced	187	Monthly and annual
Animal Feeding-stuffs: Production, Stocks and Usage of Raw Materials	841	Monthly and annual
Wheat Milled and Flour Production	588	Monthly and annual
Oatmeal Millers—Stocks, Receipts and Production	72	Monthly
Brewers, Distillers and Maltsters—Stocks and Usage of Cereals	307	Monthly and annual
Cereal Breakfast Foods	81	Monthly
The Value of Milk Purchased in England and Wales	530	Monthly
First Hand Price Reporting to Brussels	36	Monthly
Purchase of British Corn in England and Wales	9,308	Weekly
Seed Traders Annual Return	998	Annual
Registration of Seed Multiplication Contracts not in the EU	14	Biannual
Average Grower Prices for Home-Grown Herbage Seeds	12	Annual
EC Survey of Wine Stocks–Producers, Wholesalers and Retailers	75	Annual
Stocks of Cereals and Feeding-stuffs held by Importers, Dealers and Merchants	205	Annual and quarterly

Notes:

* "survey restricted due to Foot and Mouth disease—normally about 80,000

Additionally, a total of 39,275 responses were received in respect of 60 voluntary surveys which were conducted during 2001.

Defra keeps its statistical requirements under review. A research project to assess the amount of information (statistical and other) collected from farmers and growers is underway.

Bush Meat

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many arrests have been made in the last five years for crimes relating to importing illegal bushmeat; and how many convictions have resulted from these arrests. [100396]

Mr. Morley: Comprehensive records of arrests and convictions for the illegal importation of any meat are not held centrally. Prosecutions for offences relating to bushmeat can be brought under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species by HM Customs, and under the Products of Animal Origin (Third Country Imports) (England) Regulations by local authorities. We are aware of three convictions for offences relating to the illegal importation of bushmeat, all in 2001.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps the Government is taking to increase vigilance at airports to discourage the importation of illegal bushmeat from Africa [100397]

Mr. Morley: Bushmeat refers to the meat of any wild animal hunted for food. It is not necessarily from endangered species. Bushmeat forms only a very small proportion of reported seizures of illegal meat. Controls on its import arise from both the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), and from controls imposed to protect animal health. Action against illegal imports is not limited to bushmeat, nor is it targeted solely at Africa.

In the current financial year, additional measures have been introduced at airports to tackle illegal imports. Temporary agency staff, funded by Defra, have been recruited to carry out checks to detect smuggled goods—teams of six are based at our major airports. We are also paying for additional checks through overtime at regional airports, and Customs has provided support. Additional inspection resources have also been provided through the detector dog pilot based at Heathrow. A publicity campaign including videos, posters and leaflets has targeted ports, airports and points of departure.

A total of £25 million has been allocated over the next three financial years to tackle illegal imports from outside the European Union of any meat, other animal products and plant products. Following the Cabinet Office review of enforcement structures, HM Customs will be taking over all anti-smuggling activity as soon as practicable.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what discussions her Department has had with the President and Secretariat of the CITES Bushmeat Working Group to support its future work. [101327]

Mr. Morley: This Department and its representatives have had informal discussions from time to time with the President and members of the CITES Bushmeat Working Group about the general direction being taken by the Group and about progress being made. However, we have always strongly maintained that the Group should remain first and foremost a Central and West African initiative. We have therefore deliberately sought not to initiate or participate too deeply in formal discussions. Our input to the direction taken by the Group and the development of its strategies and solutions is therefore taken forward mainly in the context of our participation in meetings of the Group, such as that taking place in Douala from 26 to 28 March 2003.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what financial support her Department intends to provide the CITES Bushmeat Working Group in future years. [101330]

Mr. Morley: Following the agreement reached at the last Conference of CITES Parties (Santiago, 2002) to extend the work of the CITES Bushmeat Working Group, we have recently contributed a further £15,000 to the Group to help it carry forward its work to the next CITES Conference in 2004. This brings our total support for the CITES Bushmeat Working Group since its inception in April 2000 to £70,000.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what analysis her Department has made of the progress the CITES Bushmeat Working Group has made in tackling the unsustainable bushmeat crisis. [101354]

Mr. Morley: We have analysed reports produced both by the CITES Bushmeat Working Group itself and by those attending meetings of the Working Group on behalf of this Department. From these we believe that, after a slow start, the Group is now making good progress towards its aim of establishing strategies to overcome the problem of unsustainable trade in bushmeat in Central and West Africa.

The Group is highly committed and dedicated and has produced some useful work. In particular, it has completed an important study of laws and policies across the sub-region in support of its specific objective to develop strategies for the sustainable use of bushmeat within a lawful legislative context. We believe this study will provide a valuable resource for all the countries of the region in their efforts to harmonise and strengthen controls.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, which members of her Department will be attending the forthcoming CITES Bushmeat Working Group in Cameroon. [101328]

Mr. Morley: This Department will be represented at the next CITES Bushmeat Working Group meeting (in Douala, Cameroon, from 26 to 28 March) by Dr. David Brown of the Overseas Development Institute's Forest Policy and Environment Group.

Dr. Brown co-authored the UK Government's 11CITES Conference discussion paper "Bushmeat as a Trade and Wildlife Management Issue" (April 2000), which included the recommendation to establish a CITES Bushmeat Working Group. Dr. Brown also represented the Department at the Working Group's last meeting (in September 2002).

Animal Rights

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (1) what discussions she has had with European Union colleagues regarding a European agreement on animal rights and treatment during transport; [100553]

(2) what measures are in place to ensure that *(a)* the treatment of animals in transport is humane and that *(b)* animal rights are protected. [100552]

Mr. Morley: The 1997 Protocol to the Treaty of Rome recognises animals as sentient beings. As a result the European Union and member states must pay full regard to animal welfare in formulating and implementing policy on agriculture, transport, the internal market and research.

Animal welfare during transport is governed by directive 91/628/EEC, as amended, and implemented in Great Britain by the Welfare of Animals (Transport) Order 1997, as amended. We have regularly pressed the European Commission to introduce proposals to update and revise the directive. They have indicated that they intend to do so later this year. We look forward to playing a leading part in negotiating a new directive.

We have also had an active role in revising the Council of Europe Convention for the Protection of Animals during International Transport

Welfare of Hens

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what percentage of the eggs sold in the UK were produced in *(a)* free range systems, *(b)* barn systems and *(c)* cage systems in the last 12 months. [100378]

Mr. Morley: Defra does not hold this specific data. However, of egg packing station throughput in the UK in 2002, 23 per cent. came from free-range systems, 6 per cent. from barn systems and 71 per cent. from cage systems. During the previous year (2001), 23 per cent. came from free-range systems, 5 per cent. from barn systems and 72 per cent. from cage systems.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what representations her Department is making to the European Union on the issue of enriched cages for egg laying hens; and if she will make a statement. [100374]

Mr. Morley: The Government's policy on enriched cages has been subject to public consultation. A decision will be announced shortly.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) how many farms in the UK intensively produce eggs; and how many of these use the *(a)* barren battery cage system and *(b)* enriched cage system; [100376]

(2) how many and what percentage of farms, in the last 10 years have intensively produced eggs in the UK. [100377]

Mr. Morley: Defra does not hold this data. However, in 2002, 71 per cent. of UK egg packing station throughput came from caged birds.

Animal Cloning

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if she will make a statement on the relevance of the findings of the Banner Committee's report into the ethical implications of cloning animals. [100409]

Mr. Morley: In its 1995 Report on "Ethical implications of emerging technologies in the breeding of farm animals", the Banner Committee concluded that the cloning of farmed livestock is ethically acceptable provided it is carried out within the welfare framework principles laid down in the report. The 2002 report by the Farm Animal Welfare Council "Implications of cloning for the welfare of farmed livestock" and the 2002 report of the Agriculture & Environment Biotechnology Commission "Animals & Biotechnology" endorsed the conclusions of the Banner Committee. The Banner framework principles are now required for cloning research in the UK. This reinforces the Government's view that all animals (whether domestic, farmed or used for scientific purposes) should be kept to the highest possible welfare standards.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what plans the Government has to review the findings of the Banner Committee's Report into the ethical implications of cloning animals. [100408]

Mr. Morley: The Report of the Committee to consider the ethical implications of emerging technologies in the breeding of farm animals (the Banner Report) was published in 1995. The Government has no plans to review its findings. The Farm Animal Welfare Council reported on the welfare implications of cloning farm animals and the Government response to their report was published on 7 August 2002 and is available on the Farm Animal Welfare Council web site www.fawc.org.uk. The Agriculture and Environment Biotechnology Commission published a report on Animals and Biotechnology in September 2002, to which the Government responded last December. Both documents are available from the Commission's website www.aebc.gov.uk.

Farm Subsidies

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what financial inducements the Government is offering to farmers to farm non-food crops on set-aside land. [100216]

Mr. Meacher: Under the European Union's Arable Area Payments Scheme, farmers receive a compensatory payment for putting land into set-aside on condition that no agricultural activity or other lucrative use is carried out in the set-aside period. But, in recognition of the fact that non-food crops do not contribute to oversupply of the cereals market, the Scheme does allow a range of such crops, including energy crops, to be grown without loss of the compensatory payment.

Farmers growing short rotation coppice and miscanthus as an energy crop on set-aside land may also qualify for the establishment grants available under the Energy Crops Scheme.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what estimate she has made of the cost to public funds of farm subsidies *(a)* in total and *(b)* per head of population in 2002–03. [100610]

Mr. Morley: Defra's budget for expenditure on farm subsidies in 2002–03 is as follows:

	(a) In total (£m)	*(b) per head of population (£)*
Direct aid payments in England	1,334.3	27.13
England Rural Development Plan	214.6	4.36
Over Thirty Month Scheme compensation (UK)	253.7	4.31
Total	1,802.6	

Note:

The EU provides full or part funding for the above expenditure.

Flood Prevention

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures her Department is taking to encourage farmers to *(a)* reduce run-off and *(b)* store floodwaters on their land. [99784]

Mr. Morley: The effects of land use on flood run-off, particularly at catchment scales, are not well understood and Defra has commissioned a research project to review knowledge in this area and develop a clearly targeted programme of further research, which started in January 2003.

This Department is supporting the introduction of Catchment Flood Management Plans (CFMPs) which the Environment Agency is planning to deliver for the whole of England and Wales over the next five to six years. These will consider the impact of future development, land use changes and climate change and will explore the use of wetlands, washlands and flood storage areas in reducing flood risk to local communities.

The government is currently piloting an Entry Level Scheme aimed at paying farmers for a range of simple, environmentally beneficial management measures across wide areas of the countryside. Due largely to the scientific uncertainties mentioned above, these pilots do not contain measures specifically intended to reduce run-off or to store floodwaters. The main Entry Level Scheme is due to be introduced in 2005, subject to the success of the pilot. It is possible that some water management measures may be included at that stage if they can be scientifically justified and shown to be cost-effective. It will however be important to ensure that they do not result in incidental damage to other environmental interests, such as archaeology.

Many current flood alleviation schemes to reduce flood impact in urban areas rely on flood water storage on farm land. There is no automatic right to payment where land is naturally at risk of flooding and this risk will be reflected in the market price of the land and its pattern of use. Where changes to the flooding regime are made to benefit other areas then landowners/occupiers are entitled to compensation if they suffer any additional loss.

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to transfer responsibility for critical ordinary water courses from internal drainage boards and local authorities to the Environment Agency. [99783]

Mr. Morley: A transfer of responsibility for critical ordinary watercourses from internal drainage boards and local authorities to the Environment Agency was one proposal considered during the recent review of the administrative and funding arrangements for flood and coastal defence. I am considering the conclusions of that review and will make an announcement as soon as possible.

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps the Environment Agency is taking to prevent flooding in Marlow and Medmenham. [101371]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 6 March 2003]:* Following the flooding in January, the Environment Agency will be undertaking pre-feasibility studies to identify options for the alleviation of flooding in both Marlow and Medmenham. The Environment Agency have had discussions with residents of Medmenham at a public meeting and has met with Wycombe District Council to determine a joint approach for reducing flood risk in the area.

If the pre-feasibility study identifies a technically, environmentally sustainable and economically viable solution for the flood risk area then a capital scheme may be initiated. As well as the provision of flood defences, options for reducing flood risk may also include improved maintenance regimes by riparian owners, local authorities or the Agency and/or an improved flood warning service.

Mr. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much of the additional funding for capital projects and studies for flood and coastal defence in 2003–04, announced on 12 February will be spent on *(a)* inland wet washland storage and *(b)* managed realignment on the coast. [100618]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 4 March 2003]:* Defra will grant aid capital projects and related studies that meet specified economic, technical and environmental criteria and achieve the threshold score of 22 for 03–04 under the Department's prioritisation system. Decisions regarding which flood and coastal defence projects to promote, their timing and appropriate solutions are matters for the operating authorities—the Environment Agency (EA), local authorities and (in areas with special drainage needs) internal drainage boards. It is therefore not possible to provide the information requested.

SOLICITOR GENERAL

Cruelty to Animals

Norman Baker: To ask the Solicitor General how many animals have been returned to their owners after the owner has been convicted of causing cruelty to that animal in the last year for which records are available; and what percentage of convictions this represents. [100355]

Mr. Morley: I have been asked to reply.

These figures are not recorded.

Norman Baker: To ask the Solicitor General what the Government's policy is on animals that have been mistreated being returned to their owners after a court case has convicted the owner of cruelty. [100354]

Mr. Morley: I have been asked to reply.

Under the Protection of Animals Act 1911 there is provision for a court to make a deprivation and disqualification order in addition to any other punishment on conviction of cruelty.

The use and effectiveness of deprivation and disqualificaton orders is currently being examined in the context of the preparation of an Animal Welfare Bill.

MINISTER FOR WOMEN

Domestic Violence

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Minister for Women what discussions she has had with the Home Office regarding the central collection of domestic violence statistics; and if she will make a statement. [100964]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 5 March 2003]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 3 March 2003, *Official Report*, columns 804–05W.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Youth Justice

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many 10–17 year olds in the last two years for which data are available were sentenced by *(a)* magistrates' courts *(b)* a youth court and *(c)* a Crown court to (i) a secure training order, (ii) a young offender institution and (iii) a local authority secure unit. [100741]

Hilary Benn: *[holding answer 4 March 2003]:* The information contained in the table gives the number of juveniles sentenced to all forms of immediate custody in England and Wales in 2000 and 2001.

Statistics for 2002 will be published in the Autumn.

Juveniles sentenced to immediate custody, England and Wales, by type of court

	Secure Training Order[1]		*Detention and training order*[2]		*Young Offender Institution*[3]		*Detained under s90/92 PCC(S)A 2000*[4]	
	2000	2001	2000	2001	2000	2001	2000	2001
Magistrates' Courts	6	*	161	251	54	*	*	*
Youth Courts	77	*	3,741	5,518	1,096	*	*	*
The Crown Court	2	*	1,172	1,300	523	*	582	527

Notes:

1 Available to 31 March 2000, when replaced by detention and training orders.

2 Available nationally from 1 April 2000.

3 Replaced by detention and training orders from 31 March 2000.

4 Sec 53 Children and Young Persons Act 1933 prior to 25 August 2000.

* = not applicable.

Source:

Home Office Court Proceedings database.

The following table, compiled from Youth Justice Board data, shows the type of establishment in which juveniles sentenced to immediate custody were accommodated after sentence. Such information is not collected centrally by type of court.

Juveniles sentenced to immediate custody, England and Wales, by type of establishment in which accommodated

	2000[1]	2001	2002
Secure training centre	391	471	393
Local Authority Secure Unit	410	599	466
Young Offender Institution	5,679	6,881	5,766

Note:

[1] From 1 April 2000.

Source:

Youth Justice Board.

Smoking

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what policy his Department has adopted on smoking in the workplace. [100952]

Beverley Hughes: Smoking in the main Home Office buildings in central London is not permitted except in designated smoking rooms. The policy extends to other buildings outside central London, but is subject to local accommodation constraints for example, in rented buildings smoking may be banned by the landlord or major occupier.

National No Smoking campaigns are regularly promoted. "Stop smoking" courses and displays have been held to help staff who wish to give up smoking.

Angel Group

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the properties acquired by the Angel Group and its subsidiaries from Government departments and agencies and dates and costs of their acquisition. [99703]

Beverley Hughes: The Home Office has sold one property to the Angel Group. The Prison Service College in Love Lane, Wakefield was sold on 6 July 2001 at a price of £1,161,000.

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reason he has not replied to the letter to him dated 15 January from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton, with regard to Mrs. Huda Abdulwahed. [100685]

Mr. Blunkett: I wrote to my right hon. Friend on 28 February 2003.

Criminal Records Bureau

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the Criminal Records Bureau is processing Disclosure applications in Madras; and if he will make a statement. [100145]

Hilary Benn: Disclosure applications are not being processed in Madras, India. All Disclosure applications are processed at the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) sites at Liverpool and Darwen, Blackburn. The work being undertaken at Madras involves manual inputting of personal information such as name, date of birth and addresses during the past five years, provided by individuals on their application forms. This work is undertaken at the beginning of the process, and no information drawn from police sources or other data sources is involved.

This arrangement was introduced as part of a package of measures to improve the performance of the CRB. It has proved highly effective in enabling large numbers of paper application forms to be processed, with timely, efficient and accurate data capture, and eliminating backlogs from this critical stage of the CRB process.

The contractual provisions make it clear that the processing of data must be in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998, and security and other arrangements must be such that they do not involve a material increase to the risk of misuse of data.

Before agreement was given for any data to be processed in India, the site was visited by senior officials from the CRB, who were fully satisfied that this was the case.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to his answer of 9 January, *Official Report*, columns 287–88W, on the Criminal Records Bureau, if he will place in the Library a copy of the CRB application form for *(a)* basic, *(b)* standard and *(c)* enhanced disclosures and the guidance notes for (i) before and (ii) after they were modified. [100164]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 6 February 2003]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 25 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 403W.

Deportations

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to permit airlines to refuse to accept passengers who are being deported or removed by order of the Government where such passengers cause disruption and distress to others; and if he will make a statement. [101398]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 6 March 2003]:* It is the individual responsibility of the captain of an aircraft to have regard to the safety of all persons onboard and to refuse to accept passengers who may be a potential danger to the safety of the aircraft. Whilst the carrier has an obligation to accept removal directions lawfully given under the Immigration Act 1971 and the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999, the legislation provides the defence of "reasonable excuse" for failure to comply with such directions.

Hinton Hotel, Fareham

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many people are registered at the Hinton Hotel, Fareham by the Immigration and Nationality Directorate. [101377]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 6 March 2003]:* As at 5 March there were eight asylum seekers registered at the Hinton Hotel. They have all applied for support from the National Asylum Support Service (NASS). If eligible for support they will be dispersed, as soon as suitable accommodation is identified, to one of the designated cluster areas.

Criminal Justice Bill

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment he has undertaken of the risk of false conviction arising as a result of the implementation of Clause 81 of the Criminal Justice Bill. [100136]

Hilary Benn: Clauses 81 to 97 of the Criminal Justice Bill sets out a new statutory scheme for admitting evidence of a person's bad character. Clause 81 defines the range of evidence whose admissibility is to be determined under the new rules. It does not follow that any evidence that comes within this definition is admissible. But it does ensure that any such evidence can only be admitted under the Bill's scheme.

In terms of admitting evidence, clauses 83 and 84 set out, for non-defendants and defendants respectively, the circumstances in which evidence that falls under clause 81 can be admitted. These ensure that evidence will only be admitted where it will have a clear bearing on the issues in the case.

The scheme includes a number of important safeguards. These include, in the case of defendants, the fact that evidence is to be excluded in appropriate circumstances if admitting it would adversely affect the fairness of proceedings. In applying this test, the courts will weigh the possible prejudicial effect of the evidence against its probative value and exclude the evidence where the likely prejudice would exceed it.

The new rules will therefore assist juries and magistrates to reach proper and fair verdicts by enabling them to hear a wider range of relevant evidence while ensuring that evidence that is likely to be given too much weight or might distort a court's assessment of the issues is excluded.

Electronic Data Services

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what IT contracts have been available to Electronic Data Services in respect of work on behalf of the prison service; and if he will make a statement. [99663]

Hilary Benn: The Prison Service outsourced its Information Technology (IT) to Electronic Data Systems (EDS) with effect from 1 July 2000. Under the terms of the 12 year Agreement EDS is responsible for implementing a modern IT and telecommunications infrastructure. The contract also contains provision for IT enabled business change but any such projects are not guaranteed to EDS under its terms. The contract was awarded, following competitive tender, in February 2000.

Schools (Terrorism)

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what procedural advice has been issued to schools in London in the event of *(a)* a terrorist alert and *(b)* a terrorist attack. [100339]

Mr. Blunkett: All schools and Local Education Authorities in England have previously been made aware that they can access guidance on dealing with terrorism via the UK Resilience website www.ukresilience.info. Many local authorities have also issued guidance to schools in their area to assist in emergency planning.

Government departments and the police are also working together to develop further public information to help people maintain vigilance and prepare for the consequences of terrorist acts. The aim of any agreed activity will be to increase public safety by providing a clear consistent and co-ordinated message. I announced on 3 March that I was setting up a new website www.homeoffice.gov.uk/terrorism on which information of this kind will also be clearly available.

Student Work Placements

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many university students his Department and associated agencies have supported or sponsored with a work placement in the last year; what his policy is on work placements; what plans he has to develop such schemes; and what his policy is on paying their university fees. [98533]

Hilary Benn: The total number of university students supported or sponsored with a work placement by the Home Office over the last 12 months is 81.

The Research Development and Statistics Directorate placed 26 research trainees for a period of 12 months.

Two sandwich students were placed in the Commercial and Procurement Unit for six month placements:

Two sandwich students were placed in the Police Scientific Development Branch at Langhurst for 12 months and one for six months.

The Police Scientific Development Branch at Sandridge took on 22 sandwich students for a period of 12 months and three students for summer placements.

In addition, 20 students were offered summer placements under the Summer Development Scheme and five students were sponsored under the Windsor Fellowship scheme.

All the students were paid for the period of work. Sandwich students were paid at the Administrative Assistant rate, Summer Development Scheme student were paid at the Administrative Officer rate and Windsor Fellowship students are paid Executive Officer salaries as well as a £4,500 sponsorship fee.

There is no Home Office specific policy on this matter, nor are there any plans to further develop existing schemes, or provide additional payments for university fees.

The Home Department remains committed to supporting and encouraging work placements and to encouraging undergraduates to consider a career in the Civil Service.

Community Sentences

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will take steps to engage magistrates, lay magistrates, youth magistrates and other sentencers in the *(a)* design, *(b)* implementation and *(c)* management of community sentences and other alternatives to prison. [98879]

Hilary Benn: The Criminal Justice Bill extends the use of review courts from the drug treatment and testing order to the suspended sentence order, with further powers to introduce these for all community sentences in the future. Such courts provide sentencers with the opportunity directly to monitor an offender's progress. Sentencers will also engage closely in the use of all sentences through their representation on the Sentencing Guidelines Council.

The need for strong and effective liaison generally between the Probation Service, youth offending teams and the courts is well recognised, and arrangements have been put in place to facilitate and promote joint working practices. Such work is designed to ensure that sentencers have a full understanding of the suitability of various community penalties and their effectiveness, and that the National Probation Service and youth offending teams understand the expectations of sentencers of the services they provide. A permanent channel of communication is established through the appointment of a Sentencing Liaison Officer in each probation area, and continuous dialogue is encouraged on a local level through various mechanisms, including local criminal justice boards, and crime and disorder partnerships.

Asset Sales

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what sales of heritage assets and antiques assets have been made by his Department since 1997; and if he will list such assets; and if he will estimate the total sales proceeds [92378]

Mr. Blunkett: My Department has made no sales of heritage or antique assets since 1997

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with European Union colleagues regarding a co-ordinated approach to *(a)* protecting child asylum seekers from exploitation and *(b)* identifying and assisting them in finding their families. [100317]

Beverley Hughes: The Government has been instrumental in working to agree minimum standards for asylum seekers in Europe as a first step towards a common European asylum system.

These measures include specific provision for the protection of child asylum seekers, including the allocation of responsibility to protect the interests of those asylum seeker children who arrive unaccompanied, as well as their appropriate accommodation.

There is also a duty as far as possible to help unaccompanied asylum seeker children find their families.

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when his Department will invite Ms MAA (A1161869) to attend the asylum screening unit in connection with her asylum application. [100289]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 6 March 2003]:* A screening interview has been arranged for 10 March 2003.

Women's Prisons

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cases of *(a)* suicide and *(b)* other self-harm there were in women's prisons in each of the last 24 months (i) in total and (ii) in each institution; and if he will make a statement. [101378]

Hilary Benn: *[holding answer 6 March 2003]:* The information requested is in the following tables. Since

1 January 2001, there have been 20 self-inflicted deaths of female prisoners (all those deaths where it appears the person may have acted specifically to take her own life). The available data on "self-harm" incidents includes both attempted suicides and self-harm (without suicidal intent) as it is difficult to measure suicidal intent.

Self-inflicted deaths in female establishments: January 2001 to February 2003.

	2001			*2002*						*2003*		
	April	*Aug*	*Nov*	*Jan*	*Apr*	*Aug*	*Sep*	*Oct*	*Nov*	*Jan*	*Feb*	*Total*
Brockhill		1								1		2
Bullwood Hall	1										1	2
Durham						1		1			1	3
Eastwood Park			1		1					1		3
Highpoint (Women)							1					1
Holloway	1					1						2
New Hall				2							1	3
Styal	1					1			1	1		4
Total	3	1	1	2	1	3	1	1	1	3	3	20

Self-harm in female establishments: January 2001 to December 2002.

	2001											
	Jan	*Feb*	*Mar*	*Apr*	*May*	*June*	*July*	*Aug*	*Sep*	*Oct*	*Nov*	*Dec*
Askham Grange	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Brockhill	3	6	6	11	6	10	6	23	12	11	20	19
Bullwood Hall	1	1		2	1			4				
Cookham Wood			1	3	3		3	4	5	2	1	4
Drake Hall												
Downview												
Durham												
Eastwood Park	7	15	10	36	12	28	25	8	8	7	43	14
Foston Hall	2			1								
Highpoint (Women)	12	10	6	18	38	25	23	11	15	20	17	21
Holloway	24	18	10	20	53	36	17	34	52	70	54	155
Low Newton	1		7	11	14	8	9	11	10	11	12	14
New Hall	23	22	27	27	18	41	32	40	25	20	32	21
Send	1	1		4		1	1	4		2	1	2
Styal	1	1	6	2	16	12	40	17	28	13	5	14
Buckley Hall												
Winchester												
Total	75	74	73	134	162	161	156	156	155	156	185	264

	Jan	*Feb*	*March*	*April*	*May*	*June*	*July*	*Aug*	*Sep*	*Oct*	*Nov*	*Dec*	*Total*
Askham Grange								1				0	1
Brockhill	15	17	41	46	39	23	18	24	9	18	37	88	420
Bullwood Hall						1		1				0	11
Cookham Wood	7	14	4	3	18	10	15	1	5	6	12	4	121
Drake Hall		1			1	1	8	3	5	5	2	4	26
Downview												18	18
Durham												10	10
Eastwood Park	24	17	27	21	29	25	19	44	16	33	70	14	538
Foston Hall	11	13	16	6	12	16	15	6	9	2	2	15	111
Highpoint (Women)	19	7	10	13	18		8	16	18	26	13	14	364
Holloway	111	43	91	45	67	23	47	72	82	70	66	47	1,260
Low Newton	13	11	13	14	34	36	36	33	33	27	31	6	389
New Hall	41	20	20	21	32	19	39	25	26	22	41	42	634
Send	5	2	2	5	2			3	2	1	3	8	42
Styal	9	6	3	2	2	14	37	18	5	5	2	26	258
Buckley Hall							23	31	25	24	35	35	138
Winchester												3	3
Total	255	151	227	176	254	168	265	278	235	239	314	334	4,344

The prison population, including the female estate, contains a large number of prisoners with a combination of psychiatric disorders, alcohol and drug dependency, family background and relationship problems, histories of self-harm and previous abuse, all of which raise their risk of suicide and self-harm. Good care and support from staff saves many lives but such instances go largely unreported. The Prison Service's approach, in close partnership with other agencies such as the Youth Justice Board, and outside organisations such as Samaritans, is to better identify and support those who seem at greatest risk, with an approach that focuses on staff/prisoner relationships and the physical environment.

The Prison Service has a duty of care to all prisoners in its custody, and recognises that self-harm is a particular problem amongst women offenders. The Prison Service is currently developing several interventions that may help female prisoners reduce and manage self-harm in prison. One such example is at Holloway prison, where all prisoners who have been identified as at risk of suicide/self-harm are offered individual crisis counselling. About 40 per cent. of prisoners take up the offer, while others may be referred to alternative sources of help within the prison. Staff report that following counselling women have shown increases in self-esteem, decreases in depression and are less likely to see suicide or self-harm as the solution to their problems.

The Prison Service's suicide prevention and self-harm reduction programme (which applies to all prisoners, regardless of gender and age) includes a series of projects to improve pre-reception, reception and induction arrangements; the exchange of information; the care of prisoners; detoxification; prisoners supporting each other, and learning from investigations into deaths in custody.

Prisons

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent representations he has received in connection with London-based Prison Staff's remuneration; and if he will make a statement. [100233]

Hilary Benn: On 27 February 2003, the Prison Service Pay Review Body, whose remit covers in-charge governors and other operational managers and prison officer and related unified grades, announced its second set of annual recommendations for the remuneration of this group of staff. In making its recommendations, which have been accepted by the Prison Service, it has taken on board the representations on local pay made to it by the Prison Service, the Prison Governors' Association, the Prison Officers' Association and the Public and Commercial Services Union.

The Pay Review Body accepted the Prison Service's proposals for an increase to the local pay allowance scheme, which is extended to all Prison Service staff in London and the South East. The Pay Review Body has recommended that one of the four levels of the allowance be payable to all staff in these areas from 1 April 2003: £3,800 (relating to central London), £3,000, £2,500 and £1,100. These different levels of payment are made to prisons according to a variety of factors including evidence of recruitment and retention difficulties and the cost of living in the surrounding area. This allowance is paid in addition to the basic pay paid to all Prison Service staff nationally, and the amounts that have been set represent a substantial increase to the rates currently payable under the local pay allowance scheme.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many vacancies there were at each prison or Young Offender's Institution on 31 December 2002; and if he will make a statement. [100232]

Hilary Benn: Shortfalls of staff against forecast needed at each establishment at that date are contained in the following table.

A national recruitment campaign for prison officers was run during 2002 and resulted in the appointment of 1,562 new officers. In the last two months, a further 310 new officers were appointed and 116 other grades regraded. Provision for 2,200 training places has been made for the coming financial year. A high profile campaign is currently being run in the London area for prison officers and other continuing campaigns include the East Midlands and the female estate.

Vacancies by Prison or Young Offender (YOI) Institution on 31st December 2002

Area	*Establishment*	*Officers and Senior Operational Managers*	*Other Staff*
East Midlands (North)	Lincoln	−10.0	−16.5
	North Sea Camp	—	−3.0
	Nottingham	—	—
	Ranby	—	—
	Sudbury	—	−1.0
	Whatton	−8.0	−6.0
East Midlands (South)	Ashwell	−13.0	−14.5
	Gartree		
	Glen Parva	−13.5	−12.0
	Leicester	—	−3.5
	Onley	−17.5	−15.5
	Stocken	—	—
	Wellingborough	−7.0	−13.0
Eastern	Bedford	−23.5	—
	Blundeston	−8.0	−4.5
	Chelmsford	−12.0	—
	Grendon	−20.0	−10.5
	Highpoint South	−8.5	—
	Hollesley Bay	−6.5	−13.0
	Littlehey	−7.0	−10.0
	Norwich	−4.0	−10.0
	The Mount	−7.0	—
	Wayland	−2.0	—
High Security Prisons	Belmarsh	−36.5	−33.0
	Durham	−3.0	—
	Frankland	−19.0	—

Vacancies by Prison or Young Offender (YOI) Institution on 31st December 2002

Area	*Establishment*	*Officers and Senior Operational Managers*	*Other Staff*
	Full Sutton	−5.5	—
	Long Lartin	−14.0	−3.0
	Wakefield	—	−3.0
	Whitemoor	−59.0	−28.5
	Woodhill	−50.0	−25.5
Juvenile Establishments	Huntercombe	–	−6.0
	Werrington	−6.5	−7.5
	Wetherby	−5.5	—
Kent, Surrey and Sussex	Blantyre House	−1.0	−1.0
	Canterbury	—	—
	Coldingley	—	−4.5
	Dover	−5.0	−13.0
	Elmley	−1.0	−17.0
	Ford	−3.0	−4.0
	Highdown	−30.0	−16.5
	Lewes	−11.5	−8.0
	Maidstone	−2.5	—
	Rochester	−3.5	—
	Standford Hill	−13.0	−9.5
	Swaleside	−7.0	—
London	Brixton	−1.0	−26.0
	Feltham	−70.0	−35.0
	Latchmere House	−3.0	−4.5
	Pentonville	−9.0	—
	Wandsworth	—	—
	Wormwood Scrubs	−25.5	−28.5
North East	Acklington	−26.5	—
	Castington	−15.0	−3.5
	Deerbolt	—	—
	Holme House	−8.5	—
	Kirklevington	—	—
North West	Buckley Hall	−4.0	—
	Garth	−3.0	−4.0
	Haverigg	−5.5	−2.0
	Hindley	−28.5	−11.0
	Kirkham	—	−3.0
	Lancaster	−7.5	–
	Lancaster Farms	−6.5	−19.5
	Liverpool	−4.5	—
	Manchester	−3.0	—
	Preston	—	—
	Risley	−23.5	—
	Thorn Cross	−7.5	—
	Wymott	−4.0	—
South West	Bristol	−33.0	−20.5
	Channings Wood	−2.0	—
	Dartmoor	–	−1.5
	Dorchester	−2.0	—
	Erlestoke	−18.5	−13.0
	Exeter	−33.5	−20.5
	Gloucester	−6.0	—
	Guys Marsh	−5.0	—
	Leyhill	−3.5	−5.5
	Portland	−20.5	−7.0
	Shepton Mallet	−1.0	—
	The Verne	—	—
	Weare	−2.0	—
Thames Valley and Hampshire	Albany	−9.0	—
	Aylesbury	−8.5	—
	Bullingdon	−9.5	−3.0
	Camp Hill	−7.5	—
	Haslar	—	—
	Kingston	−1.0	−1.0
	Parkhurst	−12.0	−11.0
	Reading	−3.0	–
	Winchester	−1.0	—
Wales	Cardiff	−7.5	−2.5
	Swansea	−4.0	—
	Usk/Prescoed	−6.5	−2.0
West Midlands	Birmingham	−13.0	−7.0
	Blakenhurst	−1.0	−6.0
	Brinsford	−5.5	—

Vacancies by Prison or Young Offender (YOI) Institution on 31st December 2002

Area	*Establishment*	*Officers and Senior Operational Managers*	*Other Staff*
	Featherstone	−1.0	−6.0
	Hewell Grange	—	−6.0
	Shrewsbury	−1.0	—
	Stafford	−4.0	—
	Stoke Heath	−12.0	—
	Swinfen Hall	−1.5	−5.0
Women's Prisons and YOIs	Askham Grange	−1.0	—
	Brockhill	−3.0	−8.0
	Bullwood Hall	−16.5	—
	Cookham Wood	−13.5	−2.0
	Downview	−15.5	—
	Drake Hall	−7.5	—
	East Sutton Park	—	−1.0
	Eastwood Park	−13.5	−2.5
	Foston Hall	−0.5	—
	Highpoint North	−7.0	−28.5
	Holloway	−49.0	−14.0
	Low Newton	−16.0	−11.0
	Morton Hall	−5.0	−3.5
	New Hall	−20.0	−10.5
	Send	−13.0	−9.5
	Styal	−11.0	−27.0
Yorkshire and Humberside	Everthorpe	−1.0	−2.0
	Hull	−9.0	—
	Leeds	—	−7.5
	Lindholme	−4.5	—
	Moorland	—	—
	Northallerton	—	−1.0
	Wealstun	−5.0	—
Total		−1147.0	−671.4

Prisons (Muslims)

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with Her Majesty's Prison Service on the educational and religious needs of Muslims in prison; and if he will make a statement. [100585]

Hilary Benn: The Prison Service keeps Ministers informed of its progress on improving religious provision for prisoners of all faiths, including Muslims.

In discussion with the Advisory Council on Religion in Prisons, the Service has been devleoping a new grading structure for prison ministers which will allow ministers of all faiths to be employed on an equal footing. All Muslim prisoners have regular access to Imams. In prisons with the largest Muslim populations full-time Imams are now being employed. Eight full-time Imams are now in post and a further six are being recruited.

The Prisoners' Learning and Skills Unit (PLSU) is improving education for prisoners so that prisons are better able to respond to the needs of the individual learner. All prisoners, regardless of their cultural background, are already required to have an individual learning plan based on a comprehensive assessment of need, with basic skills given priority. The PLSU is responding to the diverse needs of the prison population by developing a cultural studies programme for prisoners which will focus on aspects such as cultural beliefs and values and prejudice.

Holloway Prison

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* 15 year olds, *(b)* 16 year olds and *(c)* 17 [illegible] olds have been held at HMP/YOI Holloway since April 2001; what the length was of each detention; and if he will make a statement. [100236]

Hilary Benn: This information could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects children's visits to be reinstated at HMP/YOI Holloway; and if he will make a statement. [100234]

Hilary Benn: Children's visits will be reintroduced at Holloway as soon as there are sufficient staff in post to run them on a permanent and predictable basis. If current recruitment projections are realised, Holloway expects the reintroduction to take place in July of this year.

Visits will be confined to a Saturday morning, however, they will take place every Saturday rather than on alternate weekends as was previously the case.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects the Resettlement programme to be reinstated at HMP/YOI Holloway; and if he will make a statement. [100235]

Hilary Benn: The Resettlement programme was introduced to Holloway in October 2002 and, despite significant staff shortfalls, the activity has been sustained in partnership with 11 outside agencies and local voluntary organisations. Initially run for a two-week period followed by a week's assessment and refinement, the programme is now running continuously, although Holloway hopes to make significant improvements to the programme once full staffing has been achieved.

Cruelty to Animals

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what action his Department is taking to increase detection and prosecution rates for crimes against animals. [100358]

Mr. Morley: I have been asked to reply.

As part of the review of animal welfare legislation leading to an Animal Welfare Bill we are considering measures to improve existing powers to investigate allegations of cruelty. We are also considering the introduction of more proactive legislation that allows earlier intervention where an animal is being kept in such a way that suffering is inevitable.

HOUSE OF COMMONS PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES (HANSARD) ● 2002-03

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INDEX TO THE

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 400**

SESSION 2002–2003

24th February—7th March 2003

Printed indexes to Hansard

The volume index is one of three printed indexes to Commons Hansard produced from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Indexing Service (POLIS). It contains references to material in the bound volumes of Hansard. The other indexes produced are:

- The fortnightly index to Hansard. This covers the same date range as the volume index but references are to the column numbering in the daily parts and weekly edition of Hansard.
- The sessional index to Hansard. This contains references to material in the bound volumes for a whole session.

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SCOPE

The indexes include entries covering:

- The content of all material recorded in Hansard, including debates, procedural motions and questions.
- The names of all Members contributing to the Parliamentary business recorded in Hansard.
- The names of some types of Parliamentary business whenever they occur in Hansard. These are 'Ministerial statements', 'Business statements', 'Opposition days' and 'Estimates days'.

ARRANGEMENT

- All headings are in one word-by-word alphabetical sequence, with Members' contribution entries distinguished from other entries by italics.
- Where a Member contributes to Parliamentary business and is the subject of Parliamentary business there are separate contribution and subject entries, the subject entry coming first.
- Entries beginning 'Mac' and 'Mc' are sorted in one sequence as 'Mac'.
- 'St', when abbreviated for Saint, is filed as 'Saint'.
- Numbers are filed as if spelt out, e.g. '10 Downing Street' as if 'Ten Downing Street'.

HEADINGS

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- *Specificity*—Entries summarise the overall content of a debate or question as specifically as the various POLIS thesauruses allow. For example, Education, Higher education, Universities or the name of a particular university is used depending on the breadth of the item.
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- *Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales*—Material relating to the whole of Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales is indexed under these headings.
- *Places within the UK*—Material about specific towns, areas and institutions is entered under the name of the specific town, area or institution.
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- *EC/EU material*—General material about the European Communities and European institutions as bodies is entered under 'European Communities' and 'EC institutions'. Organisational material about specific communities and institutions is entered under the name of the body, for example 'European Coal and Steel Community' or 'European Parliament'. Material about what the Communities and institutions are doing or propose to do is entered under various subject headings beginning 'EC' such as 'EC environmental policy'.

Parliamentary material and business

- *Material about Parliament*—This is indexed under 'Parliament', the names of the two Houses, the 'Palace of Westminster' and parts of the Parliamentary estate (such as 'Portcullis House').
- *Committees*—Material about committees is indexed under 'Committees', types of committee (such as 'Select committees') and the names of individual committees (such as 'Home Affairs Select Committee').
- *Parliamentary proceedings/procedures*—Material discussing these is indexed under the specific type of proceeding (such as 'Parliamentary questions' or 'Oral questions'), procedure (such as 'Calling of Members') or issue (such as 'Unparliamentary expressions').
- *Legislation*—Entries for Parliamentary proceedings on bills and statutory instruments are entered under their titles. Where the lead word of the bill or statutory instrument does not provide a full or clear indication of the subject there are additional subject entries when the bill or instrument is debated. For example, debates on the 'Child Support Pensions and Social Security Bill' have entries under 'Pensions' and 'Social security benefits' as well as under the title of the Bill.
- *Members' names*—These are given in the form by which the Member prefers to be known.
- *Speaker and Chair*—Contributions by the Speaker and deputies are brought together under the heading 'Speaker and deputies'. Contributions from the chair during Committees of the Whole House are brought together under 'Chairman of Committee of the Whole House'. Significant rulings and statements (as opposed to routine comments) are indicated by the sub-heading 'Rulings and statements' in both cases.

Guidance on headings

- *Cross references*—'See' references indicate all the material has been entered under another heading. 'See also' references indicate that additional information may be found under another heading.
- *Concept thesaurus*—A copy of the subject thesaurus to POLIS, listing the concept entries used in the index, is available on the Parliamentary website. A hard copy is available from the Head of the POLIS Unit, House of Commons Library, 1 Derby Gate, London, SW1A 2DG (020 7219 6456).

REFERENCES

- References in the indexes are to columns rather than pages.
- References to debates, but not questions, are accompanied by the date of the item.
- There are separate sequences in Hansard for the material taken on the floor of the House, Westminster Hall sittings and written questions:
  - References consisting of a number by itself indicate material taken on the floor of the House.
  - References ending in 'wh' indicate Westminster Hall sittings.
  - References ending in 'ws' indicate written statements.
  - References ending in 'w' indicate written questions.
- References under all headings except the names of Members contributing to Parliamentary business and the titles of legislation are listed in one numerical sequence irrespective of whether the material is taken on the floor of the House, is discussed at a Westminster Hall sitting, is a written statement or is a written question.
- References under the names of Members contributing to Parliamentary business and the titles of legislation are listed in numerical sequence under the following headings:
  - *Chamber Debates* (which includes interventions and points of order as well as significant contributions to debates);
  - *Debates Westminster Hall Debates* (covering all debates held as part of the Westminster Hall sittings); and
  - *Written Statements* (consisting of ministerial statements issued in writing); and
  - *Questions* (which includes all written, oral and private notice questions).

ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations are used in connection with the progress of bills:

- 1R=First reading
- 2R=Second reading
- Com=Committee stage
- Rep=Report stage
- 3R=Third reading
- res=resolution
- amendt(s)=amendment(s)
- *=matter taken formally without debate or division
- (HL)=Bill starting in House of Lords
- (SP)=Bill in Scottish Parliament.

Parliamentary background

- The Parliamentary website at http://www.parliament.uk contains a range of information about Parliament and the full text of some Parliamentary papers and proceedings including Hansard.
- Information on current Parliamentary business is provided in the House of Commons Information Office *Weekly Information Bulletin*, available on the website and from The Stationery Office (020 7873 8499).
- Further information on Parliamentary proceedings and procedures is available from the House of Commons Information Office (020 7219 4272).

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